

# **Collected Sermons and Writings**

**On Subjects Useful for Bible Studies  
and Practical Godly Living**

**VOLUME 2**

by

**Michael Rudolph**

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# **Collected Sermons and Writings**

## **On Subjects Useful for Bible Studies and Practical Godly Living**

### **VOLUME 2**

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## Dedication

First and foremost, I want to declare my love for my excellent wife and partner in life Marie, a true *Proverbs 31* woman, without whose unfailing love and support during these forty-six years of our marriage, I would not have had the peace of mind, energy, and freedom to produce the sermons and writings that comprise this book. If this book is in any way useful to others, Marie is as much responsible for it as I.

I also want to recognize the contributions to my life and ministry of my fellow elders Ralph E. Finley and Marcellus Powell of *Ahavat Yeshua*, and Scott Moore, Bruce Bakaysa, Douglas Stearman, and Aaron Allsbrook of *Ohev Yisrael Messianic Jewish Congregation*, the pulpit from which most of the sermons contained within this book were delivered.

And of course, I thank the Lord for allowing this work to be written by one such as I who knows better than anyone how unworthy and blessed I am to attach my name to it.



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**H. Holy Living**  
**Sermons • Vol 2**



## Acknowledging vs. Denying Yeshua

*Delivered February 4, 2012*

We read in [Luke 22:31-34](#) that Yeshua said to Simon Peter:

*“Shim ’on, Shim ’on, listen! The Adversary demanded to have you people for himself, to sift you like wheat! But I prayed for you, Shim ’on, that your trust might not fail. And you, once you have turned back in repentance, strengthen your brothers!” Shim ’on said to him, “Lord, I am prepared to go with you both to prison and to death!” Yeshua replied, “I tell you, Kefa, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me.”*

We know that, despite his protestations, Peter did deny Yeshua three times as Yeshua predicted. I remember the first time I encountered this in the Bible, and I remember thinking to myself: “What a gutless weakling Peter was, to allow his fear of being identified as one of Yeshua’s disciples to cause him to deny the Lord.” Well, I was never placed in the same kind of jeopardy as Peter. Although I never flat out denied Yeshua after I came to faith, there were times when my intentional silence or my laugh at someone’s coarse humor about him amounted to the same thing. I am bringing this to your attention in the hope that you will not follow my example when the temptation to deny Yeshua is placed at your doorstep. If it hasn’t been already, it will.

Temptation to deny Yeshua can be subtle and can come in many forms. Usually it comes from someone we want to please or someone we do not want to anger. It can occur when a co-worker blasphemes the name of the Lord and we say nothing. It can occur when our employer makes a rude remark and we do not correct him. It can occur when we go along with a joke that mocks things the Lord cares deeply about. It can occur when we hold back from witnessing to our parents or when we mislead about our belief in Yeshua in our attempt to apply for *aliyah* to Israel.

None of this is new—not only temptations to deny Yeshua, but to deny God himself. Here are two examples, from the *Tanach*, of men who were victorious over such temptations:

[Job 1:6-22](#): *“It happened one day that the sons of God came to serve ADONAI, and among them came the Adversary [i.e. Satan]. ADONAI asked the Adversary, “Where are you coming from?” The Adversary answered ADONAI, “From roaming through the earth, wandering here and there.” ADONAI asked the Adversary, “Did you notice my servant Iyov, [i.e. Job] that there’s no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil?” The Adversary answered ADONAI, “Is it for nothing that Iyov fears God? You’ve put a protective hedge around him, his house and everything he has. You’ve prospered his work, and his livestock are spread out all over the land. But if you reach out your hand and touch whatever he has, without doubt he’ll curse you to your face!” ADONAI said to the Adversary, “Here! Everything he has is in your hands, except that you are not to lay a finger on his person.” Then the Adversary went out from the presence of ADONAI. One day when Iyov’s sons and daughters were eating and drinking in their oldest brother’s house, a messenger came to him and said, “The oxen were plowing, with the donkeys grazing near them, when a raiding party from Sh’va came and carried them off; they put the servants to the sword too, and I’m the only one who escaped to tell you.” While he was still speaking, another one came and said, “Fire from God fell from the sky*

*and burned up the sheep and the servants; it completely destroyed them, and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another one came and said, "The Kasdim [i.e. Chaldeans], three bands of them, fell on the camels and carried them off; they put the servants to the sword too, and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another one came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, when suddenly a strong wind blew in from over the desert. It struck the four corners of the house, so that it fell on the young people; they are dead, and I'm the only one who escaped to tell you." Iyov got up, tore his coat, shaved his head, fell down on the ground and worshipped; he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return there. ADONAI gave; ADONAI took; blessed be the name of ADONAI." In all this Iyov neither committed a sin nor put blame on God."*

Satan tempted Job to deny God, but he did not. Other calamities befell Job even after that, and still he did not deny God. He passed the test.

Daniel 3:8-18: *"But then some Kasdim approached and began denouncing the Jews. They said to N'vukhadnetzar the king, "May the king live forever! Your majesty, you have ordered that everyone who hears sound of the horn, pipe, harp, zither, lute, bagpipe and the rest of the musical instruments is to fall down and worship the gold statue; and that whoever does not fall down and worship is to be thrown into a blazing hot furnace. There are some Jews whom you have put in charge of the affairs of the province of Bavel, Shadrakh, Meishakh and 'Aved-N'go; and these men, your majesty, have paid no attention to you. They do not serve your gods, and they do not worship the gold statue you set up." In a raging fury N'vukhadnetzar ordered that Shadrakh, Meishakh and 'Aved-N'go be brought. When the men had been brought before the king, N'vukhadnetzar said to them, "Shadrakh! Meishakh! 'Aved-N'go! Is it true that you neither serve my gods nor worship the gold statue I set up? All right, then. If you are prepared, when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, harp, zither, lute, bagpipe and the rest of the musical instruments, to fall down and worship the gold statue, very well. But if you won't worship, you will immediately be thrown into a blazing hot furnace—and what god will save you from my power then?" Shadrakh, Meishakh and 'Aved-N'go answered the king, "Your question doesn't require an answer from us. Your majesty, if our God, whom we serve, is able to save us, he will save us from the blazing hot furnace and from your power. But even if he doesn't, we want you to know, your majesty, that we will neither serve your gods nor worship the gold statue which you have set up."*

Well, we know how that turned out. The three men were thrown into the furnace and miraculously emerged unscathed. They were tempted to deny God, but they did not, and so they passed the test. Notice that they did not know whether God would bring them through the ordeal alive, yet they had no fear because they knew that, either way, they were in God's hands. The antidote for what would otherwise have been fear was their faith.

The temptation to worship heathen gods is not something we normally encounter in the western world today, but circumstances that tempt us to deny God or Yeshua are, nevertheless, common. Rabbi Dr. David Rudolph (of *Tikvat Israel*) and I recently discussed this as being a serious problem for some of us, and he shared several Scriptures with me that I would like to pass on to you.

The first two make it abundantly clear that:

(1) We Are to Publicly Acknowledge Who Yeshua Is.

Philippians 2:9-11: “Therefore God raised him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name; that in honor of the name given Yeshua, every knee will bow—in heaven, on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will acknowledge that Yeshua the Messiah is ADONAI—to the glory of God the Father.”

Hebrews 13:15: “Through him, therefore, let us offer God a sacrifice of praise continually. For this is the natural product of lips that acknowledge his name.”

The second two Scriptures tell us that:

(2) Publicly acknowledging Yeshua Enhances Our Life with God.

Romans 10:13: “...everyone who calls on the name of ADONAI will be delivered.”

1 John 4:15: “If someone acknowledges that Yeshua is the Son of God, God remains united with him, and he with God.”

To be clear, these Scriptures do not mean that if we have not had the occasion to publicly acknowledge Yeshua, that our life with God is somehow flawed. They do, however, connect our willingness to acknowledge Yeshua with being blessed by him.

The next Scripture tells us that:

(3) Publicly Acknowledging Yeshua Is a Component of Spiritual Warfare.

1 John 4:3: “...and every spirit which does not acknowledge Yeshua is not from God—in fact, this is the spirit of the Anti-Messiah. You have heard that he is coming. Well, he’s here now, in the world already!”

Here the Scripture is not speaking about men failing to acknowledge Yeshua; it is speaking about spirits. The relevance though is that there is a connection between acknowledging Yeshua and belonging to God. And because the Scripture is speaking about spirits, there is the suggestion that being unwilling to publicly confess Yeshua can result in becoming vulnerable to a wrong spirit.

A fourth set of Scriptures tells us that:

(4) Our Reluctance or Refusal to Confess Yeshua Is Often Due to Fear of Consequences.

John 9:22: “The parents said this because they were afraid of the Judeans, for the Judeans had already agreed that anyone who acknowledged Yeshua as the Messiah would be banned from the synagogue.”

John 12:42: *“Nevertheless, many of the leaders did trust in him; but because of the P’rushim [i.e. the Pharisees] they did not say so openly, out of fear of being banned from the synagogue...”*

Even today, most synagogues in the wider Jewish world would ban us for openly proclaiming Yeshua, and some would even ban us for believing in him privately.

This fear of consequences that can result from proclaiming our faith in Yeshua is at the very heart of why I chose to speak on this subject today. There are forces afoot—spiritual forces—that want to shut our mouths about Yeshua, and they attempt to do it by threatening us with consequences. At times it seems that we are at war with our Jewish brothers, but our war is not with them; it is rather with spirits that are in opposition to God.

Ephesians 6:12 is ever so applicable here as it says:

*“For we are not struggling against human beings, but against the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers governing this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.”*

But the Scripture does not end there leaving us with no remedy. The next verse, verse 13, instructs us:

*“So take up every piece of war equipment God provides; so that when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist; and when the battle is won, you will still be standing.”*

Our war equipment is not conventional, nor is it of this world. It is the truth about Yeshua, that sometimes has to be “shot” from the cannons of our mouths amidst barrages of threats and accusations that are hurled against us. Perhaps we desperately want the approval of our parents who are holding their approval hostage in the hope that we will give up this “Yeshua” nonsense. Or perhaps we want a promotion at work, or citizenship in Israel, and all we have to do to achieve them is to hide our belief in Yeshua or tell just a “little” lie. Well, we may get what we want that way but we will, at the same time, have contributed to setting back God’s program for victory in the larger war. Not only that, but it will come back to hurt us personally, for Scripture says of such situations:

Matthew 10:32-33: *“Whoever acknowledges me in the presence of others I will also acknowledge in the presence of my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others I will disown before my Father in heaven.”*

2 Peter 2:1: *“But among the people there were also false prophets, just as there will be false teachers among you. Under false pretenses they will introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and thus bring on themselves swift destruction.”*

1 John 2:23: *“Everyone who denies the Son is also without the Father; but the person who acknowledges the Son has the Father as well.”*

To quote Rabbi David:

“Yeshua calls us to risk marginalization and mistreatment due to our identification with him. It is part of the cost of what it means to follow him—to be a disciple of Yeshua. We do not have a single example in the New Testament of either Yeshua or the *Shlichim* [i.e. the apostles] instructing someone to hide faith in him. By contrast, there are many passages that encourage us to publicly share about who Yeshua is and to risk rejection, persecution, and other negative consequences as a result.”

On this note, it is instructive that we remember the following Scriptures and be willing to accept their implications in our lives:

Matthew 16:24-25: *“Then Yeshua told his talmidim, ‘If anyone wants to come after me, let him say ‘No’ to himself, take up his execution-stake, and keep following me. For whoever wants to save his own life will destroy it, but whoever destroys his life for my sake will find it.’”*

Matthew 24:5-9: *“For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah!’ and they will lead many astray. You will hear the noise of wars nearby and the news of wars far off; see to it that you don’t become frightened. Such things must happen, but the end is yet to come. For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world; all this is but the beginning of the ‘birth-pains.’ At that time you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death, and all peoples will hate you because of me.”*

John 15:18-21: *“If the world hates you, understand that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would have loved its own. But because you do not belong to the world—on the contrary, I have picked you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember what I told you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours too. But they will do all this to you on my account, because they don’t know the One who sent me.”*

2 Timothy 3:12-13: *“And indeed, all who want to live a godly life united with the Messiah Yeshua will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves.”*

So, to summarize, we are to:

- (1) Publicly acknowledge who Yeshua is.
- (2) Know that Yeshua enhances our life with God.
- (3) Know that acknowledging Yeshua is a component of spiritual warfare.
- (4) Know that our reluctance or refusal to confess Yeshua is often due to fear of consequences.

(5) Know that Yeshua calls us to risk marginalization and mistreatment in our identification with him.

I cannot think of a better way to end this message than to read the words of Peter as they are recorded in his letter to the Jews living in the Diaspora of his day:

*1 Peter 4:12-19: “Dear friends, don’t regard as strange the fiery ordeal occurring among you to test you, as if something extraordinary were happening to you. Rather, to the extent that you share the fellowship of the Messiah’s sufferings, rejoice; so that you will rejoice even more when his Sh’khinah is revealed. If you are being insulted because you bear the name of the Messiah, how blessed you are! For the Spirit of the Sh’khinah, that is, the Spirit of God, is resting on you! Let none of you suffer for being a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler in other people’s affairs. But if anyone suffers for being Messianic, let him not be ashamed; but let him bring glory to God by the way he bears this name. For the time has come for the judgment to begin. It begins with the household of God; and if it starts with us, what will the outcome be for those who are disobeying God’s Good News?—“If the righteous is barely delivered, where will the ungodly and sinful end up?” So let those who are suffering according to God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator by continuing to do what is good.”*

A key to doing what is good is to proclaim our faith in Messiah on every appropriate occasion and leave the consequences to God.

—CJB



## **Benchmarks of a Discipled Believer**

*Delivered September 27, 2008*

We have heard discipleship described as learning to be Yeshua-like, but how many of us have given thought as to what that means for each of us personally, and how each of us can determine the degree to which we are discipled? Today I propose looking into that, and I will suggest benchmarks by which we can measure how discipled we are—the level of our spiritual growth. Benchmarks are criteria against which performance can be measured and, in the case of our performance as discipled believers, all the criteria we need are found in Scripture.

Because Yeshua identified the *Sh'ma* as the pinnacle of *Torah*, what could be more Yeshua-like than loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength, and loving our neighbor as our self? That is right, of course, but love has so many facets that it does not make a good benchmark. If I profess to love God, how do I quantify how much I love him? So, as foundational as love is, I will not list it as a benchmark. Of course, if our lack of love for God or our neighbor is obvious, we can conclude that we are not very advanced in our discipleship.

There are three questions that lead us to benchmarks that are more specific—(1) Do we think as Yeshua thought? (2) Do we act as Yeshua acted? (3) Do we stand for the things for which Yeshua stood? These are still not easy to determine, but we are helped by the Bible, which reveals things about each of them. Let me begin by pointing out that all three are connected to having a close, loving, and conversational relationship with our heavenly Father, out of which grows faith. In [John 5:19](#), Yeshua said:

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”*

In becoming “Yeshua-like,” the goal is to see God with our spiritual eyes and hear him with our spiritual ears as Yeshua did. [Hebrews 11:1](#) says:

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

What kind of evidence is unseen in the natural and undetectable with our physical senses, yet capable of leading us to perfect truth? The only evidence that would cause us to be so certain of something as to be willing to act on it without seeing it in the natural is God speaking to us spirit to spirit; that is why it is so essential to see and hear our heavenly father through our spiritual senses as Yeshua did through his.

**So, I believe that the first and most foundational benchmark of a discipled believer is his having faith—that is, listening for God’s voice, and being willing to act on what he hears that he knows to be him.**

In a way, faith as the most foundational benchmark because all other aspects of being discipled depend on first having faith. [James 2:17](#) says that:

*“faith without works is dead,”*

and 2 Corinthians 5:7 instructs us:

*“For we walk by faith and not by sight.”*

The Hebrews 11:1 Scripture defines faith in connection with evidence that is not seen with natural senses, but 2 Corinthians 5:7 goes a step further and exhorts us to act on what God says rather than on our natural senses. This is a very important distinction because the believer who is not fully discipled may have faith (i.e. when he hears God he is willing to act on what God says), but he hears his fleshly desires also and gives in to them, so part of the time he is driven by his emotions and feelings rather than by God’s will. Emotions are important, but they must not be what drives us to make important decisions.

One emotion in particular deserves mention, and that is the emotion of fear. 2 Timothy 1:7 says:

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

Making decisions based on fear is destructive because fear is the opposite of faith. Think about it a minute. If we give in to fear, what are we saying about our trust in God to protect us? Romans 8:31 assures us:

*“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

Decisions made because of fear often end badly because they are tainted from their inception.

**So, the second benchmark of a discipled believer is his refusal to act on feelings and emotions—especially fear—and act instead on what he knows to be the will of God.**

The two benchmarks I have spoken of so far require that we know the will of God by hearing him through our spiritual senses. But God has provided a resource by which even those who have underdeveloped spiritual senses can know his will; it is the “Holy Scriptures”—the Bible—and God expects us to know what is in it. In military terms, we may think of God’s voice as being our “special orders” for just us alone and for specific situations, and we may think of the Bible as being our “General Orders,” applicable to everyone. Paul explains this in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 when he says:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

We are also given the example of the Bereans whom Scripture complements in Acts 17:11:

*“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”*

**So, the third benchmark of a discipled believer is his regularly studying the Scriptures for what they reveal of God’s will for him personally and mankind broadly.**

Now related to faith and to not walking according to our feelings, is a subject often referred to as “dying to self.” Its general meaning is that we are to live for God and for others and count our personal desires as unimportant in comparison. It is, perhaps, the most challenging of the benchmarks because, to achieve it, we must rid ourselves of self-concern and sinful pride, and replace them with a spirit to serve and with godly humility. It is challenging because the temptation to serve our self ahead of others manifests frequently (often several times a day) so the battle for many of us is an intensive one. Because of its importance to our spiritual growth, I am going to spend a disproportionate amount of this message describing it and will begin by reading four Scriptures; the first was spoken by Yeshua, and the other three were spoken by the *Shaliach* Paul:

Matthew 16:24: “Then Yeshua said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his pole of execution, and follow Me.’”

Romans 6:10-11: “For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Messiah Yeshua our Lord.”

Romans 8:13: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

These are hard sayings because none of us wants to die, yet we are told that in order to live and serve God we first have to die to self. To illustrate this graphically, I am going to read something I found posted on the Internet and that I edited to a small extent:

*“When you are forgotten or neglected or purposely disregarded and you don’t sting and hurt with the insult, but your heart is happy in knowing you are serving Messiah.” **That is dying to self!***

*“When the good you do is called evil, when what you desire is denied you, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, yet you refuse to let anger rise in your heart, or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loving silence.” **That is dying to self!***

*“When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any unpunctuality, or any annoyance; when you stand face-to-face with waste, folly, extravagance, spiritual insensibility—and endure it as Yeshua endured. **That is dying to self!***

*When you are content with any food, any livelihood, any climate, any society, any interruption. **That is dying to self!***

*When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation, or to record your own good works, or seek commendations—when you can truly be at peace with being unknown. **That is dying to self!***

*When you can see your brother prosper and have his needs met and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy, nor question God because your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances. **That is dying to self!***

*When you can receive correction and reproof from persons in authority and also from persons of less stature than yourself and can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart. **That is dying to self!***

If you have been comparing yourself to these qualities as I read them, perhaps you need a prayer break right about now. But don't despair. Becoming discipled and dying to self are continuous processes that go on our entire lives. We are always examining ourselves, correcting ourselves, and then aspiring to greater accomplishments.

**So, the fourth benchmark of a discipled believer is his willingness to die to self, which involves repenting of pride, crucifying his fleshly desires, and cloaking himself in godly humility.**

Next, let us look at idols. Idols are things in our lives that we deem so important that they compete with God for our attention and affection. God considers idolatry so fundamentally evil that its prohibition appears as one of the Ten Commandments received on Mt. Sinai:

*Leviticus 26:1: “You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.”*

But idols are not only carved images and engravings. For some of us money is an idol. For others of us someone we love—a spouse or a child is an idol. For others of us the security of a home is an idol. For still others of us, our stature as a professional or our political office may be an idol. The test of whether something is an idol in our lives is how much attention and effort we give to protecting it and whether we will fall to pieces if that item is taken away from us. Sometimes we can test if a thing is an idol to us without losing it by imagining losing it. Some of the things I mentioned can be very painful to imagine losing, but, if we can do so with peace that comes from faith, that thing is probably not an idol.

**So, the fifth benchmark of a discipled believer is his willingness to rid himself of all idols in his life.**

There are several other benchmarks of a discipled believer I could expound upon, but I will mention just one more—one for which Yeshua chastised the Pharisees. In Matthew 23:23-24 we read:

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”*

What are the weightier matters of the law? The scripture lists “justice, mercy and faith,” but these are merely representative of a great many others that some refer to as elements of the moral law. The Pharisees and Scribes had their priorities out of whack, concentrating so much on rituals, customs, and rules that they themselves promulgated, that they violated commandments of *Torah* that were more important. At the same time, they held themselves out to the rest of the community as virtuous, and judged others for not doing as they did. The result was that they led the Jewish community astray from God’s Word.

I am sad to say that the same kinds of things happen today in our religious communities—both Christian and Jewish. Even the term “religious” suggests it by supposing that people do “stuff”—religious “stuff” that the community requires but that are superficial and do not address heart issues. If they are law at all, they are the less weighty kind such as communal customs—*minhagim*. They might be okay—even virtuous—if the weightier matters of the law—things like love and mercy and forgiveness—were not violated or forgotten.

What does this have to do with being a discipled person? It has a great deal to do with it because a highly discipled person will not have his godly priorities out of order, while a person whose level of discipleship is inadequate most likely will.

**So, the sixth benchmark of a discipled believer is his being fastidious in the weightier matters of the law while not ignoring the less weighty ones and keeping them in a proper perspective.**

I could continue, but it is enough for now, so let us recap. Benchmarks are criteria against which performance is measured, and in the case of our discussion, the performance we are examining is the level of a believer’s discipleship. Benchmarks are valuable in helping us self-assess so we can improve and advance in Kingdom life and service.

**Let us conclude with a seventh benchmark that is for Messianic Jewish believers—doing the other six in the context of Messianic Jewish calling and obligation.**

These benchmarks are for each of us to examine ourselves—not to examine or judge our neighbor. We know ourselves—how willing we are to do what God calls us to do. Finally, let us remember that the benchmarks together add up to the commandments referenced by Yeshua in Matthew 22:37-40:

*“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

—NKJ

## Biblical Speech

*Delivered on January 7, 2015*

I was recently given a book written by one of our congregants, Jill Melton, titled “The Power of the Zip in a Heavenly Light.” I was intrigued by the title because, before I flipped through the book’s pages, I could not imagine what kind of “zip” Jill was talking about. Was it the “zip” we get from a strong cup of coffee? Was it the “zip” sound we hear when we zip up our sweater? It did not take me long, however, to realize that the “zip” to which Jill was referring is the “zip” of our mouths. You have heard the expression “zip it up?” meaning “stop talking? Well, the way we speak (and refrain from speaking) is what Jill’s book is about.

Once I understood what “zip” meant, I became intrigued by something else in Jill’s title—the word “power.” I am well acquainted with how words sometimes get us into trouble and how not speaking sometimes keeps us out of trouble. But I had not previously considered that holding our tongues can actually have power. I do not know why it hadn’t occurred to me, since one of the most powerful Scriptures, [Isaiah 53](#), gets its power partly from [verse 7](#) that says of Yeshua:

*“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”*

Jill’s excellent book reminded me that it has been five years since I gave a message on biblical speech, and that it is high time that I gave another. The subject is vitally important, for [Proverbs 18:21](#) says of it:

*“The tongue has power over life and death; those who indulge it must eat its fruit.”*

What the Scripture says is especially true within community where the way we use our tongues can bring our communities blessings or to the gates of destruction. It applies to our home communities, our work place communities, and to our congregational communities. We would like to think that there is no wrongful use of the tongue here (and for the most part we do quite well), but now and again some of us do transgress, so it is good to review God’s teaching on the proper use of our speech.

The way I will approach this message will be to use relatively few words of my own, and rather allow God to speak to us directly through his written Word. So, this message will mostly be a catalog of Scriptures, organized this way: First, Scriptures that depict wrongful uses of the tongue; second, Scriptures that exhort us to righteous and holy uses of the tongue; third, Scriptures that call for delayed speech or silence; fourth, Scriptures that call for disciplining those who transgress in their speech; and finally, I will offer some personal guidance on the proper ways to express ourselves when we become offended and have legitimate criticisms and accusations that ought to be heard.

When we hear what the Bible has to say about speech, it may seem to be at odds with the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment, and it may indeed be. In the United States, we pride ourselves on our right of free speech so, when we learn that the Bible teaches that speech should not always be free, we tend to bristle at the notion. Let us remember, though, that the founding fathers’ original understanding of the First Amendment was much narrower in scope and application than what it has

evolved to today. There are other situations as well where what the Bible teaches, and secular governments proclaim, take different paths and believers, throughout the ages have had to navigate between them. When we are faced with situations such as those, it is well to remember Yeshua's words in Matthew 22:21:

*“Give the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor. And give to God what belongs to God!”*

So, with that introduction, let us begin with Scriptures that describe the kinds of speech that transgress. First:

### **Speech that is Insincere (Flattery)**

Psalms 5:9(8)-10(9): *“Lead me, ADONAI, in your righteousness because of those lying in wait for me; make your way straight before me. For in their mouths there is nothing sincere, within them are calamities, their throats are open tombs, they flatter with their tongues.”*

Psalms 12:3(2)-4(3) *“They all tell lies to each other, flattering with their lips, but speaking from divided hearts. May ADONAI cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaks so proudly...”*

Proverbs 26:28b *“...a flattering mouth causes ruin.”*

### **Speech that Slanders (Murmuring) <sup>1,2</sup>**

Slander is among the most serious of offenses. In modern usage, the word “slander” is speech communicated to one person, that infers something negative about another person that is untrue. Biblical usage, however, is more akin to the rabbinical concept of *lashon hara*—i.e., speaking negatively of a person even if what is said is true. Here are some Scriptures that speak against *lashon hara*:

Psalms 34:14(13)-15(14): *“Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceiving talk; turn from evil, and do good; seek peace, go after it!”*

Proverbs 18:6-7: *“A fool's words get him into fights; yes, his mouth calls out for a beating. A fool's mouth is his ruin; his words are a trap for him.”*

Proverbs 11:9: *“With his mouth the hypocrite can ruin his neighbor, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.”*

Ephesians 4:29: *“Let no harmful language come from your mouth, only good words that are helpful in meeting the need, words that will benefit those who hear them.”*

James 4:11: *“Brothers, stop speaking against each other! Whoever speaks against a brother or judges a brother is speaking against Torah and judging Torah. And if you judge Torah, you are not a doer of what Torah says, but a judge.”*

<sup>1</sup> See also, Proverbs 10:18, 18:8, 26:22; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Titus 2:3.

<sup>2</sup> English translations of the Bible sometimes interchange “slander” and “gossip.”

You will notice that according to these Scriptures, the prohibition against speaking negatively about another is absolute and matters not whether what is said is true or untrue. Here is a sampling of Scriptures that command against slander:

Leviticus 19:16a: *“Do not go around spreading slander among your people...”*

Psalms 101:5a: *“If someone slanders another in secret, I will cut him off.”*

Proverbs 16:28: *“A deceitful person stirs up strife, and a slanderer can separate even close friends.”*

Romans 1:29-30a (speaking of godless and wicked people): *“They are filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and vice; stuffed with jealousy, murder, quarrelling, dishonesty and ill-will; they are gossips, slanderers...”*

Ephesians 4:31a: *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, violent assertiveness and slander...”*

Colossians 3:8: *“but now, put them all away—anger, exasperation, meanness, slander and obscene talk.”*

Titus 3:2a: *“...slander no one...”*

1 Peter 2:1 (NIV): *“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”*

Speaking negatively about someone to a third person is egregious to God, and especially so if the “someone” is a leader that God himself has set in his office. That which happened to Miryam when she murmured against Moses is the quintessential example of how serious a sin it is; we read about it in Numbers 12:1-2 and 6-10:

*“Miryam and Aharon began criticizing Moshe on account of the Ethiopian woman he had married, for he had in fact married an Ethiopian woman. They said, “Is it true that ADONAI has spoken only with Moshe? Hasn’t he spoken with us too?” ADONAI heard them.”*

*“He said, “Listen to what I say: when there is a prophet among you, I, ADONAI, make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. But it isn’t that way with my servant Moshe. He is the only one who is faithful in my entire household. With him I speak face to face and clearly, not in riddles; he sees the image of ADONAI. So why weren’t you afraid to criticize my servant Moshe?” The anger of ADONAI flared up against them, and he left. But when the cloud was removed from above the tent, Miryam had tzara’at, [leprosy] as white as snow. Aharon looked at Miryam, and she was as white as snow.”*

### **Speech that Gossips<sup>3,4</sup>**

Gossip (sometimes referred to as tale-bearing or spreading rumors) is similar to *l’shon hara* and slander; it is repeating to one person something that has been heard about another person. What is

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<sup>3</sup> See also, Proverbs 26:20; 2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Timothy 5:13-14.

<sup>4</sup> English translations of the Bible sometimes interchange “gossip” and “slander.”



repeated in gossip is often negative, but does not have to be, such as when one reveals a matter that was intended to remain private or that is just plain incorrect. Repeating something that is not private and that is joyous and correct is not gossip. Here is a sampling of Scriptures that speak against gossip:

Exodus 23:1a: *“You are not to repeat false rumors...”*

Proverbs 11:13: *“A gossip goes around revealing secrets, but a trustworthy person keeps a confidence.”*

Proverbs 20:19: *“A gossip goes around revealing secrets, so don’t get involved with a talkative person.”*

Proverbs 26:20: *“If there’s no wood, the fire goes out; if nobody gossips, contention stops.”*

Romans 1:29 (speaking of godless and wicked people for the second time): *“They are filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and vice; stuffed with jealousy, murder, quarrelling, dishonesty and ill-will; they are gossips...”*

2 Corinthians 12:20: *“For I am afraid of coming and finding you not the way I want you to be, and also of not being found the way you want me to be. I am afraid of finding quarreling and jealousy, anger and rivalry, slander and gossip, arrogance and disorder.”*

### Speech that Tells Lies<sup>5</sup>

Several weeks ago, we heard a message that suggested that there are times when lying might be sanctioned by God; I don’t know about that. We do see a few occasions in the Bible where God seems to give a pass to lying, for example, when Jacob lied to his father Isaac (with Rebecca’s help in fact) in order to obtain Isaac’s blessing (Genesis 27:1-29). A second example is when Rahab lied to the king of Jericho in order to save two spies that were sent out by Joshua and whom she was hiding (Joshua 2:1-6). I will not speculate on these occurrences and can only tell you that all the Scriptures in the Bible that specifically address lying teach that lying is immoral and sinful.

Proverbs 6:16-17a: *“There are six things ADONAI hates, seven which he detests: a haughty look, a lying tongue...”*

Exodus 20:16 (13d): *“Do not give false evidence against your neighbor.”*

Proverbs 12:22: *“Lying lips are an abomination to ADONAI, but those who deal faithfully are his delight.”*

Proverbs 19:9: *“A false witness will not go unpunished; whoever breathes out lies will perish.”*

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<sup>5</sup> See also, Psalms 34:14(13); Proverbs 10:18.

Proverbs 25:18: *“Like a club, a sword or a sharp arrow is a person who gives false testimony against a neighbor.”*

Colossians 3:9a: *“Never lie to one another...”*

The Bible has many other things to say about wrongful speech—prideful speech, perverse speech, cursing, and more; but what I want to address now is some of what the Bible says about the righteous and holy use of speech. The Scriptures are many, and here are but a few:

Psalms 34:2(1): *“I will bless ADONAI at all times; his praise will always be in my mouth.”*

Psalms 98:4: *“Shout for joy to ADONAI, all the earth! Break forth, sing for joy, sing praises!”*

Proverbs 10:11a: *“The speech of the righteous is a fountain of life...”*

Proverbs 10:13a: *“On the lips of the intelligent is found wisdom...”*

Proverbs 12:17a: *“He who tells the truth furthers justice...”*

Matthew 6:9: *“You, therefore, pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven! May your Name be kept holy...”*

These are a lot of Scriptures, but God’s desire that we use our gift of speech for good warrants our hearing just a few more, so please bear with me:

2 Corinthians 6:6-7a: *“We commend ourselves by our purity, knowledge, patience and kindness; by the Ruach HaKodesh; by genuineness of love and truthfulness of speech...”*

Ephesians 4:29: *“Let no harmful language come from your mouth, only good words that are helpful in meeting the need, words that will benefit those who hear them.”*

Colossians 4:2: *“Keep persisting in prayer; staying alert in it and being thankful.”*

Finally, Hebrews 4:12 says that *“the Word of God is alive! It is at work and is sharper than any double-edged sword...”* Clearly then, speaking the Word of God is one of the best uses of our speech, and has great power for good.

### **Speech Kept Under Control**

1 Corinthians 14:40 states: *“...let all things be done in a proper and orderly way,”* and verse 14:33 tells us that *“...God is not a God of unruliness but of shalom...”* Applying these principles to our speech, we encounter the following Scriptures:

Psalms 141:3: *“Set a guard, ADONAI, over my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips.”*

Proverbs 10:19 “*When words are many, sin is not lacking; so he who controls his speech is wise.*”

James 1:26: “*Anyone who thinks he is religiously observant but does not control his tongue is deceiving himself, and his observance counts for nothing.*”

### **Speech That Is Silent**

How can speech be silent? I have already alluded to how Yeshua’s silence in the final hours of His life spoke volumes and released power. Here are some other Scriptures that suggest times when there is virtue in being slow to speak or remaining silent:

Exodus 14:14 (NIV): “*The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.*”

Psalms 37:7a: “*Be still before ADONAI; wait patiently till he comes.*”

Proverbs 11:12: “*He who belittles another lacks good sense, whereas a person of discernment stays silent.*”

Proverbs 13:3: “*He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but one who talks too much comes to ruin.*”

Proverbs 17:28: “*Even a fool, if he stays silent, is thought wise; he who keeps his mouth shut can pass for smart.*”

James 1:19: “*Therefore, my dear brothers, let every person be quick to listen but slow to speak, slow to get angry*”

### **Scripture Calls Us to Expel or Withdraw from Those Who Transgress with Their Tongues**

The Scriptures we have just heard spoken ought to impress us with how damaging the wrongful use of our tongue can be, and especially in congregational communities. The reason is that gossip, slander, lying, and improperly accusing leaders causes divisions among the brethren, and a spirit of disunity can tear a community apart. That is not to say that leaders are immune from criticism and accusation when they do wrong, but there are remedies for that which I will discuss in a moment. First, however, let us take note of several Scriptures that call for discipline and withdrawal from those who transgress in their speech and do not repent:

Galatians 1:8-9, applies to a person who claims to be a believer but preaches heresy:

*“But even if we—or, for that matter, an angel from heaven!—were to announce to you some so-called “Good News” contrary to the Good News we did announce to you, let him be under a curse forever! We said it before, and I say it again: if anyone announces “Good News” contrary to what you received, let him be under a curse forever!”*

The next two Scriptures call for us to avoid and, if necessary, even expel a person from our midst if he or she is divisive:

Titus 3:10-11: *“Warn a divisive person once, then a second time; and after that, have nothing more to do with him. You may be sure that such a person has been perverted and is sinning: he stands self-condemned.”*

Romans 16:17-18: *“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put snares alongside the teaching in which you have been trained—keep away from them. For men like these are not serving our Lord the Messiah but their own belly; by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the innocent.”*

There is also a Scripture that requires that we cast out of our community, persons who scoff at the Word of God:

Proverbs 22:10: *“Throw the scoffer out, and quarreling goes too; strife and insults cease.”*

And there is also a Scripture requiring that we withdraw from a brother in the faith who is disorderly and unscriptural in the way he conducts his life:

2 Thessalonians 3:6: *“Now, in the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah we command you, brothers, to stay away from any brother who is leading a life of idleness [the NKJ says “walks disorderly”], a life not in keeping with the tradition you received from us.”*

This last Scripture does not specifically refer to speech, but it is relevant because one of the ways we can be disorderly and unscriptural, is through the way we speak.

The ways that we apply these Scriptures is a topic for another message but for now, notice that persons who do not control their tongues within a believing community need to be removed from the community. It is not a matter of First Amendment rights; it is a matter of protecting the community.

### **Ways to Address Legitimate Complaints**

The Scriptures do not leave us without ways to raise legitimate complaints within congregations. Offenses can be of various kinds, but there are two basic types—private offenses and public offenses. A private offense is one in which an individual commits sin against another individual, and the remedy is given in Matthew 18:15-17, where one first confronts the offender alone, then with one or two others, and finally brings the matter to the “congregation,” which we interpret as being the congregation’s elders. A public offense is one that affects the congregational community as a whole. One can attempt to correct such a sin privately, but the usual remedy is to report it to the elders who are authorized to deal with it pursuant to whatever Scriptures apply. It is akin to reporting a theft to the police in the public arena. In all cases, making accusations public, whispering accusations to third persons, and gossiping about what one has heard that is critical of another person are strictly forbidden.

A special case exists when the one being accused or complained about is an elder. 1 Timothy 5:19 requires that we:

*“Never listen to any accusation against a leader unless it is supported by two or three witnesses.”*

When an accusation is made against an elder, a congregation sometimes brings in elders from other congregations to assist. In the case of Tikkun congregations,<sup>6</sup> members have the right to bring complaints against their elders and to appeal any decisions of their elders with which they disagree on biblical grounds.

I will conclude with a prayer taken from Psalms 19:15(14):

*“May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable in your presence, ADONAI, my Rock and Redeemer.”*

—CJB

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<sup>6</sup> Tikkun America is an apostolic governing body.

## Calling Right “Wrong” and Wrong “Right”

*Delivered August 2, 2014*

Justifying our sins is a phenomenon that is no doubt familiar to us all.

- “Yes, I hit the so and so, but he deserved it for what he called me.”
- “Sure, I did not point out the clerk’s error when he entered a lower price for the item than was on its label, but that was because the item was priced too high in the first place.”

There are typical reasons why we are tempted to make excuses for our misdeeds instead of confessing them and repenting. One reason is to justify our getting back at those that have hurt us by seeking to hurt them in return. Another is to gain an advantage for ourselves, and a third is to escape being blamed or punished for something we have done. Excuses abound, such as: “I had a deprived childhood,” or “I was abused by my parents.” Blame-shifting is a common thread for all such justifications.

Making excuses for our sins is (of course) wrong, but at least it does not attempt to say that our sinful conduct was good and right. If we say that, we carry justification of sin to a much higher level—one that is especially odious to God, and that [Isaiah 5:20-21](#) warns us against with these strong words:

*“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who change darkness into light and light into darkness, who change bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter! Woe to those seeing themselves as wise, esteeming themselves as clever.”*

In many quarters, the world today does exactly that—promotes evil as being good, and good as being evil. The idea of promoting evil as good used to shock me more than it does now—probably because, over the years, I have seen so many examples of it; here are but a few that I have encountered:

- Love is “good” and, in fact, Scripture says that “God is love” ([1 John 4:8b](#)). Surely then, God would not want a man to remain married to a woman whom he does not love. Would not a loving God prefer that a man replace his wife whom he does not love with one whom he does love?

It is completely logical, and has been defended that way by many a man who has left his wife for another and has called it “good..”

- According to Muslims, *Jihad* is “good” because it is a war or struggle against infidels (non-Muslims) that are, by their definition, “bad.” So, it stands to reason that ridding the world of infidels (we among them) through the waging of *Jihad* must be “good.”

So, Hamas considers it “good” to lob explosive rockets into Israel in the hope of randomly killing Jews.

- A married couple who want children is considered “good,” and circumstances that fall short of it are considered to be not good or “bad.” Today, to a greater degree than ever before, murdering un-

wanted children to avoid bringing them into the world in less than ideal circumstances is defended as being “good.”

Calling evil “good” is bad enough, but what is even more shocking is when good is called “evil.” Here are some examples that you may recognize:

- It used to be that seeking to preserve the sanctity of marriage by limiting the reasons why couples could divorce was considered “good.” Today, those who would legislate against “no-fault” divorces are accused of being narrow-minded and “bad” for a free society.
- It used to be that two men having sex was universally condemned as sinful, and their marrying each other was unthinkable. Now, in an ever-growing part of American society, homosexuality and same-sex marriages have become accepted as normal, and those who used to be considered virtuous for opposing them are today labeled “homophobes” and “bad” for impeding personal freedoms.
- Not so long ago, those who took an active stand against killing unborn children were universally praised as being “good.” Now, those very same people are accused of being narrow-minded and “bad” for society for interfering with a woman’s freedom to do with her body (and with that which is within her body), whatever she wishes.
- Until recently terrorists were universally condemned as being “bad.” However, now that Israel has retaliated against Hamas militarily, world opinion has recast Hamas from being terrorists (“bad”) to being freedom fighters (“good”), and the Israelis cast as brutal aggressors (“bad”).

Crazy as this topsy-turvy world has become, we should not be surprised because, with western society having moved away from believing in and valuing the Bible as God’s Word, there remains no standard by which one can, any longer, determine what is right and what is wrong. 2 Timothy 3:1b-5a forewarns us of society’s steady moral decline as the end-time approaches:

*“...in the acharit-hayamim (last days) will come trying times. People will be self-loving, money-loving, proud, arrogant, insulting, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, uncontrolled, brutal, hateful of good, traitorous, headstrong, swollen with conceit, loving pleasure rather than God, as they retain the outer form of religion but deny its power.”*

And Isaiah 3:5-9 tells us that, as the end approaches, confusion will ensue:

*“People will oppress each other—everyone his friend, everyone his neighbor. The young will be insolent toward their elders, the insignificant arrogant toward the respected. A man will take hold of his brother in his father’s house and say, “You have a coat, so rule us! Take charge of this ruin!” But on that day, he will protest, “I don’t have a remedy, I lack food and clothing for my own house; don’t put me in charge of people!” For Yerushalayim is ruined, and Y’hudah has fallen; because their words and deeds defy ADONAI, in open provocation of his glory. Their very look witnesses against them! They parade their sin, like S’dom; they don’t even try to hide it—all the worse for them!—they bring evil on themselves.”*

Calling that which is right “wrong” and wrong “right” has led to some of the most despicable of human acts. In 1933, Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsfürer* of the SS and one of Adolph Hitler’s right-hand lieutenants, established the first concentration camp in Dachau. In 1939, he founded the “Lebensborn Project” (also known as the “procreation order”) that encouraged SS and *Wermacht* officers (including those who were married) to discreetly have children with young Aryan women under controlled conditions. The children who were born of these liaisons were then taken from their mothers at an early age and raised in Nazi institutional homes, the goal being that, when they grew to adulthood, they would become leaders in a Nazi Aryan nation. To Himmler, Germany’s “final solution” to solve its “Jewish problem” and his encouragement of married men to have children out of wedlock was not only “not wrong,” it was touted as supremely “right and good” for Germany’s future as an ethnically pure nation.

Hitler twisted “right” and “wrong” in order to justifying his evil pursuits. Here is a translated short excerpt of his writings from *Mein Kampf*:<sup>7</sup>

*“The best characterization is provided by the product of this religious education, the Jew himself. His life is only of this world, and his spirit is inwardly as alien to true Christianity as his nature two thousand years previous was to the great founder [meaning Yeshua] of the new doctrine. Of course, the latter [meaning Yeshua] made no secret of his attitude toward the Jewish people, and when necessary he even took to the whip to drive from the temple of the Lord this adversary of all humanity, who then as always saw in religion nothing but an instrument for his business existence. In return, Christ was nailed to the cross, while our present-day party Christians debase themselves to begging for Jewish votes at elections and later try to arrange political swindles with atheistic Jewish parties—and this against their own nation.”*

This distortion of truth should not surprise us, for we are told in [John 3:19-20](#):

*“Now this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, but people loved the darkness rather than the light. Why? Because their actions were wicked. For everyone who does evil things hates the light and avoids it, so that his actions won’t be exposed.”*

And [Romans 1:18-20](#) followed by [25-28](#) tells us:

*“What is revealed is God’s anger from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth; because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities—both his eternal power and his divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse...”*

*“They have exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, by worshipping and serving created things, rather than the Creator—praised be He forever. Amen. This is why God has given them up to degrading passions; so that their women exchange natural sexual relations for unnatural; and*

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7 Adolph Hitler, “Mein Kampf,” Translated by Ralph Manheim, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA, 1943, p. 307.



*likewise the men, giving up natural relations with the opposite sex, burn with passion for one another; men committing shameful acts with other men and receiving in their own persons the penalty appropriate to their perversion. In other words, since they have not considered God worth knowing, God has given them up to worthless ways of thinking; so that they do improper things.”*

Put more concisely, they call those things that are bad “good,” and those things that are good “bad.” They likewise call those things that are right “wrong,” and those that are wrong “right.” If we are feeling charitable, we may say that they are spiritually deceived, and if we are feeling not so charitable, we suggest that they intend the evil that they do.

As I said earlier, attempting to explain away our sins through logical justification is human, but twisting right with wrong and good with bad is a step beyond. Why is this happening? Perhaps because it is essentially what Adam and Eve did that caused them to be expelled from the Garden of Eden. Let us consider that premise as we read [Genesis 3:1-6](#):

*“Now the serpent was more crafty than any wild animal which ADONAI, God, had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You are not to eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman answered the serpent, “We may eat from the fruit of the trees of the garden, but about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, ‘You are neither to eat from it nor touch it, or you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman, “It is not true that you will surely die; because God knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it had a pleasing appearance and that the tree was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her; and he ate.”*

God told Adam (and Adam in turn told Eve) that eating from the tree in the middle of the garden was a “bad” thing to do. As false prophets do, the serpent (commonly believed to represent Satan) contradicted God and told Eve that it was a “good” thing to do. Eve concluded that the serpent was “right” and that God was “wrong,” and she convinced her husband to follow the serpent instead of God. So, in their twisting of right with wrong, Adam and his wife chose to follow the serpent over God. It was a deadly mistake and, according to [Deuteronomy 13:2\(1\)-4\(3\)](#), our need to be cautious and not follow a false prophet as they did, is just as relevant today: it reads:

*“If a prophet or someone who gets messages while dreaming arises among you and he gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder comes about as he predicted when he said, ‘Let’s follow other gods, which you have not known; and let us serve them,’ you are not to listen to what that prophet or dreamer says. For ADONAI your God is testing you, in order to find out whether you really do love ADONAI your God with all your heart and being.”*

Well, I have said a lot about how, as we progress toward the end-times the world twists right with wrong and good with evil more and more. I have also shown you that this twisting is akin to rejecting God’s leadership (which is a rejection of God himself), and that we should not be surprised to see it happen because the Bible predicts that it will. Nevertheless, let us not think that, in the interim, there is nothing for us to do but grieve the inevitable because, in addition to telling us the “bad” news, the Bible also gives us the “good” news of Yeshua’s soon return, the hope of our salvation, and

instructions for what we are to do in the meantime. We cannot, by any of our actions, alter the course of what is destined to occur, but we can affect its timing. Meanwhile, our marching orders are to walk in faith and godly righteousness, even as society’s moral fabric crumbles around us.

2 Peter 3:11-14 puts it this way:

*“Since everything is going to be destroyed like this, what kind of people should you be? You should lead holy and godly lives, as you wait for the Day of God and work to hasten its coming. That Day will bring on the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt from the heat; but we, following along with his promise, wait for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness will be at home. Therefore, dear friends, as you look for these things, do everything you can to be found by him without spot or defect and at peace.”*

And Proverbs 3:5-6 followed by 4:25-27 exhorts us:

*“Trust in ADONAI with all your heart; do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him; then he will level your paths.”*

*“Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze on what lies in front of you. Level the path for your feet, let all your ways be properly prepared; then deviate neither right nor left; and keep your foot far from evil.”*

And finally, 1 Peter 5:6-11:

*“Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that at the right time he may lift you up. Throw all your anxieties upon him, because he cares about you. Stay sober, stay alert! Your enemy, the Adversary, stalks about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Stand against him, firm in your trust, knowing that your brothers throughout the world are going through the same kinds of suffering. You will have to suffer only a little while; after that, God, who is full of grace, the one who called you to his eternal glory in union with the Messiah, will himself restore, establish and strengthen you and make you firm. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.”*

We began this message with Isaiah 5:20, and let us end with it:

*“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who change darkness into light and light into darkness, who change bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter!”*

As for us, let us walk in the ways of the Lord and pray fervently, for *“the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”* (James 5:16b). And let us not be confused or shaken when we see increased instances of people twisting right with “wrong,” and good with “evil.” The Bible predicts it.

—CJB

## Dealing with Political Correctness

Delivered August 18, 2012

Deuteronomy 13:2(1)-4(3) instructs us:

*“If a prophet or someone who gets messages while dreaming arises among you and he gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder comes about as he predicted when he said, ‘Let’s follow other gods, which you have not known; and let us serve them,’ you are not to listen to what that prophet or dreamer says. For ADONAI your God is testing you, in order to find out whether you really do love ADONAI your God with all your heart and being.”*

This seems straightforward enough. If someone tells me to follow any god but *Adonai*, I will not listen to him or follow him. But things are not always that obvious, as you will see from my recent correspondence with Jonathan Allen, a Tikkun emissary who lives in the UK. Jonathan assists me by editing and uploading to the Tikkun web site, sections of a book I am currently writing. One of the completed sections is on not eating food polluted by idols and contains the following paragraph:

“A matter that deserves some discussion is the meaning of “polluted by idols.” Some translations render this “offered to idols,” or “sacrificed to idols,” bringing to mind the ritual slaughter of an animal offered to a pagan god and the meat then brought home to eat. This kind of idol worship is rare in the developed world, but still may occur among pagan and satanic cults. We do sometimes encounter restaurants and food markets where there is evidence that the owners engage in idol worship (oriental restaurants especially), and we also encounter “*halal*” restaurants and markets where the meats are blessed by Muslims in the name of Allah. In my opinion, the former is not a violation of Scripture so long as the food being offered for sale has not been involved in idolatrous rituals. The latter is more problematic however and, in my opinion, eating such food may indeed violate Scripture unless there is nothing else to eat.”<sup>8</sup>

Upon receiving the paragraph, Jonathan wrote back:

“Michael, you raise some interesting questions. We are definitely aware of some Indian (Hindu) restaurants in the UK where blessings and prayers are said over the food in the kitchen before it is served to customers. A number of “charismatic” Christians (and Christian groups) refuse to eat in such establishments because they say they can “feel” the curse. Similarly, the pressure to appease the Muslim community in this country and, in many cases throughout Europe, means that virtually all meat sold in the UK and many European supermarkets is automatically *halal* unless it explicitly says otherwise. This is giving Messianic Jews and others concerned about this issue some major headaches!”

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<sup>8</sup> This and remarks that follow are based on the presupposition that the Islamic god “Allah” is not the one true God *Adonai-Tzva’ot*. Although Muslims claim that Allah is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they also say that (1) Yeshua is a prophet but not the son of God, (2) Allah sent Mohammed to be the ultimate prophet, and (3) Allah gave mankind the Qur’an, which is the ultimate Scripture in that it contains Allah’s exact words revealed through the angel Gabriel.

I responded back to Jonathan:

“The problem with political correctness in England appears to be serious. We cannot control prayers that are said over meat secretly, but what you describe opens Europe to God’s punitive judgment. I do think that the individual consumer is exempted by God if there is nothing else to eat or if excluding meat from his diet would be unhealthy. But, what about *kosher* meat? Is it available? Also, does *halal* meat in a British market necessarily mean that it has been blessed by a Muslim cleric, or does it merely indicate an appropriate method of slaughter?”

Jonathan responded back to me:

“Michael, there is *kosher* meat only in areas of the country where there is a large enough Jewish population to justify having a shop. The main supermarkets do not carry *kosher* meat at all, although they do carry quite a range of other non-fresh kosher foods depending on the product and the demand. And, yes, I agree that Europe is (a) becoming increasingly Muslim controlled (not by real politics, but by political correctness and Muslim-manipulated public opinion), and (b) liable for and, in my opinion, starting to feel G-d’s judgment.”

And in response to my question: “Does “*halal*” in a British market necessarily indicate that the meat has been blessed by a Muslim cleric?” Jonathan responded:

“All the major meat producers employ appropriate Muslim staff and clerics to make sure that their whole production lines and output are fully ‘*halal*.’ Too much money (and risk of public pressure) to ignore.”

At first glance, it may not seem as though what Jonathan is talking about has to do with eating meat polluted by idols since there are no physical idols or sacrifices being made. But Jonathan’s last remark: “Too much money (and risk of public pressure) to ignore,” strongly suggests that there are idols of another kind. In the name of political correctness and under financial pressure, it appears that England has turned its entire food industry over to Muslim control so that virtually every piece of meat sold must be blessed by a Muslim cleric in the name of the god of Islam! So yes, in my opinion, *halal* meat is polluted by idols and we should not eat it unless nothing else is available. The bigger sin, however, is of the society that has allowed itself to be governed by idolaters and has, in the process, itself become idolatrous.

But England is not our country, and I would not be making such a point of this were it not a warning for us as well. Here in the U.S. it is not about *halal* meat that we must be concerned; it is about other things that belong to God that are systematically being wrested away from him and delivered to another god whose name is “political correctness.” Things like sexual intimacy that God meant to be between a man and a woman to seal their covenant of marriage and to produce children. In the name of “political correctness,” homosexuality has increasingly become a sanctioned lifestyle, and marriage is being hijacked to include the union of two men or two women. And with what have we to argue against it if there is no belief in God or the Holy Scriptures as a standard? Why stop at a marriage of two people? Why not three people? Or four people? Or between a man and his pet animal

that he professes to love? There is no end to perversion if one does not have the standard of eternal truth by which to live, the standard of God's Holy Scriptures.

I know that I am "preaching to the choir" on this, but although we are a numerical minority and sometimes feel powerless, the reality is that our connection to God and what we know of biblical prophecy assure us that He (and therefore we) will have the ultimate victory. As bad as things seem and as bad as things will get, we must remember that our Bibles do not prophesy the destruction of mankind, but rather the salvation of those who belong to Yeshua. Yes, many will perish but, in the end, God will be victorious and we who finish the race holding fast to him will be part of that victory.

There are many distractions that are put in our path by Satan to cause us to stumble. Voices of political correctness and secular logic that tempt our flesh and telling us to go this way or that way, that God's way is not the right way, not the convenient way, not the safe way, or not the only way. Voices professing logic like "After all, isn't God love? So, if a man loves his parrot, what is wrong with his marrying it?" Of course, my example is outlandish, but it was not so long ago that it was equally outlandish to believe that homosexuality and same-sex marriage would become commonplace and even protected by law. The voices are seductive because they feed into our weaknesses so, when we hear them, it is well to remember the words of Proverbs 14:12:

*"There can be a way which seems right to a person, but at its end are the ways of death."*

The problem is not new. In 1 John 4:1-3 we read:

*"Dear friends, don't trust every spirit. On the contrary, test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Here is how you recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges that Yeshua the Messiah came as a human being is from God, and every spirit which does not acknowledge Yeshua is not from God—in fact, this is the spirit of the Anti-Messiah. You have heard that he is coming. Well, he's here now, in the world already!"*

Similarly, and no doubt to address the same problem, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians urging them to test everything. Paul's words are equally instructive to us because there are false prophets in the world today who would intentionally mislead us, and also because well-intentioned men sometimes make mistakes and miss-hear the voice of God. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22:

*"Don't quench the Spirit, don't despise inspired messages. But do test everything—hold onto what is good, but keep away from every form of evil."*

Testing was also standard operating procedure for the men of Berea who "welcomed Paul's message," but engaged in "checking the Tanakh every day to see if the things Sha'ul was saying were true" (Acts 17:11).

I would not be speaking to you with this sense of urgency if it was only our individual welfare that was at stake. We may individually know what is right and be adhering to it, but what of our sons and daughters and their sons and daughters? What of our aging parents and other family members? What

of our neighbors whom God commands that we love? What of our nation that was founded on godly vision that we see eroding into Sodom and Gomorrah before our eyes?

I am going to momentarily digress from the subject of idolatry and political correctness in order to bring to this talk something I think I can show is related to it; I will get back to political correctness shortly.

According to 2Timothy 2:3-4, we who are believers in Yeshua are soldiers in God's army; it reads:

*“Accept your share in suffering disgrace as a good soldier of the Messiah Yeshua. No soldier on duty gets involved with civilian affairs, since he has to please his commanding officer.”*

This statement that we are soldiers is not metaphoric—it is real. We are not the kind of soldiers that kill people (as in the Crusades) but rather soldiers who seek to save people through the message of Scripture and the anointing of God's Spirit:

*“Not by force, and not by power, but by my Spirit, ’ says ADONAI-Tzva ’ot.” (Zechariah 4:6).*

And as do all soldiers, we fight alongside friendly soldiers and against enemy soldiers. That is what soldiers do; they fight as part of an army. In this case, the friendly soldiers are our fellow believers in Yeshua, and the enemy soldiers are Satan's minions:

*“For we are not struggling against human beings, but against the rulers, authorities and cosmic powers governing this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.” (Ephesians 6:12).*

Serving in God's army is not all glory. The typical action movie does not portray a soldier's life as one of suffering, but the 2 Timothy Scripture tells a different story. It tells us that, as one of God's soldiers, we should expect to experience suffering and humiliation as Yeshua did. This comes up again and again in Scripture but, because it is unpleasant to think about, we tend to block it from our minds or gloss over it. But we must stop doing that and must instead confront it because, if we are not ready to suffer for God, we are vulnerable to being overtaken by the enemy in a time of weakness.

The same thing is stated another way in 1 Peter 2:21:

*“Indeed, this is what you were called to; because the Messiah too suffered, on your behalf, leaving an example so that you should follow in his steps.”*

And here is Paul rallying the troops in his letter to the Philippians:

*“Only conduct your lives in a way worthy of the Good News of the Messiah; so that whether I come and see you or I hear about you from a distance, you stand firm, united in spirit, fighting with one accord for the faith of the Good News, not frightened by anything the opposition does. This will be for them an indication that they are headed for destruction and you for deliverance.*

*And this is from God; because for the Messiah's sake it has been granted to you not only to trust in him but also to suffer on his behalf, to fight the same battles you once saw me fight and now hear that I am still fighting.” (Philippians 1:27-30).*

Thankfully, most of us in the Western World will not have to die for our faith, but it is a reality faced by many believers who live elsewhere, particularly in the Middle East and the Orient, so we must remember to pray for our brothers and sisters who live in such places. Although for us it is not martyrdom that threatens, persecution for our beliefs is, nevertheless, common.

This is where we get back to talking about the idolatry of political correctness. In the Western World (including the United States), persecution of believers who resist political correctness occurs all the time and can take many forms. Sometimes the form is economic, as we recently read about how the mayor of a major city sought to withhold business licenses from Chick-Fil-A because the president of Chick-Fil-A expressed his opposition to same-sex marriage. Sometimes the form is social ostracism. Sometimes the form is vandalism; someone does not like what we stand for, so he paints swastikas on our wall. Sometimes it is that no one in our community will hire us for work. Sometimes it is finding that we have received an undeserved “F” on a college term paper. Whatever the way, it hurts, and there an easy (albeit ungodly) way to make the attacks and the hurt go away—which is abandon God’s Word and conform to what is politically correct and what is expected of us by the secular god of political correctness. Yes, that will stop the persecution, but we will eventually have to answer to God for it, and what will we have to say then?

For my part, I am determined to stand my ground and fight. Experiencing pain sometimes, but also experiencing the satisfaction of knowing I am on God’s winning team and that I have a role in the victory. It is not easy for me to watch events that I cannot control unfold as we move forward in the end times. Scripture tells us that things will get worse before they get better, but there is one area I can control—my personal choices of whether I follow God or the ever-present pressures of political correctness that pull in the other direction. I do not want to see the USA go the way of England and other European countries but, frankly, it is just about there. Still, I am not in despair because according to 2 Timothy 2:3-4, I am a soldier of God, and I know for a certainty that my army—God’s army—will prevail. Meanwhile, I have a soldier’s job to do, which is to recruit new soldiers for the battle, and to man the “guns” which, in this kind of war is prayer. All of us who are believers have that same soldier’s commission, so let us suit up with Ephesians 6:12-17 and, by the numbers:

1. *“Take up every piece of war equipment God provides; so that when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist; and when the battle is won, you will still be standing. Therefore, stand!*
2. *Have the belt of truth buckled around your waist.*
3. *Put on righteousness for a breastplate.*
4. *Wear on your feet the readiness that comes from the Good News of shalom.*
5. *Carry the shield of trust, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One.*

6. *Take the helmet of deliverance; along with the sword given by the Spirit, that is, the Word of God...*”

All suited up? Then, my fellow soldiers, ***Move Out!***

—CJB



## **Doing what Is Right**

*Delivered September 6, 2018*

I graduated from law school and passed the Bar in 1968 and while practicing law during the day, began to study psychology at Catholic University in the evening. Everything was going well for me professionally, and I was in my second year at Catholic U. when God made himself known to me and a week later, I knew that Yeshua was my savior.

One of the first things I did after my encounter with God was to study Scripture intensively with complete conviction that whatever it said was true. And it did not take long for me to notice contradictions between what Scripture taught and how I was conducting myself in the practice of law. I was practicing ethically by the bar's standards, but I began to realize that Scripture called for a higher standard.

I'll give you an example. A lawyer is expected to be a vigorous advocate for his client and do everything that is legal to promote his client's interest. Well, at that time my practice was mainly criminal law and my clients' interests were, understandably, "beating the rap" (if you get my meaning). Now in a criminal trial, the prosecutor puts witnesses on the stand to testify to what the witness knows and what the prosecutor believes will lead the jury to conclude that the defendant is guilty as charged. Often, such witnesses are "eyewitnesses"—that is—they testify that they saw a crime being committed, and the defendant committing the crime. This kind of testimony almost always leads to a conviction if the jury believes the witness so, I saw my job as defense counsel as cross-examining the witness in a manner that would make the jury believe that the witness was deaf, blind, stupid, lying, and probably a criminal himself, even though I knew none of those things were true. To me (and frankly to the bar also), that approach was entirely fair and even expected.

Now the problem is that, while being ethical according to legal standards, I was lying according to biblical standards because I was intentionally trying to discredit a credible witness which is different than cross-examining to assure that the witness actually saw what he said he saw. Because of my new faith, I began feeling unclean and concluded that a believer cannot practice criminal law and be right with God at the same time.

I ran into similar difficulty with my studies of psychology. I was in my second year of graduate study and taking a course in "projective techniques." You may have heard of the Rorschach Inkblot test where you show the client inkblots and they tell you what they see in them. Well, it seemed a little loony to me in the first place, but what really capped it off was that my professor confessed to the class that his own life was in shambles and yet he was professing how to diagnose and treat people whose lives were in similar disarray. With my new biblical understanding I said to myself the same thing about psychology that I concluded about the practice of law: "This cannot be right, so it must be that a believer in God cannot be a psychologist. So, with all the fervor and naiveté of a new believer, I did what seemed right at the time—I disenrolled from Catholic University, and I shut down my practice of law.

In the year that followed I earned my living doing legal research at American University. That took me off the front lines of having to conduct trials, and I also discovered and began studying Biblical

Counseling—a practice that uses the wisdom and power of Scripture to minister the same kinds of healing that my professors of psychology were trying to bring about by other means. As time passed and I grew in biblical understanding and spiritual maturity, I began to realize that it was not “law” that was the problem I had had with my former practice, it was the way I conducted myself in it. I came to understand that there was a very simple three-step solution to what earlier seemed like a hopeless contradiction between being a legal advocate and being biblical, and that solution was (1) determine what’s right; (2) do it; (3) let God take care of the consequences.

Simple and straight-forward as it seems, the truth of it did not occur to me for a while because my analytical nature was to try to predict and manage the consequences of my actions. So, even when there was a clearly right thing to do, I often did not do it and did something else instead when I foresaw a potential negative consequence.

I did not see it then, but I now see clearly that my problem was that I was not applying 2 Corinthians 5:7:

*“We walk by faith. not by sight.”*

Conducting one’s affairs with faith is impossible if one is unwilling to trust God with consequences. I believe that is why God sometimes tests us by allowing us to be in situations where we are given choices that have consequences and where there is only one right choice. We read, for example, in Exodus 15:25b-26, where God gave a commandment, told Israel to do what was right, and then stepped back to see what Israel would do:

*“There He [God] made a statute and an ordinance for them [the Israelites]. And there He tested them, and said, ‘If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.’”*

There are many occasions in Scripture where God instructs Israel to do what is right; sometimes the Israelites did what was right, and sometimes they did not. Here are two such instructions and an instance where God gave praise for their doing what was right:

Deuteronomy 6:18: *“And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers...”*

Deuteronomy 12:28: *“Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever; when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.”*

2 Kings 10:30: *“And the LORD said to Jehu, ‘Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.’”*

One might ask: “If we know that God wants us to do right and tells us what is right, why don’t we?” The answer lies in our reluctance to trust him—to put ourselves in his hands. This lack of trust produces fear in us and causes us to try to protect ourselves by making decisions according to what seems safest rather than according to what we know is right. This acting on fear rather than on faith is sin, for we read in 2 Timothy 1:7:

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

And in James 4:17 we read:

*“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*

About a year after I quit the practice of law, I returned to it with a new ethos and determination to apply the three biblical steps I had discovered: (1) Determine what’s right; (2) Do it; (3) Let God take care of the consequences. Now when I took criminal cases to trial I no longer cross-examined witnesses I knew to be truthful with the goal of discrediting them; rather I probed their testimony to determine whether they may have been mistaken. For example, if a witness testified that he saw the face of my client 50 feet away in a dark alley, I probed whether his eyesight justified his certainty. If he normally wore glasses but not have them on at the time, I brought that fact out to the jury. If the witness was a co-defendant in the alleged crime, I probed as to whether he had been offered a plea bargain conditioned on his giving testimony against my client; that, of course, would have made the truth of his testimony suspect. If, in a background check, I found that the witness had previously been convicted of perjury, I brought out the history of his having lied under oath at another proceeding. I considered all that to be fair. If, however, after cross-examination of this kind I uncovered nothing that reasonably cast doubt on the witness’ testimony, I carried it no further.

My clients often did not appreciate it when I told them in advance about my biblically clean approach to cross-examination. Some sought another attorney, and some threatened to complain to the Bar. None ever did, and I resolved in my own mind to do what was right regardless of the possible danger to me and to my license to practice law.

From time to time I hear news stories about national figures making decisions motivated by fear of consequences. In one such story a politician urges us to not support Israel against its neighboring enemies because they control much of our oil supply. Another story tells of how another politician is fearful of withholding money from a certain dictator head of state because the dictator might begin showing favor to terrorists. I found myself thinking: “What is wrong with these people?” They know what is right and what is wrong, so why do they not just do what is right and trust God to manage the consequences? The answer was, of course, obvious. They either do not know God or do not trust God, and they therefore fear the possible consequences of certain actions.

Those stories were national and international, but many of us have personal stories as well of times we wrestled with decisions even though we knew only one decision was the right one. There are many ways we can find ourselves in that place, and when we do, it is well to remember two Scriptures, the first of which has already been mentioned:

2 Timothy 1:7: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me.”

Making decisions out of fear—that is, trying to figure out which course of action is safest rather than which is right is, in effect, trying to do things through our own strength rather than through God’s strength, and that neither pleases God nor bodes well for a good result. Do you remember the men who Moses sent to spy out the land at God’s direction? Moses instructed them in Numbers 13:17a-20a:

*“Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, “Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.”*

The men were to gather intelligence to assist Moses in formulating a plan for capturing the land which God promised to the Israelites. Moses trusted God but ten of the twelve spies did not trust God. They succumbed to fear, brought a bad and fearful report of Giants in the land, and tried to persuade Moses and the Israelites that taking possession of it would be impossible. The Israelites who also did not trust God said:

*“If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt? ...Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.”* (Numbers 14:2-4).

Joshua and Caleb saw the same things in the land as their ten comrades, but they trusted God and said in response:

*“The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them.”* (Numbers 14:7b-9).

As you no doubt recall, God was not very happy with the men who brought the bad report and with the Israelites who did not trust God to keep his word. It was the quintessential example of men knowing what was right but wanting to do what seemed safe.

How many of us are prone to the same thing? How many of us are willing to say, even in advance of a situation occurring: “Whatever temptation I am faced with, no matter how dangerous the circumstances, I will trust God by (1) determining what’s right; (2) doing it; (3) letting God take care of the consequences?” If our answer is: “Sure I am willing to trust God but show me the situation before I

make the commitment!” then we are walking on weak and dangerous ground insofar as our faith is concerned, and we need to repent.

We are approaching the Holy Days of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* that are all about repenting of those things we do that are wrong and turning instead to do what is right. I pray that this message will embed itself in each of our hearts and minds as a restatement of God’s will that in all things we are to determine what is right, trust God by doing it, and let God take care of the consequences.”

—NKJ

## Forgiveness and Reconciliation

*Delivered April 21, 2018*

The subjects of forgiveness and reconciliation are not just for the *Yom Kippur* season. Both of them are, in fact, attributes that God himself possesses and, without them, we could try (as earnestly as we could) to repent of our sins, but our attempts would be to no avail. God's willingness to forgive us and restore his relationship with us, are the only reasons that our attempts to repent are effective. During the Mosaic Covenant period, God's requirement of the Israelites in order to receive forgiveness for their sins was that they first repent and then follow up their repentance by sacrificing sheep and goats in the Tabernacle (later the Temple). But we today are subject to the New Covenant; in this Covenant, God still requires us to sacrifice, but just as he provided a substitute sacrifice for Abraham (a goat in the thicket), He has provided a substitute sacrifice for us in the person of his beloved son Yeshua. So, if we want God to forgive our sins, two things are required of us—our sincere repentance, and our affirmation and adoption of Yeshua's sacrifice as our own.

But it is not God's forgiveness of us that I want to speak about today, but rather our forgiveness of each other, the two of which see are related. For some reason, men find it hard to forgive and often judge each other even more harshly than God judges us. The result is that we sometime withhold our forgiveness from those who have hurt us, even though God does not withhold his forgiveness from us when we hurt him!

Yeshua was confronted with this issue when Peter asked him in [Matthew 18:21b](#):

*"Rabbi, how often can my brother sin against me and I have to forgive him? As many as seven times?"*

Yeshua's answer to him in [verse 22](#) was:

*"No, not seven times, ...but seventy times seven!"*

Then Yeshua followed with a parable to help explain to Peter the importance of forgiving; the parable in [Matthew 18:23-35](#) went this way:

*"Because of this, the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared with a king who decided to settle accounts with his deputies. Right away they brought forward a man who owed him many millions; and since he couldn't pay, his master ordered that he, his wife, his children and all his possessions be sold to pay the debt. But the servant fell down before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' So out of pity for him, the master let him go and forgave the debt. But as that servant was leaving, he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him some tiny sum. He grabbed him and began to choke him, crying, 'Pay back what you owe me!' His fellow servant fell before him and begged, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused; instead, he had him thrown in jail until he should repay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were extremely distressed; and they went and told their master everything that had taken place. Then the master summoned his servant and said, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt just because you begged me to do it. Shouldn't you have*

*had pity on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And in anger his master turned him over to the jailers for punishment until he paid back everything he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat you, unless you each forgive your brother from your hearts.”*

While there is no explicit commandment in the *Torah* that requires we forgive our brother, there is a commandment that means the same thing; in Leviticus 19:17, God says:

*“Do not hate your brother in your heart, but rebuke your neighbor frankly, so that you won’t carry sin because of him. Don’t take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI.”*

Rabbinic literature endorses the principle of forgiving others and gives, as the example we are to follow, Joseph’s forgiveness of his brothers that we read about in Genesis 50:16-21:

*“So they [Joseph’s brothers] sent a message to Yosef which said, “Your father gave this order before he died: ‘Say to Yosef, “I beg you now, please forgive your brothers’ crime and wickedness in doing you harm.”’ So now, we beg of you, forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.” Yosef wept when they spoke to him; and his brothers too came, prostrated themselves before him and said, “Here, we are your slaves.” But Yosef said to them, “Don’t be afraid! Am I in the place of God? You meant to do me harm, but God meant it for good—so that it would come about as it is today, with many people’s lives being saved. So don’t be afraid—I will provide for you and your little ones.” In this way he comforted them, speaking kindly to them.”*

But back to Yeshua: Notice that when Peter asked Yeshua how many times he had to forgive his brother, he asked it just that way, using the expression *“have to forgive him.”* Clearly, Peter was resistant to having to forgive his brother each time his brother sinned against him, and it is often the same with us. Yeshua’s parable was given as a warning to Peter, but it is also a warning to us that our forgiveness of each other is connected to God’s forgiveness of us.

We read in Mark 11:25-26:

*“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” (NKJ).*

And in Colossians 3:13:

*“Bear with one another; if anyone has a complaint against someone else, forgive him. Indeed, just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive.”*

Why should it be so difficult for us to forgive? Probably because there is a lingering part of our fallen nature that causes us to want to lash out against those who harm us. But in Romans 12:19, Paul instructs us not to do that, for he says:

*“Never seek revenge, my friends; instead, leave that to God’s anger; for in the Tanakh it is written, ‘ADONAI says, ‘Vengeance is my responsibility; I will repay.’”*

Some of us may not be aware of it, but there are not one, but two kinds of forgiveness in Scripture, and our responsibility to forgive others is different for each of them. Let us consider the first one, that I will call “Personal Forgiveness.” It is the kind that is commanded in [Mark 11:25](#) that I referred to previously:<sup>9</sup>

*“And when you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive your offenses.”*

Notice that this Personal Forgiveness is unconditional and is to be granted, not only to brothers and sisters (in the Lord), but to all who have sinned against us and hurt us. It does not seek to judge the offender, nor does it require that the offender be repentant, and it must be given as soon as possible after the offense is committed so that bitterness does not take root within us and do spiritual damage. This kind of forgiveness releases the matter to God for whatever justice He deems is required, and does not retain anger or a desire for personal revenge. [Ephesians 4:31-32](#) says of it:

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, violent assertiveness and slander; along with all spitefulness. Instead, be kind to each other; tenderhearted; and forgive each other, just as in the Messiah God has also forgiven you.*

Personal Forgiveness is a manifestation of godly love that we are to give—even to our enemies—for we read in [Luke 6:27-32](#):

*“Nevertheless, to you who are listening, what I say is this: ‘Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone hits you on one cheek, offer the other too; if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. If someone asks you for something, give it to him; if someone takes what belongs to you, don’t demand it back. Treat other people as you would like them to treat you. What credit is it to you if you love only those who love you? Why, even sinners love those who love them.’”*

Yeshua illustrated this kind of forgiveness when, in [Luke 23:34a](#), he beseeched his Father in heaven to forgive the Roman soldier executioners who were, even at that moment, subjecting him to an unjust and painful death;

*“Yeshua said, ‘Father, forgive them; they don’t understand what they are doing.’”*

Our granting Personal Forgiveness and our not harboring bitterness against those who have sinned against us opens the way for God to forgive us for our sins as well. In the same way, if we do not grant Personal Forgiveness, [Matthew 6: 14-15](#), [Mark 11:25](#) (for the third time) and [Luke 6:37](#), convey the certainty that God will not forgive us either:

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<sup>9</sup> In translations other than the CJB, there is an additional verse 26.



*“For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will not forgive yours.”*  
(Matthew 6:14-15)

*“And when you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive your offenses.”* (Mark 11:25)

*“Don’t judge, and you won’t be judged. Don’t condemn, and you won’t be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”* (Luke 6:37)

Now perhaps you are troubled by what seems to be the injustice of having to forgive a person for committing a sin against you if he remains unrepentant. Well, remember that I said there were two kinds of forgiveness? So, let us now examine the second kind that I call “Judicial Forgiveness”<sup>10</sup> that is commanded in Luke 17:3-4:

*“Watch yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. Also, if seven times in one day he sins against you, and seven times he comes to you and says, ‘I repent,’ you are to forgive him.”*

Judicial forgiveness is different than Personal Forgiveness in several ways that this Scripture illustrates. First, it applies only to brothers and sisters (in the Lord). Second, whereas Personal Forgiveness must be given unconditionally, Judicial Forgiveness is only granted if the offending brother repents. I call it “Judicial Forgiveness” because the one who has been sinned against is the one who judges whether the offending brother is repentant, and he must judge him repentant before forgiving him. This kind of forgiveness is unique in another way as well, which is illustrated in John 20: 23:

*“If you forgive someone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you hold them, they are held.”*

Here you see that if one who has been sinned against forgives his offending brother, God also forgives the brother. Conversely, if one who has been sinned against withholds forgiveness because, in his judgment, his brother is not repentant, God honors the judgment and does not forgive the brother either. That is why I call this kind of forgiveness “Judicial Forgiveness” as distinguished from the first kind which is “Personal Forgiveness.” But what if the brother who is sinned against judges his brother’s repentance incorrectly and does not forgive when he should? Although Scripture does not speak to that situation, I am confident that God, who is the higher judge, will forgive and will show the mistaken brother his error.

You may ask why, in explaining John 20:23, I kept referring to “brother” when the Scripture does not say “brother.” It is because the verse involves judging, and Scripture empowers us to judge only those who are within the body of believers and not those who are outside; this principle is spoken of by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13:

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<sup>10</sup> Sometimes termed “Transactional Forgiveness.”

*“For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Isn't it those who are part of the community that you should be judging? God will judge those who are outside. Just expel the evildoer from among yourselves.”*

Summarizing:

1. Personal Forgiveness must be granted to everyone, is unconditional, and clears the way for God to forgive us.
2. Judicial Forgiveness, on the other hand, applies only between believers, should only be granted if the offending brother is judged by the offended brother to be repentant, and clears the way for the offending brother to be forgiven by God.
3. If we are sinned against, one of the first things we must do is exercise Personal (unconditional) Forgiveness toward the offender, whether or not he is a brother. This is vital because, unless we purge ourselves of unholy attitudes, we are not in a proper frame of mind or in a spiritual condition to follow through with decisions that are subsequently required of us.

Backing up a bit, I need to add this: After granting Personal Forgiveness, the first thing we should do is decide whether or not to overlook the sin because, even when it is permissible for us to seek redress, we can choose to not do so. That we are allowed this choice is spoken of in Proverbs 19:11:

*“People with good sense are slow to anger, and it is their glory to overlook an offense.”*

Also, Romans 12:18:

*“If possible, and to the extent that it depends on you, live in peace with all people.”*

Some offenses are easily overlooked—especially those that are unintentional, have done no great harm, and are unlikely to be repeated. Although it may seem that overlooking an offense is always the loving thing to do, it is not necessarily so. Our decision should be based on what is best for the offender and what is protective of others. It should not be based on our feelings. Also, if an offense is overlooked, it must *really* be overlooked, in that the offender must not be accused of it in the future and it must not be mentioned again unless it becomes relevant because the sin is repeated.

If our decision is to not overlook the offense, our next decision depends upon whether or not the offender is a brother in the Lord. If he is not, it is unlikely that he can be appealed to with Scripture, yet he may come under conviction if confronted with universally accepted principles of conduct and morality. If he will not listen to what we have to say or is not willing to make things right or we believe that confronting him may be dangerous, we are permitted to seek redress with help from the secular authorities in reliance upon Romans 13:1, which states:

*“Everyone is to obey the governing authorities. For there is no authority that is not from God, and the existing authorities have been placed where they are by God.”*

If, however, the offender is a brother in the Lord, we are not biblically permitted to sue him in the public courts and, if justice is to be pursued, it must be through a *bet din* of the body of believers. This is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 6:1-7:

*“How dare one of you with a complaint against another go to court before pagan judges and not before God’s people? Don’t you know that God’s people are going to judge the universe? If you are going to judge the universe, are you incompetent to judge these minor matters? Don’t you know that we will judge angels, not to mention affairs of everyday life? So if you require judgments about matters of everyday life, why do you put them in front of men who have no standing in the Messianic Community? I say, shame on you! Can it be that there isn’t one person among you wise enough to be able to settle a dispute between brothers? Instead, a brother brings a lawsuit against another brother, and that before unbelievers! Actually, if you are bringing lawsuits against each other, it is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?”*

So, if the offender is a brother in the Lord, we do not subject him to secular judgment; rather, our recourse for justice and reconciliation is through a three-step process that is defined in Matthew 18:15-17, the details of which we will leave for another day.

Let us end with two Scriptures that remind us of our need to forgive sins committed against us, and for all members of the body of believers to be in reconciliation and at peace with one another; first Colossians 3:12-15:

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with feelings of compassion and with kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; if anyone has a complaint against someone else, forgive him. Indeed, just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive. Above all these, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together perfectly; and let the shalom which comes from the Messiah be your heart’s decision-maker, for this is why you were called to be part of a single Body. And be thankful-“*

And Philippians 4:7:

*“Then God’s shalom, passing all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua.”*

—CJB

## Friendship

*Delivered July 15, 2006*

Friendship for a believer is not an option. The ability and willingness to be a friend is not only a godly trait for us, it is one of God's attributes; God says in Isaiah 41:8:

*“But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend.”*

God's friendship with Abraham is referenced again in James 2:23 where we read:

*“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”*

Not only Abraham, but Moses too, for in Exodus 33:11 we read:

*“So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”*

One of the characteristics of friendship is our willingness to sacrifice for our friend—to put our friend's welfare before our own. We see, in the New Covenant Scriptures, in John 15:15, how Yeshua possessed his Father's capacity to be a friend to men, and declared his friendship to his disciples by telling them:

*“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”*

We were created in God's image and therefore we too have the capacity to befriend and to receive friendship from God and from one another. In terms of human friendship, Scripture gives us the amazing example of the relationship of David and Jonathan; we read in 1 Samuel 18:1:

*“Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”*

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul exhorts us that:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”*

So, the Scriptures that reveal God's friendship with Abraham and Moses, Yeshua's friendship with his disciples, and Jonathan's friendship with David, are for our benefit—examples for us to emulate. Through Scripture, God is showing us that we are to befriend one another as they did, and that means loving one another. Proverbs 17:17 tells us:

*“A friend loves at all times.”*

And [John 15:13](#) tells us:

*“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”*

In addressing his friends, Yeshua said:

*“These things I command you, that you love one another”* ([John 15:17](#)).

If we are Yeshua’s friends, that commandment is meant for us!

[Proverbs 27:17](#) tells us:

*“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”*

And we do not stay friends by merely saying nice things to each other, for in [Job 17:5](#) we read:

*“He who speaks flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children will fail.”*

No, we stay friends by being forthright with each other, by caring about each other, by treating each other with loving respect, and by upholding each other in the way we speak. [Psalms 15:1-3](#) says it this way:

*“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend...”*

As friends, God expects us to depend upon one another, protect one another, and support one another, as we have need and as we can fulfill each other’s needs. In this, [Proverbs 27:10](#) exhorts us:

*“Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend, nor go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity; better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.”*

There is a song that bids friends farewell in God’s peace; the words are:

*Shalom chaverim*

Peace be to you, friends

*L’hitra’ot, shalom.*

Until we meet again, *shalom*.

—NKJ

## **Fulfilling All Righteousness**

*Delivered March 31, 2007*

In Matthew 3:11, we read these words spoken by John:

*“I indeed immerse you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.”*

Have you ever considered why John was immersing there in the first place and by what authority? Little is known about it, except that immersion was commonly practiced in the ancient Jewish world for restoring spiritual and physical purity.

As with John’s *mikvah*, ancient writings disclose that ritual Jewish washings often required a complete covering by water. The *Shulchan Aruch*, the major Code of Jewish Law teaches about such immersion (*Yoreh De’ah*, chapt. 15, 198:1), and the *Mishnah* of the Babylonian Talmud ( *Moed, Yoma 3 Mishneh 3*) tells us that the High priest immersed himself five times and washed his hands and feet ten times during the sacrifices and ministries of *Yom Kippur*. Also, Hillel taught that immersion, as well as circumcision, was required for Gentiles to convert to Judaism, and in Isaiah 1:16, we read of a washing specifically for repentance; it reads:

*“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil...”*

If one has any doubt that immersion for repentance was a Jewish practice, surely it is dispelled by Matthew 3:5-6 which shows the overwhelming response to John’s *mikvah*, for we read:

*“Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were immersed by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.”*

And even the religious Jewish establishment responded, for in Matthew 3:7 we read:

*“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his mikvah, he said to them, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’”*

All of this has been background leading up to a very special Jew who responded to John’s call for repentance and immersion, and in Matthew 3:13-15 we read:

*“Then Yeshua came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be immersed by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be immersed by You, and are You coming to me?” But Yeshua answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.”*

At first, John objected to immersing Yeshua, because he knew who Yeshua was and that he was without sin. John’s immersion was for repentance, so he concluded there was no purpose in Yeshua being

immersed. But when Yeshua said: “...it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness,” John understood and immersed him.

Why did John change his mind? Was he merely being obedient to Yeshua’s insistence? I used to think that, but God revealed something to me which I will share with you. The “fulfillment of righteousness” to which Yeshua was referring was obedience to the Jewish community’s expectation that when a public call to repentance was offered, anyone who desired to repent or to be seen as repentant could be expected to respond. Put another way, anyone seen not responding would have been thought of as unrighteous. The Pharisees and Sadducees whom John rebuked were, in fact, unrepentant, but did not want to be seen that way. Yeshua, on the other hand, was fully righteous, but wanted to identify with righteousness by doing all that the community expected of a righteous Jew.

Now mind you, Yeshua was not responding to a command of *Torah*; it would not have been sin for him or anyone else to refuse John’s immersion. He was responding to the cultural expectations of the Jewish community of that day in order to present himself as a good witness in furtherance of his service to the Father. And in his submitting to an immersion he did not need, he became our example and hope that as we attempt to comply with the religious and cultural expectations of *our* Jewish communities, we too may be seen as fulfilling all righteousness in him.

What I am suggesting is this—that as Messianic Jews and Gentiles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, conforming to the perceived righteous standards and expectations of the wider Jewish community, so long as they are not contrary to Scripture, may be more spiritually important to our Jewish witness than some of us have thought. In my own case, my Jewish lifestyle has done much to enhance my witness of Yeshua to Jewish brethren whom God has brought across my path and keeps bringing across my path. It might take a day of talk for me to convey my beliefs in depth, but it takes only a moment of observing me to get the point that I am a Torah-compliant Jew, and only a sentence or two more to convey that I am a follower of Yeshua. My desire is that my voluntary compliance with Jewish norms will be perceived as righteous so that my message about Yeshua may be taken seriously.

God was gracious (despite my resistance) to provide an example of this just yesterday. I had visited one of the Jewish bookstores near my home in Wheaton, Maryland to purchase a gift for the youngster who will find the *afikomen* at our *seder*. As I was browsing, a young man dressed in Orthodox Jewish garb took notice of the blue thread in my *tzitzit*, rattled off three authorized sources from where one might procure *kosher* blue threads, and asked me from which source mine came. I was taken aback by his question because I was in a hurry to get home and surmised that my answer would get me into a prolonged conversation. Nevertheless, I responded:

“I bought these *tzitzit* from someone who made them for me; she probably got the blue threads from G-Street Fabrics. Scripture commands that I wear blue threads so I am wearing blue threads.”

The young man frowned and looked troubled, so I figured I was in for it. He stroked his chin and said: “You used the term Scripture. That’s interesting. Let me ask you something.” And he went on to ask me whether I thought the words of the *Sh’ma* alone should be put in a *mezuzah* or whether the Ten Commandments should also be included. Since his question had nothing to do with the *tzitzit* he

previously asked about, I concluded he was either bating me or testing me, so I gave him as complete an answer as I could and made sure to make the point that most *halachic* decisions were made for whole communities by ancient sages. Then he surprised me by candidly telling me his opinion of what he thought should be put in a *mezuzah*. So, I said:

“That’s interesting. You seem disturbed by my willingness to be non-*halachic* in what kind of blue threads I wear but you seem to be considering being non-*halachic* about your *mezuzot*. So now let me ask you a question. Do you think a modern Jewish community—say a small community like a congregation—has authority to declare *halachah* for itself?”

I could not believe the young man’s next response. He said it was so rare to find someone like me who was willing to discuss such things. He missed such discussions since he had come back from living in Israel, and he wanted to know if I had the time to talk some more. Well, it was 2:00 PM on Friday and the store was about to close, so I told him I would pay for my purchase and talk with him outside.

When we got outside, he looked at his watch and bemoaned that he only had a few minutes before he would have to catch his bus. I told him where I had parked, and he said he had time to walk with me to my car. On the way, he asked me what synagogue I was a member of. “Okay,” I thought, “the cat’s out of the bag now.” So, in my not-so-subtle way I said:

“I am a member of a Messianic Jewish congregation. We believe that Yeshua—Jesus is *Mashiach*.”

“I thought you might be,” he said, “I’ve met a few Messianic Jews, but they all seemed to be so Christian in their life and attitude.” “You’re the first one I’ve ever met who’s clearly Jewish and can talk about Jewish things.”

I began to explain that I was not the only one, but that his experience with Christianized Jews was probably the result of many Jews who came to faith in Yeshua through Christianity because the Messianic Jewish movement is still relatively young. “We’re all very influenced by our first instruction,” I said.

Then he said: “I was not going to go to that bookstore today, but something told me I should. I am glad I did, but I have to run now. I want to give you my phone number so we can talk again after *Yom Tov*. Will that be okay?” Of course, it was okay, so we exchanged phone numbers and names, and wished each other “*Shabbat Shalom*.”

Okay, so I almost blew it by my impatience in the store, but apparently God had already gotten hold of Ariel (that was his name), so he hung in despite my initial response. And as the conversation progressed and I started warming up to him, it became clear that God had provided that meeting as a divine appointment for his benefit, and had used—not my eloquence in explaining Yeshua—but those things about me that were in compliance with Jewish culture, and even in intentional non-compliance, to cause Ariel to feel sufficiently at home that he was willing to receive the few words I had to say. And notice that God had prepared him for our meeting through prior encounters with other Messianic Jews even though they were not able to carry him further.



So, what has my meeting Ariel to do with my message today? It is an exhortation to all of us that our cultural identity as either Jews or Gentiles who have become part of a community of Jews is a powerful circumstance that God can use to help bring the Jewish people to faith in Yeshua or at least a step closer. God used my decision to wear *tzitzit* (albeit made from yarn bought in a fabric store) and also my familiarity with other Jewish matters to make me sufficiently interesting and acceptable to Ariel that he wanted to continue our conversation.

Notice that Ariel needed me—a seemingly *Torah*-compliant—Jew with whom he could feel comfortable, but the way was paved for me to speak to him about my belief in Yeshua by other Messianic Jews (and perhaps Gentiles) who were more culturally Christian. So, God uses us all.

Just as Yeshua’s community expected him to submit to an immersion that he did not need personally, our Jewish community expects things of us that we may not need either but, when we comply, like Yeshua we are fulfilling all righteousness.

—NKJ

## Having the Courage of Our Convictions

*Delivered November 2, 2013*

Each time we complete the public reading of one of the Books of *Torah*, we stand and exclaim:

**חזק! חזק! ונתחזק!**

*Chazak! Chazak! V'nit-chazeik!*<sup>11</sup>

“Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!”

Why do we shout this? It is to remind us that we need God’s strength to keep God’s *Torah*. Obeying God’s law is sometimes at great cost, and to keep *Torah*, we have to have the courage of our convictions. Now that is an interesting saying—“Have the courage of our convictions!”

Here are what three dictionaries say the expression means:

1. “If you have the courage of your convictions, you are brave enough to do what you feel is right despite any pressure for you to do something different.”
2. “It is the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear; i.e. bravery.”
3. “To act in accordance with one’s beliefs, especially in the face of criticism and danger.”

Let us consider the words “courage” and “convictions,” as they are used in the expression “courage of our convictions.” “Courage” is similar to the word “strength,” and “convictions” is very close to the word “beliefs.” Not just any beliefs, but beliefs in what are right, true, and virtuous. And where do we get such beliefs? Of course, from the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. So, the first thing we need to realize is that before we can have the “courage of our convictions” we must have convictions—biblical convictions—and we must hold them so strongly, that we are willing to endure consequences and persecution from those who oppose God’s values.

Having the courage of our convictions is not found in the Bible in so many words, but its principle most certainly is. In fact, the Bible is replete with illustrations of men and women who tenaciously held to their convictions in the face of danger, hardship, and sometimes even death.

Let me share a few of these with you. In [Joshua 1:6-9](#), God said to Joshua:

*“Be strong, be bold; for you will cause this people to inherit the land I swore to their fathers I would give them. Only be strong and very bold in taking care to follow all the Torah which Moshe my servant ordered you to follow; do not turn from it either to the right or to the left; then you will succeed wherever you go. Yes, keep this book of the Torah on your lips, and meditate on*

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<sup>11</sup> Derived from [Deuteronomy 31:6](#).

*it day and night, so that you will take care to act according to everything written in it. Then your undertakings will prosper, and you will succeed. Haven't I ordered you, 'Be strong, be bold'? So don't be afraid or downhearted, because ADONAI your God is with you wherever you go."*

This was a situation in which Joshua and the Israelites were about to face a military enemy, and God reminded Joshua that he needed to be “strong and very bold”—not militarily (although he needed that too), but in following the commandments of *Torah*. He was not to be afraid because, so long as he followed the *Torah*, God would be with him. Had Joshua doubted God, he could not have had the courage he needed to face the enemy. But he did believe God, and the courage of his convictions allowed him to lead his men into battle and prevail.

We find another example of military courage born of biblical conviction in the famous story of David and Goliath. In 1 Samuel 17:33-37 we read:

*“Sha'ul said to David, “You can't go to fight this P'lishti [this Philistine]—you're just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth!” David answered Sha'ul, “Your servant used to guard his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear would come and grab a lamb from the flock, I would go after it, hit it, and snatch the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned on me, I would catch it by the jaw, smack it and kill it. Your servant has defeated both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised P'lishti will be like one of them, because he has challenged the armies of the living God.” Then David said, “ADONAI, who rescued me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will rescue me from the paw of this P'lishti!”*

Of course, we know how that turned out—David won over Goliath because he had the courage of his convictions.

Not all examples of such courage have to do with *military* enemies. Just as dangerous are evil men—opponents of God who have power and abuse their power. Such was the case of N'vukhadnetzar, the king of Babylon. It was reported to him that three young Israelites, Shadrakh, Meishakh and 'Aved-N'go, refused to bow down to his god, so he had them brought before him and said to them in Daniel 3:15-18:

*“All right, then. If you are prepared, when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, harp, zither, lute, bagpipe and the rest of the musical instruments, to fall down and worship the gold statue, very well. But if you won't worship, you will immediately be thrown into a blazing hot furnace—and what god will save you from my power then?” Shadrakh, Meishakh and 'Aved-N'go answered the king, “Your question doesn't require an answer from us. Your majesty, if our God, whom we serve, is able to save us, he will save us from the blazing hot furnace and from your power. But even if he doesn't, we want you to know, your majesty, that we will neither serve your gods nor worship the gold statue which you have set up.”*

So, into the furnace they went! And were they made toast? No, they were not! Because they had courage that matched their convictions, God brought them through the fiery furnace unscathed.

And a favorite of mine is the story of Esther. In the Book of the Bible named after her, there is a back-and-forth conversation between her and her cousin Mordekhai—her from inside the king’s palace, and Mordekhai from outside. Mordekhai sent a message to Esther (through an intermediary) informing her that the king had issued a decree to kill all the Jews in the kingdom, and he implored her to intercede with the king on the Jews’ behalf. At first, she was afraid, and sent back this reply:

*Esther 4:11: “All the king’s officials, as well as the people in the royal provinces, know that if anyone, man or woman, approaches the king in the inner courtyard without being summoned, there is just one law—he must be put to death—unless the king holds out the gold scepter for him to remain alive; and I haven’t been summoned to the king for the past thirty days.”*

But Mordekhai responded:

*Esther 4:13-14: “Don’t suppose that merely because you happen to be in the royal palace you will escape any more than the other Jews. For if you fail to speak up now, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from a different direction; but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows whether you didn’t come into your royal position precisely for such a time as this.”*

This last comment of Mordekhai’s is a clear indication that he believed God knew in advance that this would happen and intentionally placed Esther in her position of influence so that she could help. Upon hearing it, Esther summoned the courage of her convictions and replied:

*Esther 4:16: “Go, assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan, and have them fast for me, neither eating nor drinking for three days, night and day; also I and the girls attending me will fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.”*

Well, we know that she did not perish, and is recorded in the Bible as a heroine for saving her people. Why? Because God gave her courage to act on her convictions.

But things do not always turn out that favorably, like for Stephen, whose courage resulted in his being killed. We read in [Acts 7](#) how he was chastising and calling a crowd of Jewish men to repentance; try and imagine the reception he received when the crowd heard him say this:

*Acts 7:51-52: “Stiffnecked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You continually oppose the Ruach HaKodesh! You do the same things your fathers did! Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who told in advance about the coming of the Tzaddik [the Righteous One], and now you have become his betrayers and murderers!—you!—who receive the Torah as having been delivered by angels—but do not keep it!”*

In Stephen’s case, his courage resulted in his being stoned; we read in [Acts 2:57-60](#):

*“At this, they began yelling at the top of their voices, so that they wouldn’t have to hear him; and with one accord, they rushed at him, threw him outside the city and began stoning him. And the witnesses laid down their coats at the feet of a young man named Sha’ul. As they were stoning*

*him, Stephen called out to God, “Lord Yeshua! Receive my spirit!” Then he kneeled down and shouted out, “Lord! Don’t hold this sin against them!” With that, he died...”*

When we read stories about such people—martyrs for the faith we call them—we often shrink back from thinking of ourselves as one day being in their shoes because, deep down, we suspect that we are not spiritually ready to do similarly, and we are afraid. So, we put them on a pedestal as being “super humans” and fool ourselves into thinking that we will never have to follow their examples. We tell ourselves: “I’ll never be called to do such things—endure persecution, personal loss, and even death for my convictions.” The problem is that Scripture says otherwise—Scriptures like Luke 9:23-24, in which Yeshua tells us:

*“If anyone wants to come after me, let him say ‘No’ to himself, take up his execution-stake daily and keep following me. For whoever tries to save his own life will destroy it, but whoever destroys his life on my account will save it.”*

Or John 15:20:

*“Remember what I told you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too...”*

Or 2 Timothy 3:12:

*“And indeed, all who want to live a godly life united with the Messiah Yeshua will be persecuted...”*

If we do not take these Scriptures and others like them seriously as applying to us, we are, in effect, saying to God: “No, I do not have the courage of my convictions and, what is more, if I have to face trials that require such courage, I would rather give up my convictions.”

Because we live in the Western World and especially in the United States, most of us will never have to face physical torture for our faith. Not so in the Middle East, the Orient, and the Third World. But let us talk about our own situation. How are we called to act courageously on our convictions? Well, let us just look around! There is unbelief and ungodliness everywhere, beckoning to us—“Come join us.” It is saying:

*“Life is easier with us. Life is safer with us. Your biblical principles are old fashioned. There is no God and, if there were, would He not want the best for you? Come with us! Be safe!”*

Most of us have heard that voice at one time or another, and some of us remember occasions when we have given in to it. It speaks to us when our supervisor at work “asks” something of us that is unethical, and when our friend or associate urges that we join him in some kind of inappropriate conduct. In the case of our employer—saying “no” to him or her could have adverse consequences for advancement at our job because our employer has power over us in the workplace. In the case of refusing to go along with our friend’s inappropriate invitation—that could have social consequences—perhaps we will be typed “holier than thou” and ostracized. The first case is an example of positional

power, and the second is an example of social power. Both fall short of the extreme situations of martyrdom that we read about in Scripture, but the principle is the same. We are confronted by a choice of doing right or wrong, and we are tempted to do what is wrong because fear wells up within us, and we want to avoid consequences. In both cases, there are two questions before us: (1) “Do we have convictions?” and (2) “Do we have the courage of our convictions?”

1 Corinthians 10:13 makes a promise that should offer us some solace, for it states:

*“No temptation has seized you beyond what people normally experience, and God can be trusted not to allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. On the contrary, along with the temptation he will also provide the way out, so that you will be able to endure.”*

I know that some of us are aware of this Scripture, and I want to make sure that we do not misinterpret it. The way out that the Scripture promises is not necessarily one that we would choose for ourselves. Stephen’s way out was to die for having the courage of his convictions and, as you can see by what he cried out with his last breath, he was indeed given the capacity to endure it.

Our way out of a moral dilemma with which we may one day be faced could be that final. We cannot discount the possibility but, if it is less, it will be no less meaningful and perhaps no less painful. Our godly way out of a temptation that threatens to compromise our convictions may have to include being demoted in a job or losing it; perhaps being downgraded by a teacher unjustly; perhaps being refused a loan without cause. It may result in our losing money, losing friends, enduring gross inconvenience, or any number of other unpleasant results. Painful as they may be, we are, nevertheless, promised that God will give us the capacity to endure them if we exercise the courage of our godly convictions.

Romans 8:28: *“Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose...”*

Many of us have experienced this phenomenon in our own lives. We become sick and are hospitalized—that’s bad! However, in the course of our hospitalization, we encounter patients and staff that profit from our ministry due to our being there—that’s good! We are laid off from our job—that’s bad. But when we are re-hired, it is in a job that better suits us, and we have more influence—that’s good! As for biblical examples, I am thinking of how Joseph was accosted by his brothers and sold into slavery—that was very bad! But because of that happening, Joseph became a powerful ruler in Egypt, and got to save his family, the future Jewish people—that was very good! And of course, the prime example is Yeshua himself who was persecuted, arrested, tried, convicted, and executed merely for who he was—that was very, very, bad! However, because he had the courage of his convictions and embraced his destiny to the glory of God, salvation came to the world—very, very, good!!

So, let us summarize. We are called to have convictions—biblical ones—and then to act on our convictions with courage provided by the Holy Spirit. It would be a mistake to rely on mere natural courage because then, all the evil one has to do is increase the temptations set before us until our human courage fails. Also, we should be willing to conform our lives to the heroes we read about in the

Bible—heroes who embraced their roles as living sacrifices in their service to God, the prime example being Yeshua.

Finally, I want to leave you with what I think is the clearest statement in the Bible of a disciple of Yeshua who, without question, had the courage of his convictions and is worthy of our emulating. In Acts 20:22-24, in his farewell to the elders at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul said to them:

*“...Now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Yerushalayim. I don’t know what will happen to me there, other than that, in every city, the Ruach HaKodesh keeps warning me that imprisonment and persecution await me. But I consider my own life of no importance to me whatsoever, as long as I can finish the course ahead of me, the task I received from the Lord Yeshua—to declare in depth the Good News of God’s love and kindness.”*

I now end this message as I began:

“Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!”  
*Chazak! Chazak! V’nit-chazeik!*

—CJB

## Heeding the Voice of God

*Delivered November 7, 2015*

What it means to obey God's commandments (those written down by Moses) is clear, but what is not so clear is what "listening to God's voice" means. I raise the issue because Scripture is replete with commandments to listen to and obey God's voice; here are a few of them from the *Tanakh*:

Exodus 15:26b: *"If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."*

Deuteronomy 13:4(5): *"You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him."*

Deuteronomy 27:10: *"Therefore you shall obey the voice of the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today."*

Deuteronomy 28:1-2: *"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God ..."*

Jeremiah 11:4b: *"Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,"*

And here are three from the New Testament that do not use the word "voice," but speak of "hearing" God's spoken Word:

Matthew 7:24: *"Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:"*

Luke 11:28b *"...blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*

James 1:22-23 *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror..."*

I do not believe, as some in Rabbinical Judaism do, that "hearing God's voice" refers to the existence of an "Oral *Torah*."—that is to say, words spoken to Moses that were not written down, but rather conveyed verbally (as an oral tradition) from generation-to-generation. I also do not believe that "listening to God's voice" is a mere metaphor for comprehending what the written words of *Torah* say literally, or that it means hearing the *Torah* read aloud as in a classroom.

The Israelites under Moses heard and were guided by God's voice in three ways:



1. Hearing God's Voice directly from Mount Sinai:

Exodus 19:9: *“And the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.”*

Deuteronomy 4:32-33: *“For ask now concerning the days that are past which were before you since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other whether any great thing like this has happened or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?”*

2. Hearing God's Voice from an angel:

Exodus 23:20-22: *“Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.”*

3. Hearing God's Voice from a prophet:

Numbers 12:6: *“Then He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.”*

Deuteronomy 18:17-18: *“And the LORD said to me [Moses]: ‘What they [the Israelites] have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.’”*

God's Voice that was spoken in any of these ways during the time of Moses can be heard by us today at least as clearly, because today we have the great gift of the New Covenant and the Holy Spirit that was prophesied in Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34):

*“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD.”*

So today, each of us can hear God's voice speak to us in the same way as the prophets of old heard him. And as Jeremiah prophesied, we no longer have to inquire of our neighbor or our brother about what God is saying, because we all can know him, and hear him for ourselves.

It is clear to me that God's voice that is heard by men, is (and always has been) the voice of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, God speaks through the words of his written commandments, but it is the Holy Spirit that explains how we ought to apply them in our individual lives and circumstances. Interpretation of the commandments is necessary because they are a body of law that was given centuries ago when everything was in place governmentally to enable the Israelites to comply with each and every commandment as written. They had the Tabernacle and its altar; they had a functioning Levitical priesthood; they had anointed prophets; they had judges, and they had governing elders. Today, we have prophets and elders who also serve as judges, but we do not have the other things that are needed to obey all the commandments literally.

Clearly, we cannot comply with the *mitzvot* that require some form of animal sacrifice, but there are also those that do not involve sacrifice yet cannot be complied with literally. I give as an example Deuteronomy 21:18-21:

*“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.”*

If we lived during the time of Moses, we would not have blinked an eye about the appropriateness of complying with this commandment but, if we try to do it today, we will be in a heap of trouble. Nevertheless, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

So, in what way is the Scripture on stoning our stubborn and rebellious son profitable? Is there an application or principle that it teaches that would be acceptable both to God and to our secular governments today? We can take guesses at it, but the only way we can know for sure is to pray for and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit who, if we ask him, will reveal it to us.

There are several times in Scripture in which the Holy Spirit led Yeshua to interpret *Torah* commandments in a way that was not literal. In Deuteronomy 24:1, we read:

*“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,” etc.*

This Scripture that seems to recognize a liberality in divorcing one's wife, is interpreted by Yeshua in Matthew 19:3-9 this way:

*“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.’ They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.’”*

Here is another example of where Yeshua was led to interpret the *Torah* in a non-literal way. Exodus 20:13b commands:

*“You shall not commit adultery.”*

Adultery has always been understood to mean a person who is married having sexual relations with one who is not his or her spouse. But we read Yeshua’s wider interpretation of the commandment in Matthew 5:27-28:

*“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

All of this is to say that the Holy Spirit connects us to the Father and to Yeshua (who is now at the right hand of the Father) in the same way as he connected Yeshua to the Father while Yeshua was here on earth:

1Corinthians 2:13-15: *“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.”*

It is important that we expect to hear God’s Voice through the Holy Spirit with a mind to obey. So much so, that Romans 8:14 says:

*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”*

The Holy Spirit can speak to us loudly and he can speak to us softly, but most often he speaks to us as described in 1 Kings 19:12:

*“...and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”*

One last thing: Because our hearing of God's voice can be faulty, we are admonished in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to "*Test all things; hold fast what is good.*" It is the approach that was used by the men of Berea, and Acts 17:11 says of them:

*"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things (i.e. that which Paul taught them) were so."*

—NKJ

## Intimacy with God and Thanksgiving

*Delivered December 5, 2015*

There are many who do not know about God because they have not read the Bible, nor have they considered his creation. Then there are those who *have* read the Bible, *have* observed his creation and therefore *could* know about God, but they do not believe that what the Bible says is true and are therefore blinded by their sin of unbelief. But thankfully, there are also those who have read the Bible, believe what the Bible says, and have open eyes to what God has made.

We call such people believers in God because they know about God and believe what the Bible says about him. However, some of those who are believers in God and have even received Messiah Yeshua as Lord would not say that they experience walking with God as their ordinary experience. They are “born again” ([John 3:1-8](#)) and destined for eternal life but are not fully enjoying God’s presence and the reality of his Kingdom on earth. They experience God from time to time but confess that they do not know him intimately as one knows a friend. I am confident that some of us here are in that category. Some here experience God but are aware that there is something more and have not yet found their way to it. But take heart, because there is a way to have a more intimate relationship with God, and it has to do with thanksgiving.

I want to share with you an understanding that I think God gave me about how to have intimacy with him. As a matter of fact, Yeshua has already revealed it to all of us. He has shown us the way to experience God intimately—to know the Father as he knew him while on earth, through what we read in [Matthew 26:26-28](#):

*“While they were eating, Yeshua took a piece of matzah, made the b’rakhah, broke it, gave it to the talmidim and said, “Take! Eat! This is my body!” Also he took a cup of wine, made the b’rakhah, and gave it to them, saying, “All of you, drink from it! For this is my blood, which ratifies the New Covenant, my blood shed on behalf of many, so that they may have their sins forgiven.””*

In this [Matthew](#) account of that event, Yeshua blessed the *matzot* (the bread) and gave thanks. That is what the CJB translation means by saying that he “made the *b’rakhah*” (gave thanks in the NKJ) before he drank the wine and led his disciples in doing likewise. It is the same in [Mark 14:22-25](#), [Luke 22:14-20](#), and [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#). Yeshua gave thanks before partaking of the bread and wine.

Until recently, I had not focused on the thanksgiving component of the Lord’s Table ceremony. When I led the *Shulchan Adonai* from memory (without reading one of the Scriptures), I typically said “and then he blessed the bread”...“and then he blessed the wine...,” and then I proceeded to say the traditional *b’rachot* over the bread and the wine and did not pause to thank God personally in addition. I am now fully aware that it was not coincidental that Yeshua’s thankfulness to his Father in heaven was mirrored in his invitation to his disciples to be intimate with him—to figuratively take his very being into themselves through the bread (that represented his body), and the wine (that represented his blood), in an attitude of thanksgiving.

Let me show you another Scripture where thankfulness is linked to intimacy with God; it is Philippians 4:6:

*“Don’t worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.”*

And two verses later Philippians 4:9:

*“Keep doing what you have learned and received from me, what you have heard and seen me doing; then the God who gives shalom will be with you.”*

Not worrying about anything and having *shalom* in the face of difficulty requires faith, and having faith comes from hearing God’s voice and knowing him intimately through his voice. Romans 10:17 in the NKJ version reads:

*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Also, Psalms 95:2a in the CJB says:

*“Let’s come into his presence with thanksgiving.”*

This Scripture can be thought of in two ways. The way I previously thought of it was that when we come into God’s presence during prayer, let us do so with thanksgiving. That is a good way to look at it, but the Hebrew of this verse is open to being translated in another way as well; the Hebrew text says:

הָדוֹתָבְ וַיִּנְפְּ הַמִּדְבָּר

*N’kadmah panayn b’todah*

Let us for a minute focus on the word “*todah*” (which means “thanks,”) preceded by the Hebrew letter “*bet*,” and the vowel “*shvah*,” together pronounced *b’todah*. According to lexicons, the “*bet*” and “*shvah*” (transliterated “*b*”) can mean “in,” “at,” “with,” or “by.” Most versions (including the CJB) translate the “*bet*” and “*shvah*” in the word *b’todah* in Psalms 95:2 to mean “with,” and so they translate the verse something like:

*“Let’s come into his presence with thanksgiving.”*

However, if you translate the “*bet*” and “*shvah*” to mean “by” (which is also legitimate) you get the following:

*“Let’s come into his presence “by” thanksgiving.”*

And since one of the meanings of the English word “by” is “by way of” (or “through”), the Scripture can, in addition to its more common translation, mean:

*“Let’s come into his presence “by way of” thanksgiving.” or “Let’s come into his presence “through” thanksgiving.”*

This is entirely different than the CJB and other modern translations, and suggests that if we want to achieve intimacy, or improve our intimacy with God, we should turn our attention to walking in continuous thanksgiving. Expressed another way, walking in continuous thanksgiving is a key ingredient (if not *the* key ingredient) in experiencing intimacy with God.

To continue our exploration of the importance of being thankful to God, let us now look at this in the opposite way—the way of not being thankful. Romans 1:20b-22 says of those who knew God but were not thankful to him:

*“...Therefore, they have no excuse; because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened. Claiming to be wise, they have become fools!”*

Indeed, the thankfulness to which Scripture calls us is not only to thank God for the things that we perceive to be blessings, but to be thankful for all things:

Ephesians 5:18-20: *“Don’t get drunk with wine, because it makes you lose control. Instead, keep on being filled with the Spirit—sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to each other; sing to the Lord and make music in your heart to him; always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:18: *“In everything give thanks, for this is what God wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua.”*

Always giving “*thanks for everything*” is the key. “*Everything*” means for life itself. It is the way of life prescribed in the Bible—being continually mindful that without God’s graciousness, we would not have life, nor purpose on earth. I came to this understanding early in my born-again life; it made a huge difference in my intimate relationship with God, and I have never looked back.

Interestingly, I had a foretaste of it in my mid-teen years when I had my first summer job working in a country hospital, at a time when God was not a conscious part of my life. There, on a daily basis, I saw sickness and death and suffering, and I remember so clearly how I compared my own life and health with the plight of the patients there, and how I experienced a deep sense of thankfulness. But at the time, God was not part of my conscious world, and so my thankfulness was *for* things, but not *to* anyone. I also remember feeling ill at ease because it was not lost on me that my feeling of well-being was because of the comparison with the misfortune of others. Nevertheless, the good feeling generated by thankfulness (and tempered by guilt) followed me through my teen years and early adulthood, and I am sure that it contributed toward my generally positive attitude toward life. It was only after I met God in my middle adult years that I transferred being thankful *for things* to being thankful *to someone*, that someone being God. And as soon as I made that transfer, the guilt I spoke of previously left me.

When I gave my testimony on an earlier occasion, I shared that soon after I met God and subsequently met Yeshua, the Scripture verse Genesis 5:24 “*Hanokh (Enoch) walked with God,*” deeply impressed me, and I sought that same kind of relationship with God as Enoch’s—a relationship in which I could sense God’s presence continually. I am convinced that the combination of my desiring it with all my heart combined with my walk of continuous thanksgiving to God is what has resulted in God granting me the intimacy for which I asked.

Although I cannot transfer my relationship with God to others, I can give you the elements of how I acquired it and how you can acquire it. As I have said, it consists of two things, (1) desiring it with all your heart, and (2) walking with a continuous attitude of thankfulness to God for all things in your life. I am convinced that if you do those two things and do not throw a wrench into it with unrepentant sin (notice I said *unrepentant* sin), that God will give you the desire of your heart to walk with him in intimacy because Scripture promises it. Psalms 37:4-5 reads:

*“Then you will delight yourself in ADONAI, and he will give you your heart’s desire. Commit your way to ADONAI; trust in him, and he will act.”*

Since thanksgiving is so crucial to our intimacy with God, I want to spend these concluding few minutes reading Scriptures about thanksgiving:

Psalms 92:2(1b)-3(2): *“It is good to give thanks to ADONAI and sing praises to your name, ‘Elyon, to tell in the morning about your grace and at night about your faithfulness,”*

Psalms 97:12: *“Rejoice in ADONAI, you righteous; and give thanks on recalling his holiness.”*

Psalms 100:1-5: *“A psalm of thanksgiving: Shout for joy to ADONAI, all the earth! Serve ADONAI with gladness. Enter his presence with joyful songs. Be aware that ADONAI is God; it is he who made us; and we are his, his people, the flock in his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, enter his courtyards with praise; give thanks to him, and bless his name. For ADONAI is good, his grace continues forever, and his faithfulness lasts through all generations.”*

Psalms 105:1: *“Give thanks to ADONAI! Call on his name! Make his deeds known among the peoples.”*

Colossians 3:16-17: *“Let the Word of the Messiah, in all its richness, live in you, as you teach and counsel each other in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude to God in your hearts. That is, everything you do or say, do in the name of the Lord Yeshua, giving thanks through him to God the Father.”*

Let us finish by reading Psalms 136 responsively. I will read the first part of each verse and let us together say: *“for his grace continues forever.”*

*“Give thanks to ADONAI, for he is good, for his grace continues forever.  
Give thanks to the God of gods, for his grace continues forever.  
Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his grace continues forever;*



*to him who alone has done great wonders, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who skillfully made the heavens, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who spread out the earth on the water, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who made the great lights, for his grace continues forever;  
the sun to rule the day, for his grace continues forever;  
the moon and stars to rule the night, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who struck down Egypt's firstborn, for his grace continues forever;  
and brought Isra'el out from among them, for his grace continues forever;  
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who split apart the Sea of Suf, for his grace continues forever;  
and made Isra'el cross right through it, for his grace continues forever;  
but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Sea of Suf, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who led his people through the desert, for his grace continues forever;  
to him who struck down great kings, for his grace continues forever;  
yes, he slaughtered powerful kings, for his grace continues forever;  
Sichon king of the Emori, for his grace continues forever;  
and 'Og king of Bashan, for his grace continues forever;  
then he gave their land as a heritage, for his grace continues forever;  
to be possessed by Isra'el his servant, for his grace continues forever;  
who remembers us whenever we are brought low, for his grace continues forever;  
and rescues us from our enemies, for his grace continues forever;  
who provides food for every living creature, for his grace continues forever.  
Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his grace continues forever.*

And let us say, "Amen!"

—CJB

## ***Lashon Hara***

*Delivered on February 10, 2018*

The First Amendment of our United States Constitution reads as follows:

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

This has loosely become known as the “Freedom of Expression Amendment,” and each of its components has been challenged in the courts numerous times. Regrettably, two of its components, freedom of speech and freedom of the press have come to mean that we have the right to say just about anything we want to, short of giving away state secrets, making threats against persons, or shouting “fire” in a crowded theater. There are civil remedies against defamation (i.e. libel and slander), but they are often ineffective against defaming public figures such as celebrities and political leaders. One needs only watch a television news channel for a short time to hear that our president is mentally ill, an abuser of women, a white supremacist, and a Russian collaborator.

Well, if you do not already know it I will tell you, that freedom of speech (such as it has come to mean in our country) is not a biblical precept and, according to the Bible, most of the political talk that is rampant in the media, coming from both parties, is nothing short of sin. And not only that but, according to Scripture, if we search out and listen to or read such negative things because we find them entertaining—we contribute to the sin and commit sin ourselves.

There is a Jewish tradition that prohibits speaking derogatory speech about another person that is called *lashon hara*, meaning “evil tongue.” Whether it is written, spoken, or communicated by the rolling of eyes, *lashon hara* has long been considered in Judaism to be sinful because, no matter how seemingly slight, it always causes harm to a person. I have previously alluded to the secular counterpart of *lashon hara* called “defamation.” *Lashon hara* is like defamation, but it is broader in that the truth of a pejorative statement is a defense against defamation, but it is not a defense against *lashon hara*. For example, spreading the word that John Doe stole money is not considered defamatory if it is true, but it is nonetheless *lashon hara* whether true or not. Now before I go further, I must tell you that the term *lashon hara* does not appear in Scripture, nor does its broad definition. That notwithstanding, Scripture is replete with commandments to not use speech hurtfully or otherwise improperly; for example, Psalms 34:14(13) reads:

*“...keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceiving talk*

Scripture also prohibits *rekhilut* (gossip) in Leviticus 19:16a:

*“Do not go around spreading slander among your people ...”*

And we read in Ephesians 4:29:

*“Let no harmful language come from your mouth, only good words that are helpful in meeting the need, words that will benefit those who hear them.”*

In Ephesians 5:4 we read:

*“Also out of place are obscenity and stupid talk or coarse language; instead, you should be giving thanks.”*

And in James 4:11 we read:

*“Brothers, stop speaking against each other! Whoever speaks against a brother or judges a brother is speaking against Torah and judging Torah. And if you judge Torah, you are not a doer of what Torah says, but a judge.”*

There is a children’s rhyme that goes this way: *“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never harm me.”* It is often taught to children as a lesson that they should not retaliate against name-calling, but the weight of Scripture teaches that the rhyme is not true. Indeed, despite its intended lesson, the rhyme should be instead: *“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can hurt me even more.”* The lesson of the substitute rhyme and also of Scripture is that we must be vigilant that our tongues are used only for good and for holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16), and not for harm. James 3:6-10 says:

*“Yes, the tongue is a fire, a world of wickedness. The tongue is so placed in our body that it defiles every part of it, setting ablaze the whole of our life; and it is set on fire by Gei-Hinnom itself. For people have tamed and continue to tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures; but the tongue no one can tame—it is an unstable and evil thing, full of death-dealing poison! With it we bless ADONAI, the Father; and with it we curse people, who were made in the image of God. Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing!”*

Speaking negatively about a person invariably harms him in some way and bringing harm to a person (except when sanctioned legally) is always wrong. It is egregious to God, and especially so if the *lashon hara* is against a leader that God himself has set into office. That which happened to Miryam when she spoke against Moses is the quintessential example of how serious a sin it is; we read about it in Numbers 12:1-2 and Numbers 12:6-10:

*“Miryam and Aharon began criticizing Moshe on account of the Ethiopian woman he had married, for he had in fact married an Ethiopian woman. They said, “Is it true that ADONAI has spoken only with Moshe? Hasn’t he spoken with us too?” ADONAI heard them.”*

*“He said, “Listen to what I say: when there is a prophet among you, I, ADONAI, make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. But it isn’t that way with my servant Moshe. He is the only one who is faithful in my entire household. With him I speak face to face and clearly, not in riddles; he sees the image of ADONAI. So why weren’t you afraid to criticize my servant Moshe?” The anger of ADONAI flared up against them, and he left. But when the*

*cloud was removed from above the tent, Miryam had tzara'at, [leprosy] as white as snow. Aharon looked at Miryam, and she was as white as snow. "*

Consider that Miryam and Aharon were not even talking to strangers; they were talking to each other—within the family—and look at what happened (see also, [James 5:9](#)).

[Matthew 5](#) and [Matthew 18](#) of the New Covenant Scriptures have much to say about this subject as well, because speech so often causes human conflicts. [Matthew 5:23-24](#) speaks to us if we are the offender, and [Matthew 18:15-17](#) speaks to us if we are the one who is offended. In both cases, the required initial action is for us to hold our tongue, not speak negatively about our brother or sister to others, and instead go directly and immediately to the person with whom we have the conflict. It is only after there has been no success at reconciliation that others may be brought in to help, and then, only in a strictly controlled manner. In the second and third attempts at reconciliation, [Matthew 18:16](#) and [18:17](#) are part of an authorized judicial process that begins with mediation and culminates in a *beit din* adjudication. Whatever is spoken before witnesses at these two “judicial” sessions is considered testimony and is therefore exempt from the prohibition of *lashon hara*.

This message stands for the principle that, unless exempt, no derogatory comment about another should leave our lips, whether or not what we say is true; but there are exceptions. The exceptions are when we mean it for his good, when we mean it for justice, and when we have a special responsibility to speak. I will have more to say about this later, but loose talk merely for the purpose of venting criticism is considered “gossip” which is strictly forbidden in Scripture; here is what Scripture has to say about Gossip and its companion slander:

[Proverbs 11:13](#): “*A gossip goes around revealing secrets, but a trustworthy person keeps a confidence.*”

[Colossians 3:8](#): “*...but now, put them all away—anger, exasperation, meanness, slander and obscene talk.*”

And Sha’ul wrote to the Corinthians:

[2 Corinthians 12:20](#): “*For I am afraid of coming and finding you not the way I want you to be, and also of not being found the way you want me to be. I am afraid of finding quarreling and jealousy, anger and rivalry, slander and gossip, arrogance and disorder.*”

These Scriptures have to do with the speaking of *lashon hara*, but what about the intentional listening to it? I do not mean hearing just enough of it to recognize what it is—I mean giving a willing ear to it. I suggest that listening to *lashon hara* is also *lashon hara*—not with the tongue but with the ear—and perhaps is even more sinful than speaking evil because the one who willfully listens to it becomes an enabler and a contributor to the other person’s sin.

Here are Scriptures that clearly show God’s attitude toward those who listen to the *lashon hara* of gossip:

Proverbs 16:27: *“A worthless person digs up evil [gossip]—it is like scorching fire on his lips.”*

Proverbs 20:19: *“A gossip goes around revealing secrets, so don’t get involved with a talkative person.”*

You see that getting involved with a “talkative” person enables his sinful talking. If there is no one listening to him, there is no reason for him to continue to talk and, if he does not talk, he will not sin. Consider also, the warning of 2 Timothy 2:16:

*“But keep away from godless babbling, for those who engage in it will only become more ungodly, and their teaching will eat away at people like gangrene.”*

The Scripture suggests that if we listen to godless babbling it will eat away at us, as well as at the person who is doing the babbling.

It is relatively simple to control our own speech so as not to commit *lashon hara*, but what should we do when *lashon hara* is spoken to us? That is not so simple because it requires judgment and sometimes risk of a relationship, depending upon who the person is to us. Nevertheless, Galatians 6:1a says this:

*“Brothers, suppose someone is caught doing something wrong. You who have the Spirit should set him right, but in a spirit of humility...”*

And almost as a follow-up, 2 Timothy 2:25 says:

*“Also, he should be gentle as he corrects his opponents. For God may perhaps grant them the opportunity to turn from their sins, acquire full knowledge of the truth...”*

As important as it is to stop the *lashon hara* that is being spoken, helping the offending person to recognize that it is wrong and that he must turn away from it is even more important. Because there is no one Scripture nor instruction that covers all situations, it is important that we let the *Ruach Ha-Kodesh* guide us on how to proceed. The Holy Spirit knows whether bringing correction will be profitable in each situation and, if so, how best to bring it. There have been times when the Holy Spirit instructed me to move away from where the *lashon hara* was being spoken, and other times when he instructed me to correct the offending person boldly. There were times when he instructed me to change the subject, and other times when he told me to not attempt correction, but rather to respond tangentially.

I encountered such a situation just recently. I was conversing with a person whom I knew to be an unbeliever when, out of the blue, he referred to someone we both knew as “weird Sally” (I have named her “Sally” fictitiously for obvious reasons). And he did not stop with that comment but continued to relate multiple instances of Sally’s unsocially acceptable behavior, seemingly without rationale since Sally had nothing to do with what we were previously discussing. Instead of correcting him by citing Scripture (What good would that have done?) I told him that, through my pastoral experience caring for a wide variety of people, I had become both familiar and comfortable with relat-

ing to and working with people who have disabilities, including the kind of disability that Sally might have. I told him that when I get to know a someone, I get to know both their strengths and their weaknesses and, when possible, I try to help them overcome their deficits and encourage them to pursue their strengths.

I could tell that the man to whom I was speaking was stunned by my reply because he immediately stopped talking about Sally. I am sure that he had never thought in those terms other than perhaps applied to his personal family, and the concept seemed to fascinate him. As I previously said, I did not cite chapter and verse of Scripture, but I did not need to because he knew full well the authority of the principles I was espousing.

You may not find yourself in exactly the same situation as I have just described and your background from which you will be able to draw is most likely different from mine, but how will you respond when someone corners you with *lashon hara*? I say “when” and not “if” because if it has not already happened it will, and if it has already happened it will happen again.

Each situation requires its own unique response and that is why being led by the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* is so important. Much will depend on the person's age compared to yours, his station in life compared to yours, whether or not he is a believer in God and/or Yeshua, whether or not you are under his authority (such as his being your employer or your teacher), and the relationship that you and he has had prior to this happening. It is important that you do not shrink back in fear or believe that you do not have the right, authority, or duty to address the *lashon hara* as God would have you address it. His being an unbeliever does not excuse it and, as a matter of fact, God may have put you in just that place and at just that time to be his witness. I have found that many unbelievers who are resistant to being preached to about God and Yeshua, are nevertheless open to hearing what God and Yeshua have to say about everyday practical issues. And when a person opens himself to the Word of God, he will eventually open himself to God.

I said earlier that there are three exceptions to *lashon hara*, and I would like to address them a bit more fully now. Speaking negatively about a person is permitted when it is intended for his good, but it must be accompanied by godly wisdom and discretion. Miryam's offense of murmuring was that she vented poison against Moses and did not intend what she said to be for Moses' good. Had she said instead ...

*“Aaron, I am worried about Moses because I think that marrying the Ethiopian woman was the wrong thing for him to do.”*

her comment, while still critical of Moses, would have been intended for Moses' good, and I am sure she would not have been punished for what she said.

The second exception to *lashon hara* is when our negative words about a person are meant for justice. A situation in which this happens is when we give testimony against a person in a *beit din* or a secular court of law. Deuteronomy 19:15 anticipates this through its instruction:

*“One witness alone will not be sufficient to convict a person of any offense or sin of any kind; the matter will be established only if there are two or three witnesses testifying against him.”*

Clearly, the testimony referred to here is derogatory and not exculpatory.

The third exception to *lashon hara* is when our negative statement about a person is in response to our having a special responsibility to speak. An example would be reporting a crime or an abuse of a child, or a juror deliberating with other jurors. Sha’ul himself made statements that would be considered *lashon hara* had he not been imbued with special responsibility for the congregations he was overseeing; consider, for example, his comments about his fellow *shaliach* Kefa:

Galatians 2:11-13: *“Furthermore, when Kefa came to Antioch, I opposed him publicly, because he was clearly in the wrong. For prior to the arrival of certain people from [the community headed by] Ya’akov, he had been eating with the Gentile believers; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he was afraid of the faction who favored circumcising Gentile believers. And the other Jewish believers became hypocrites along with him, so that even Bar-Nabba was led astray by their hypocrisy.”*

Also, Sha’ul names names in 1 Timothy 1:19b-20:

*“By rejecting conscience, some have made shipwreck of their trust; among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander. I have turned them over to the Adversary, so that they will learn not to insult God.”*

Speech has spiritual power and can be used for both good and bad. It can bring comfort and it can distress; it can bring blessing and it can harm. As believers, our witness of Yeshua to those who do not know him requires that we be different, and one of the most noticeable ways of our being different is how we speak and how we respond to others who speak. Ridding ourselves of *lashon hara* is not an option, and we must take it seriously.

—CJB

## Listening to the Voice of God

*Delivered February 12, 2011*

I recently taught on the *mitzvot* that were compiled by Maimonides centuries ago when he compiled and put in approximate order of subject, 613 commandments of God that he believed were contained within the *Torah*. He separated them into 248 positive commandments—i.e. those saying that we must do something, and 365 negative commandments—i.e. those saying we must not do something. I'll give you an example of how they are written by reading the first two positive ones from a book titled "The Commandments:"<sup>12</sup>

### 1. Believing in God

"By this injunction we are commanded to believe in God; that is, to believe that there is a Supreme Cause who is the Creator of everything in existence. It is contained in His words (exalted be He): *I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, etc.*" (Exodus 20:2).

### 2. Unity of God

"By this injunction we are commanded to believe in the Unity of God; that is to say, to believe that the Creator of all things in existence and their First Cause is One. This injunction is contained in his words (exalted be He): *Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One*" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

The *mitzvot* that follow are "Loving God," "Fearing God," "Worshiping God," "Cleaving to God," and so on. You see, a *mitzvah* written by Maimonides did not simply quote what God said—it interpreted and then restated what God said into "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" forms. Since Maimonides wrote *mitzvot* I don't see why we cannot, so let us compose a few from what we know of *Torah* Scripture. "Thou shalt love God," "Thou shalt fear God." "Thou shalt worship God." "Thou shalt cleave to God." Give me some more!

...receive suggested *mitzvot* from congregants...

Did I hear "Thou shalt obey God?" Would it surprise you to know that obeying God was not one of the commandments on Maimonides' list? Yet Scripture commands it so many times. Here! Let me read you some:

Numbers 15:38-40: "*Speak to the people of Isra'el, instructing them to make, through all their generations, tzitziyot on the corners of their garments, and to put with the tzitzit on each corner a blue thread. It is to be a tzitzit for you to look at and thereby remember all of ADONAI's mitzvot and obey them, so that you won't go around wherever your own heart and eyes lead you to prostitute yourselves; but it will help you remember and obey all my mitzvot and be holy for your God.*"

Deuteronomy 11:22-23, 32: "*For if you will take care to obey all these mitzvot I am giving you, to do them, to love ADONAI your God, to follow all his ways and to cling to him, then ADONAI*

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12 Charles B. Chavel, editor and translator, *The Commandments*, (New York: The Soncino Press, 1967).



*will expel all these nations ahead of you; and you will dispossess nations bigger and stronger than you are. ...And you are to take care to follow all the laws and rulings I am setting before you today.”*

Deuteronomy 30:15-16: *“Look! I am presenting you today with, on the one hand, life and good; and on the other, death and evil—in that I am ordering you today to love ADONAI your God, to follow his ways, and to obey his mitzvot, regulations and rulings ; for if you do, you will live and increase your numbers; and ADONAI your God will bless you in the land you are entering in order to take possession of it.”*

So, what is going on? Is it that the very existence of commandments makes the requirement to obey them self-evident and perhaps that is why Maimonides chose to not include them in his compilation? Then why did God himself command obedience and repeat it so many times? I do not know why, and I have inquired of several scholars who have studied Maimonides and they also do not know why. And here is another interesting thing. There are numerous instances where *Torah* Scriptures command listening to God’s “voice” in addition to obeying his commandments, and Maimonides does not mention any “listening” *mitzvot* either. Here are some of the Scriptures that require us to listen:

Exodus 15:26: *“He said, ‘If you will listen intently to the voice of ADONAI your God, do what he considers right, pay attention to his mitzvot and observe his laws, I will not afflict you with any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians; because I am ADONAI your healer.’”*

Deuteronomy 13:5(4): *“You are to follow ADONAI your God, fear him, obey his mitzvot, listen to what he says, serve him and cling to him...”*

Deuteronomy 27:10: *“Therefore you are to listen to what ADONAI your God says and obey his mitzvot and laws, which I am giving you today.”*

Deuteronomy 28:1: *“If you listen closely to what ADONAI your God says, observing and obeying all his mitzvot which I am giving you today, ADONAI your God will raise you high above all the nations on earth...”*

So, what should we think about this? Is God’s voice—that is, what he says—simply what is written in Scripture, or is there more to it? The rabbis say that there is more, and they call it the Oral *Torah* which, they say, was given along with the *Torah* that was written down by Moses at Mt. Sinai. We in Messianic Judaism do not ascribe to an oral *Torah* because there is no biblical evidence of it. On the other hand, we do ascribe to an aspect of the *Torah* that has flexibility of interpretation to accommodate different situations, and that is the *Torah* written in our hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit—a gift of the New Covenant that was prophesied in Jeremiah 31:32(33)-33(34):

*“For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, ‘Know*

*ADONAI*; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.”

I ask myself: “What has the *Torah* written on our hearts to do with listening to God’s voice?” As I usually do when I talk to myself, I also answer myself: “It has EVERYTHING to do with listening to God’s voice because, while we cannot hear words written on parchment speak, we can hear persons, and the Holy Spirit is a spirit person. The words that are written in the *Torah* never change. They do not adjust to take account of individual situations such as the loss of the Temple, the sacrifice of Yeshua, most Jews today living in the Diaspora, or the multitude of other changes that have occurred over the last several thousand years.

Ahh, but you argue... “The *Torah*’s words DO accommodate for diverse situations.” You say that you yourself have experienced how the Word of God is amazingly adaptable so that today the *Torah* sets our path in one direction and if tomorrow’s day requires it, it will set our path in another direction tomorrow. It is supernatural how the words of the *Torah* seem to change.

Well, the words of Scripture do not change, and as wise and well-crafted as they are, they are not, by themselves supernatural! What is supernatural is the Word-interpreter, the Holy Spirit, who speaks to us and guides us in how the words of *Torah* apply to each and every situation we encounter. So, there *is* a person speaking! There *is* a voice to hear! It is the voice of God spoken by the Holy Spirit who instructs us on the application of God’s *Torah*, moment-by-moment if we have ears to hear! It is the essence of the New Covenant, and why [Romans 8:14](#) can say:

*“All who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons.”*

In my conversations with people, some long-time committed believers tell me that they are not sure they have ever heard the voice of God. Now part of the problem comes from the words “hear,” “listen,” and “voice,” because we normally associate those words with audible sounds, and even those of us who know we hear God, most of us have never heard him audibly. No, that is not what the words mean, nor do they mean receiving communication from God in a human language and yet we occasionally do. More commonly, what we hear is what is described in [1 Kings 19:12](#):

*“After the earthquake, fire broke out; but ADONAI was not in the fire. And after the fire came a quiet, subdued voice.”*

Other translations call it a “still small voice,” but it amounts to the same thing in that God’s voice is normally not overwhelming and compelling because He wants our actions to be governed by our decision to obey him—not by his ability to force himself on us.

Our listening to God, in an equally quiet way is the most important part of our intimacy with him and the only way to guarantee hearing him. But that is not the subject of our discussion today. Today I am saying something a lot more obvious, which is that when several people speak simultaneously, it is difficult to hear any one of them. And so, it is with God’s “quiet subdued voice” if our own voice is blasting. Our self-will—our desire to have things our way—our striving to be in control—all

of these generate a barrage of continuous and loud chatter that literally drowns God out. If we are to be led by God, we must be willing to relinquish control and listen.

I want to emphasize that the Scriptures that tell us to listen to God's voice that I read earlier are commandments and not mere exhortations. They warn us that we cannot obey God's commandments without also obeying his voice. And lest anyone think that this is just antiquated Mosaic stuff, consider the words of Matthew 7:24-27:

*“So, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on bedrock. The rain fell, the rivers flooded, the winds blew and beat against that house, but it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the rivers flooded, the wind blew and beat against that house, and it collapsed—and its collapse was horrendous!”*

Also, John 10: 27-28a:

*“My sheep listen to my voice, I recognize them, they follow me, and I give them eternal life...”*

And also, James 1:22-24:

*“Don't deceive yourselves by only hearing what the Word says, but do it! For whoever hears the Word but doesn't do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror, who looks at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”*

A word to the wise then is to be quiet and listen. Psalms 46:11(10) says:

*“Desist (NKJ: “Be still”), and learn that I am God, supreme over the nations, supreme over the earth.”*

Ecclesiastes 5:1(2)-2(3) says:

*“Don't speak impulsively—don't be in a hurry to give voice to your words before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on earth; so let your words be few. For nightmares come from worrying too much; and a fool, when he speaks, chatters too much.”*

And finally, Luke 11:27-28 says:

*“As Yeshua was saying these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice to call out, “How blessed is the mother that gave birth to you and nursed you from her breast!” But he said, ‘Far more blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it!’”*

So, let us summarize. It is insufficient to merely learn the commandments of God because, without listening to God's voice, we will not always know how to apply them. We should not expect to hear

God's voice loud. Rather, we should expect hear it as a quiet subdued voice, and we should arrange our listening environment to be equally quiet so as to enhance our hearing. That means we must not talk much or, put another way, we must not dwell on our personal desires and self-interests to the extent that they diminish our ability to hear God. If we truly want to hear God, we must put "self" aside, be quiet, and listen.

My prayer for us today is that God's spirit of quiet *shalom* will permeate our inward parts, that we will listen for God's voice and, when we hear what He has to say, we will obey.

—NKJ

## New Beginnings 1

*Delivered December 27, 2014*

January 1 is only a few days away and most of the world will be looking forward to the New Year. Will it be a better year? We hope so. Some of what the year brings will be under our control, and it is customary in some quarters to make New Year resolutions—promises to ourselves to do things that we have thus far put off, and to stop doing things that we should not be doing; in biblical vernacular, “repent.” So, why do we often wait until the New Year’s Day to address them? It is because there is something about a new year that gives us hope for a fresh start—renewed strength, and determination for new beginnings. But of course, that is only in our minds—or is it? New years and repeated cycles of times and seasons are built into God’s calendar and into his creation, and all of them imbue us with hope for new beginnings.

According to the Bible, the New Year does not begin on January 1; Exodus 12:1-2 tells us:

*“ADONAI spoke to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt; he said, “You are to begin your calendar with this month; it will be the first month of the year for you.”*

The verses that follow speak of when God brought the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery, and Exodus 23:15a tells us that it was during the month of Aviv (Spring), for it says:

*“Keep the festival of matzah: for seven days, as I ordered you, you are to eat matzah at the time determined in the month of Aviv...”*

The month of Spring is when the barley in Israel becomes ripe, so the first day of *Aviv* is on the New Moon of what the modern Jewish calendar calls the month of *Nisan*.

*Aviv* was certainly a month of new beginnings for the Israelites, but it was not their first. In order for there to have been a “new beginning” there must have first been a beginning, and the beginning of beginnings is, of course Genesis 1:1:

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

Reading further in Genesis 1:26-27:

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth.’ So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.”*

That was the beginning, and the first “new beginning” for mankind was God’s grace in allowing Adam and Eve to remain physically alive after Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. Had God not done that, none of us would be here today.

The next “new beginning” occurred when God allowed a remnant of mankind to survive the flood at a time when everyone except Noah and his family had turned away from God; we read in Genesis 6:5-8:

*“ADONAI saw that the people on earth were very wicked, that all the imaginings of their hearts were always of evil only. ADONAI regretted that he had made humankind on the earth; it grieved his heart. ADONAI said, “I will wipe out humankind, whom I have created, from the whole earth; and not only human beings, but animals, creeping things and birds in the air; for I regret that I ever made them.” But Noah found grace in the sight of ADONAI.”*

Centuries later, the beginning of what was to become the Jewish people was God’s covenant with Abraham; we read of it in Genesis 15:1-6 and 19a:

*“Some time later the word of ADONAI came to Avram in a vision: “Don’t be afraid, Avram. I am your protector; your reward will be very great.” Avram replied, “ADONAI, God, what good will your gifts be to me if I continue childless; and Eli’ezer from Dammesek inherits my possessions? You haven’t given me a child,” Avram continued, “so someone born in my house will be my heir.” But the word of ADONAI came to him: “This man will not be your heir. No, your heir will be a child from your own body.” Then he brought him outside and said, “Look up at the sky, and count the stars—if you can count them! Your descendants will be that many!” He believed in ADONAI, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” (verses 1-6)... “That day ADONAI made a covenant with Avram ...”*

And Genesis 17:4-8 completes our understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant:

*“As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you. I will give you and your descendants after you the land in which you are now foreigners, all the land of Kena’an, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God.”*

Moving forward in time from the Abrahamic Covenant, a “new beginning” for the Jewish people occurred when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness to Mount Sinai, and made a Covenant with them. In Exodus 19:3-6a we read:

*“Moshe went up to God, and ADONAI called to him from the mountain: “Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya’akov, to tell the people of Isra’el: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim [priests] for me, a nation set apart.’”*

The Sinai Covenant consisted of not just those words, but of many others that span Exodus 19 through 24 in which God gave the Israelites everything they needed for their new nation—statutes of law, judges to administer the law, a Tabernacle for conducting sacrifices, a priesthood to intercede and conduct the sacrifices, prophets who could speak God’s will to individuals and into the community, a government structure, and a promised land. The Tabernacle’s sacrifices enabled the Israelites to enjoy renewal by having their sins covered over, and the cycle of appointed times and repetition of the seasons inspired the Israelites to leave behind the old and embrace God’s provision of “new beginnings.”

Thus far, we have identified five separate incidences of “beginnings” and “new beginnings”; they are (1) the creation, (2) God’s allowance of mankind’s redemption following Adam’s sin, (3) God’s continuation of mankind through Noah, (4) God’s covenant with Abraham, and (5) God’s covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. One would think that those would be enough, but our God is a forgiving God, and his grace is replete with offering “new beginnings.” Note that all of these “new beginnings” are referred to as “covenants.” That is because, in order to help us out of our apparent habit of repeatedly sinning against him, God adjusts the manner in which He relates to us so as to give us opportunities to change our ways:

Isaiah 43:18-19: *“Stop dwelling on past events and brooding over times gone by; I am doing something new; it’s springing up—can’t you see it? I am making a road in the desert, rivers in the wasteland.”*

Lamentations 3:21-24: *“But in my mind I keep returning to something, something that gives me hope—that the grace of ADONAI is not exhausted, that his compassion has not ended. [On the contrary,] they are new every morning! How great your faithfulness!”*

2 Chronicles 7:14: *“Adonai said to Shlomo: “...if my people, who bear my name, will humble themselves, pray, seek my face and turn from their evil ways, I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

During the time of the Divided Kingdom, Israel had strayed from God so many times that God determined it was time to announce another “new beginning.” The Lord therefore put these words in Jeremiah’s mouth:

Jeremiah 30(31)-33(34): *“”Here, the days are coming,” says ADONAI, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’udah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI. “For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.””*

Years later, during the Babylonian exile, Ezekiel prophesied the coming of this New Covenant as well:

Ezekiel 11:17-20: “Therefore, say that Adonai ELOHIM says this: ‘I will gather you from the peoples and collect you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give the land of Isra’el to you. Then they will go there and remove all its loathsome things and disgusting practices, and I will give them unity of heart. ‘I will put a new spirit among you. I will remove from their bodies the hearts of stone and give them hearts of flesh; so that they will live by my regulations, obey my rulings and act by them. Then they will be my people, and I will be their God.’”

Ezekiel 36:23b-29a: “The nations will know that I am ADONAI,’ says Adonai ELOHIM, ‘when, before their eyes, I am set apart through you to be regarded as holy. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you from all the countries, and return you to your own soil. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them. You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors. You will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness.”

This New Covenant that was prophesied by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel promised new beginnings for Israel indeed.

My friends, we are so blessed to be living in the age in which we are living. We are witnesses to, and recipients of, the New Covenant of which I just spoke. The New Covenant came in several stages, all of which were connected to Messiah Yeshua. First, was his birth—the Son of God born as a natural man. Second, was Yeshua’s selection of disciples and his instruction to them during his life here on Earth. Third, was Yeshua’s sacrificial death and resurrection that obliterates our sins and gives eternal life to those of us who repent in his Name. Fourth, was his forty-day return to earth to live among and give further instruction to his disciples. Fifth, was Yeshua’s ascension from the Earth to join his Father in Heaven. Sixth, was the Holy Spirit, whom Yeshua sent to earth in his stead ten days later, to dwell within us, to give us spiritual gifts, power, and communication with God previously available only to the prophets. And seventh, was the spread of Yeshua’s message of love and hope for new beginnings (through his disciples) to the furthest reaches of the Earth. There are other stages yet to come, and each one promises to bring even more “new beginnings” for mankind.

The “new beginnings” of the prior covenants pale in comparison to the ones available to us in the New Covenant today. Consider these Scriptures for comparison:

2 Corinthians 5:17-19: “Therefore, if anyone is united with the Messiah, he is a new creation—the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new! And it is all from God, who through the Messiah has reconciled us to himself and has given us the work of that reconciliation, which is that God in the Messiah was reconciling mankind to himself, not counting their sins against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

John 3:16-17: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed. For God did not



*send the Son into the world to judge the world, but rather so that through him, the world might be saved.”*

Revelation 21:3-5a: *“I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “See! God’s Sh’khinah is with mankind, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and he himself, God-with-them, will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will no longer be any death; and there will no longer be any mourning, crying or pain; because the old order has passed away.” Then the One sitting on the throne said, “Look! I am making everything new!””*

1 Peter 1:3-4: *“Praised be God, Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who, in keeping with his great mercy, has caused us, through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah from the dead, to be born again to a living hope, to an inheritance that cannot decay, spoil or fade, kept safe for you in heaven.”*

These “new beginnings” are beckoning to us and are available to us. Ephesians 4:22-24 assures us that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to:

*“...strip off [our] old nature, because [our] old nature is thoroughly rotted by its deceptive desires; and [we] must let [our] spirits and minds keep being renewed, and clothe [ourselves] with the new nature created to be godly, which expresses itself in the righteousness and holiness that flow from the truth.”*

I began this message by reminding us that January 1 is only a few days away and that most of the world will be looking forward to “new beginnings” in the New Year. Will it be a better year? God’s Word assures us that, regardless of our individual circumstances—regardless of wars—regardless of evil in the world—it most certainly will be a better year if we take hold of God’s promises, put ourselves in his trustworthy hands, and fearlessly do that which we ought to do with our new nature and with the power and authority He has given us through the Holy Spirit.

I also urge us to be cognizant of and not eschew the days on the Jewish calendar that are designated “New Year” but do not fall on *Nisan 1*. *Rosh HaShanah* (that falls on *Tishrei 1*), is such an example because of its connection to *Yom Kippur* and its theme of renewal for the coming year.

So, the next time that someone wishes me a “Happy New Year” (whichever New Year they mean), my reply should be: “I cannot predict if it will be “happy,” but it is certain to be joyful because I intend to take full advantage of the many opportunities for “new beginnings” that God has already provided and that He has promised to provide in the future.” More likely I will just say: “God’s blessings in the New Year to you as well.”

—CJB

## New Beginnings 2

*Delivered January 4, 2020*

New Year's Day this past Wednesday was a day that many in the world saw as a moment in time for new beginnings. They made resolutions to do things and to make changes in their lives that they largely will not keep because they will rely on their own power and will to accomplish them. Yet, the idea of their being new beginnings at a point in time is biblical and is spoken of throughout Scripture.

Consider the earliest one that the Bible describes; Genesis 1:1 (CJB) tells us:

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

It was not the “beginning” of beginnings, because angelic beings, and who knows what else, existed before God created the heavens and the earth. We know from Nehemiah 9:6 that the angels themselves had a beginning, so it is probably accurate to say that the Genesis creation was a first “new beginning.”

Now, there would probably not have been a need for any subsequent new beginnings had Adam not disobeyed God and eaten of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. But he did, and that caused all of creation (including man) to fall from grace and essentially to die spiritually. God could have left it at that, but, in his compassion, he devised a way that man could, over time, return to his former relationship with him by proving that he could consistently do the opposite of that which caused his fall. Disobedience caused man's fall so, in his wisdom, God prescribed that obedience would be man's path back to eternal life with him.

Now some of you here may be saying to yourselves: “Eternal life through obedience?” “Rabbi Rudolph is preaching salvation by works of the Law!” Well, in a way I am, but not the way you may be thinking—not just any works of the law, but works that God specifically designated for each covenant, and works that changed with each covenant. We who are believers in Messiah Yeshua know that there is no salvation other than through him. Acts 4:12 (NKJ) assures us of that when it says:

*“There is salvation in no one else! For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by whom we must be saved!”*

Also, Romans 10:8 (NKJ) tells us:

*“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart “ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord [Yeshua] and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

And Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJ) tells us:

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

Ephesians 2 says, “*not of works,*” yet we read in Matthew 19:16-17:

*“A man approached Yeshua and said, “Rabbi, what good thing should I do in order to have eternal life?” He said to him, “Why are you asking me about good? There is One who is good! But if you want to obtain eternal life, observe the mitzvot.””*

Hold on now! “The *mitzvot*” to which Yeshua referred were the commandments dictated to Moses—the “Law!” Why is Yeshua advising the man that if he wants eternal life he must observe the Law? Isn’t observing the Law works? We skip to verse 21 for the answer:

*“Yeshua said to him, ‘If you are serious about reaching the goal, go and sell your possessions, give to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven. Then come, follow me!’”*

Yeshua knew that the man’s money and possessions were idols to him, and that he would not keep God’s commandments if it meant giving them up. Yeshua also knew that the man was not going to follow him, even to gain eternal life, because the man could not bring himself to do the works that required that he part with his wealth.

Do you see it now? “Following Yeshua and performing works are related and cannot be separated; giving up what one must in order to follow Yeshua is (in a sense) an act of works because it a willful decision. James 2:14 (NKJ) says it this way:

*“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”*

So, in the New Covenant where we find ourselves, the works that will save us are to turn away from sin, give up what we must of the world, and follow Yeshua. But they are not the same works that were required of Adam, nor of Abraham, nor of the Israelites under Moses. Yeshua had not yet been born, so their “new beginnings” had entirely to do with—repenting of sin, giving up worldly ways, turning to God, and in the case of the Israelites who received God’s covenant at Mt Sinai, obeying the commandments given through Moses.

Israel’s foundational new beginning was being led out of Egypt, and then receiving its Covenant at Mount Sinai. Our foundational new beginning is the New Covenant that was prophesied by Jeremiah; we are told of it in Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34):

*“Here, the days are coming,” says ADONAI, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI. “For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says*

*ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, [saying] ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.”*

Almost as a continuation of the Jeremiah prophecy, we read in Ezekiel 36:26-28:

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them. You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors. You will be my people, and I will be your God.”*

Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied that there would be a new beginning for Israel that would involve a New Covenant and the Holy Spirit working within us. Neither of them said how or when this would come about, and although Jeremiah prophesied that God would forgive us and “remember our sins no more,” he did not disclose that God would achieve it by sending his son Yeshua to be our Messiah and sacrifice himself in our behalf.

Nevertheless, there are other Scriptures that were understood by the Israelites as prophetic of a coming Messiah; we know this because by the time Yeshua was born, all of Israel was expecting a Messiah and was looking for him. Here are two prophecies that unquestionably influenced Israel to be on the lookout for a Messiah; first, Deuteronomy 18:15-19:

*“ADONAI will raise up for you a prophet like me from among yourselves, from your own kinsmen. You are to pay attention to him, just as when you were assembled at Horev and requested ADONAI your God, ‘Don’t let me hear the voice of ADONAI my God any more, or let me see this great fire ever again; if I do, I will die!’ On that occasion ADONAI said to me, ‘They are right in what they are saying. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I order him. Whoever doesn’t listen to my words, which he will speak in my name, will have to account for himself to me.’”*

And then of course the well-known prophecy of Isaiah 53:1-12 that speaks not only of a suffering Messiah, but of a Messiah that will sacrifice himself for the sins of others. I will read it to you in its entirety:

*“Who believes our report? To whom is the arm of ADONAI revealed? For before him he grew up like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground. He was not well-formed or especially handsome; we saw him, but his appearance did not attract us. People despised and avoided him, a man of pains, well acquainted with illness. Like someone from whom people turn their faces, he was despised; we did not value him. In fact, it was our diseases he bore, our pains from which he suffered; yet we regarded him as punished, stricken and afflicted by God. But he was wounded because of our crimes, crushed because of our sins; the disciplining that makes us whole fell on him, and by his bruises we are healed. We all, like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way; yet ADONAI laid on him the guilt of all of us. Though mistreated, he was submissive—he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to be slaughtered, like a sheep silent before its*

*shearers, he did not open his mouth. After forcible arrest and sentencing, he was taken away; and none of his generation protested his being cut off from the land of the living for the crimes of my people, who deserved the punishment themselves. He was given a grave among the wicked; in his death he was with a rich man. Although he had done no violence and had said nothing deceptive, yet it pleased ADONAI to crush him with illness, to see if he would present himself as a guilt offering. If he does, he will see his offspring; and he will prolong his days; and at his hand ADONAI's desire will be accomplished. After this ordeal, he will see satisfaction. By his knowing [pain and sacrifice], my righteous servant makes many righteous; it is for their sins that he suffers. Therefore I will assign him a share with the great, he will divide the spoil with the mighty, for having exposed himself to death and being counted among the sinners, while actually bearing the sin of many and interceding for the offenders.”*

There are other prophetic Scriptures as well, such as the graphic description of Yeshua's crucifixion in [Psalms 22:1-32](#), and the prophecy of [Isaiah 7:14](#):

*“Therefore Adonai himself will give you people a sign: the young woman [Virgin] will become pregnant, bear a son and name him ‘Immanu El’ [God is with us].”*

So, the foundational “new beginning” for us, is the New Covenant that was ushered in by Yeshua's birth, ministry, sacrifice, and resurrection here on earth, followed by the “Counselor” (the Holy Spirit) that Yeshua said he would send us. We read Yeshua's words in [John 16:5-7](#):

*“But now I am going to the One who sent me. ‘Not one of you is asking me, ‘Where are you going?’ Instead, because I have said these things to you, you are overcome with grief. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I don't go away, the comforting Counselor [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you. However, if I do go, I will send him to you.”*

And send him to us he did, for he came in power on that very next *Shavuot* that is today commonly referred to as “Pentecost.” Interestingly and not a coincidence, *Shavuot* is a celebration of firstfruits of the Spring harvest, which is a new beginning for the agricultural year.

I began this message with a reminder that we are fresh into a new year that many look forward to as a new beginning. Although there is only one New Year's Day on our secular calendar, there are at least two New Year's Days on Jewish calendars—one biblical and one rabbinical. Referring to the month of *Nisan*, [Exodus 12:2](#) commands us:

*“You are to begin your calendar with this month; it will be the first month of the year for you.”*

And [Leviticus 23:24](#) commands us to:

*“Tell the people of Isra'el, ‘In the seventh month, the first of the month is to be for you a day of complete rest for remembering, a holy convocation announced with blasts on the shofar.”*

Although Scripture does not define this latter day as the beginning of a new year, the Jewish community worldwide calls it *Rosh HaShanah* (which means “head of the year”) because it ushers in an

annual season of introspection and repentance that is followed ten days later by the *Yom Kippur* sacrifice for the covering-over of our sins committed during the prior year. Prior to the New Covenant, that sacrifice, and the daily Temple sacrifices, were the only new beginnings available, and the closest that Israelites and Gentiles within the Jewish community could come to being cleansed of their sins. But that all changed with the sacrifice and resurrection of Yeshua, for we read in 1 Peter 1:3-4:

*“Praised be God, Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, who, in keeping with his great mercy, has caused us, through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah from the dead, to be born again to a living hope, to an inheritance that cannot decay, spoil or fade, kept safe for you in heaven.”*

Being born again in Yeshua is truly the newest beginning we can have, for it does more than cover over our sins; it totally wipes them out. We read in Hebrews 10:10-14:

*“It is in connection with this will that we have been separated for God and made holy, once and for all, through the offering of Yeshua the Messiah’s body. Now every cohen stands every day doing his service, offering over and over the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this one, after he had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, sat down at the right hand of God, from then on to wait until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has brought to the goal for all time those who are being set apart for God and made holy.”*

So, Yeshua’s sacrifice does much more than cover our sins over; if we repent of our sins and receive his sacrifice as our own, it totally wipes them away, giving us an entirely fresh slate—the newest beginning that we could possibly have. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

*“...if anyone is united with the Messiah, he is a new creation—the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new!”*

And along with this new beginning comes eternal life, for we read in John 3:16 (NKJ):

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

That this new birth gives us eternal life is wonderful but, even more wonderful, is that our eternal life will be in the presence of and in fellowship with God. We will (in essence) have returned to how it was between God and man in the Garden of Eden, but this time our fellowship with God will be in heaven.

If there is anyone here that has not yet experienced God’s offer of a new beginning, you can have it right now. Also, there may be some here who have experienced the new birth but need a re-charge of the Spirit. Whenever we come to Yeshua with a repentant heart we are forgiven and blessed with a new beginning. He says to us in Matthew 11:28-39:

*“Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

We will close our service now, but the elders will remain up front to pray with anyone who would like to receive Yeshua for the first time, or to pray for a revival of your spirit, for healing, or for any other need.

—CJB

## Preparing for the End Times

*Delivered May 3, 2014*

Almost everyone in the “civilized” world has heard that the Bible predicts the decline of society, wars, natural disasters, moral degradation, forces that come against God, and finally the end. These things are known even by those who do not study the Bible, and they are known even more intimately by those who do. They are believed by some and not by others and responded-to differently by some than by others.

I have never been enamored of studying end-time prophecies because my view has been that what will be, will be. God has determined what will happen and, since nothing I do will change it, there is no profit in my putting too much time and energy into studying it or thinking about it. Also, I have seen bad fruit come from believers who became wrapped up in trying to understand the end of times and make preparations for it. The least of it was their spending more time on it than was profitable, and the extreme of it was becoming fearful and making plans to protect themselves—things of which God would not approve such as quitting their jobs, disposing of their possessions, building survival bunkers, and even preparing to blast off from the earth in rocket ships. Even more harmful than bizarre was their becoming unbalanced in their biblical walk and giving too little attention to matters that were of more immediate importance.

I clearly remember my thoughts the first time I read the account of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible. “How incredible,” I thought, “that those people could stoop to such low moral levels. It is no wonder that God destroyed them. It is inconceivable that such a thing could ever happen in the United States today.” I was naive about what was already happening around me when I first read it but, as time went on and little by little, I saw Sodom and Gomorrah reconstruct before my eyes. And, as I studied Scripture, I gradually became aware of what the New Covenant Scriptures predicted about it:

In [Luke 17:22-32](#) we read:

*“Then he said to his talmidim, ‘The time is coming when you will long to see even one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will say to you, ‘Look! Right here!’ or, ‘See! Over there!’ Don’t run off, don’t follow them, because the Son of Man in his day will be like lightning that flashes and lights up the sky from one horizon to the other. But first he must endure horrible suffering and be rejected by this generation. Also, at the time of the Son of Man, it will be just as it was at the time of Noach. People ate and drank, and men and women married, right up until the day Noach entered the ark; then the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, as it was in the time of Lot—people ate and drank, bought and sold, planted and built; but the day Lot left S’dom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. That is how it will be on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, if someone is on the roof with his belongings in his house, he must not go down to take them away. Similarly, if someone is in the field, he must not turn back—remember Lot’s wife!”*

And [2 Peter 2:1-6](#) we read:



*“But among the people there were also false prophets, just as there will be false teachers among you. Under false pretenses they will introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and thus bring on themselves swift destruction. Many will follow their debaucheries; and because of them, the true Way will be maligned. In their greed they will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their punishment, decreed long ago, is not idle; their destruction is not asleep! For God did not spare the angels who sinned; on the contrary, he put them in gloomy dungeons lower than Sh’ol to be held for judgment. And he did not spare the ancient world; on the contrary, he preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, and brought the Flood upon a world of ungodly people. And he condemned the cities of S’dom and ‘Amora, reducing them to ashes and ruin, as a warning to those in the future who would live ungodly lives...”*

And Romans 1:18-32, sums up the situation perfectly; it is long and I am tempted to shorten it as I read it to you, but I am convicted that God wants you to hear it in its entirety:

*“What is revealed is God’s anger from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth; because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities—both his eternal power and his divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse; because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened. Claiming to be wise, they have become fools! In fact, they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for mere images, like a mortal human being, or like birds, animals or reptiles! This is why God has given them up to the vileness of their hearts’ lusts, to the shameful misuse of each other’s bodies. They have exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, by worshipping and serving created things, rather than the Creator—praised be he forever. Amen. This is why God has given them up to degrading passions; so that their women exchange natural sexual relations for unnatural; and likewise the men, giving up natural relations with the opposite sex, burn with passion for one another; men committing shameful acts with other men and receiving in their own persons the penalty appropriate to their perversion. In other words, since they have not considered God worth knowing, God has given them up to worthless ways of thinking; so that they do improper things. They are filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and vice; stuffed with jealousy, murder, quarrelling, dishonesty and ill-will; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God; they are insolent, arrogant and boastful; they plan evil schemes; they disobey their parents; they are brainless, faithless, heartless and ruthless. They know well enough God’s righteous decree that people who do such things deserve to die; yet not only do they keep doing them, but they applaud others who do the same.”*

One would have to be brain-dead not to realize that we are not just seeing early signs of these prophecies coming to pass—we are knee-deep in the middle of them. Homosexuality becoming a normal lifestyle. Men marrying men and women marrying women. Atheism touted as a bona fide religion. And these are not just societal incursions. Society is actually turning on its head, where what used to be called wrong and was prohibited is now not only allowed, but preferred. Those who profess belief in God and God’s moral teachings are ridiculed as being uninformed and even dangerous. Those who seek to build their family with the traditional male and female roles are scorned for oppressing

women. Spanking a child is now child abuse and, in some quarters saying “no” to a child is seen as detrimental to his (political correctness requires that I also say “her”) healthy growth. Machine-gunning thirty people on television or in a child’s video game is the exercise of free expression, but a kindergartener posturing his fingers to look like a gun causes his suspension. Judeo-Christian beliefs contributed to the founding of this country, but now believers in God are being discriminated against and sometimes even persecuted. And let us not forget to mention that killing unborn children for convenience and in late-term pregnancy is steadily gaining in acceptability.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 reads:

*“Moreover, understand this: in the acharit-hayamim [the end of days] will come trying times. People will be self-loving, money-loving, proud, arrogant, insulting, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, uncontrolled, brutal, hateful of good, traitorous, headstrong, swollen with conceit, loving pleasure rather than God, as they retain the outer form of religion but deny its power.”*

And of course, we cannot help but notice the increase in natural disasters—earthquakes, tsunamis, forest fires, famines, tornados, floods. And the rise of false messiahs. When you think of modern-day false messiahs, don’t necessarily look for those who proclaim themselves to be messengers of God. Look for men of power and influence who eschew God, and claim that they will save us from one thing or another by their power, their personality, or their brilliance. All of these are also prophesied in the Bible:

Matthew 24:7-14, 23-24: *“For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world; all this is but the beginning of the ‘birth-pains.’ At that time you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death, and all peoples will hate you because of me. At that time many will be trapped into betraying and hating each other, many false prophets will appear and fool many people; and many people’s love will grow cold because of increased distance from Torah. But whoever holds out till the end will be delivered. And this Good News about the Kingdom will be announced throughout the whole world as a witness to all the Goyim. It is then that the end will come...At that time, if someone says to you, ‘Look! Here’s the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ don’t believe him. For there will appear false Messiahs and false prophets performing great miracles—amazing things!—so as to fool even the chosen, if possible.”*

And we see technology gradually taking control of us, moving us closer to the prophesied “mark of the beast:”

Revelation 13:11-18: *“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. It had two horns like those of a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence; and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, the one whose fatal wound had been healed. It performs great miracles, even causing fire to come down from heaven onto the earth as people watch. It deceives the people living on earth by the miracles it is allowed to perform in the presence of the beast, and it tells them to make an image honoring the beast that was struck by the sword but came alive again. It was allowed to put breath into the*

*image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could even speak; and it was allowed to cause anyone who would not worship the image of the beast to be put to death. Also it forces everyone—great and small, rich and poor, free and slave—to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead preventing anyone from buying or selling unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This is where wisdom is needed; those who understand should count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person, and its number is 666.”*

I am not giving this message to warn you against falling into the sins described in these Scriptures since I am confident that you will not. I am giving it to warn you against becoming despondent as you see the prophecies unfold and you realize that you are not able to change much for the better. You may be asking yourself: “What is the purpose of my life at all, since what will happen in the end is pre-ordained?”

It is a good question that deserves an answer. First, we who know the truth and are willing to tell it to others are God’s instruments to lead others to salvation. Remember that, in the Garden of Eden, in Genesis 2:16b-17, God told Adam:

*“You may freely eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, it will become certain that you will die.”*

Mankind has been under a death sentence ever since Adam ate from the tree, and everything that has transpired since then, including these last days’ happenings, is the result of God’s grace in wanting to save those of us who are willing to do the opposite of what Adam did, by obeying God in a way that Adam did not. Until the very end, every person has the chance, during his lifetime, to do his part in reversing Adam’s sin by being obedient to God, repenting of his sins, and receiving Yeshua’s atoning sacrifice.

What we are seeing in these last days, is a sorting out process that is the result of the New Covenant liberty that God has given us. Through it, God has stepped back and has allowed us to choose which way we will go. The sinfulness that is prevalent today is not new; it existed in Paul’s day as well. Paul had no more ability to effect change in those who were sold out to sin than we have, yet he was not despondent. As a matter of fact, he was optimistically proactive for, in Romans 11:13b-14, we read him to say:

*“I make known the importance of my work in the hope that somehow I may provoke some of my own people to jealousy and save some of them!”*

Keep Paul’s words in mind because Paul’s mission of preaching redemption through Yeshua to whomever would receive it, is our mission as well.

Meanwhile, believers and unbelievers alike will have to endure tribulation. Some teach that believers will be lifted out of what Revelations 7:13-17 calls “the great tribulation” or, as the CJB translates it, “the great persecution,” but you can draw your own conclusions; here is what John writes about it:

*“One of the elders asked me, “These people dressed in white robes—who are they, and where are they from?” “Sir,” I answered, “you know.” Then he told me, “These are the people who have come out of the Great Persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb. That is why they are before God’s throne. Day and night they serve him in his Temple; and the One who sits on the throne will put his Sh’kinah upon them. They will never again be hungry, they will never again be thirsty, the sun will not beat down on them, nor will any burning heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them, will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.””*

I believe that this Scripture is speaking about believers who have come out of the tribulation with their faith intact. I do not think that believers will be spared persecution and other hardships because there are Scriptures that warn us to be prepared for it:

Luke 21:34-36: *“But keep watch on yourselves, or your hearts will become dulled by carousing, drunkenness and the worries of everyday living, and that Day will be sprung upon you suddenly like a trap! For it will close in on everyone, no matter where they live, throughout the whole world. Stay alert, always praying that you will have the strength to escape all the things that will happen and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man.”*

Acts 14:21-22: *“After proclaiming the Good News in that city and making many people into talmidim, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the talmidim, encouraging them to remain true to the faith, and reminding them that it is through many hardships that we must enter the Kingdom of God.”*

Young people—teens—those of you who are in your twenties—these Scriptures are speaking to you. They are not calling you to be afraid and hunker down, but rather to be “watchmen on the wall”—to be looking for the approaching armies of evil that are sure to attack us and, when you see them, to sound the alarm and do battle against them. We who are older are depending on your youth and your strength. Does the U.S. or the Israeli military recruit middle age or old men and women to be soldiers? Of course not; they want young people like you. The senior officers are usually older because their maturity and experience in battle are important for training and directing the younger soldiers, but they are the younger soldiers who aim and shoot the weapons. It is the same in God’s army. You who are young are our front line of defense and, if you do not stand guard, if you do not train for battle and you do not fight when the enemies of God confront you, then we who are older and have sent you into the battle, will be overrun by the enemy along with you.

So yes, the end-times are upon us and, as prophesied, things are heating up in every quarter. None of us can stop the inevitable, which is that many (if not most) people in the world will be lost. But that is no reason to slack off of our mission to be ambassadors and soldiers for God and help to save those whom we can. It is a war, and we are in it whether we want to be or not, so let us train for it with these watchwords of Peter in 2 Peter 3:10-14:

*“However, [he said,] the Day of the Lord will come “like a thief.” On that Day the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will melt and disintegrate, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up. Since everything is going to be destroyed like this, what kind of people should*

*you be? You should lead holy and godly lives, as you wait for the Day of God and work to hasten its coming. That Day will bring on the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt from the heat; but we, following along with his promise, wait for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness will be at home. Therefore, dear friends, as you look for these things, do everything you can to be found by him without spot or defect and at peace.”*

—CJB

## **Render to Caesar the Things that Are Caesar's**

*Delivered July 4, 2015*

Matthew 22:15-21: *“Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk, And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Yeshua perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.” So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.””*

Yeshua’s response to the Pharisees was about Caesar’s taxation, but the past week’s Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage caused the Scripture to jump out at me as one that we will have a lot more to do with from now on. More than ever before, we will have to distinguish between what belongs to God and what belongs to Caesar; Caesar for us meaning our secular governments—federal and state.

Jurisdiction over marriage is claimed by both biblical and secular authorities—the secular authorities due to the health and welfare clauses of their respective constitutions, and the biblical authorities because of the myriad of Scriptures that inform and instruct about marriage. I know I am preaching to the choir here, but allow me to quote just a few of the Scriptures that establish and speak about marriage:

Genesis 2:22-24: *“Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

Deuteronomy 24:5: *“When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.”*

1 Corinthians 7:1-4: *“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.”*

Notice that the biblical references to husbands and wives in these Scriptures use the words “him” and “his” for husbands, and “her” and “hers” for wives. That is important because those advocating same-sex marriages also use the words “husband” and “wife,” but they redefine them so that wives can be men, and husbands can be women.

I previously said that jurisdiction over marriage is claimed by both biblical and secular authorities. We experience this shared jurisdiction when we go to the courthouse to obtain a license to marry, and then go to a church or synagogue to speak the words of covenant that create the marriage when they are spoken before God.

The laws of divorce are also claimed by both biblical and secular authorities, and it is not uncommon for each of them to refuse to recognize the other. For example, one might obtain a decree of divorce from a secular judge, but certain branches of Judaism will not recognize it and will require a “Jewish” divorce known as a “*get*.” And the opposite is also true; a couple that obtains a “*get*,” is still considered married by the secular authorities until and unless the couple also obtains a decree of divorce from a secular court.

Until now, Bible believers have been able to walk astride and satisfy (albeit sometimes uncomfortably) both the biblical and the secular authorities, but the recent Supreme Court decision making same-sex marriage the law of the land has changed that because the sin of homosexuality is at the root of it. Proponents of same-sex marriage speak of love. Why shouldn't two men or two women love one another they say? Why shouldn't two men or two women be able to covenant with each other to share living quarters, household expenses and responsibilities? It is presented in so logical and in so innocent a way that it disguises what is really going on, which is that men are having sex with men, and women are having sex with women. They are committing homosexual acts that are explicitly prohibited in the Bible. I could spend the rest of this message-time reading the many Scriptures that ban such practices, but here are three that pretty much say it all:

Romans 1:18-19, 24-32: *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.” ... “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”*

1 Corinthians 6:9-10: *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”*

1 Timothy 1:8-10: *“But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine...”*

Normally, I would not be so graphic about sexual matters in a *Shabbat* message, but the situation we find ourselves in as a result of the Supreme Court's ruling calls for it. The last two Scriptures I read refer to “Sodomites.” Do you know who Sodomites are? They are men who perform the vile sexual act of sodomy (anal or oral copulation) on one another (or on women), reflective of what caused God to destroy the city of Sodom.

Now in the face of clear biblical evidence prohibiting homosexual acts, you would think that the Christian Church would be opposing the Court's legalization of same-sex marriage. Well, some in the Church are, but alas not all, and those that are not, twist Scriptures like Romans 1:18-32 in unbelievable ways like this one that I extracted (and edited) from an article on the Internet:

*“The persons involved in the orgies referred to in Romans 1 were former Christians, and were heterosexual. Romans 1 condemns them because they went against their nature—their heterosexual orientation—by engaging in same-gender sexual behavior. By the same reasoning, lesbians and gays who went against their fundamental nature—their homosexual orientation—and engaged in opposite-gender sexual behavior would also be sinning. Therefore, what God really wants is for people to not go against their respective natures; heterosexual people should remain heterosexual, and homosexuals should remain homosexual.”*

As I said earlier, I know that I am preaching to the choir, but I believe these things need to be said. Attempts to justify homosexuality have been with us since the earliest of times, but we are now at a new place because, for the first time, it has been embraced as a normative way of life by the government and has been made the law of the land. What is coming (if it is has not already come) is a general assault on the Scriptures, and persecution of those of us that uphold Scripture's commandments. I have already heard the term “Bible-believing bigot” used by the media.

Let us be clear that while the Bible condemns homosexual acts, it does not condemn individuals who have an unhealthy attraction to members of their own sex but do not act on it. Such people are in an unhappy bondage and are in need of God's deliverance to be set free. I read 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 to you earlier, but I will read it again and this time include verse 11:

*“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Yeshua and by the Spirit of our God.”*

So, the Bible condemns homosexual acts and those who continue to practice them, but, at the same time, promises deliverance, forgiveness, and restoration to those who repent of prior sexual sins and seek spiritual help in the name of Yeshua and through the power of the Holy Spirit.



The subject of this message is “Render to Caesar the Things that Are Caesar’s, and to God, the things that are God’s” (from Matthew 22:21). We may have treated the Scripture as academically interesting in the past but, as more and more pressure is put upon us to comply with the Supreme Court’s ruling and persecution comes to those who show disapproval of it and resist it, each of us will have to search our souls for how firmly we believe the Scriptures.

Am I sounding the alarm too quickly? After all, no one is talking about abolishing biblical heterosexual marriage, and I am sure that none of us here who are unmarried intend to marry a person of his or her own sex. No, forcing us to marry contrary to Scripture is not the way that the persecution will come. It will come by penalizing us socially, politically, and economically when our views against same-sex marriage become known, and we act on those views. I do not consider that same-sex marriage is anything but sin, and I will refuse marriage counseling to those who are engaged in it, except to counsel them to repent and get out of it. Will I be sued for my refusal? Perhaps, but for this I am willing to be sued. How will we respond if a same-sex couple begins to attend our services and *chavurot* and do not immediately repent? Of course, we will minister the word of God to them, but what if we start liking them and they us? And what if their presence and eventual acceptance in our community begins to influence others to the normalcy of same-sex marriage? Will we have the courage to eject them? Well, if they claim to be believers or they become believers while they are with us, Scripture requires it, for 1 Corinthians 5:1 and 5 says:

*“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife!” ... “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Yeshua.”*

A different sin, but the principle is the same.

Consider 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

*“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”*

And also 2 Thessalonians 3:6:

*“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”*

These are real end-time things that will begin to happen and, when they do, we will have to be prepared to deal with them biblically despite almost certain retribution. One of the consequences that I see down the road is that Messianic Jewish congregations and Christian churches that hold the line

on biblical values will have their tax exemptions taken away. The result will be that we who tithe will no longer receive a tax deduction for our tithes. Will we have prayed this through and be prepared to stand on biblical principle when the time comes?

The UMJC just introduced emergency legislation in an attempt to protect its member congregations; it says in part:

*“Because marriage is a sealed and divinely affirmed covenant between a man and a woman, our congregations do not recognize same -sex unions as marriage, and decline to perform or affirm same sex unions.”*

It is a start, but there are so many other ways that we can be impacted.

So, what do we do? First of all, we pray for God's protection and for wisdom on how to respond to each assault as it comes. Second, we take comfort that an assault on us is also an assault on God and, although we are caught in the middle, God is on his throne and in control.

Remember what Paul reminded us in 2 Timothy 3:12 when he said:

*“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Messiah Yeshua will suffer persecution.”*

And take solace from what Yeshua said in Matthew 5:10-11:

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.”*

So, we are to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. May the Lord give us wisdom to know “which is which,” so that when the persecution we expect arrives, we will (as did Martin Luther) point to the Bible and without hesitation proclaim: “HERE I STAND!”

—NKJ

## Servanthood

*Delivered January 10, 2015*

I want to speak to you about a subject that is easy to comprehend, but that many find difficult to achieve. The subject is “servanthood.” The world is familiar with servants of all kinds. If we are wealthy enough, we might employ domestic servants to clean our house, go to market, cook our food, wash our clothes, answer our front door, and drive our automobile. If we own land and livestock, we may employ servants to plant and harvest our crops or care for our animals. If we are the owner of a business, we may have employees—servants that are paid to do what is asked of them.

In common understanding, being a servant is not thought of as a prestigious occupation. Ask a boy or girl: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” He or she is not likely to say: “I want to be a servant.” Why not? Because being a servant normally connotes a lack of personal freedom, and the doing of hard work at the sacrifice one’s own pleasures in order to benefit another. Not an attractive prospect, and even less attractive if we are not being paid and our having to give service to another is forced upon us. That, we call “slavery.”

The Bible acknowledges the difficulty and unattractiveness of being an unwilling servant or slave but has a different take on performing service when it is given for a holy purpose. When that is the case, we call it “servanthood”—a concept that is very different in it being considered a high and revered calling. We see this clearly in the astonishing words of Yeshua; in [Matthew 23:11-12](#) we read:

*“The greatest among you must be your servant, for whoever promotes himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be promoted.”*

And in [Matthew 20:26b-27](#):

*“...whoever among you wants to be a leader must become your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave!”* (See also, [Mark 10:43b-44](#)).

I know I am speaking mainly to believers here, but even to believers these words are sometimes a hard pill to swallow because none of us is yet perfected, and devoting our lives to serving others is quite the opposite of what the world and our natural flesh draws us to. It is much easier to think (and many of us have been taught) that selfless servanthood is for the very few whom we call “martyrs”—men and women of exceptional spiritual strength that we read about in the Bible, and that give us a glimpse into what the Kingdom of God will be like in the afterlife. But as for the here and now, we think, God cannot possibly expect such exemplary behavior from us.

We gravitate to this view because it puts off to the future what we do not want to face in the present, and it carries with it the false theology that the Kingdom of God is for our afterlife and is not manifest in the world today. It is an easy theology to believe, but it is false because God’s Kingdom is wherever God is, and God dwells on the earth today (via the Holy Spirit).

Consider the words of the “Lord’s Prayer” in Matthew 6:10:

*“May your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.”*

Yeshua introduced the expectancy that God’s Kingdom would be coming to earth, and that his will would be done here on earth. Yeshua prayed this when he lived here, but he was referring to the time when he would leave the earth and would send back the Holy Spirit in his place. According to Scripture, that occurred on the *Shavuot* that we call “Pentecost.” Anyway, all of this has been to say that the lofty goal of our embracing servanthood is not for some future time in heaven, but for today as well.

Now I want to point out something that I find quite amazing. The whole of our fallen world believes in servanthood, but servanthood of the kind that says: “It is right and natural that you should serve me.” The appeal of using others for our own self-interest is as old as the Garden itself when Eve tempted Adam to join her in eating of the forbidden tree. It fuels dictators and despots, and even trickles down to families in which husbands and wives vie for power and control over the other. And in the Bible and in other accounts of history it seems to be the way of all humanity and all of humanity’s gods, with only one exception—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and those people who take up God’s challenge to repent, and to aspire to be like him. We read in 2 Chronicles 7:14:

*“...if my people, who bear my name, will humble themselves, pray, seek my face and turn from their evil ways, I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

Do you realize the enormous implication of this? To my way of thinking, it is absolute proof of the existence of God and of the truth of the Scriptures because, considering what we know of the natural inclinations of men, who could possibly have invented a god to write about that is so good, so pure, so giving, so compassionate, so sacrificing and so serving of his created beings? All the other gods we read about demand service for themselves and give little in return.

Yes, our God is a God who serves more than He receives. We are familiar with 1 John 4:19 that says:

*“We love because He first loved us.”* (NAS).

Well, there is a corollary to it that could very well say:

*“We serve because He first served us.”* [my words]

God has been our example of serving others since the very beginning. Consider these examples:

1. God was Adam’s gardener:

Genesis 2:8: *“ADONAI, God, planted a garden toward the east, in ‘Eden, and there He put the person whom He had formed.”*

2. God served as Adam’s grocer:

Genesis 2:16-17: *“ADONAI, God, gave the person this order: “You may freely eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”*

3. God was Adam's matchmaker:

Genesis 2:18: *"ADONAI, God, said, "It isn't good that the person should be alone. I will make for him a companion suitable for helping him."*

4. God was Adam's and Eve's clothier and tailor:

Genesis 3:21: *"ADONAI, God, made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."*

5. Years later, God served as Noah's a ship designer:

Genesis 6:14-16: *"Make yourself an ark of gofer-wood; you are to make the ark with rooms and cover it with pitch both outside and inside. Here is how you are to build it: the length of the ark is to be 450 feet, its width seventy-five feet and its height forty-five feet. You are to make an opening for daylight in the ark eighteen inches below its roof. Put a door in its side; and build it with lower, second and third decks."*

6. God was Sarah's fertility doctor:

Genesis 18:11-14: *"Avraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself, thinking, "I am old, and so is my lord; am I to have pleasure again?" ADONAI said to Avraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and ask, 'Am I really going to bear a child when I am so old?' Is anything too hard for ADONAI? At the time set for it, at this season next year, I will return to you; and Sarah will have a son."*

7. When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt He served as their guide in the wilderness:

Exodus 13:17-18: *"After Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not guide them to the highway that goes through the land of the P'lishtim, because it was close by—God thought that the people, upon seeing war, might change their minds and return to Egypt. Rather, God led the people by a roundabout route, through the desert by the Sea of Suf."*

8. When the Israelites ran out of food in the desert God served as their baker:

Exodus 16:4: *"ADONAI said to Moshe, "Here, I will cause bread to rain down from heaven for you."*

9. When the Israelites reached Mount Sinai, God served as their community organizer and their legislator of law:

Exodus 19:3-6a: *"Moshe went up to God, and ADONAI called to him from the mountain: "Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya'akov, to tell the people of Isra'el: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my*

*own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.”*

I could give many more examples of how God served the Israelites during the Mosaic period, but let us move forward in time to see how God continues to serve us in the New Covenant. To begin with, Isaiah prophetically described a coming Messiah (who we now know was God in human form) who would be our servant, and who would suffer in our behalf:

*Isaiah 53:4-7: “In fact, it was our diseases He bore, our pains from which He suffered; yet we regarded him as punished, stricken and afflicted by God. But He was wounded because of our crimes, crushed because of our sins; the disciplining that makes us whole fell on him, and by his bruises we are healed. We all, like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way; yet ADONAI laid on him the guilt of all of us. Though mistreated, He was submissive—He did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to be slaughtered, like a sheep silent before its shearers, He did not open his mouth.”*

And these are words of Yeshua himself, recorded by his disciples, that exemplify the servanthood that he came to exemplify and teach us:

*Matthew 20:28: “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve—and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (also, *Mark 10:45*).

*Luke 22:27: “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.”* (NKJ).

*John 13:3-5: “Yeshua was aware that the Father had put everything in his power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God. So He rose from the table, removed his outer garments and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then He poured some water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the talmidim and wipe them off with the towel wrapped around him.”*

And here is what the Apostle Paul says about Yeshua’s servanthood:

*Philippians 2:6-8: “Though He was in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God something to be possessed by force. On the contrary, He emptied himself, in that He took the form of a slave by becoming like human beings are. And when He appeared as a human being, He humbled himself still more by becoming obedient even to death—death on a stake as a criminal!”*

Do you find all of this as awesome as do I? Our omnipotent God serving the likes of us through the ages, and then sending his son Yeshua to earth to be the servant of us all—to exemplify godly servanthood, and finally to sacrifice his life in a most painful way so that we might live? Does it not deserve a significant response from us? The response that God has always wanted from us is recorded in Deuteronomy 10:12:

*“So now, Isra’el, all that ADONAI your God asks from you is to fear ADONAI your God, follow all his ways, love him and serve ADONAI your God with all your heart and all your being...”*

Quoting the Hebrew Scriptures, Yeshua commanded:

Matthew 22:37b-39: *“You are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ’ This is the greatest and most important mitzvah. And a second is similar to it, ‘You are to love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

Here are some other Scriptures, with examples of how we are to love and be as servants to our fellow man:

Deuteronomy 22:1-2: *“You are not to watch your brother’s ox or sheep straying and behave as if you hadn’t seen it; you must bring them back to your brother. If your brother is not close by, or you don’t know who the owner is, you are to bring it home to your house; and it will remain with you until your brother asks for it; then you are to give it back to him.”*

Proverbs 22:9: *“He who is generous is blessed, because he shares his food with the poor.”*

Proverbs 25:21: *“If someone who hates you is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.”* (see also, Romans 12:19).

John 12: 26: Spoken by Yeshua: *“He who loves his life loses it, but he who hates his life in this world will keep it safe right on into eternal life! If someone is serving me, let him follow me; wherever I am, my servant will be there too. My Father will honor anyone who serves me.”*

Romans 12 1: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”* (NKJ).

Galatians 5:13: *“For, brothers, you were called to be free. Only do not let that freedom become an excuse for allowing your old nature to have its way. Instead, serve one another in love.”*

If the foregoing Scriptures have convinced you (or perhaps you were already convinced) that servanthood—i.e. serving God and man—is an indispensable part of the life of a believer, then be encouraged that your being part of Messianic Judaism in a Messianic Jewish congregation is an ideal and exciting place from which to serve. We have much to offer our Jewish brethren who do not yet know their Messiah, and much to offer the Christian Church that, for the most part, has yet to acknowledge as a reality, its grafted-in connection to Israel.

Our congregation describes itself as “a congregational home for Jewish believers in *Yeshua*, and for Gentile believers called to serve *Messiah* alongside their Jewish brethren.” If we fulfill that goal, we will indeed be doing well in our servanthood.

—CJB

## Speaking Biblically

*Delivered August 7, 2010*

According to Scripture, the human mouth is a weapon and, just as with the other weapons, the mouth can be used both to hurt and to bless.

James 3:8-10: *“But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so”*

When the Scripture says that “no man can tame the tongue,” it is not referring to taming the way we tame animals—by conditioning them with rewards and punishments. The tongue does, nevertheless, need to be controlled:

Psalms 39:1: *“[To Jeduthun I said], “I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me.”*

Yes, the tongue needs to be controlled, but not by physical conditioning; yes, it is a physical part of the body, but it is tied closely to the condition of its owner’s heart. See in Matthew 12:34-37 for how Yeshua admonishes the Pharisees about the improper use of their mouths, and what it has to do with their hearts:

*“Brood of vipers!...”*

Yeshua is not very happy with them!

*“...How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

I did not choose this subject for today’s message for its theological interest. I chose it because the way we use our mouths—the way we speak to each other and about each other—can either build up or break down our congregational community. By what it speaks, the mouth can either be an instrument for blessing or cursing—an instrument of provision and nurture, or a weapon that kills.

Before I go further in discussing the particulars of how we ought and ought not to use the mouths that God gave us, I would like to review some Scriptures on the subject so that we have an understanding of how God views this:

Proverbs 10:31-32: *“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, But the perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked what is perverse.”*



Proverbs 21:23: “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles.”

Psalms 50:16-22: “But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son. These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.’ Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver...”

Ephesians 4:29: “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

Romans 1:28-30: “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters...”

And referring to the young widows of the First Century community, we read:

1Timothy 5:13: “And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.”

James 1:26: “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.”

1Peter 2:1: “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking...”

God expects us to use our mouths properly even when confronted by our enemies:

Romans 12:14: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”

Many of us have heard the Hebrew term “*lashon hara*.” *lashon hara* is any negative speech about a person regardless of the truth of what is said, the justification of saying it, and even whether it is only said privately to the person who is the subject of the negative remark. Consequently, *lashon hara* is not always prohibited and, in fact is sometimes required such as when accusatory testimony is given in a court of law. That notwithstanding, Jewish understanding is that speaking negatively about a person is to be discouraged and only engaged in when necessary and under controlled conditions.

What makes this not simple is that none of us consciously sets out to harm a person by our speech, and yet we sometimes fall into doing it; sometimes we catch ourselves and sometimes we are completely oblivious to our transgression. None of us is immune; not the young among us, nor the old; not the parent nor the child; not the elder nor the new disciple. Negative remarks made about a

person can be accidental or driven by emotions such as anger and fear, or it can be deliberate such as when one seeks to punish or gain an advantage.

Here is a hypothetical case that is realistic. A young man in the congregation has feelings for a young woman and becomes emotionally desperate for reciprocation (i.e. he wants her to say she feels similarly). But there is a problem. There is another young man in the congregation with the same affections, and the young woman knows it. So, rather than put it in God's hands and pray that the Lord's will be done in the matter, the first young man begins to make disparaging remarks to the young woman about his rival in the hope that she will be persuaded to lose interest in the rival. The rival finds out about it, becomes angry, and does similarly to get back at the first young man.

Let us take a look now at the pattern of sin and destruction that has been sown into the congregation through the above interaction and *lashon hara*. It is clear to us, looking at it from the outside, that the backbiting and tale-telling engaged in by the two young men are sin but, interestingly, neither of *them* are conscious of it, nor are they conscious that they are waging war against each other with the weapon of their mouths. To *them* it is natural to blurt out disparaging remarks about the other because they are fixated on achieving their desired result—winning the lady's affections. What they are also unaware of is that they have placed the young woman they profess care for in jeopardy of falling into sin herself by allowing them to fill her ears with poison about the other. The only right thing for her to do is refuse to hear either of them and call them to repentance. But is she mature enough and secure enough to do it? If not, she is likely to become a facilitator of the young men's sin and will soon be in sin herself and three young people will be sinning. But it does not stop there. It does not take long before their friends hear about what is going on, begin to take sides, and before long the entire congregation is in sin.

What should have been done was for each person who found him/ herself receiving a bad report about another to stop the storyteller from finishing, refuse to hear the rest, and direct him/her to comply with Matthew 18:15 which states:

*“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.”*

“Oh, I could not possibly do that,” they might say. Then a different Scripture applies—1 Peter 4:15:

*“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.”*

It seems harsh to associate being a “busybody in other people's matters” with sins such as murder, thievery, and doing evil, but the Scripture is not a mistake. It highlights how serious and damaging God considers gossip to be compared with how casually we have often come to regard it.

Do you doubt your strength and conviction to stop gossip from someone you know by refusing to receive it? It is one of the obligations of being a disciple of Yeshua, and God will help you. I sometimes have congregants come to me hoping that, as Rabbi, I will take over their complaint and do the hard work of confronting someone, leaving the actual complainer anonymous. I can tell you now

that if you come to me with that expectation I will stop you from relating the story to me as soon as I understand where the conversation is going, and I will direct you to go to the person that you have a complaint against.

There are so many ways that we can use our mouths to hurt that the best I can do is to mention a few of them and related Scriptures:

**Talebearing:**

Proverbs 11:13: *“A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.”*

Proverbs 18:7-8: *“A fool’s mouth is his destruction, And his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body.”*

Proverbs 20:19: *“He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.”*

**Whispering:**

Proverbs 16:28: *“A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.”*

**Backbiting:**

Psalms 15:1-3: *“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend...”*

Psalms 34:13(12)-14(13): *“Who is the man who desires life, And loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit.”*

Let us bring this message to an end by recalling an earlier Scripture spoken by Yeshua to the Pharisees:

Matthew 12:34-37 *“...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

The prayer of all of us here who have heard this message should be the words of Psalms 19:15(14):

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.”*

*Amen.*

—NKJ

## Spirituality

*Delivered October 25, 2008*

Today, I want to speak to you about spirituality. According to Scripture, there are two kinds of men (and women); there are those who are carnal—that is, given to a life of satisfying the desires of their flesh, and those who are spiritual—those who are willing to crucify their flesh in order to serve God. Crucifying the flesh means “dying to self”—setting aside self-will so that God’s will can be done. Knowing what that entails is the mark of an educated man; striving to do it, however, is the mark of a disciple.

Romans 8:5-8 says it this way:

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

So, there is carnality and spirituality, and they are opposites. 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 uses the term “natural man...” it says:

*“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Messiah.”*

So, carnal men and natural men are one and the same. When God created man, He did not desire that natural man’s nature would be carnal, and it was not carnal until Adam sinned. “Spirituality” had no meaning before the “fall,” because the opposite of it—carnality—did not yet exist. Adam could experience temptation but did not become carnal until he gave in to it.

But Adam did sin, and its consequence is that we find ourselves in a fallen world; and we are part of the fallen world—even those of us who have received Yeshua been given a new spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:17: *“Therefore if any man be in Messiah, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*

Our new spirit gives us a renewed nature that causes us to not want to sin against God, but it wars against a part of our old nature that we call “flesh.” In a way, we have the same choices to make as did Adam—to obey God or sin, and how spiritual we are may be measured by how often our new spirit prevails over our flesh. Through Yeshua and the Holy Spirit, God has given us the power to prevail, but it is still our choice, for as we read in Ephesians 4:20-24:

*“But you have not so learned Messiah, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Yeshua: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man*

*which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” (see also, [2 Corinthians 7:1](#); [1 Peter 1:16](#))*

When we talk about spirituality, of course we mean “biblical” spirituality. The word has a very broad meaning, and in today’s world it is often applied to spirits other than that of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, what does biblical spirituality look like? The most minimal form of it is our believing enough in God that we are willing to pray to him and ask him to meet our needs and protect us from adversity. Although such prayers are self-serving, they are, nevertheless proper, because we read in [John 16:24](#):

*“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*

But notice that the Scripture does not just say “ask,” it says “in My name.” That small difference is not insignificant, for we also read in [Matthew 21:22](#):

*“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”*

“Believing” is the key, and it is tied to another Scripture, [James 4:3](#) that warns us:

*“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*

You see, “believing” is not just believing in God or in Yeshua—it is also believing that God will answer your prayers. But your new spirit will not allow you to believe that God will answer your prayers if they are contrary to his will—to what He wants you to pray for. This, in turn, is linked to another Scripture, [1 John 3:22](#), that says:

*“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”*

All of this comes down to a principle called “faith,” and [Hebrews 11:6](#) says of it:

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

If we have that kind of faith, the promise of [Matthew 11:28-30](#) is available to us:

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

Do you see how all these Scriptures and principles are tied together? If you focus on just one of them and exclude the others, you might mistakenly come to believe that once you confess Yeshua you au-

tomatically become spiritual and the power of God is transferred to your hands to get anything you want; but that is not that way it is at all, and the truly spiritual man knows it.

Let us go back briefly to the minimal spirituality we spoke of earlier—the willingness to acknowledge God and to pray to him prayers of petition. While pursuing God for our protection and relief might seem to be a no-brainer, most people (even those who profess belief in God) do not pray at all or only pray to God as a last resort. How often have we heard a doctor portrayed on television saying to a patient’s family: “I have done all I can for him; there is nothing left to do now but pray.”?

Why does a statement such as that so often pass for reasonable? It is because many people believe in God intellectually—that is, they believe that there exists a creator whom they call God—but relatively few people believe that God is really alive to us—that He has power, that He loves us, and that He is willing and able to help us with our needs. But how can people know that and be sure of that? Where do we learn it from? They may have been told that by someone, but we ultimately know it from the Bible or from a supernatural visitation of the Holy Spirit.

If we only believe in God intellectually and do not know or believe that which is in the Bible, we do not have information about who God is, what God is like, and what God can and wants to do for us. It is then no wonder that we do not pray to him as a first resort, and do not have confidence that He will respond by giving us relief. If we have a lack of biblical knowledge, even if we do pray, there is often no power in it because, while we may believe in God, we do not know in faith that God is our Heavenly Father who cares about us and is willing to intervene in our lives. Bottom line: Belief in the truth of the Scriptures is essential for having a meaningful relationship with God, and therefore godly spirituality is inseparable from belief in the Bible. We cannot think of ourselves as disciplined believers if we are not sure about the truth and accuracy of the Bible even if we believe in Yeshua. On the other hand, if we read the Scriptures, two beneficial things will happen: (1) We will become acquainted with who our Heavenly father and Messiah Yeshua are and (2) our faith in them will build. Romans 10:17 says:

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

It is supernatural that if we hear God’s words, we will acquire faith to believe in what He says. And how do we go about hearing God’s words? By exposing ourselves to what is written in Scripture—either through reading it or through hearing it preached.

I always pray as my primary means of coping with all of life’s problems, and I recommend it without reservation to others because God can, and often does, help us out of our difficulties. And by the way, do not think of prayer as mere therapy. Therapy, of whatever kind and whatever operative theory is a natural solution to emotional problems—not to be dismissed, yet natural and therefore limited. The reason prayer works so well is because God is supernatural, and his power has no limitation.

Anyone who has not been relying on prayer to help them with the stresses of their life will be taking a very big step if they begin now. However, there is more of God available to us than just his answering prayer, so why not get the full complement of what He has to offer? Marvelously, the full

complement of what God has to offer is himself! He does not want to be a distant God, but rather a fatherly companion. We know this because Scripture tells us so in Deuteronomy 30:11-14:

*“For this commandment [God’s Word] which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.”*

And in Revelation 3:20-21, Yeshua tells us that not only is God’s Word close at hand, but He himself is close at hand, for he says:

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”*

Opening our door to Yeshua causes us to be overcomers. Overcomers of what? Of being crushed and destroyed by the adversities of life.

All of this is part of being spiritual, but you see we have now taken a step beyond merely praying to God to solve our problems—we have asked God to enter our lives and take control; that is an order of magnitude beyond. Real spirituality is pursuing a personal relationship with God and releasing control of our lives to him.

When Yeshua was asked by a Pharisee what is the most important commandment, Yeshua answered him:

*“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)*

If you want to be spiritual and an over comer of life’s adversities, invite Yeshua into your life and give him control—love him and your heavenly Father with all of your heart, soul and strength, and also love all persons whom God brings into your life. If you do that, your life will be so completely changed that stresses such as worry and fear will no longer have a place in it, and then you will know what true spirituality is.

—NKJ

## Taking Personal Responsibility

*Delivered October 17, 2015*

On the occasion of the *Bar Mitzvah* of Samuel C.

*Bar Mitzvah* has different meanings to different people. What it meant to me when I became a *Bar Mitzvah* was that it was a time to appease my parents and grandparents, to have a party, to get presents from relatives I did not know, and to not have to go back to Hebrew School. Samuel (whose *Bar Mitzvah* we are celebrating today) is far ahead of where I was at his age, and I thank God for it. Still, here and at all Messianic Jewish congregations, there is so much planning and attention given to the ceremonial aspect of *Bar Mitzvah*, that I think it is well for us to be reminded of *Bar Mitzvah*'s real intended meaning.

“*Bar Mitzvah*” is Aramaic for “Son of Commandment,” and God’s commandments define what is right and what is wrong in human behavior. In a sense, we are all *b’nei mitzvah* (sons and daughters of God) and, whether or not we choose to obey God (in fact, whether or not we even believe in him) we come to an age of adulthood when God holds us responsible for our conduct, independent of our parents. Scripture does not tell us exactly what that age is but, according to Jewish tradition, it is age 13 for boys, and age 12 for girls. So, in Jewish tradition, a *Bar Mitzvah* (and a *Bat Mitzvah* in the case of a girl) is not a ceremony at all but is rather the young man himself who has reached that age of personal responsibility.

We say that today is Samuel’s *Bar Mitzvah* because, despite this not being his exact thirteenth birthday, it is the day that we are recognizing him as has having passed from the shelter of his childhood to the glaring light of accountable adulthood. Samuel could have slept-in this morning instead of his having come to his celebration, and he would still be a *Bar Mitzvah* in both God’s eyes and in ours. So, Samuel, what I will say in the rest of this message directly applies to you, but it also applies to all the adults here because we are all responsible for keeping the commandments of God that apply to us individually.

Although Scripture it does not mention *Bar Mitzvah* by name, it is replete with exhortations to personal responsibility and accountability as we graduate from childhood to adulthood. In 1 Corinthians 13:11 we read:

*“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, argued like a child; now that I have become a man, I have finished with childish ways.”*

Prior to our reaching the age of personal responsibility, God held our parents responsible for our conduct, in that He commanded them (in Proverbs 22:6):

*“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

But Scripture is clear that once we reach the age of personal responsibility (the age of *Bar Mitzvah*), God holds us (not our parents) accountable for sins we commit. With regard to the most grievous of sins, Deuteronomy 24:16 states it this way:



*“Fathers are not to be executed for the children, nor are children to be executed for the fathers; every person will be executed for his own sin.”*

Similarly, in Ezekiel 18:20 we read:

*“The person who sins is the one that will die—a son is not to bear his father’s guilt with him, nor is the father to bear his son’s guilt with him; but the righteousness of the righteous will be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked will be his own.”*

The fact that God holds adults responsible for their actions (both their righteous actions and their sinful actions) and rewards or punishes accordingly is not only a matter between children and their parents, but is a general Kingdom principle:

Proverbs 9:12: *“If you are wise, your wisdom helps you; but if you scoff, you bear the consequences alone.”*

Isaiah 3:10-11: *“Say that it will go well with the righteous, that they will enjoy the fruit of their actions; but woe to the wicked, it will go badly with him; for what he has done will be done to him.”*

Galatians 6:5: *“...each person will carry his own load.”*

Those of us who have been adults for a while have come to know this, but young men newly coming of age sometimes insist on learning the hard way. God sees everything, and it is futile to try to hide our deeds from God. In Numbers 32:22-23, Moses instructs Israel to obey God by crossing the Jordan and taking the promised land, and he tells them:

*“...if the land has been conquered before ADONAI, and only after that do you return—then you will be clear before ADONAI and before Isra’el, and this land here will be yours to possess before ADONAI. But if you will not do this, then you have sinned against ADONAI, and you must understand that your sin will find you out.”*

And in Galatians 6:7-8 we read:

*“Don’t delude yourselves: no one makes a fool of God! A person reaps what he sows. Those who keep sowing in the field of their old nature, in order to meet its demands, will eventually reap ruin; but those who keep sowing in the field of the Spirit will reap from the Spirit everlasting life.”*

And 2 Corinthians 5:10:

*“...for we must all appear before the Messiah’s court of judgment, where everyone will receive the good or bad consequences of what he did while he was in the body.”*

There are many examples in Scripture of persons seeking to avoid personal responsibility by shifting blame to others; here are two of the most famous ones:

*Genesis 3:9-13: “ADONAI, God, called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I ordered you not to eat?” The man replied, “The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ADONAI, God, said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman answered, “The serpent tricked me, so I ate.””*

*Matthew 27:22-24: “Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Yeshua, called ‘the Messiah’?” They all said, “Put him to death on the stake! Put him to death on the stake!” When he asked, “Why? What crime has he committed?” they shouted all the louder, “Put him to death on the stake!” When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and said, “My hands are clean of this man’s blood; it’s your responsibility.””*

Unless we want to be in the company of Adam and Pilate and share their fate, trying to fool God by shifting blame regarding our sins is not what we want to do for Romans 1:18-20 says that we are without excuse:

*“What is revealed is God’s anger from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth; because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities—both his eternal power and his divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse...”*

Mankind’s need to embrace personal responsibility and not blame-shift is recognized even in the secular realm. Ron Haskins of the Brookings Institution published this statement in his July 2009 article titled “The Sequence of Personal Responsibility...” he wrote:

*“Personal responsibility is the willingness to both accept the importance of standards that society establishes for individual behavior and to make strenuous personal efforts to live by those standards. But personal responsibility also means that when individuals fail to meet expected standards, they do not look around for some factor outside themselves to blame. The demise of personal responsibility occurs when individuals blame their family, their peers, their economic circumstances, or their society for their own failure to meet standards. The three areas of personal decision-making in which the nation’s youth and young adults most need to learn and practice personal responsibility are education, sexual behavior and marriage, and work.”*

It is an excellent statement, and the only thing that makes it different from what Scripture teaches, is that the standards it espouses are “society’s standards” which, regrettably, are not always God’s standards.

The personal responsibility about which I spoke so far is responsibility for ourselves—for our conduct, and for maintaining our relationship with God. Indeed, In Deuteronomy 6:2-3, God commands us to:

*“...fear ADONAI your God and observe all his regulations and mitzvot that I am giving you—you, your child and your grandchild—as long as you live, and so that you will have long life. Therefore listen, Isra’el, and take care to obey, so that things will go well with you, and so that you will increase greatly, as ADONAI, the God of your ancestors, promised you by giving you a land flowing with milk and honey.”*

And centuries later, in Mark 1:15, Yeshua says to us:

*“The time has come, God’s Kingdom is near! Turn to God from your sins and believe the Good News!”*

The Good News of which Yeshua spoke was that he was sent from the Father to cleanse us of our sins, to bring us close to him and, if we repent and receive him, to give us eternal life. In 1 John 5:11-13 we read:

*“And this is the witness: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Those who have the Son have the life; those who do not have the Son of God do not have the life. I have written you these things so that you may know that you have eternal life—you who keep trusting in the person and power of the Son of God.”*

And in John 3:16-18 we read:

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but rather so that through him, the world might be saved. Those who trust in him are not judged; those who do not trust have been judged already, in that they have not trusted in the one who is God’s only and unique Son.”*

That is the Good News we are responsible for embracing.

But it is only part of the story—the part that speaks of our taking personal responsibility for ourselves. The part of which I have not yet spoken (and which is next in a *Bar Mitzvah*’s growth and maturation), is the taking upon oneself responsibility for the welfare of others; for as Philippians 2:4 instructs us:

*“...look out for each other’s interests and not just for your own.”*

Also, the *Sh’ma* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) that we heard earlier today speaks of embracing the *Torah* not only ourselves, but also of conveying it to others:

*“...and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, all your being and all your resources. These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead, and write them on the door-frames of your house and on your gates.”*

Yeshua confirmed the *Sh'ma*, when in Luke 10:25-28:

*“An expert in Torah stood up to try and trap him by asking, “Rabbi, what should I do to obtain eternal life?” But Yeshua said to him, “What is written in the Torah? How do you read it?” He answered, “You are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your understanding; and your neighbor as yourself.” “That’s the right answer,” Yeshua said. “Do this, and you will have life.””*

As you plainly see, the “*Sh'ma*” calls us to first take responsibility for ourselves, and then to take responsibility for the welfare of others. The others are first our family and then our neighbor who is any other person that God brings across our path that needs our friendship or our help. Samuel, as a *Bar Mitzvah*, in addition to serving your family, there are two kinds of help you may be called upon to give others, and two kinds of “others” that may need your help. The two kinds of help are (1) physical help and (2) directive/corrective help, and the two kinds of “others” are (1) adults older than yourself, and (2) peers your own age.

Giving physical help is the easiest, and you no doubt give it already. A package is too heavy or awkward for one person to carry so you assist in carrying it. It is the other kind of help—the one that requires your advice, direction, and yes, even your correction that is the challenging one. When you are faced with the responsibility of giving such help and think that it is not your place to give it, it would be well to remember Galatians 6:1-2:

*“Brothers, suppose someone is caught doing something wrong. You who have the Spirit should set him right, but in a spirit of humility, keeping an eye on yourselves so that you won’t be tempted too. Bear one another’s burdens—in this way you will be fulfilling the Torah’s true meaning, which the Messiah upholds.”*

Samuel, as a young person, you have likely had more experience being on the receiving end of correction than experience in correcting others. But that is one of the responsibilities of becoming a *Bar Mitzvah*. You must remain teachable and correctable yourself, but God now calls you to teach and correct others as well.

Now as to giving directive or corrective help to those older than you: It is difficult to bring yourself to do it but, when God calls you do it, remember the Apostle Paul’s advice to his younger brother-in-the-faith Timothy; he said to him in 1 Timothy 4:12:

*“Don’t let anyone look down on you because of your youth; on the contrary, set the believers an example in your speech, behavior, love, trust and purity.”*

Also, in 2 Timothy 2:22-25, Paul instructed Timothy to:

*“...flee the passions of youth; and, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart, pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love and peace. But stay away from stupid and ignorant controversies—you know that they lead to fights, and a slave of the Lord shouldn’t fight. On the contrary, he should be kind to everyone, a good teacher, and not resentful when mistreated. Also he*

*should be gentle as he corrects his opponents. For God may perhaps grant them the opportunity to turn from their sins, acquire full knowledge of the truth,”*

Samuel, Paul’s words are for you as well, and when you are called upon by God to give correction to those who are your seniors:

Ephesians 4:2-3: *“Always be humble, gentle and patient, bearing with one another in love, and making every effort to preserve the unity the Spirit gives through the binding power of shalom.”*

Now, as for offering direction or correction to your peers—that is what is called servant leadership, and you must not shrink back from embracing it. Yeshua explained servant leadership to his disciples this way; he said:

Matthew 20:25-28: *“You know that among the Goyim, those who are supposed to rule them become tyrants, and their superiors become dictators. Among you, it must not be like that. On the contrary, whoever among you wants to be a leader must become your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave! For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve—and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Samuel, you and all *B’nei Mitzvah* are called by God to be servant leaders of our peers.

There is so much more I want to say to you, Samuel, but it is time that we stop. I know that my words for you today came from the Holy Spirit, so internalize them and act on them. May the Lord bless you and your family on this great day of passage from childhood to adulthood, and in your years to come.

—CJB

## Walking with God and Hearing His Voice

*Delivered December 10, 2012*

I want many things for my congregation. I want it to be known as a home for Jewish believers in Yeshua. I want it to be known as a place where Jewish and Gentile believers serve God in unity, harmony, and equality. I want it to be known as a congregation of learners and prayers. But most of all, I want it to be known as a place where we can experience God.

Part of experiencing God is hearing his voice. How many of us can say that we hear God's voice? Some of us know that we do, some of us think that we do, some of us question whether we do, and some of us doubt that we do. And of those of us who would say "yes, I hear God's voice," how many of us would say we hear him accurately? God's voice is most often not heard audibly, i.e., with our ears. Most often it is "heard" in our spirit in what [1 Kings 19:11-12](#) refers to as his "still small voice."

Hearing God tell us something that He wants us to repeat to another is what we call prophecy. But when God tells us something that is just for us alone, we call it revelation or something else, but it is the essence of prophecy nonetheless, and any time we hear his voice we are engaging in a prophetic function. Hearing God's voice is a very important part of having a personal relationship with him. We can talk at someone all day long, but unless that person talks back to us—unless we have a dialog with that person—we really do not have a meaningful relationship.

God speaks many kinds of words to us. Some of God's words are predictive—telling us that something will happen in the future. Some of God's words are directive—instructing us to take certain actions or to refrain from certain actions. Some of God's words are corrective—chastising us and turning us away from sinful conduct. Some of God's words are interpretive such as when He shows us what a passage of Scripture means or how it applies in our immediate situation. Some of God's words tell us things He wants us to know or give us understanding of things that would otherwise elude us. These are sometimes called words of knowledge or words of wisdom. But most often, God's words to us are words of fatherly comfort and friendship—words of assurance that He knows us, loves us, and is always with us.

The first regular and consistent Bible teaching I received after I became a believer was from fChristian radio teachers like Vernon McGee and Carl MacIntyre. In those days I spent a lot of time driving the Washington Beltway because I was teaching law courses in several community colleges. One day I heard one of these teachers quote a passage of Scripture that changed my perspective forever; it was [Genesis 5:24](#):

*"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."*

"And Enoch walked with God." "And Enoch walked with God." I could not get the idea of it out of my mind. Imagine anyone walking with God—the friendship—the intimacy. That was what I wanted. That was what I wanted my relationship with God to be. I wanted to walk with God and, like the old Christian hymn:<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "In the Garden," C. Austin Miles, March 1912, inspired by [John 20:15](#).

“And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am His own;  
And the joy we share as we tarry there,  
None other has ever known.”

I felt God’s presence even as a new believer, but this—THIS was a new and deeper way of knowing God—to be able to WALK with him and TALK with him. That desire burned in my consciousness. I wanted that and then, somehow, I knew I could have it by just stepping out in it. I did it, and I have been conscious of walking and talking with God ever since.

Now don’t get me wrong. I do not mean that I haven’t sometimes sinned and walked away from God. But God has gone after me and has been faithful to send his Holy Spirit to convict me and bring me back so, more often than not, I sense the presence of God wherever I go. Knowing God with that kind of intimacy is intensely liberating. There is no fear of life’s circumstances, no compulsion to protect and to strive, and there is indeed a peace that passes all understanding.

Now there would be no reason for me to tell you all of this if I were some kind of special person who had this special connection to God that others could not have. But consider that I received the revelation from a radio broadcast to which thousands of people were listening. How special could I be? The fact is, that Scripture promises this intimacy with God to anyone who will believe for it and take it. Notice I did not say ASK for it, though you might ask just to be polite. But God has already given it to us, and all we have to do is take it. To confirm the correctness of what I am telling you, all you need do is look at a few Scriptures—first at Scriptures that assure us that we can all hear his voice:

Psalms 95:7b: “...*Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness,*”

John 10:27: “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*”

John 18:37: “*Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.*”

Next are Scriptures that guaranty that we can all know him:

John 14:7: “*If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.*”

John 14:16-17: “*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*”

1 John 5:20: “*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true...*”

And the granddaddy of all the New Covenant Scriptures—the one that predicts the New Covenant—Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34) that is repeated in Hebrews 8:11:

*“‘Here, the days are coming,’ says ADONAI, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’udah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,’ says ADONAI. ‘For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,’ says ADONAI: ‘I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.’” (CJB)*

Not only has God told us that we can hear his voice and know him, He has also told us in Hebrews 13:5:

*“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

Now if we are convinced that we *can* hear God, the next logical question is: “How do we do it?” Okay, first things first. It is hard to hear God if we are far away from him, and Proverbs 15:29 reminds us:

*“The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.”*

So, the first thing we need to do is clean up our lives and ourselves so that God can hear us and answer us. If we do not, we will still hear God, but we will not like what we hear because we will hear only one thing over and over: “Stop sinning.” “Repent!” “Stop sinning.” “Repent!” Not very pleasant listening. We do not want to hear God saying that to us but, if we do, we had better obey him because we can only draw near to God to hear his voice say other things if we first repent of our sins; James 4:8 states:

*“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”*

Okay, let us now suppose that we have repented of our sins. So, we pray and ask God to speak to us—to let us hear his voice and perhaps we do not hear his voice. So, we may pray some more and perhaps we still do not hear his voice. And we pray and ask God why? And at that point some of us finally hear God shouting over our chatter, telling us: “*I have been speaking to you, but you have been so busy talking that you did not hear me. And then we remember Psalms 46:11(10), which instructs us:*

*“Be still, and know that I am God...”*

There is an example in Scripture where Elijah could not hear God at first because of all the noise around him. In 1 Kings 19:11-12 (that I previously mentioned), God says to Elijah:

*“Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in*



*the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire A STILL SMALL VOICE.*”

And so, we finally quiet down and listen, and what do you know? We can finally hear God.

Now here is a caution. What we believe to be the voice of God cannot be trusted unless we check it out by comparing it against Scripture. Consider the Berean example. Acts 17:11 applauds their process of diligently discerning words they received:

*“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”*

The word they received was what was told to them by disciples of Yeshua, but they only trusted what they heard after they confirmed it in the Scriptures. The apostle Paul gave similar instructions to Timothy when he told him that the Scriptures of the *Tanakh* were to be trusted for all things; in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 he said:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Proverbs 30:5 tells us that *“Every word of God is pure,”* but verse 6 warns us:

*“Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.”*

So, it is necessary that we test all words we hear (or think we hear) against the certainty and reliability of Scripture, because the voice of God will never contradict his written Word. We can think that we have heard God’s voice, but we are all fallible; that is why Words given publicly during a service are judged by elders, and that is why when we are alone and think we have heard God’s voice, we have a responsibility to judge it according to the Scriptures.

Like the chicken and egg paradox, the voice of God is heard when we have faith to listen for it, but as Romans 10:17 assures us:

*“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”*

So, we must have faith to hear but we must hear to have faith. If that is confusing, let us not worry about it and just let God do a work in our lives.

Now, let us summarize!

First: Our ability to have intimacy with God and know him in the New Covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah.

Second: The promised intimacy with God comes from our being able to walk with God and hear his voice via the *Ruach HaKodesh*—the Holy Spirit.

Third: Our ability to hear God’s voice and converse with him is normal for the believer, but we must be repentant of our sins to hear his voice clearly.

Fourth: We should expect to hear God’s voice, but not expect it to be loud and booming; rather expect a still small voice speaking to our spirit within us.

Fifth: If we want to hear God’s voice, we must not drown it out by incessantly talking during prayer. We must stop to listen, “and know that He is God.”

Sixth: We must be like the Bereans and test that which we believe to be the voice of God against Scripture.

Seventh and finally: We must remember the paradox that we must have faith to hear but hear to have faith.

—NKJ

# **J. Overcoming through Faith**

## **Sermons • Vol 2**



## Dealing with Stress God's Way

*Delivered June 21, 2014*

Experiencing stress once in a while is normal and even helpful because it hones our abilities and pushes us to our limits much as trainers push athletes to their limits. However, stress is not normal and not helpful if it occurs frequently, because it tends to reduce our quality of life and has adverse health consequences as well.

Stress may be defined as “a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances.” Stress can be disabling but, according to Scripture, we need not have it. In Matthew 11, verses 28 to 30 we read Yeshua saying:

*“Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

The Scripture does not employ the word “stress,” but clearly the heaviness of stress is that of which it is speaking. Pursuing relief by merely asking God for it might seem simple and obvious, but often even believers do not do it. People who profess belief in God often do not look to him as their first recourse, and sometimes do not look to him except as a last resort. How often do we hear a “television program” doctor say: “I have done all I can; there is nothing left to do but pray?” Why is this? It is because it is one thing to believe in God intellectually, and it is another thing to believe that He is a God who has power, loves us, and is willing and able to help us with all of our needs, including ridding us of stress.

If we only believe in God intellectually and do not know or believe what is in the Bible, we do not have information about who God is, what He is like, and what he can and wants to do for us. It is then no wonder that we do not pray to him as a first resort and have confidence that He will respond by giving us relief! And then if we do decide to pray for relief, there is sometimes no power in our prayer because, while we believe in God, we do not have faith that God is willing and able to intervene in our lives.

Even without initially having faith, if we take the trouble to read the Scriptures, two beneficial things will happen: (1) We will become acquainted with who our heavenly father is, and (2) our faith in him will build, for Romans 10:17 says:

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* (NKJ).

It is a promise that is supernatural, and therefore our logic cannot grab hold of it. If we hear God's words we will acquire faith to believe in what He says; and how do we go about hearing God's words? By exposing ourselves to what is in the Scriptures through either reading it or hearing it preached.

This is one of those messages that, in the midst of preparing it and reading the Scriptures that pertain to it, I became impatient with my own words because the words of the Scriptures were so powerful.

So, at the risk of being considered uncreative, I am going to read you a lot of the Scriptures I came across. Do not lose track of the subject though which is “Dealing with Stress God's Way.”

*Isaiah 55:1-2: “All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You without money, come, buy, and eat! Yes, come! Buy wine and milk without money—it's free! Why spend money for what isn't food, your wages for what doesn't satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and you will eat well, you will enjoy the fat of the land.”*

Thirst and hunger are stressful. Here, God is saying that his relief for these stresses is free for the taking, so why pay for remedies that will not work?

*Jeremiah 17:7-8: “Blessed is the man who trusts in ADONAI; ADONAI will be his security. He will be like a tree planted near water; it spreads out its roots by the river; it does not notice when heat comes; and its foliage is luxuriant; it is not anxious in a year of drought but keeps on yielding fruit.”*

The tree planted near water is analogous to our planting ourselves near God and trusting him. Like the tree near the water, if we trust God, we will be anxious for nothing.

*Habakkuk 3:17-18: “For even if the fig tree doesn't blossom, and no fruit is on the vines, even if the olive tree fails to produce, and the fields yield no food at all, even if the sheep vanish from the sheep pen, and there are no cows in the stalls; still, I will rejoice in ADONAI, I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”*

This is an exhortation to ride through bad times by rejoicing in God and in our salvation.

Now, here is a Scripture that we all know, and that needs no comment from me:

*Psalms 23: “ADONAI is my shepherd; I lack nothing. He has me lie down in grassy pastures, he leads me by quiet water, he restores my inner person. He guides me in right paths for the sake of his own name. Even if I pass through death-dark ravines, I will fear no disaster; for you are with me; your rod and staff reassure me. You prepare a table for me, even as my enemies watch; you anoint my head with oil from an overflowing cup. Goodness and grace will pursue me every day of my life; and I will live in the house of ADONAI for years and years to come.”*

There are many more Psalms that speak to us of being overcomers. Psalms 27:1-3 speaks about overcoming fear by trusting God. Fear is one of the most disabling of stresses, but God has the solution:

*“ADONAI is my light and salvation; whom do I need to fear? ADONAI is the stronghold of my life; of whom should I be afraid? When evildoers assailed me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and foes, they stumbled and fell. If an army encamps against me, my heart will not fear; if war breaks out against me, even then I will keep trusting.”*

And Psalms 55:23(22):

*“Unload your burden on ADONAI, and he will sustain you. He will never permit the righteous to be moved.”*

Yes, burdens stress us greatly, and this Psalm exhorts us to offload our cares on him through the exercise of our faith.

Trusting God is indeed the key; as Proverbs 3:5-6 puts it:

*“Trust in ADONAI with all your heart; do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him; then he will level your paths.”*

A level path is a stress-free path, for you need not labor to climb up, nor hold yourself back from sliding down.

Matthew 6:25-34 (see also, Luke 12:22-31): *“Therefore, I tell you, don't worry about your life—what you will eat or drink; or about your body—what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds flying about! They neither plant nor harvest, nor do they gather food into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they are? Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to his life? And why be anxious about clothing? Think about the fields of wild irises, and how they grow. They neither work nor spin thread, yet I tell you that not even Shlomo in all his glory was clothed as beautifully as one of these. If this is how God clothes grass in the field—which is here today and gone tomorrow, thrown in an oven—won't he much more clothe you? What little trust you have! So don't be anxious, asking, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or 'How will we be clothed?' For it is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Don't worry about tomorrow—tomorrow will worry about itself! Today has enough [problems] already!”*

Here is a one-two punch from the Book of John, verse 14:1 followed by verse 27:

*“Don't let yourselves be disturbed. Trust in God and trust in me.”*

*“What I am leaving with you is shalom—I am giving you my shalom. I don't give the way the world gives. Don't let yourselves be upset or frightened.”*

And here is what I call the Romans trilogy, verses 8:6, 8:28, and 15:13 linked together:

- *“Having one's mind controlled by the old nature is death, but having one's mind controlled by the Spirit is life and shalom.”*
- *“Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose...”*
- *“May God, the source of hope, fill you completely with joy and shalom as you continue trusting, so that by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh you may overflow with hope.”*

And let us not forget the Philippians “dynamic duo,” verses 4:6-7 followed by verse 19:

*“Don't worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then God's shalom, passing all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua.” “Moreover, my God will fill every need of yours according to his glorious wealth, in union with the Messiah Yeshua.”*

Just two more, so bear with me:

James 1:2-3: *“Regard it all as joy, my brothers, when you face various kinds of temptations; for you know that the testing of your trust produces perseverance.”*

And finally:

1 Peter 5:6-7: *“Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that at the right time he may lift you up. Throw all your anxieties upon him, because he cares about you.”*

There is a song that captures the message very well; its lyrics are:

*“All these trials and temptations ...  
Oh, what needless pain we bear.  
All because we do not carry,  
Everything to God in prayer.”*

Brothers and sisters, prayer is the greatest means that God gives us for coping with the stresses of life. Even if our faith level is low, God can (and often does) help us out of our difficulties when we ask him to. Prayer is not mere therapy. Therapy, whatever kind it is, is man's attempt at a solution to ease emotional problems. It is not to be dismissed out of hand, but it is natural and therefore limited. The reason prayer works so well is because God is supernatural, and his power has no natural limitations.

Those of us who do not regularly rely on prayer to help with the stresses of life can take a big step forward by committing to rely on prayer from now on. Also, there is more benefit to praying than just God answering our prayers. The fullness of what prayer has to offer is fellowship with God himself. God does not want to be distant, but rather a close constant companion to us. We know this because Scripture says so. A father instructs his child because he loves his child, and so it is with God who tells us in Deuteronomy 30:11-14:

*“For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach. It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, ‘Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?’ Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, ‘Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?’ On the contrary, the word is very close to you—in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it!”*



And in Revelation 3:20-21, Yeshua tells us, not only is God's Word close at hand but Yeshua himself is close at hand, for he says:

*“Here, I'm standing at the door, knocking. If someone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he will eat with me. I will let him who wins the victory sit with me on my throne, just as I myself also won the victory and sat down with my Father on his throne.”*

Opening our door to Yeshua allows us to be over comers. Over comers of what? Of being crushed and destroyed by the stresses of life. If we feel unduly stressed in our daily lives, we are not overcoming even though Yeshua assures us that we can. To take hold of his promise, we must pray and ask the Holy Spirit to enter our lives and take control. Letting go may be difficult at first, but it is the only way.

When Yeshua was asked by a Pharisee: “*Rabbi, which of the mitzvot in the Torah is the most important?*” Yeshua answered him:

Matthew 22:37-39: “*You are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*’ This is the greatest and most important mitzvah. And a second is similar to it, *‘You are to love your neighbor as yourself.’*”

If we want to be over comers of life's adversities, we must invite God into our lives and give him control. We must love him with all our heart, soul and strength, and apply his love (that He gives us) to loving others. If we do those things, our lives will be so shielded from faithless thoughts and unholy temptations, that stress born of worry, fear, and self-concern will no longer have a place to thrive.

—CJB

## Emotions and Feelings

*Delivered August 27, 2016*

Today I want to speak to you about emotions and feelings, components of God's creation that sometimes causes us great difficulty. Emotions and feelings are almost synonymous, and in this message, I will consider them the same. They can be used as God intends, but they can also be misused and lead us into sin. In that regard, they are like a part of our body. Our limbs and our eyes are blessings, but Matthew 18:8-9 also says of them:

*“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”*

Our emotions are similar in that they can bless us if we use them correctly, but they can destroy us if we do not. Many of us have experienced times when our emotions have gotten out of control and led us into trouble, but we must not disdain them on account of it because, if we do, the harm to our relationships that depend on emotion can be severe.

Let me illustrate by emotions that are tied to love. Many of us have come into Messianic Judaism schooled in the three New Testament Greek words for love—*eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. We were taught that *eros* is love connected to intimacy and sexual passion, *philia* is the affectionate love of friendship, and *agape* is the purest kind of love that is generated by godly covenant obligation and is substantially lacking in emotion or strong feelings. As a result, some of us have concluded that the highest way to love someone (including God and our spouses) is to do so without there being an emotional component to it and, if emotions and feelings intrude, our love is not of the purest kind. Those of us who have come to believe this would do well to reconsider, because there is no human activity that is not accompanied by feelings of some kind. Case in point, a Pharisee confronted Yeshua (Matthew 22:36-39) and asked him:

*“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Yeshua said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

Let us look at the second part of what Yeshua said, loving our neighbor as our self. The Scripture uses a derivative of the word *agape* as the kind of love we are to have, yet is there anyone here whose concern for his or herself is without emotion? It is impossible of course, so it must be the same for the *agape* love we are to have for our neighbor as well. And if it is so with our neighbor, then it must also be so with the love that we are to have for God. Notice that the Scripture does not say that we are to love God with our minds only; it says that we are to love him with our hearts and souls as well. That infers emotion, and it defines the love we are to have for our heavenly father as similar to the love each of us is meant to have for our earthly parents—love that includes having feelings toward them. I must confess that it took me some years to come to the place where my relationship with God took on an emotional component but, ever since, I have “felt” so much closer to him. Now why have I said these things? It has been to make the point that one of the ways we some-

times misuse our emotions is to try to eliminate them, and that is wrong. Yeshua characterized himself as a man with emotions, as we read how he responded to Lazarus' death in John 11:33-36:

*“Therefore, when Yeshua saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Yeshua wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’”*

And there are other Scriptures as well that recognize emotions as part of our human condition; here are a few:

Psalms 139:23: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties...”*

Proverbs 15:13: *“A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.”*

Proverbs 17:22: *“A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.”*

Ecclesiastes 3:4: *“A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance...”*

Matthew 5:4: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*

Refusing to recognize and utilize our God-given emotions is wrong, but equally wrong is allowing our emotions to drive our actions unchecked by biblical considerations and direction by the Holy Spirit. Emotions and feelings in and of themselves are not sins because we cannot control how we feel about things and are therefore not responsible for them so long as they do not propel us to act sinfully. The trouble is that too often they do because our “old man” tends to cater more to feelings than to obeying the commandments of God. I will demonstrate with two of the most common emotions, the first being fear.

“Fear” and its close cousin “anxiety” are often (although not always) the result of our not having sufficient faith-reliance in God, and Romans 14:23b tells us that:

*“...whatever is not from faith is sin.”*

Whereas, most feelings are beyond our ability to control, it is not the case with fear and anxiety which Scripture tells us we can control through faith:

Joshua 1:9: *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”*

Psalms 23:4: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”*

Luke 12:4: *“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.”*

Philippians 4:6-7: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Messiah Yeshua.”*

2 Timothy 1:7: *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

When Scripture commands that we rid ourselves of something or that we are able to say “no” to something, we must believe that it is true. In the case of fear, Scripture exhorts us to not be afraid or anxious, and instead to pray. In short, it assures us that God is in control and that He is well able to protect us.

Another emotion that can get out of control if we are not careful is anger. Psalms 4:5a(4a) says of it:

*“Be angry, and do not sin.”*

And similarly, Ephesians 4:26-27 tells us:

*“Be angry, and do not sin:” do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.”*

Once again, we see that it is not the feeling or the emotion that is sin, but rather improper actions that we allow as a result. To make the point, Scripture reveals an occasion on which Yeshua became angry but did not sin:

Mark 3:4-5: *“Then He said to them [i.e. the Pharisees], “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they kept silent. And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.”*

Because anger can easily get out of control and lead us to sin, Scripture warns us about it. Here is some of what Scripture has to say about anger and what we should and can do about it:

Proverbs 12:16: *“A fool’s wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame.”*

Proverbs 15:1: *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

Proverbs 15:18: *“A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.”*

Proverbs 16:32: *“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty [man], and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”*

Proverbs 16:32 is especially important. It tells us that anger is such a strong and potentially explosive emotion, that a man who is able to control it is better even than a conquering warrior. Here are some other Scriptures about anger worth knowing:

Proverbs 19:11: *“The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.”*

Ecclesiastes 7:9: *“Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.”*

James 1:19-20: *“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”*

I could list other emotions that can get us into trouble, but I think that the two I have given—fear and anger—are sufficient to make my point. But let me not leave you without giving you Scripture’s way to deal with such emotions and avoid sinning on account of them. There are two ways, and they go together; the first is to put our self in God’s hands and pray to him for protection and wisdom instead of precipitously resorting to self-help:

Psalms 4:1: *“Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.”*

2 Corinthians 1:3-4: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”*

That is the first way that we are to deal with our emotions—put ourselves in God’s hands and pray for his merciful protection, and solutions. The second way that goes along with it is to remember that God has already given us power and authority to act in Yeshua’s Name. We read in 1 Corinthians 10:13:

*“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*

So, the second way that we keep from sinning in the face of strong emotion is to look for the way of escape that God has assured us is always there. With power and authority given us by the Holy Spirit, we have the ability (and also the responsibility) to direct our actions in a godly manner despite emotions that may urge us otherwise.

Do we really have such spiritual power, and isn’t using it usurping God’s role? Yes, we have the power because God has given it to us, and no, it is not usurping God if we use it because it is what God intends; consider these Scriptures:

Proverbs 25:28: *“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.”*

According to this Scripture, we have the power to rule over our own spirit, and God expects us to exercise that rule.

Proverbs 29:11: *“A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.”*

Apparently, we are able to control that which we say and that which we do not say, and God expects us to seek him (through the Holy Spirit) to know which is which.

Romans 12:1: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”*

According to this Scripture, we are expected to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, which means that we are expected to endure whatever God calls us to endure—even discomfort and pain—in order to serve his purposes. Some of us have been taught that if we have enough faith, all of our worldly troubles will go away. Regrettably, that is not what Scripture says.

Romans 12:2: *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

From this Scripture, we know that it is within our power to refuse to be conformed to the standards of this world, and that it is within our power (by submitting to God) to have our minds renewed so as to be in synch with the mind of God. A fantastic achievement, but entirely doable according to Philippians 4:13 that says:

*“I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me.”*

And 1 Corinthians 2:16 that says:

*“For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Messiah.”*

I am almost finished, but not quite yet. Galatians 5:16b exhorts us to:

*“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”*

And Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that:

*“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”*

Notice the reference to “self-control.” Believers are able to tap into God’s power and exercise self-control on a level that would be impossible without it. Colossians 3:8b tells us that, in God’s power, we can:

*“...put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language ...”*

All of what I have shared in this message can be boiled down to a single Scripture, 2 Corinthians 5:7, that says:

*“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*

The sight that is referred to in this Scripture is not only eyesight; it is any sensory input to us that gives us information upon which we are moved to act. Such sight may be through what we see, through what we hear, or through what we feel inside us when we either see or hear. Walking “by faith and not by sight” does not mean disregarding the emotions that impact us. It means that we refer them to God and receive back his instruction before we act on them. If we do not learn to do that, we will continuously stumble on account of them and act in ways that damage our lives and the lives of others.

—NKJ

## Exchanging Inactive Attitudes for Attitudes of Faith

*Delivered August 30, 2008*

God was not a reality to me in my early graduate school years, but I had no problem at all singing folk songs about God or about Jesus. One such song began this way:

*“I saw Jesus on the cross on a hill called Calvary.  
‘Do you hate mankind for what they done to you?’  
He said ‘talk of love not hate, things to do—it’s getting late.  
I’ve so little time and I’m just passing through.’”*

That song<sup>14</sup> touched me in a strange way. As a young man who never thought deeply about eternal things, it caused me to contemplate the temporariness of my own life, and my need to make the most of it. The problem was that I concluded that making the most of it meant merely being happy and doing whatever it took to stay happy. Frank Sinatra’s famous song “I did it my way” pretty much describes my life until the middle 70s when God revealed himself to me and, in one profound moment, “my way,” became “his way.”

Now when I say “his way,” I mean that I saw, for the first time, that happiness was not the goal, but that obedience to God and service to my fellow man was the goal and that happiness could be achieved in the process. A lot of change was needed in my attitudes before I could fully embrace this revised outlook on life, and God was gracious to accelerate my discipleship so that today, when I think back over my life as a believer, I no longer count my memory of temporal pleasures as being part of my life’s fulfillment. I now see pleasures in their proper place—blessings for which I am ever so thankful to God. And as for my life’s fulfillment? God will judge it by how selflessly I am willing to help others be fulfilled as well.

Becoming discipled requires changing attitudes, and when I say that God accelerated my discipleship, I do not mean it was just him and me alone in the wilderness. On the contrary, God used many others to help me change. I recently came across a book by James MacDonald titled “Lord, Change My Attitude (Before It’s Too Late)” and, as I was leafing through it, an attitude that I hadn’t thought of before jumped out at me—it was the attitude of inaction, and our need to replace it with an active attitude of faith. I can understand this sounding strange to you, and you may be thinking “What does action have to do with faith?” Consider what [James 2:17-24](#) has to say about this:

*“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’”*

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<sup>14</sup> Lyrics by Dick Blakeslee, 1948; recorded by Leonard Cohen, approx. 1973.



*And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”*

“Works” connotes action, and no “works” connotes inaction. James admonishes us that if we have faith for something, we must act on it. An inactive attitude is not, therefore, an attitude of faith; rather, it is an attitude that can know what is right and yet do nothing about it. An inactive attitude is also a disobedient attitude, because all of God’s commandments call us to action. 2 Corinthians 5:7 exhorts us to “walk by faith, not by sight.” So, faith involves walking in what we believe, and walking involves doing. One cannot be consistent and effective in “doing” if one has an inactive attitude; they are opposites.

There are several possible reasons for a believer to have an inactive attitude when it comes to things of God. Since my message time is limited, I will speak about only four of them; they are: (1) not believing completely that the Bible is true; (2) believing that the Bible is true but not trusting God; (3) allowing our emotions to rule us; and (4) seeking to serve ourselves before others.

Let us begin with (1) not believing completely that the Bible is the true and infallible Word of God. I say: “not believing completely,” because I have learned that not everyone who calls himself a Bible believer would stake his or her life on everything the Bible says. Those who do not believe the Bible are on shaky ground because, short of God visiting us and teaching us in person, Scripture is really the only way that we can know for sure what is true. Perhaps there are some here who doubt that a rational and educated person can believe that the entire Bible is true and that, in its original languages, the Bible is completely without fault. Well, I testify to you today that I am educated, and I *do* believe it, and I *do* stake my life on it. Indeed, God has visited each of us who have been born again of the Spirit and, through our new spirit, He has spoken assurance to us that the Bible (in its original languages) is true, and that believing it and being active in belief is the only way to achieve a life of fulfillment, stability, and *shalom*.

Still, there are some among us who have blocked out or rejected the full message, and the consequence is that they are weak and hurting in their ability to overcome life’s adversities; they know what the Bible says but their inactive attitude toward it handicaps them. If that is you, you need to spend less time being satisfied that you are a believer, and more time believing, and acting on your belief. Believing what? you ask? Believing everything the Bible says, from cover to cover. And doing what? Doing everything you hear God telling you to do, everything that is commanded, and everything that is reasonable that comes from an undoubting spirit. You might wish there were an easier way, but God has provided no other way.

Let us now look at a few reasons that believers can sometimes not fully believe the Bible. A primary one is being ignorant of what Scriptures teach. We understand how that can happen in the case of a new believer or one who has spent years in a church that does not sufficiently teach Scripture, but it also can happen when a believer does not consider all the books of the Bible to be equally valid, and therefore does not pay sufficient attention to parts of the Bible. To properly understand God’s Word on a subject, everything the Bible says about it must be considered and given weight according to its context, its application, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is like a lawyer looking up the law on the carrying of weapons. He will probably find a statute that authorizes a permit-holder to carry a

concealed weapon, but he will not know the totality of the law if he has not read further and has also found the school and church exception which is elsewhere in the code. The Bible is just like that. If a believer does not have a complete knowledge of what is in it and does not consider its entire contents, he can come up with wrong doctrines that cause him to not fully understand and believe the Bible.

Another reason that believers can sometimes not fully believe the Bible is that they have not bought into God's powerful and supernatural nature. Their experience with books other than the Bible is that they all contain some degree of fault, so it is difficult for them to look at this book and believe that it does not. I like retelling something Sid Roth said on his radio program years ago that speaks to this. He asked a man who was doubting the Bible's accuracy, whether he believed in God, and the man said "yes." Sid then asked him if he believed that God created the world according to his perfect will, and the man answered "yes." Then Sid asked him, "Well, if you believe that God has the power to create the world and everything in it according to his perfect will, why do you find it so hard to believe that He could have written a perfect book?" And of course, the answer was that the man did not really have the convictions about God that he professed.

Another reason that believers sometimes do not fully believe the Bible is—are you ready for this? It is because they don't want to. Yes, because the Bible often directs us in ways that we do not like. It directs us to repent from sins that we have gotten used to or that we enjoy, and it directs us to do things that are inconvenient or contrary to what we would do. At times it seems more defensible to disbelieve or selectively believe the Bible than to admit that we believe it and then justify saying "no" to it. We do not really want to face our sins, so we obscure them by rationalizing that the Bible could not really be saying what it seems to be saying, or that the Bible has just gotten it wrong in this case. We act as though God did not anticipate our situation and had He, He would certainly have made sure that the Bible was written differently. Of course, once we decide that we do not believe the whole Bible, we can justify having an inactive attitude toward it.

I spent a disproportionate amount of time on reason (1) and I will not spend as much time on the others so, let us move on now to reason (2)—believing that the Bible is true, but not trusting God. Surely, it is obvious why not trusting God would put a damper on someone having an active attitude toward godly things, but why would a born-again Bible believer not trust God, and how can he get away with it? Well, he doesn't get away with it, but God allows us time to mature. That is why there are so many Scriptures urging us to trust God; for example:

Psalms 56:12(11): *"In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*

Proverbs 3:5-6: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."*

Isaiah 12:2: *"Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.'"*

2 Corinthians 1:9: *Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,"*

1 Timothy 4:10: “For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.”

1 Timothy 6:17: “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.”

Not trusting God is never acceptable, but God allows us time to get to where we ought to be; still, not trusting God is sin. A person who does not trust God fully is likely to chew over whether or not he will be obedient to God when he reads a direction in the Bible that he does not like. He may believe that the Bible’s directives are truly from God but wonder whether God will let him down by not keeping his promises of protection. That, of course, is not an attitude of faith; such a person is weak in his spirit, feels little peace, and though he may be born-again and eternally saved, he blows in the wind of life’s adversities.

Let us move on now to reason (3) for why a believer may have an inactive attitude when it comes to things of God—allowing his emotions to rule him. If God’s direction to him through Scripture or revelation causes him to fear and renders him inactive so that he does not obey, he sins. If bitterness towards a brother keeps him from forgiving and actively seeking reconciliation, his attitude of inaction is sinful. If anger seizes him and he responds contrary to Scripture and to God’s will, he sins because his actions are in the flesh while his potentially spiritual attitude remains inactive. If he allows sexual temptation to lure him into sin, it is the same. The common factor in all these situations is allowing himself to be ruled by emotion, thereby acting contrary to God’s commandments. While his attitude toward his sinful conduct may be active, his attitude toward obeying God is inactive, and so he is defenseless and without excuse. 2 Corinthians 5:7 has this to say about allowing our emotions to rule us:

*“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*

I cited this Scripture earlier, but I cite it here for another purpose. “Faith” here is contrasted with “sight,” and “sight” here does not only mean eyesight, but any natural means by which we perceive reality. That includes what we call our five senses, also our intelligence, our visceral and sexual emotions, and so on; feeling emotion is just as physical as feeling with our fingers or experiencing eyesight. Faith does not utilize any of the senses; in fact, if we unduly lean on any of them, our resulting actions cannot be of faith. This is clearly seen in another Scripture, Hebrews 11:1, which says:

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

According to this Scripture, if we see it beforehand, faith is not involved. But we do not want to live that way because Hebrews 10:38 says:

*“Now the just shall live by faith; ...”*

And Romans 14:23 says:

*“...for whatever is not from faith is sin.”*

Reason (4) for why a believer may have an inactive attitude when it comes to things of God is that some of us consistently seek to serve ourselves before others. That conflicts with all of Scripture, including the Gospel message that calls us to follow Yeshua's example of living sacrificially and serve others. It goes without saying that if we are intent on self-concern, self-aggrandizement, self-promotion, self-protection, and self-satisfaction, any sacrifice for others or service to others that costs us anything (or is inconvenient) goes out the window and, although we know and believe what we are called to do, we do not do it. Once again, an inactive attitude toward the things of God.

I do not want to leave you without some guidance on how to change from an attitude of inaction to an attitude of faith should you need to change. If your attitude of inaction is because you do not completely believe that the Bible is true, I urge you to put into practice Romans 10:17:

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

The implication of this Scripture is that if we immerse ourselves in the Word of God—the Bible—its supernatural power will do its work in us, we will hear God, and our faith will grow.

If we believe the Bible but our attitude of inaction is because we do not fully trust that God will fulfill his promises and protect us, then spending quality time with God is the answer. Some people call it prayer, but I just call it hanging out with God. You cannot really trust someone unless you know him very well. And you cannot get to know someone very well unless you spend lots of time with him. In Revelation 3:20, Yeshua promises us:

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”*

Our part is to knock on the door by spending quality time with God and he will do *his* part.

If our attitude of inaction is because we are allowing our emotions to rule us, we should meditate on 2 Corinthians 5:7 and also these three Scriptures:

2 Timothy 1:7: *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

Galatians 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

1 John 4:4: *“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*

The foregoing Scriptures are medicine to the soul and the spirit. If we meditate on them and place ourselves in God's hands, He will deliver us from the bondage of being ruled by our emotions. But we must do our part because James 4:7 also says:

*“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*

Finally, if our attitude of inaction is because we have been seeking to serve ourselves over others, then we must do two things. The first is to meditate on the following Scriptures:

Mark 12:28-31: *“Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’ Yeshua answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. ‘And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. ‘And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.’”*

Romans 12:10: *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another...”*

John 13:14-15: *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”*

What this will do is remind us of how important God thinks it is for us to love him, and to also love and serve our neighbor. The second thing we must do is just stop seeking to serve ourselves and putting ourselves first. It is an act of the will that is completely within our control.

What we have been talking about is becoming overcomers of life’s adversities by exchanging attitudes of inaction for attitudes of faith. Scripture assures us that we can be over comers:

1 John 5:3-5: *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Yeshua is the Son of God?”*

Revelation 2:7: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the ekklesia. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*

If anyone here has needed to hear this teaching, I pray that God gives you determination to follow through with what you now know to do.

—NKJ

## Faith amidst Adversity

*Delivered September 10, 2011*

I am moved to give this message about faith in the aftermath of what has recently befallen our sister Melissa. But it is not meant for Melissa, nor for her family because I have no doubt that they know it better than I can deliver it. Rather, it is meant for those of us who, in the past week, sat on the sidelines watching the drama of Melissa's medical ordeal unfold and wondering "why?"

If you are hoping I am about to tell you "why," you will be disappointed because I do not know "why." What I do know though, is that God is in control and He has been helping Melissa and her family walk through it every step of the way.

Throughout our lives, each of us encounters trials that test our faith. Even observing the trials of others can test our faith as we are tempted to ask questions like "God, why did you let that particular thing happen? Or questions that reveal slipping faith like "God, if you are really there, why did you let that happen?" Or perhaps not questions, but statements to God made in anger such as: "God, I thought you were a just, a caring, and a merciful God. What kind of God are you who would let such a thing happen?"

Adversities that befall us or that we observe befalling others, regardless of possible reasons or whether we know the reasons, are always tests of our faith, and we either pass the test or we do not. Over the years, I have seen some people lose their faith over such tests, and others overcome gloriously to become stronger in their faith than before. Scripture anticipates that it can go either way; if it could not, it would not be a test. So, let us spend the few minutes we have together today reviewing what Scripture teaches about faith.

Perhaps the most important Scriptures of all are the ones that define faith and tell us why faith is important. They are [Hebrews 11:1](#) and [Hebrews 11:6](#) which respectively say:

*"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*

*"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*

This last verse is self-explanatory in telling us that we cannot please God by anything we do if our actions are not accompanied by faith. Let us, however, examine [verse 1](#) which is not as self-evident and that tells us what faith is.

The very first word in the verse, the word "now," has been the source of much theologizing because it corresponds to a specific Greek word, and the casual use of "now" as a lead-in word to a sentence is not common in Greek. An unnamed commentator put it this way "Faith is NOW—not after the fact has materialized!" So, you can read the verse in two ways by giving different emphases to the word "now." you can read it: *Now "FAITH is the substance of things hoped for..."* or you can read it: *"NOW faith is the substance of things hoped for..."* I do not know if the commentator is right in his emphasis on the word "now," but he is consistent with the rest of the verse, so let us look further.

*“The substance of things hoped for...”* “Hope” in this verse of Scripture is needed as a target for the faith spoken of. One has to hope for something in order for it to be important enough that we are willing to exercise faith for it. It would not make sense to exercise faith for a yellow butterfly with brown spots to settle on a rose petal unless we want it to happen.

The word *“substance”* is used. Does that mean that faith is literally a substance? Once again, we are faced with English versus Greek usage where English allows the word “substance” to refer to tangible materials such as water, and to also mean something of unmistakable reality. “Word of Faith” proponents such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland like to emphasize the word “substance” because one can make use of a physical substance to cause a desired result, and they preach that we should make use of faith to gain desired ends in much the same way. I am opposed to that point of view except in cases where that which we are hoping for is clearly consistent with God’s will.

The word *“evidence”* is a very key word in this verse. Evidence is something so real that it can be “detected” by our senses—something we can touch, taste, feel, smell, see, or hear, or detect or measure with instruments. Evidence is what we consider trustworthy to lead us to truth. In a court of law, we convict and acquit based upon evidence. So, by Scripture saying that faith is “evidence,” it is inferring that it is very real and is trustworthy to lead us to truth.

The verse says that faith is *“the evidence of things not seen.”* How extraordinary! Most evidence we do “see”—either with our physical senses or with scientific instruments. But this faith thing—although it is so real as to be evidence, it is evidence that we cannot see in the normal way.

When I burn my hand on a hot stove, the evidence of pain causes me to withdraw my hand quickly. I do not then doubt that the stove was hot because I am, in effect, “seeing” the pain through my sense of feeling. If I see a missile being hurled toward me, I jump to the side to avoid being hit. My seeing the moving missile is evidence that I trust, so I react. But Scripture says that although faith is evidence (inferring also that it is trustworthy), I cannot see it in the natural. What then is evidence of things not seen in the natural and yet so trustworthy that we are willing to act on it? There can be only one thing, and that is God revealing his will to us Spirit to spirit.

Bottom line: No matter how badly I want something, I cannot exercise godly faith for it if I have not first heard God say that He also wants it. So, when I pray, the first thing I ask myself is: “Have I heard God say if I pray for such and such it will come to pass?” If I have, I can pray for the matter with confident expectation of the outcome. If I have not heard God say it, I may still pray with hope if it is my desire, but it cannot be with the same confidence in the outcome because a key ingredient is lacking in my not having heard God’s voice in advance.

There is, by the way, a Scripture corollary to [Hebrews 11:1](#) that also shows faith and sight to be opposites; it is [2 Corinthians 5:7](#) that says:

*“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*

I find this Scripture particularly useful for giving counsel against making major decisions based on feelings rather than on determining God’s will. We have already seen that “sight is not just “eye-

sight,” and that our feelings are a form of sight because they respond to stimuli and give us information about the outside world. I hope that by now you clearly see that governing our conduct and actions by sight (i.e. how we feel about things) is contrary to the exercise of faith.

There is a false teaching I have heard that is a misapplication of the conversation between Yeshua and his disciples that is recorded in Matthew 21:18-22:

*“Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, “Let no fruit grow on you ever again.” Immediately the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither away so soon?” So Yeshua answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.””*

And another Scripture like it:

Mark 11:24: *“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”*

The false teaching is that if we want anything, all we have to do is dredge up enough belief for it and God will give it to us. So, we have people squinting their eyes in prayer visualize the thing they want and repeating over and over: “I believe.” “I believe.” “I believe.” Now come on! Does that sound like the God we know? A god who is willing to be manipulated into giving anyone what he or she wants? It doesn’t to me, and here is another Scripture reminding us that prayers of genuine faith must be according to God’s will:

1 John 5:14-15: *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”*

But back to Matthew 21 and Mark 11: The key to understanding the Matthew 21 Scripture is the qualification: *“if you have faith and do not doubt...”* We have already discussed what is needed to have faith, and that is to first hear the voice of God telling us what God wants so we can pray according to his will. But there is this other matter that is equally important, and that is that when we do hear God’s voice, we believe him and trust him.

Here is a situation in which Yeshua chastised his disciples for not believing God; in Matthew 17:14-19 we read:

*“And Yeshua rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Yeshua privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” So Yeshua said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”*



There is no question that, in this situation, God wanted the demon out of the child. I am sure the disciples knew that, but they did not trust that God would actually do it. We see from these examples that faith requires basically three things: (1) hearing the voice of God say what He wants; (2) believing God; and (3) acting on God's voice. Whoa! Where did that third requirement—"acting on God's voice" come from? From James 2:17:

*"Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."*

I would be remiss not to share these other two important Scriptures on faith with you:

Habakkuk 2:4: *"Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith."*

1 Corinthians 2:4-5: *"And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."*

Okay, let us now briefly get back to Hebrews 11:6 that I mentioned but skipped over earlier because I said it was self-evident; it reads:

*"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*

God views our not having faith in him as very serious because not having faith in God means doubting his character to honor his Word and do what He says He will do. That is why Romans 14:23 says:

*"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin."*

I am speaking to a room occupied by people who do believe God, so let me put it this way. Suppose someone you know lacks faith and you want to help him solidify his relationship with God; what should you do? One thing you can do that does not require either his cooperation or his knowledge is to pray for him. And I do not mean just once; I mean consistently. Another thing you can do if he will let you, is expose him to the Bible as often and in as many ways as he will accept it. That is because Romans 10:17 promises us:

*"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

Up to now I have shown you that sight and faith are opposites; stating it in the extreme, if we have total knowledge and understanding about something, we have no need whatever to rely on God. For that reason, I am content to not know many things so I can put myself in his care.

Moving along slightly, there is another thing that is the opposite of faith and that is fear.

2 Timothy 1:7 tells us:

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

Think of it logically and you will see it. When we fear something, it is because we are not, at that moment, putting ourselves in God’s care and trusting him. And the opposite is true as well; if we completely trust God with any area of our lives it is impossible, at that moment, to be afraid.

Fear seems like such a natural thing, and it is for short periods of time and when it is in response to real danger. But when it dominates or diminishes one’s quality of life, it is not consistent with having faith; it is the spirit of fear that we are warned about, and we need to cast it out of us aggressively using the biblical tools of love and faith. Consider these applicable Scriptures:

1 John 4:18: *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”*

Mark 4:40: *“But He said to them, ‘Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?’”*

Psalms 56:4(3)-5(4): *“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?”*

Let us look at some of the circumstances that can cause fear. I lost both my parents when they were elderly, but I lost my younger brother when he was relatively young. After each loss I felt somewhat disoriented—it was unreal that someone who had been there all my life was no longer there. I knew my parents were with the Lord, but that did not counteract the emptiness in my heart. Because I knew they were with the Lord I was not grieving for their sakes, but for mine, and I was comforted by Romans 8:28 that says:

*“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*

It is hard to see how God will turn some things for good, but He will. We recall Joseph’s plight on his being taken captive and sold into slavery by his brothers. Later, when Joseph gained prominence in Egypt and was reunited with his brothers, he said to them:

Genesis 50:19-20: *“Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”*

Joseph said it then, but can you imagine how abandoned and alone he must have felt when he was first abducted? These things are put in Scripture so we can learn from them. Psalms 27:1 reminds us:

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”*

And Romans 8:31:

*“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

This is a time in history of considerable political and financial instability, and unrest both in the world and in our country. On top of that, there are evil-doers, natural disasters, and personal hardships, sicknesses, and losses. None of them are we able to explain, but the way to overcome them all is through faith in God.

—NKJ

## **Fear of Rejection and Pride of Rejection**

*Delivered March 29, 2014*

I want to speak to you today about rejection. No one likes to be rejected, but Scripture promises that sooner or later rejection will come upon us. So, how we handle it when it comes will make the difference between whether we walk in holy bold righteousness or shrink into a walk of fear and compromise.

There are many ways that we can be rejected, and many people to whom we are especially vulnerable in that being rejected by them carries an especially severe sting. Members of our close family for instance. Who has never received a hurtful word of rejection from a husband, wife, mother, father, son or daughter? It is a common occurrence, and painful when it happens.

There are those outside our families to whom we are vulnerable as well. Being rejected by peers is unpleasant, to say the least, and especially to youngsters who yearn for peer acceptance. For others, being rejected by their employer is not only unpleasant, but carries financial consequences as well. According to Scripture though, the challenge is not in our being rejected (as I have said, Scripture promises rejection), but in how we respond to it. There are godly ways to respond, and not so godly ways as we shall see.

Yeshua is our quintessential example of a man who was painfully rejected, yet he received it bravely and with godly purpose. In [Isaiah 53:3-7](#), we read these well-known prophetic words:

*“He is despised and REJECTED by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.” (NKJ).*

Jumping forward a few centuries to [John 15:18-21](#), here is what Yeshua said about how his rejection is destined to impact us; he said:

*“If the world hates you, understand that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would have loved its own. But because you do not belong to the world—on the contrary, I have picked you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember what I told you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours too. But they will do all this to you on my account, because they don’t know the One who sent me.” (CJB).*

And in [John 16:1-2](#), Yeshua warned his disciples:

*“I have told you these things so that you won’t be caught by surprise. They will ban you from the synagogue; in fact, the time will come when anyone who kills you will think he is serving God!” (CJB).*

It was especially painful for Yeshua because his own Jewish people rejected him. We read in [John 1:11](#):

*“He came to his own homeland, yet his own people did not receive him.” (CJB).*

Yeshua was not the only “righteous” person in the Bible to suffer rejection. Joseph was rejected big time—once when he was sold into slavery by his brothers, and another when he was falsely accused and thrown into an Egyptian prison. But, with God’s help, he overcame and rebounded to become second in charge of Egypt. Proof that he overcame was his statement to his brothers in [Genesis 50:20](#):

*“You meant to do me harm, but God meant it for good—so that it would come about as it is today, with many people’s lives being saved. (CJB).*

During Yeshua’s life on earth, many of the Jews who believed in him feared rejection from the synagogue; we read in [John 12:42-43](#):

*“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. (NKJ).*

Sha’ul (also known as Paul) was both rejected and ejected from synagogues with some regularity. We read of one such occasion in [Acts 18:4-6](#):

*“Sha’ul also began carrying on discussions every Shabbat in the synagogue, where he tried to convince both Jews and Greeks. But after Sila and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Sha’ul felt pressed by the urgency of the message and testified in depth to the Jews that Yeshua is the Messiah. However when they set themselves against him and began hurling insults, he shook out his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! For my part, I am clean; from now on, I will go to the Goyim!” (CJB).*

The examples I have shown you so far were of righteous men who suffered rejection for their faith. There were other occasions however, where persons of faith suffered rejection that they justly deserved, mostly from God himself. Examples are Moses when he exhibited arrogance by hitting the rock (instead of speaking to it) and was kept from entering the promised land; Moses’ sister Miryam when she questioned Moses’ authority and was inflicted with leprosy; and David when he caused Uriah the Hittite’s death and subsequently lost his son, born of Bathsheba, to illness. But all of them were able to overcome because they did not blame God. Instead, they repented, and God received them back. God has always tempered justice with mercy, for as we read in [1 John 1:9](#):

*“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (NKJ).*

Besides feeling bad, rejection can cause trouble in two ways. The first way comes from acting to avoid rejection in ways that are improper, sinful, or just plain unwise. An example of such an action is when we accept a dare from a friend or peer group to do something dangerous, illegal, or harmful. Fraternity and Sorority hazing sometimes includes such elements, and young people are coerced to submit by their desire to belong and by their fear of being rejected. But getting into trouble because of fearing rejection need not be that organized. Drug habits often begin by a desire to be “cool” in the eyes of friends, and deaths all too often occur on our highways by those who drink too much in order to be socially accepted.

One way of being rejected is to be isolated or ignored, and another way is to be persecuted or harmed. When a social club rejects a person, the only harm done is to his feelings. When an employer rejects a person by firing him, the person is harmed in his ability to earn a living. In either case, Scripture calls us to not fear rejection, because fear is the opposite of faith. Scripture has much to say about fear:

2Timothy 1:7: *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (NKJ)*

Psalms 34:5(4): *“I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.” (NKJ)*

Psalms 27:1: *“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (NKJ)*

Psalms 118:6: *“The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (NKJ)*

1John 4:18: *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (NKJ)*

Isaiah 35:4: *“Say to those who are fearful-hearted, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.’” (NKJ)*

I now want to familiarize you with a term that I never heard of before (I believe) I received it from the Lord a few days ago while seeking him for help in writing this message. The term is “pride of rejection.” “Pride of rejection” comes in two “flavors.” The first does not seem like sin but it is—not the rejection, but the pride—and it tends to cause us to act in ways that are improper. Examples might be showing up to a wedding in jeans or playing loud dissonant music on a boom box for all to hear. These actions are saying “Look at me! I am what matters—not what I wear.” and “This is my space. If you don’t like my music, then: ‘Too bad!’” And then, of course, we are likely to be rejected. Sometimes, pride of rejection is accompanied by wanting to be accepted by a group that is itself rejected by those outside the group. People who wear green spiked hair seek acceptance in punk society that is proud of being rejected by the majority of people who dress conservatively. That kind of

“pride of rejection” can result from thinking too highly of oneself mixed with thinking too little of oneself, and therefore seeks attention and affirmation from kindred souls. Yes, we can actually think too highly of ourselves and too little of ourselves at the same time.

The second “flavor” of “pride of rejection” is somewhat like the first, but it is the reverse of the first in the way it manifests. This kind of “pride of rejection” causes us to become easily hurt when we perceive rejection, to become angry (although sometimes the anger is suppressed), and to withdraw from others and from causal situations. I say “perceive” rejection, because often we are not really being rejected but imagine that we are. What goes on in our mind is something like this: “I am worth more than the way he is treating me. I do not deserve to be treated that way.” An example of this kind of “pride of rejection” is when an employer questions an employee about the way he is doing something, or tells him to change something he is doing, and the employee’s eruptive response is: “You think I do not know what I am doing? Fine! Get someone else! I quit!”

As I keep repeating, being rejected is not the problem. The problem is either one’s fear or one’s pride. I gave you several examples of what the Bible has to say about fear, so now let us see what Scripture has to say about pride. There is so much there, especially in Proverbs, that I can share only a few verses as illustrations:

Proverbs 8:13: *“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” (NKJ)*

Proverbs 11:2: *“When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.” (2 NKJ)*

Proverbs 16:5: *“Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.” (NKJ)*

Proverbs 16:18-19: *“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.” (NKJ)*

Proverbs 29:23: *“A man’s pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor.” (NKJ)*

Pride is a sin, much like other sins; so why (one might wonder) is pride so offensive to God? I believe the answer is revealed in Deuteronomy 8:11-18, when God instructs the Israelites and says to them:

*“Be careful not to forget ADONAI your God by not obeying his mitzvot, rulings and regulations that I am giving you today. Otherwise, after you have eaten and are satisfied, built fine houses and lived in them, and increased your herds, flocks, silver, gold and everything else you own, you will become proud-hearted, forgetting ADONAI your God—who brought you out of the land of Egypt, where you lived as slaves; who led you through the vast and fearsome desert, with its poisonous snakes, scorpions and waterless, thirsty ground; who brought water out of flint rock for you; who fed you in the desert with man, unknown to your ancestors; all the while humbling and testing you in order to do you good in the end—you will think to yourself, ‘My own power and*

*the strength of my own hand have gotten me this wealth. 'No, you are to remember ADONAI your God, because it is he who is giving you the power to get wealth, in order to confirm his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as is happening even today.' (CJB).*

So, we are told in Scripture to expect rejection, and are warned against fearing it. We are also warned against pridefully inviting rejection or allowing pride to dominate our thoughts and actions when we are actually rejected. Fear and pride of rejection are bondages that have no redeeming value and must be expunged from us for us to be set free.

Sometimes we do not realize that we are bound and not free, but there is a simple diagnostic test for it. The test is, do we feel offended when we are rejected or think about being rejected? If the answer is “yes,” then we are in bondage and need to be set free. But isn’t it natural, you say, to feel offended if we have been wronged? Natural yes, but in Yeshua we are able to transcend things of the natural and aspire to Kingdom heights. To the extent that we do we are free, and to the extent that we do not we are enslaved.

If I have persuaded you that “fear of rejection” and “pride of rejection” are bad, the logical next question is, “How can we avoid them or get rid of them if we have them?” Of course, pray for God’s deliverance, but sometimes He will only act if we act first. The nature of “fear of rejection” is that those of us who have it are not trusting God with every area of our lives. The nature of “pride of rejection” is that those of us who have it tend to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. And the nature of both of them is that we turn inward with self-concern instead of turning outward to love our neighbor as our self as commanded in [Leviticus 19:18](#). The remedy requires a makeover of our attitudes from those of self-indulgence to those of serving others. It is a choice of obedience that is best expressed in [Deuteronomy 30:11-14](#) when God said to the Israelites:

*“For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach. It isn’t in the sky, so that you need to ask, ‘Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?’ Likewise, it isn’t beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, ‘Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?’ On the contrary, the word is very close to you—in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it!” (CJB).*

—CJB



## **Fear the Opposite of Faith**

*Delivered October 19, 2016*

I want to begin by telling you the first time that I turned my back on fear and gave myself over to trusting God. My son David was born in 1967, nine years before I became a believer. An incident occurred when David was an infant when he stopped breathing for a short time during an illness and I became very afraid. I did not connect my fear reaction to the incident until much later, but by the time David was in his late teens (by that time I had become a believer), I had developed an unhealthy fear about his becoming injured or dying. It was so severe, that when he drove somewhere and was late getting home I phoned hospital emergency rooms to learn if someone of David's description had been brought there.

I was a relatively new believer when David was a teen, reading the Bible often, and being discipled mainly through Christian radio. Well, one day while in the midst of feeling fear, what I had learned from the Bible about fear came to me and so did a deep awareness that the fear I was carrying was inappropriate for a believer and contrary to the Scriptures. So impactful was the realization, that there and then I gave David and everything about David over to God. And not only David, but everything else of mine as well—my wife Marie, everything I owned, and my own life also. And you know what? From that moment on I experienced a freedom that I had not previously known. Today I know what happened; I had had an encounter with the Holy Spirit and was delivered from a spiritual bondage of fear.

That was a milestone in my faith-walk with God, and it remained with me over the years. Whenever I moved in even the slightest direction toward fear, I brought the memory of my deliverance to mind as well as 2 Timothy 1:7 that reads:

*“For God gave us a Spirit who produces not timidity (the NKJ says not “a spirit of fear”), but power, love and self-discipline.”*

My faith pitted against fear was tested again recently. Most of you know that about ten weeks ago I had quadruple by-pass open heart surgery. I was feeling fine on Thursday September 8, when I began feeling a pain in my chest that would not go away. I was driving with Marie at the time, so we de-toured to the emergency room of Suburban Hospital. By the time I arrived at the hospital I was feeling fine again, but tests showed that I was having some kind of heart incident. They kept me overnight, catheterized my heart, and discovered that I had a 98% blockage of four arteries that I needed to nourish my heart with blood. My choice was to leave the hospital and probably collapse with a massive heart attack very soon or submit to quadruple by-pass surgery. I made the obvious choice (that was not really a choice), but that is not what I want to emphasize about this. What I want to emphasize is that I experienced no fear. Later in the day and the next day several in my family tried to help me deal with the fear that they assumed was there, but it was not. I remember telling my son Brian that I was at perfect peace and had given my situation and myself over to God with complete trust. The trust was not that I would survive the operation, and truly I did not know if I would. The trust was that I was in God's hands whether in this world or in the next, and I was content for it to be either way. Death was not an important consideration because either way I knew I would live.

Well, you know the rest. This is the fourth week that I am back at services. I was driving six weeks after the operation and was getting around days after. And the pain of recovery? Except for a little soreness in my chest muscles, there was no pain. Now I do not know how ordinary that is in this kind of surgery, but I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you who prayed for me and continue to pray for me. I am sure that my rapid and nearly pain-free recovery was substantially due to all the prayers that went up.

We live at a time when threats to our well-being surround us and where tragedy and catastrophe occur with regularity. Some of these threats are economic, with our government and economists seemingly unable to agree on what is best to do for the country. Some of these threats are climatic—degrading air quality, diminishing clean water, and dilemmas of how to use fuel without making things worse. Some of these are natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, tornados and earthquakes, and some of these such as airplane crashes, are the result of imperfect technology and human error. There are also threats to us that are caused by evil in the world, and those for which we have no explanation at all. All of these can evoke fear in us if we do not trust God, and I do not mean trust him only for what we want to happen; we must trust him in whatever happens.

There are two kinds of fear that Scripture does not say is bad. The first is the kind that causes us to jump back and defend ourselves when something startles us or attacks us. That is a natural defense mechanism that God has built into us for our preservation in dangerous situations where there is no time to think or pray. Physiologists call it the response of “fright, fight, or flight.” This kind of fear can persist for the duration of danger and is normal and helpful.

The second kind of fear that the Scripture does not say is bad is a proper fear of God. No, the kind of fear that Scripture says is bad is the kind that is the opposite of having faith in God. It is the kind that does not trust God with our possessions, our lives, or the lives of our loved ones. It is the kind that demands to understand why a bad thing has happened so that we can console ourselves in our understanding and seek to control our destinies. Some of us have read the Bible many times through without it occurring to us that the Bible is full of bad things that have happened to good and innocent people. Such stories do not pierce us because they are accounts of things that happened many years ago and very far away, but they occurred, nonetheless.

Fear is an appropriate response when it is in response to acute danger. But when it persists and dominates or diminishes the quality of life, it is not of God. It is the spirit of fear that we are warned about in Scripture, and we need to cast it out of us aggressively, using the biblical tools of love and faith. Consider 1 John 4:18, which tells us:

*“There is no fear in love. On the contrary, love that has achieved its goal gets rid of fear (the NKJ says: “perfect love casts out fear”), because fear has to do with punishment; the person who keeps fearing has not been brought to maturity in regard to love.”*

The Scriptures are replete with encouragements to faith and warnings against fear; I have chosen nine of them to share with you:

Psalms 23:1-4: *“ADONAI is my shepherd; I lack nothing. He has me lie down in grassy pastures, he leads me by quiet water; he restores my inner person. He guides me in right paths for the sake of his own name. Even if I pass through death-dark ravines, I will fear no disaster; for you are with me; your rod and staff reassure me.”*

Psalms 34:5(4): *“I sought ADONAI, and he answered me; he rescued me from everything I feared.”*

Psalms 56:4(3)-5(4): *“Most High, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God—I praise his word—in God I trust; I have no fear; what can human power do to me?”*

Psalms 112:6b-8: *The righteous will be remembered forever. He will not be frightened by bad news; he remains steady, trusting in ADONAI. His heart is set firm, he will not be afraid, till finally he looks in triumph at his enemies.”*

Psalms 118:6: *“With ADONAI on my side, I fear nothing—what can human beings do to me?”*

Isaiah 12:2: *“See! God is my salvation. I am confident and unafraid; for Yah ADONAI is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation!”*

Mark 4:40: *“He [Yeshua] said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you no trust even now?”*

Philippians 4:6-7: *“Don’t worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then God’s shalom, passing all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua.”*

Hebrews 13:6: *“Therefore, we say with confidence, “ADONAI is my helper; I will not be afraid—what can a human being do to me?”*

Let us now look at some of the circumstances that can cause fear. They can be severe, and they can involve severe loss. I lost both my parents when they were elderly, but I lost my younger brother when he was relatively young. After each loss I felt disoriented—it was unreal that someone who had been there all my life was no longer there. I knew my parents were with the Lord, but that did not help counteract the emptiness in my heart. Because I knew they were with the Lord I was not grieving for their sakes but for mine, and I was comforted by Romans 8:28 that says:

*“Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose;“*

It is hard to see how God will turn some things for good, but He will. Remember Joseph’s plight on his being taken captive and sold into slavery by his brothers? Later when Joseph had gained prominence in Egypt and was reunited with his brothers, he said to them:

*“Don’t be afraid! Am I in the place of God? You meant to do me harm, but God meant it for good—so that it would come about as it is today, with many people’s lives being saved.” (Genesis 50:19b-20)*

He said it then, but can you imagine how abandoned and alone he must have felt when he was first abducted? These things are put in Scripture so we can learn from them. Psalms 27:1 reminds us:

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”* (NKJ)

And Luke 12:4 admonishes us:

*“My friends, I tell you: don’t fear those who kill the body but then have nothing more they can do.”*

In order for that Scripture to give us comfort, we have to have faith in Scripture’s teaching of the afterlife, so we ought to ask ourselves—“Do we believe?” If we do, 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 has meaning for us, and if we don’t it doesn’t; here is what that Scripture says:

*“Look, I will tell you a secret—not all of us will die! But we will all be changed! It will take but a moment, the blink of an eye, at the final shofar. For the shofar will sound, and the dead will be raised to live forever, and we too will be changed. For this material which can decay must be clothed with imperishability, this which is mortal must be clothed with immortality. When what decays puts on imperishability and what is mortal puts on immortality, then this passage in the Tanakh will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin; and sin draws its power from the Torah; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah!”*

We often think of fear as a feeling, and indeed there is a physical component to it. However, God does not command us regarding our feelings, but rather about the choices we make despite of our feelings. That is the teaching of 2 Corinthians 5:7:

*“...for we live by trust, not by what we see”* (rendered in the New King James: *“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*)

The Greek word for “sight” in this Scripture is ἔδους (pronounced “aye-dos”), and the Greek word for “faith” is πίστις (pronounced “pistis”). *Aye-dos* refers not only to eyesight, but to all of our senses, including those that imbue us with feelings. If we walk by *aye-dos* (sight), we are destined to be plagued by fear at every turn of life. What we want to do is walk in *pistis* (faith) and enjoy the freedom of knowing that, in all things, we are in God’s loving hands.

To summarize, fear is the opposite of faith and of trusting God for our welfare and protection both in this world and in the world to come. Fear is also debilitating, and it opens us to spiritual attack. That is why there are so many Scriptures in both the *Tanakh* and in the New Covenant Writings that warn us against giving in to fear and that exhort us to walk in faith instead.

—CJB

## Overcoming through Faith

*Delivered July 7, 2018*

It took me a while in the process of my becoming disciplined to turn from using faith as a tool to achieve what I want, to its proper use which is to cement my relationship with God and to achieve what He wants. Shortly after becoming a believer, I was overly influenced by “Word of Faith” theology that uses (or should I rather say mis-uses) Scriptures on faith as a tool to manipulate God into giving us what we want—Scriptures such as Matthew 21:21-22 that says:

*“So Yeshua answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”*

And Mark 11:23-24:

*“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”*

So, when I wanted something, or I wanted something to happen, I squinted my eyes, gnashed my teeth, balled my fist, and said to myself over and over “I believe! I believe!” And in that state of mind I asked God for whatever it was that I wanted and even, on occasion, attempted to “speak it” into existence by adding to it the words “in Yeshua’s name.” After all, if a mountain will throw itself into the sea just because I tell it to...well, you get the point!

The problem was that much of what I prayed for that way did not come to pass. When I asked my “word of faith” mentors “why,” their answer was always the same—that I was lacking in faith. But how much more faith could I have? I squinted my eyes in prayer so hard that I could barely open them afterwards, and my clenched fists are probably why I have arthritis in them today. I sensed that something was wrong in my approach, but the Scriptures seemed so clear and convincing.

Then the Lord graciously quickened a Scripture to me; it was Hebrews 11:1 which reads:

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

Mmmm, I thought...The Scripture says that faith is “*the evidence of things not seen.*” I was educated in both law and science and was trained to believe that if you cannot see a thing, touch it, smell it, taste it, hear it, or measure it with instruments, then it is not real and has no evidentiary value. So, was Hebrews 11:1 self-contradictory? An oxymoron? At first, I did not know what to think but then (with God’s help), understanding came to me. The only way a person can be certain of something that he cannot detect with his five natural senses or with instruments is if God reveals it to him. I had clear forgotten about our sixth sense which is our supernatural ability to hear the still small voice of God (1 Kings 19:12).

Once I realized my omission, Hebrews 11:1 made complete sense to me, and so did Matthew 21 and Mark 11 that say that if we command a mountain to ‘*Go and throw yourself into the sea!*’—‘*it will be done!*’ The faith that is needed to cause such things to happen is not according to what I want done, but rather according to what God wants done. In other words, true faith requires that we first hear God, and then respond by praying according to *his* will—not according to our own. It is consistent with 2 Corinthians 5:7, which says:

*“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*

And also, Romans 10:17, which says:

*“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

I came to know that faith cannot be separated from first hearing the will of God, which is what “asking in Yeshua’s name” in John 14:13-14 means when it says:

*“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”*

And also, what “abiding in Yeshua” means in John 15:7 when it says:

*“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”*

Both of these terms (and terms like them) mean that our prayers, if they are prayers of faith, must be what we hear to be God’s will—not ours. Of course, if God’s will and ours coincide, so much the better.

Well, that realization and John 15:4-5 are what got me away from “Word of Faith” theology. John 15:4-5 says:

*“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”*

I now saw that Scripture completely contradicted the “Word of Faith” theology I had been taught, which was that the authority to pray things into existence (and even command them into existence) had been given to me and me alone, and that the only thing I had to do to cause them to happen was to conjure up enough faith and tack “in Yeshua’s name” to my prayers, and “in Yeshua’s authority” to my proclamations. I learned that I could not use my God-given authority to get what I wanted and that, as a believer, I was to do as Yeshua taught in Luke 9:23-24:

*“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.”*

Also, the Apostle Paul's words in Galatians 2:20a:

*"I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me..."*

And, his words in Colossians 3:3:

*"For you died, and your life is hidden with Messiah in God."*

Well, dying-to-self sounded yucky to me, but I began to relax in the idea that God's destiny for a believer is to be a servant and not a *macher*.<sup>15</sup>

But what of Scriptures like 1 John 5:4-5?

*"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Yeshua is the Son of God?"*

Or Scriptures like Romans 8:36-37:

*"As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"*

First, I am told that as a believer I have overcome the world, then I am told that I can be killed all day long as a sheep for the slaughter, but then I am told that that is okay because I am more than a conqueror. Well that did not sound very "okay" to me. What was Scripture trying to tell me? It was trying to tell me that, while I am eternally protected, in Messiah (i.e. my salvation is assured), my earthly existence shares the fallenness of the world and the rest of humanity, and I must therefore prepare myself to endure some of the same hardships, dangers, and adversities that befall the rest of mankind.

As I was preparing this message, I noticed something that I had never before noticed—how many verses there are in the Book of Revelation about overcoming:

Revelation 2:7b: *"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."*

Revelation 2:11b: *"He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."*

Revelation 2:17b: *"To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."*

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<sup>15</sup> Yiddish for "an important person."

Revelation 2:26: “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations...”

Revelation 3:5: “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”

Revelation 3:12: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.”

Revelation 3:21: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

Revelation 12:21: “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

There must be something really important about overcoming for there to be so many verses of Scripture in Revelation that speak to it. And what does 1 John 5:4-5 mean when it says that I have “overcome the world?” When I become sick, how is that overcoming the world? You may have noticed that I have trouble walking without a cane. How is that overcoming the world? I believe that Paul gives us a glimpse into the answer when he says in 2 Timothy 4:5-7:

*“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

And Paul gives us the specific answer in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; when he says:

*“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Yeshua, that the life of Yeshua also may be manifested in our body.”*

You see, the kind of overcoming for which believers are destined is not to be taken out of the world or to be totally protected from sins committed by others and from the fallenness of man, but rather to be given spiritual armor to be “hard pressed and yet not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed.”

Yeshua himself is our greatest example as we read, in Psalms 22:7(6)-17(16), the prophetic account of the torment that he was destined to endure in his future execution:

*“But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!” But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon*



*You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God. Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet..."*

In his torturous misery, Yeshua calls out to his heavenly Father in Psalms 22:20(19):

*"But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!*

So, we (like Paul and Yeshua) will have to endure that which all of mankind endures, but our faith will protect us from being destroyed so that we may finish our earthly race victoriously as did both Paul and Yeshua. And remember the lesson taught in Hebrew 11:6:

*"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*

Are you an overcomer of life's adversities and hardships, or do they throw you into fear, depression and despair? If you know that you are vulnerable and need more faith, please come up for prayer at the close of the service.

—NKJ

## Shalom in Fearful Times

*Delivered March 27, 2010*

These are fearful times. We are at war in two countries, trying to keep one rogue nation from acquiring nuclear weapons and another from using ones they already have, and trying to broker peace between Israel and entities sworn to destroy her. Our economy has gone south, too many of us are out of work, we have a new national health plan that no one knows how to pay for, and men are marrying men, and women are marrying women. On top of that, every few weeks there seems to be a major earthquake, a volcanic eruption, a record snowstorm, a damaging flood, or a tsunami somewhere. As for this local region, being in the shadow of the Capitol we are ever aware of the potential for a terrorist attack. All of these have the potential cause us to fear if we let it. I say it that way because, according to Scripture, we don't have to "let it." 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us:

*"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."*

What we are seeing that is so unsettling is what God has told us would happen. It is that we are seeing it and experiencing it instead of just reading about it. Look at these predictive Scriptures of the end-times and see if you do not recognize them in what is going on around us:

2 Timothy 3:1-5: *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power."*

Matthew 24:6-8: *"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."*

1 Timothy 4:1-3: *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth."*

2 Peter 2:1-3: *"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber."*

Luke 21:24-26: *"And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."*

*And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken."*

Zechariah 12:3: *"And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it."*

These prophecies are not given to us to evoke fear, but to assure us that God is in control. Fear and insecurity are the opposite of faith. They rob us of the joy and *shalom* that God wants us to have even while going through such perilous times. Are we believers or are we unbelievers? If we are believers, let us benefit by our faith and embrace what God *has* given us to believe:

Hebrews 13:6: *"The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"*

Psalms 27:1: *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?"*

Proverbs 3:5-6: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."*

Philippians 4:6-7: *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Messiah Yeshua."*

1 Peter 5:6-7: *"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."*

Psalms 42:6(5): *"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance."*

Luke 12:22-26: *"Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?"*

Romans 8:26-28: *"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

Philippians 4:13: *“I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me.”*

Psalm 34:5(4): *“I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears.”*

Those are but a few of the Scriptures that exhort us to place our trust in God and not be afraid. Hear this though. God does not promise us immunity from suffering. I know that some of us have been taught that God will rapture believers before the great tribulation, but I do not believe that. I see much more evidence in Scripture that believers will acquire inner strength through faith and the Holy Spirit, so they can be godly witnesses in the midst of tribulation.

Our elders have recently become aware that some in this community believe that they have received a word from God that there will soon be a disruptive event that will affect the Washington, D.C. area and, in response, they have begun to make preparations such as storing food and purchasing gasoline. The elders cannot affirm that word, but there is a reality of potential danger in living near the Nation’s Capital so, making preparation against several days’ loss of our civil infrastructure is not unreasonable. That notwithstanding, we ought not to be afraid and, if we are, we should stop everything we are doing and meditate on Psalm 23 because that is what it is for:

*“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.”*

—NKJ

## Walking by Faith and Not by Feelings

*Delivered July 2, 2016*

The measure of a disciplined man is that he has substantially incorporated the teaching of 2 Corinthians 5:7 in his life; that teaching is expressed in the New King James version as:

*“For we walk by faith and not by sight.” (NKJ)*

As a way of adding context to the Scripture, verses 4 to 7 from the Complete Jewish Bible reads:

*“Yes, while we are in this body, we groan with the sense of being oppressed: it is not so much that we want to take something off, but rather to put something on over it; so that what must die may be swallowed up by the Life. Moreover, it is God who has prepared us for this very thing, and as a pledge he has given us his Spirit. So we are always confident—we know that so long as we are at home in the body, we are away from our home with the Lord; for we live by trust, not by what we see.”*

Although the 2 Corinthians Scripture speaks of “sight” or “what we see,” it does not mean eyesight alone, but rather all our senses that bring us information and that influence our actions. That means our physical senses of touch, smell, hearing, eyesight and taste, as well as the sensations of our in-nards. The responses of our brains (our thoughts), when added to the sensations within our bodies, produce what we call “feelings” or “emotions.” And so, we might paraphrase 2 Corinthians 5:7 by saying that:

*“...we respond to the things that life throws at us by trusting in what we know is God’s will for us, and not by our emotions or our feelings about either things or people” [my words].*

“Easier said than done,” you say! Yes, that is true, and that is why walking by faith and not by sight is the mark of a disciplined man. The noted teacher of faith, Smith Wigglesworth, once said:

*“I can’t understand God by feelings. I can’t understand the Lord Jesus by feelings. I can only understand God the Father and Jesus by what the Word says about them. God is everything the Word says He is. We need to get acquainted with Him through the Word.” Too many people try to get acquainted with God through their personal feelings. When they feel good, they think God has heard their prayers. If they don’t feel particularly good they think He has not heard them. Their faith is based on their feelings whereas it should be based on God’s word.”*

God never puts upon us more than we can handle, and never asks of us that which we cannot do. 1 Corinthians 10:13 assures us of this; it reads:

*“No temptation has seized you beyond what people normally experience, and God can be trusted not to allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. On the contrary, along with the temptation he will also provide the way out, so that you will be able to endure.”*

And, to remind us and encourage us that we can walk by faith when our feelings and emotions pull us the other way, He provided examples for us of those who were severely tempted, and yet prevailed. A prime example of such a person was Abraham, in the incident that we call “the binding of Isaac”; beginning in [Genesis 22:1-13](#), we read:

*“After these things, God tested Avraham. He said to him, “Avraham!” and he answered, “Here I am.” He said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Yitz’chak; and go to the land of Moriyah. There you are to offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will point out to you.”*

What must Abraham have felt at that moment? It is awful enough to suffer the death of one’s child from accident or sickness, but to cause it by one’s own hand ...! Do you not think that Abraham’s emotions were screaming at him at that moment to not do it? Of course, they were and that was the point of the test that God gave him. We continue reading at [verse 3](#):

*“Avraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, together with Yitz’chak his son. He cut the wood for the burnt offering, departed and went toward the place God had told him about. On the third day, Avraham raised his eyes and saw the place in the distance. Avraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go there, worship and return to you.” Avraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Yitz’chak his son. Then he took in his hand the fire and the knife, and they both went on together. Yitz’chak spoke to Avraham his father: “My father?” He answered, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Avraham replied, “God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son”; and they both went on together.”*

At that point, Isaac did not know that he was the lamb that was going to die, but he surely knew that something was up because there was a fire but no lamb. And why did Abraham tell his young assistants to stay behind with the donkey? It is because he knew that if they saw what he was about to do to Isaac they would have stopped him. Abraham probably knew that the young men did not have sufficient faith to overcome their natural feelings and be able to trust God. We continue reading at [verse 9](#):

*“They came to the place God had told him about; and Avraham built the altar there, set the wood in order, bound Yitz’chak his son and laid him on the altar, on the wood.”*

We have no doubt read that passage many times over the years, but have we considered how Abraham could have accomplished it? By that time, Isaac had to have realized what was about to happen, and Abraham was up in age while Isaac was a strapping young man. The only way that Abraham could have bound Isaac and laid him on the wood of the altar was for Isaac to cooperate. And what must Isaac have been experiencing in all of this? A bit of anxiety perhaps? Scripture does not tell us about Isaac’s faith, but it must have been equivalent to Abraham’s. Continuing with [verse 10](#):

*“Then Avraham put out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of ADONAI called to him out of heaven: “Avraham? Avraham!” He answered, “Here I am.” He said, “Don’t lay your hand on the boy! Don’t do anything to him! For now I know that you are a man who fears God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” Avraham raised his*

*eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in the bushes by its horns. Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.”*

So, Abraham (and I suggest Isaac as well) passed God’s test of walking by faith and not by their emotions and feelings. There was another young man who was put to the same test as Isaac, and who actually had to die in order to pass it. It was, of course, Yeshua. He, like Isaac, accepted that he was about to die and knew that there would be no ram in the thicket to save him. But Yeshua had an advantage, you say, *“For in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”* (Colossians 2:9 NKJ paraphrased). Yes, that is true, but Yeshua was also a man, and experienced all the natural emotions that men experience; this is made clear in Matthew 26:36-39, where we read:

*“Then Yeshua went with his talmidim to a place called Gat-Sh’manim and said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Kefa and Zavdai’s two sons. Grief and anguish came over him, and he said to them, “My heart is so filled with sadness that I could die! Remain here and stay awake with me.” Going on a little farther, he fell on his face, praying, “My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet—not what I want, but what you want!””*

And Hebrews 4:15 adds to this by saying:

*“For we do not have a cohen gadol [high priest] unable to empathize with our weaknesses; since in every respect he was tempted just as we are, the only difference being that he did not sin.”*

Scripture also provides us with an opposite example—an example of a disciple who did not walk by faith and insisted on seeing in order to believe. We read in John 20:24-29:

*“Now T’oma [Thomas] (the name means “twin”), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Yeshua came. When the other talmidim told him, “We have seen the Lord,” he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger into the place where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe it.” A week later his talmidim were once more in the room, and this time T’oma was with them. Although the doors were locked, Yeshua came, stood among them and said, “Shalom aleikhem!” Then he said to T’oma, “Put your finger here, look at my hands, take your hand and put it into my side. Don’t be lacking in trust, but have trust!” T’oma answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Yeshua said to him, “Have you trusted because you have seen me? How blessed are those who do not see, but trust anyway!””*

The test that Thomas did not pass was the test of 2 Corinthians 5:7:

*“For we walk by faith and not by sight.”* (NKJ)

These would merely be interesting stories if they only applied to Abraham, Isaac, Thomas, and Yeshua, but they apply to us as well. The Scriptures I read to you have been given to us to help us *“walk by faith and not by sight.”* Let us each of us think for a minute. How immune are we to allowing our emotions to get the best of us? I have been working on keeping my emotions in check ever since I

came to faith, and I still lose it every now and then. Emotions that sometimes get in our way and cause us problems are fear, worry, anxiety, broken heartedness, depression, and anger. These are just examples, and while our feelings and emotions are given to us to be used appropriately, they can cause us to sin if we act wrongly in response to them. Let us look at each of them; first, fear, worry, and anxiety as a group. 2 Timothy 1:6 in the NKJ assures us that:

*“...God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

Also, in Proverbs 12:25 we read:

*“Anxiety in a person’s heart weighs him down, but a kind word cheers him up.”*

And in John 14:26-27, Yeshua tells his disciples that he is leaving them, and he urges them not to fear; we read:

*“But the Counselor, the Ruach HaKodesh, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything; that is, he will remind you of everything I have said to you. What I am leaving with you is shalom—I am giving you my shalom. I don’t give the way the world gives. Don’t let yourselves be upset or frightened.”*

Well, if God has not given us a spirit of fear, where does unjustified fear come from? It comes from our lack of faith that God is in control. What then is the remedy for fear, worry, and anxiety? It is to repent of our lack of faith, put ourselves, our loved ones and our circumstances in God’s hands, and determine to trust God.

The next emotion on our list of examples is broken-heartedness. Psalms 34:19(18) assures us that:

*“ADONAI is near those with broken hearts; he saves those whose spirit is crushed.”*

Also, in Psalms 147:2-3 we read:

*“ADONAI is rebuilding Yerushalayim, gathering the dispersed of Isra’el. He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.”*

What then is the remedy for broken-heartedness? The same. It is to put ourselves and our circumstances in God’s hands and determine to trust God. In Job 13:15, we read in the NKJ:

*“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”*

Next on the list of emotions is depression. Depression is a bad feeling that is commonly accompanied by negative thoughts. It can come upon us at various times and for various reasons that can be spiritual, situational, and/or medical. In cases where the etiology of depression is medical, it ought to



be treated medically; but, if it is the result of hurtful situations or satanic spirits, it needs to be treated biblically. Psalms 42:6(5)-12(11) describes a depressive state; it reads:

*“My soul, why are you so downcast? Why are you groaning inside me? Hope in God, since I will praise him again for the salvation that comes from his presence. My God, when I feel so downcast, I remind myself of you from the land of Yarden, from the peaks of Hermon, from the hill Mizar. Deep is calling to deep at the thunder of your waterfalls; all your surging rapids and waves are sweeping over me. By day ADONAI commands his grace, and at night his song is with me as a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, under pressure by the enemy? My adversaries’ taunts make me feel as if my bones were crushed, as they ask me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” My soul, why are you so downcast? Why are you groaning inside me? Hope in God, since I will praise him again for being my Savior and God.”*

The spiritual cure for depression caused by Satan is expressed in James 4:7:

*“...submit to God. Moreover, take a stand against the Adversary, and he will flee from you.”*

We have the authority to stand against Satan, and to command unclean spirits that he has put on us to leave.

Now the last emotion on the list—anger. Ephesians 4:26-27 says that we can:

*“Be angry, but don’t sin—don’t let the sun go down before you have dealt with the cause of your anger; otherwise you leave room for the Adversary.”*

And Psalms 37:8 instructs us:

*“Stop being angry, put aside rage, and don’t be upset—it leads to evil.”*

Notice that none of the emotions I have spoken about are sins in and of themselves but, if we allow ourselves to be governed by them instead of by faith, sin and destruction lurk at the door. What kinds of sin and destruction? All kinds! Offending and driving away those whom we love, making bad decisions that result in loss and, most important, displeasing God; for Hebrews 11:6 states:

*“And without trusting [i.e. having faith], it is impossible to be well pleasing to God, because whoever approaches him must trust that he does exist and that he becomes a Rewarder to those who seek him out”*

In the natural, none of us have the ability to go against our feelings and conform our actions to God’s will. We need God to empower us to do it, but we have a two-part role to play. The first part is that we must be open to receive God’s power through the Holy Spirit. If we are willing, Philippians 4:13 promises us:

*“I can do all things through him who gives me power.”*

The second part of our role is to trust God to manage how we use the power that he gives us. Proverbs 3:5-6 implores us to:

*“Trust in ADONAI with all your heart; do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him; then he will level your paths.”*

I have taken him up on his offer. I hope you will as well.

—CJB

**K. Prophecy**  
**Sermons • Vol 2**



## **Priesthood, Prophecy and Covenant**

*Delivered February 27, 2016*

“Covenant” describes the way in which God has related to his human creation since the beginning. It is a relationship in which parties declare binding obligations one to the other. God’s original covenant with Adam was that He would be Adam’s God and father, and Adam would be obedient to his father as is fitting for a loving son. But Adam did not obey, and so God changed the covenant. He removed Adam from the Garden of Eden, and distanced himself from Adam so that, from that time forward, Adam and his descendants (i.e. all of mankind) would have to find their way back to a relationship with God over centuries, and in stages.

There came a time when God decided to draw men a step closer to him through a unique combination of priesthood and prophecy. Priests and prophets are persons who are specially gifted to be intermediaries, thereby reducing the relational distance between man and God. The actual distance between man and God does not change, but the effective distance does. It is the way it was in these United States before and after the pony express. Prior to the pony express, anyone who moved west and wanted to communicate to someone in the east had to return there personally. With the advent of the pony express, however, riders served as communicators by carrying written messages back and forth. The mileages between east and west did not change, but the apparent effective distances were shortened through communication.

Priests and prophets function similarly to these messengers, but with important differences. The pony express riders did not open the messages that they carried, and they carried their messages in both directions. God’s priests and prophets (in a sense) do open the messages they carry, sometimes adding their own prayers of intercession to them, and priests carry them from men to God, while prophets carry them from God to men. Sometimes, priests and prophets are one and the same person, and a priest who is gifted prophetically can carry messages in both directions as did the pony riders. My analogy with pony riders is over-simplistic, of course, but perhaps it will serve to make my point.

God communicated with mankind through selected individuals for a considerable number of years, but it was not until Abraham, that God decided to commission an entire nation of communicators. He chose Abraham’s descendants to be that nation, for we read in [Genesis 17:1-7](#):

*“When Avram was 99 years old ADONAI appeared to Avram and said to him, “I am El Shaddai [God Almighty]. Walk in my presence and be pure-hearted. I will make my covenant between me and you, and I will increase your numbers greatly.” Avram fell on his face, and God continued speaking with him: “As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you.”*”

The future mission of Abraham’s descendants as communicators was not fully understood by them at the time, and full understanding had to wait until the next great covenant—the “Mosaic:”

Exodus 19:3-6: “*Moshe went up to God, and ADONAI called to him from the mountain: “Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya’akov, to tell the people of Isra’el: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim [priests] for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.’”*

So, the Israelites were to be a priestly people and, while there is not a specific Scripture describing them as also a prophetic people, we know that they had prophetic capability because there is at least one time on record when they heard God’s voice clearly and directly. We read of that occasion in Deuteronomy 18:15-16:

*“ADONAI will raise up for you a prophet like me from among yourselves, from your own kinsmen. You are to pay attention to him, just as when you were assembled at Horev and requested [of] ADONAI your God, [saying] ‘Don’t let me hear the voice of ADONAI my God any more, or let me see this great fire ever again; if I do, I will die!’”*

The attribute of being able to hear God’s voice is the prophetic attribute but, because the gathered Israelites begged God not to speak to them directly again, He did not do so for the remainder of the Mosaic Covenant and spoke instead only through certain individuals whom we call the prophets. The Israelites retained their priestly commission to the Gentile nations but, from that time on until the New Covenant, only select individuals were gifted prophetically.

I want to move forward and speak about the New Covenant, but I must first mention how the Levitical priesthood came into existence. Apparently, God’s original plan did not contemplate a Levitical priesthood, but rather that every firstborn of Israel would be set aside for special priestly service. We read of this in Exodus 13:2, in which God says:

*“Set aside for me all the firstborn. Whatever is first from the womb among the people of Isra’el, both of humans and of animals, belongs to me.”*

Although Scripture does not specifically say it, it appears that it was these firstborns of the Israelites and not the Levites who were originally to serve in the Holy Tabernacle (later the Temple). However, Numbers 8:17-19 combined with Exodus 32:25-29 seem to indicate that, after the golden calf incident, God changed his plan and replaced them with the Levites:

Numbers 8:17-19: *“For all the firstborn among the people of Isra’el are mine, both humans and animals; on the day I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I set them apart for myself. But I have taken the L’vi’im [the Levites] in place of all the firstborn among the people of Isra’el, and I have given the L’vi’im to Aharon and his sons from among the people of Isra’el to do the service of the people of Isra’el in the tent of meeting and to make atonement for the people of Isra’el, so that no plague will fall on the people of Isra’el in consequence of their coming too close to the sanctuary.”*

*Exodus 32:25-29: “When Moshe saw that the people had gotten out of control—because Aharon had allowed them to get out of control to the derision of their enemies—Moshe stood at the entrance to the camp and shouted, “Whoever is for ADONAI, come to me!” All the descendants of Levi rallied around him. He told them, “Here is what ADONAI, the God of Isra’el, says: ‘Each of you, put his sword on his side; and go up and down the camp, from gate to gate; and every man is to kill his own kinsman, his own friend and his own neighbor!’” The sons of Levi did what Moshe said, and that day three thousand of the people died. Moshe said, “You have consecrated yourselves today to ADONAI, because every one of you has been against his own son and against his own kinsman, in order to bring a blessing on yourselves today.””*

God then commanded that all the firstborn males of Israel should be purchased back (redeemed) from sanctuary service by means of their parents paying the Levitical priests five silver shekels for each of them. This procedure is today called the *pidyon ha-ben* (or redemption of the son), and we read about it in Numbers 18:15-16, in which God says to the Levitical priests:

*“Everything that comes first out of the womb, of all living things which they offer to ADONAI, whether human or animal, will be yours. However, the firstborn of a human being you must redeem, and the firstborn of an unclean beast you are to redeem. The sum to be paid for redeeming anyone a month old or over is to be five shekels of silver [two ounces], as you value it, using the sanctuary shekel (this is the same as twenty gerahs).”*

Now on to the New Covenant. I want to emphasize at the outset that it is the “New” Covenant and not the “renewed” covenant as some would like to think of it. Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34) says of the New Covenant:

*““Here, the days are coming,” says ADONAI, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,” says ADONAI. For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, [saying] ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.””*

The New Covenant is new because God (in Jeremiah) said it is new, and because at the time Hebrews was written, the Mosaic Covenant was already old and in the process of passing away; we read in Hebrews 8:13:

*“By using the term, “new,” he has made the first covenant “old”; and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether.”*

The New Covenant is also prophesied and described in Joel 3:1(2:28)-5a(32a), which reads:

*“After this, I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions; and also on male and female slaves in those days I will pour out my Spirit. I will show wonders in the sky and on earth—blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible Day of ADONAI. At that time, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved.”*

The New Covenant was ushered in by Yeshua and was brought to further fruition when the Holy Spirit came to dwell within all who would receive him. This is prophesied in [Ezekiel 36:27](#) where we read:

*“I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them.”*

It seems that all of the Bible’s history of covenants has to do with mankind’s return to its original and intended relationship with God, and the New Covenant is a giant leap forward toward that goal. There are seven main elements of the New Covenant; I will list each of them along with a Scripture or two for each:

1. The New Covenant brings forgiveness of sin and salvation to those who repent, through the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua.

[Romans 3:25a](#): *“God put Yeshua forward as the kapparah [atonement] for sin through his faithfulness in respect to his bloody sacrificial death.”*

[John 3:14-15](#): *“Just as Moshe lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who trusts in him may have eternal life.”*

2. The New Covenant moved the Temple of God from its house of brick and mortar to the bodies of believers in Yeshua where the Holy Spirit resides today.

[1 Corinthians 6:19a](#): *“Or don’t you know that your body is a temple for the Ruach HaKodesh [the Holy Spirit] who lives inside you, whom you received from God?”*

3. The New Covenant restored our individual abilities to hear the voice of God through the Holy Spirit.

[John 16:13](#): *“However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative but will say only what he hears. He will also announce to you the events of the future.”*

[Romans 8:14](#): *“All who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons.”*



4. The New Covenant brings us spiritual gifts, and power to lead godly lives through the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 1:7: *“For God gave us a Spirit who produces not timidity, but power, love and self-discipline.”*

Ephesians 4:11: *“Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers.”*

5. The New Covenant and its benefits, has been extended to Gentile believers in Yeshua by means of connecting them to the Jewish people.

Ephesians 2:14-16: *“For he himself is our shalom—he has made us both one and has broken down the m’chitzah [curtain of separation] which divided us by destroying in his own body the enmity occasioned by the Torah, with its commands set forth in the form of ordinances. He did this in order to create in union with himself from the two groups a single new humanity and thus make shalom, and in order to reconcile to God both in a single body by being executed on a stake as a criminal and thus in himself killing that enmity.”*

Romans 11:16-18: *“Now if the hallah [bread] offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you—a wild olive—[Gentiles] were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree [Israel], then don’t boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.”*

6. The New Covenant enlarged the Kingdom of Israel to embrace a new Commonwealth of Israel, a priesthood consisting of all believers in Yeshua (both Jew and Gentile) and a new High Priest, Yeshua.

1 Peter 2:9-10: *“But you are a chosen people, the King’s cohanim [priests], a holy nation, a people for God to possess! Why? In order for you to declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; before, you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

Hebrews 4:14-15: *“Therefore, since we have a great cohen gadol [high priest] who has passed through to the highest heaven, Yeshua, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we acknowledge as true. For we do not have a cohen gadol unable to empathize with our weaknesses; since in every respect he was tempted just as we are, the only difference being that he did not sin.”*

Notice that God’s original way of communicating with mankind through priests and prophets is a continuing theme of the New Covenant. It has, however, been bumped up several notches from the Mosaic Covenant, in that now all believers in Yeshua have become priests with prophetic abilities. Our access to (and our ability to fellowship with) God, has been partially restored, reminiscent of the way it was for Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Keep in mind also, that we could not have received any of these New Covenant benefits, had Yeshua not died for our sins, been resurrected back to life, and returned to the Father to send back the Holy Spirit.

I think Ephesians 2:17-22 is a suitable ending for this message; it says of Yeshua:

*“Also, when he came, he announced as Good News shalom to you far off and shalom to those nearby, news that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. On the contrary, you are fellow-citizens with God’s people and members of God’s family. You have been built on the foundation of the emissaries and the prophets, with the cornerstone being Yeshua the Messiah himself. In union with him the whole building is held together, and it is growing into a holy temple in union with the Lord. Yes, in union with him, you yourselves are being built together into a spiritual dwelling-place for God!”*

—CJB

## Prophecy Then and Now

Delivered April 20, 2013

In Messianic Jewish congregations, we encounter a variety of beliefs and attitudes about prophecy. I do not mean prophecy in the Bible; we all believe in that because we all believe the Bible. No, I mean contemporary prophecy—words ostensibly received by revelation today and spoken in the name of the Lord today.

Some of us came to the Lord amidst supernatural manifestations and, having experienced the supernatural at least once in our lives; it is easy for us to accept the reality of prophecy which is, after all, supernatural. For others of us who have not had supernatural experiences or may have been disciplined in churches and congregations that were skeptical or even hostile to the supernatural, accepting prophecy may be less easy. Ephesians 4:11 tells us that prophecy is a “gift of the Holy Spirit,” and you are probably aware that there are leaders in the Body of Believers who contend that the gifts were only for “biblical” times and are not for today.

There is, of course, the other side of the coin—those who are quick to proclaim supernatural gifts where there are none, and even a few who are willing to falsify manifestations of the Holy Spirit. More likely, some of us may be skeptical of the supernatural because somewhere in our past we were misled or defrauded. I confess that I am careful about supernatural claims for that very reason.

Let me tell you of an incident that occurred when I was a relatively new believer; it is not about prophecy, but about another manifestation of the supernatural; the principle, however, is the same. I once attended a church service where people occasionally fell to the floor, supposedly overcome by the Holy Spirit. When the pastor concluded his message, congregants lined up to receive prayer, and when the pastor laid hands on them each, in turn, fell to the floor. I stood back in amazement and asked someone standing near me what was going on. “Oh,” he said, “They’re being slain in the Spirit! They’re receiving healing from God.” Well, I was not convinced, so I decided to do some investigating. When I saw a pre-teen boy go down after he was prayed for, I approached him and asked him what he had experienced. “Not much, he replied.” “So, what made you fall down,” I asked? “Oh,” he said, “The pastor kept pushing on my head and everyone else fell down, so I did too.” As you can see, that incident made an impression on me.

Now do not get me wrong. I believe that God’s power can overcome a person and cause him to fall, and I have known some entirely trustworthy people who have fallen in the Spirit. I believe in God’s supernatural power; it is just that I have seen false manifestations as well, so while I am respectful, I am also cautious. Now prophecy is a very special gift; in fact, I call it the “granddaddy of all the gifts” because all the other gifts of the Spirit make use of it. What I mean by that is that the essence of prophecy is the ability to hear God’s voice and operating in the other gifts also requires hearing God’s voice.

So far as I can tell, the first person in the Bible to be called a prophet was Abraham, when God said to Avimelekh:

Genesis 20:7: “...return the man’s [meaning Abraham’s] wife to him now. He is a prophet, and he will pray for you, so that you will live. But if you don’t return her, know that you will certainly die—you and all who belong to you.”

So, what did it mean for Abraham to be a prophet? Abraham heard God and spoke with God, but so did Avimelekh. In the Garden of Eden, it was common for Adam and Eve to speak with God, and a way to understand the Garden is that it was a place where one could commune with God continually and naturally. But Adam (and through him mankind) was banished from the Garden, for we read in Genesis 3:23-24:

*“Therefore ADONAI, God, sent him out of the garden of ‘Eden to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So he drove the man out, and he placed at the east of the garden of ‘Eden the k’ruvim and a flaming sword which turned in every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.”*

The “life” “of the tree of life” was life with God; therefore, when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, their normal life with God (their ability to hear God and speak with God about everyday matters) ceased. So! Were Adam and Eve prophets during the time they lived in the Garden of Eden? Was Noah a prophet when, years later, he heard God’s voice and conversed with him? Was Avimelekh a prophet for the same reason?

I would say “yes” for Noah, and “no” for Adam, Eve, and Avimelekh and here is why. A prophet is a person who not only can hear God’s voice but is instructed by God to convey his words to those who cannot or do not also hear. Adam, Eve, and Avimelekh heard God’s voice and conversed with him for their own purposes; it was part of their relationship with him. Noah, on the other hand, was instructed to build an ark and was told by God:

Genesis 7:1: “Come into the ark, you and all your household; for I have seen that you alone in this generation are righteous before me.”

Noah was required to repeat what God told him to his household—not only for their survival, but for the survival of mankind; that, in my opinion, is what made Noah a prophet. And it is the same with Moses who, years later, heard God’s voice, received the *Torah*, and gave it to the Israelites. By Moses’ time, very few individuals had the ability to hear God’s voice, and those who did have the gift (prophets) possessed it—not for themselves—but to help their fellow Israelites receive direction from God.

It was that way with all the “Old Covenant prophets,” and even with Saul who was able to prophesy when he came under the influence of the Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 10:6-13). And let us not forget Balaam’s donkey that, you recall, saw an angel in his path that Balaam could not initially see and spoke warnings to Balaam to save him (Numbers 22:9-35). So, God can even use a donkey to prophesy.

That is how it was under the Old (the Mosaic) Covenant but, even that early in history, God revealed that he would be sending us a very special prophet, after which, things would change radically. It is recorded in Deuteronomy 18:18-19:

*“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I order him. Whoever doesn’t listen to my words, which he will speak in my name, will have to account for himself to me.”*

The test of the legitimacy of a prophet was spelled out clearly in Deuteronomy 18:21-22, which says:

*“You may be wondering, ‘How are we to know if a word has not been spoken by ADONAI?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of ADONAI, and the prediction does not come true—that is, the word is not fulfilled—then ADONAI did not speak that word. The prophet who said it spoke presumptuously; you have nothing to fear from him.”*

The penalty for prophesying falsely was unforgiving in those days, for in Deuteronomy 18:20 we read:

*“But if a prophet presumptuously speaks a word in my name which I didn’t order him to say, or if he speaks in the name of other gods, then that prophet must die.”*

Years went by, and we come to Jeremiah’s prophecy of a New Covenant which we find in Jeremiah 31:32(33)-33a(34a):

*“For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest...”*

Jeremiah not only prophesied that there would be a New Covenant, but that through that Covenant, ordinary people would come to possess the chief attribute of a New Covenant prophet which is not only hearing God but knowing him intimately via the Holy Spirit.

After his resurrection, Yeshua walked the earth in his risen form, taught his disciples for forty days and, before he departed to be with his Father, instructed them to remain in Jerusalem; He said to them:

Luke 24:49: *“Now I am sending forth upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been equipped with power from above.”*

The disciples did as Yeshua directed them and remained in Jerusalem. Finally:

Acts 2:1-4: *“The festival of Shavu’ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.”*

Acts 2:12-18: *“Amazed and confused, they all went on asking each other, ‘What can this mean?’” But others made fun of them and said, “They’ve just had too much wine!” Then Kefa stood up with the Eleven and raised his voice to address them: “You Judeans, and all of you*

*staying here in Yerushalayim! Let me tell you what this means! Listen carefully to me! These people aren't drunk, as you suppose—it's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken about through the prophet Yo'el: 'ADONAI says: "In the Last Days, I will pour out from my Spirit upon everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my slaves, both men and women, will I pour out from my Spirit in those days; and they will prophesy."*

That is how it began, and the Holy Spirit has indwelt believers and enabled believers to prophesy ever since. Some prophecy is given in tongues and some in languages that men understand. Some prophecy is given publicly, and some privately. But mostly, when we hear God's voice it is not for others, but for our own guidance, in which case we call it "revelation." The ability to hear God's voice for our own guidance is available to each and every one of us and, now and then, God will call on one or another of us to prophesy as well.

Although all New Covenant believers are able to hear God and from time to time to prophesy, not all are gifted to be prophets. Prophets in the New Covenant function differently than prophets under Moses, as we may see in Ephesians 4:11-13:

*"Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers. Their task is to equip God's people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah, until we all arrive at the unity implied by trusting and knowing the Son of God, at full manhood, at the standard of maturity set by the Messiah's perfection."*

So, the special function of the prophet today is to use his gift to equip the body for God's work of service. That is different than it was under Moses.

You may recall that earlier, I referred to prophecy as "the granddaddy of all the other gifts"; well, I derive my understanding of it from the passage in Ephesians that I just read. Emissaries (apostles) need to hear God's voice to know how to lead inter-congregationally. Evangelists need to hear God's voice to guide them on how to present the "Good News." Pastors need to hear God's voice to guide them on how to counsel their flock. And teachers need to hear God's voice to understand and be able to convey the deep and sometimes hidden meanings of the Scriptures.

When prophetic words are brought forth, it is all our responsibilities to discern the accuracy of what we have heard and to reject what we deem a mistake or incorrect. The Bereans took this responsibility seriously, for we read in Acts 17:10-11:

*"But as soon as night fell, the brothers sent Sha'ul and Sila off to Berea. As soon as they arrived, they went to the synagogue. Now the people here were of nobler character than the ones in Thessalonica; they eagerly welcomed the message, checking the Tanakh every day to see if the things Sha'ul was saying were true."*

We also read in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22:

*“Don’t quench the Spirit, don’t despise inspired messages. But do test everything—hold onto what is good, but keep away from every form of evil.”*

How then should we test what we hear? First ask, does it line up with what is written in Scripture? That is the first and most basic test. Then ask, does the Spirit within us bear witness that the word is both true and has come from God? A word can be true, and yet God may not have spoken it at that particular time. Finally, is the word edifying and consistent with other things we know? 1 Corinthians 14 has much to say about prophesying with tongues and interpreting tongues, but verses 29-33 has this to say about prophecy in general:

*“Let two or three prophets speak, while the others weigh what is said. And if something is revealed to a prophet who is sitting down, let the first one be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, with the result that all will learn something and all will be encouraged. Also, the prophets’ spirits are under the prophets’ control; for God is not a God of unruliness but of shalom.”*

Sometimes God speaks to us, but what He says is for us only and not for the rest of the body. If that is the case, we should not speak it. Sometimes God gives us a word for the body, but the timing or occasion is not right. If that is the case, we should not speak it either. Notice that the 1 Corinthians Scripture says *“the prophets’ spirits are under the prophets’ control...”*

Directive prophecy delivered in a congregation should be given to the elders for their discernment before it is spoken. It is a proper role of the elders to judge prophecy for the safety of the community:

Hebrews 13:17: *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your lives, as people who will have to render an account.”*

There is much more that I can say, but I will close with this advice. Develop your gift of hearing God’s voice in small groups where your words can be discerned, and mistakes corrected by your friends whom you trust. In the New Covenant, the ability to prophesy has been made available to everyone, and we need no longer fear the penalty of law for miss-hearing God. Over time, your accuracy and confidence in hearing God will increase, and you will be invited to share what you have heard more broadly. Then, when you do share, preface your words with “I believe I heard God say ...” or something similar that invites the discernment of your elders and fellow congregants.

—CJB

## The Prophetic Word

*Delivered March 16, 2019*

Reflecting back to when I was a new believer, a single verse of Scripture stands out as having been particularly influential in my spiritual growth; it is Genesis 5:24:

*“Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” (NIV)*

I was impacted by that Scripture in a profound way, and thought to myself: “Yes, that is what I want my relationship with God to be—to walk with him as Enoch did.” Yeshua gave us the way for our sins to be forgiven and for us to have eternal life, but the larger picture of what he did for us is that he brought us into a New Covenant—a new way of relating to God, in which the average man and woman can walk with God as Enoch did, and be closer to him than man has been able since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:8a we read:

*“They heard the voice of ADONAI, God, walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze ...”*

That is how it was supposed to be for Adam’s and Eves’ children as well, but we know what happened. Adam sinned against God, was ejected from the Garden and, until recently, we who are descended from Adam have been kept at a distance. Through God’s grace we did not lose our relationship with him entirely but, for many years, we lost our ability to be close and familiar with him as a child is supposed to be with his father. God continued to hear us, but we lost our ability to hear him without the help of intermediaries whom God chose from time to time. God spoke through men like Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and others whom we call “prophets” and, to hear from God, we had to go through them.

That was our state of affairs during the Mosaic Covenant, but during that Covenant period God spoke something startling through Jeremiah; He said:

*“‘Here, the days are coming,’ says ADONAI, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,’” says ADONAI. “For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,” says ADONAI: “I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, [saying] ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34))*

For those who lived in Jeremiah’s time and heard those words spoken, how and when the New Covenant would come must have been a great mystery. But we are blessed to be living centuries later and we know how and when it was given. It was through God’s only begotten son Yeshua, our Messiah, who sacrificed himself for the forgiveness of our sins so that we could once again draw close to God and not only speak *to him*, but also hear him speak *to us*. And, from John 16:5-14, we know that God



accomplished it through the Holy Spirit whom He sent to earth to reside among us. Yeshua explained it to his disciples this way; he said:

*“But now I am going to the One who sent me. ‘Not one of you is asking me, ‘Where are you going?’ Instead, because I have said these things to you, you are overcome with grief. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I don’t go away, the comforting Counselor will not come to you. However, if I do go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will show that the world is wrong about sin, about righteousness and about judgment—about sin, in that people don’t put their trust in me; about righteousness, in that I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; about judgment, in that the ruler of this world has been judged. I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t bear them now. However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative but will say only what he hears. He will also announce to you the events of the future. He will glorify me, because he will receive from what is mine and announce it to you.”*

Yeshua’s words came to pass that next *Shavu’ot* when the Holy Spirit fell on those who were assembled in Jerusalem (Acts 2) and, from that day to this, the Holy Spirit has been living among us and ministering to us through his presence, and we are once again able to hear God directly. Hebrews 8:6 says:

*“But now the work Yeshua has been given to do is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as Torah on the basis of better promises.”*

Truly, the New Covenant is a superior covenant because, through it, we can draw close to God and walk with him in ways of which our ancestors could only dream. Yeshua identified his blood (which was about to be shed) with the New Covenant when, at his last Passover meal, he took the wine cup, gave it to his disciples, and said to them:

*“This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.”* (Mark 14:24b (NKJ))

So, does this renewed ability to hear God make us all prophets? In a sense “yes,” and in a sense “no.” I will try to explain, but the explanation requires that I first share a bit more of the biblical history of prophecy.

Since the sin of Adam, God has always allowed certain persons the ability to hear his voice so that He could speak to the rest of us through them. We call those persons “prophets” even when the Bible does not name them as such. But beginning with Abraham, God began to use the term and made the office of “prophet” an official part of the Covenant that He made through Moses. So, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and Miryam were all prophets who could converse with God and repeat to others what God told them to say. Then, when the office of “prophet” became institutionalized as part of the Mosaic Covenant, men who did not have the Holy Spirit upon them knew that they could routinely consult prophets and, through that indirect means, could know God’s will for their lives. It is noteworthy that Scripture gives Abraham and Moses special attention among the prophets, for in Isaiah 41:8 (and repeated in James 2:23) God referred to Abraham as his friend, and later in Numbers 12:6-8, He said of Moses:

*“Listen to what I say: when there is a prophet among you, I, ADONAI, make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. But it isn’t that way with my servant Moshe. He is the only one who is faithful in my entire household. With him I speak face to face and clearly, not in riddles; he sees the image of ADONAI.”*

During the Mosaic Covenant, there were an untold number of prophets available to the Israelites and we know the names of some of them—especially those for whom books of the Bible are named. These prophets of the Mosaic Covenant were held to a very strict standard of accuracy and faithfulness, for we read in [Deuteronomy 13:2\(1\)-6\(5\)](#):

*“If a prophet or someone who gets messages while dreaming arises among you and he gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder comes about as he predicted when he said, ‘Let’s follow other gods, which you have not known; and let us serve them,’ you are not to listen to what that prophet or dreamer says. For ADONAI your God is testing you, in order to find out whether you really do love ADONAI your God with all your heart and being. You are to follow ADONAI your God, fear him, obey his mitzvot, listen to what he says, serve him and cling to him; and that prophet or dreamer is to be put to death; because he urged rebellion against ADONAI your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from a life of slavery in order to seduce you away from the path ADONAI your God ordered you to follow. This is how you are to rid your community of this wickedness.”*

And we also read in [Deuteronomy 18:22](#):

*“When a prophet speaks in the name of ADONAI, and the prediction does not come true—that is, the word is not fulfilled—then ADONAI did not speak that word. The prophet who said it spoke presumptuously; you have nothing to fear from him.”*

Now those Scriptures were given under the Mosaic Covenant, and what I really want to talk to you about is what prophets and prophesying are like today. After quoting Jeremiah that God would make a New Covenant with Israel and Judah, [Hebrews 8:13](#) says this:

*“By using the term, “new,” he has made the first covenant “old”; and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether.”*

It is an extraordinary statement until one realizes that the Book of Hebrews was written before the Second Temple was destroyed and at the time of total overlap of the New and Old Covenants. It therefore stands to reason that what was on its way to vanishing then is even further along toward vanishing now, or it has already vanished. Either way, we should expect there to be significant differences in both prophecy and prophets in the New Covenant compared to the Old Covenant, and so there are. Consider first, [Ephesians 4:11-13](#):

*“Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers. Their task is to equip God’s people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah, until we all arrive at the unity implied by*

*trusting and knowing the Son of God, at full manhood, at the standard of maturity set by the Messiah's perfection."*

We see that prophets have a very different function today than they had previously, and it is no doubt because today, all of God's people can hear the voice of God and can prophesy to varying degrees through being gifted by Holy Spirit. Whereas previously, prophets were needed as intermediaries in conveying God's instructions to the common Israelite, today's prophets are mainly for the purpose of equipping God's people. God continues to speak to us through others, but He does so far less often than before because we can now hear God's voice for ourselves.

Although our ability to hear God for personal direction is now available to all of us, the ability to prophesy (i.e. speak God's Words for the benefit of others) is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to some, and not to others. We read in

1 Corinthians 12:7-11:

*"Moreover, to each person is given the particular manifestation of the Spirit that will be for the common good. To one, through the Spirit, is given a word of wisdom; to another, a word of knowledge, in accordance with the same Spirit; to another, faith, by the same Spirit; and to another, gifts of healing, by the one Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, the ability to judge between spirits; to another, the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues; and to yet another, the ability to interpret tongues. One and the same Spirit is at work in all these things, distributing to each person as he chooses."*

And in Romans 12:6 we read:

*"But we have gifts that differ and which are meant to be used according to the grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, use it to the extent of your trust..."*

I hesitate to say that one spiritual gift is superior to another but, if I were to judge by the writings of Paul, prophecy would win hands down, for in 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 we read:

*"Pursue love! However, keep on eagerly seeking the things of the Spirit; and especially seek to be able to prophesy. For someone speaking in a tongue is not speaking to people but to God, because no one can understand, since he is uttering mysteries in the power of the Spirit. But someone prophesying is speaking to people, edifying, encouraging and comforting them. A person speaking in a tongue does edify himself, but a person prophesying edifies the congregation. I wish you would all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you would all prophesy. The person who prophesies is greater than the person who speaks in tongues, unless someone gives an interpretation, so that the congregation can be edified."*

Prophecy has never been without its problems. During the Mosaic Covenant, prophets that erred in their message were defrocked, and false prophets were stoned. We do not stone false prophets today, but Peter warns us that they are still among us, active and dangerous. We read in 2 Peter 2:1-3a:

*“But among the people there were also false prophets, just as there will be false teachers among you. Under false pretenses they will introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and thus bring on themselves swift destruction. Many will follow their debaucheries; and because of them, the true Way will be maligned. In their greed they will exploit you with fabricated stories.”*

And Matthew 7:15-16a:

*“Beware of the false prophets! They come to you wearing sheep’s clothing, but underneath they are hungry wolves! You will recognize them by their fruit.”*

And also Matthew 14:23-24:

*“At that time, if someone says to you, ‘Look! Here’s the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ don’t believe him. For there will appear false Messiahs and false prophets performing great miracles—amazing things!—so as to fool even the chosen, if possible.”*

For that reason, we are instructed by 1 John 4:1-6 to beware and not be taken-in and, in all cases where prophecy is given, to test the spirits to determine whether they are from God or from the adversary:

*“Dear friends, don’t trust every spirit. On the contrary, test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Here is how you recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges that Yeshua the Messiah came as a human being is from God, and every spirit which does not acknowledge Yeshua is not from God—in fact, this is the spirit of the Anti-Messiah. You have heard that he is coming. Well, he’s here now, in the world already! You, children, are from God and have overcome the false prophets, because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore, they speak from the world’s viewpoint; and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God doesn’t listen to us. This is how we distinguish the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error.”*

Finally, it is very important we remember that in the New Covenant the Holy Spirit can indwell each of us, and each of us can therefore receive directly from God and prophesy on some level. For most of us, the level of prophetic anointing will be modest, but for some of us it will be great and the words we speak in God’s name will be accurate and carry great weight. Those of us who exhibit an exceptionally great anointing may even be recognized as New Covenant prophets, though most of us will not.

Messianic Jewish congregations should encourage their members to develop their prophetic abilities within small group *chavurot* before sharing publicly. We do not expect one hundred percent accuracy, but we do hope for continuous growth in our prophetic abilities. Yes, we take risks in allowing allegedly prophetic words to be given by members and, for that reason, our elders must assume responsibility for testing every word that is spoken. We mostly do not encounter problems, but occasionally we do. When we believe that a word allegedly from God has been spoken in error and im-

mediate correction is not needed, we confer with the giver of the word, pray, and then render a judgment. If we judge the word to be wrong (or partially wrong) and it is of sufficient significance, we come before the members and correct the word publicly at the first opportunity. On rare occasions a word that is given requires immediate correction. In those cases, we caucus at the front of the sanctuary and, after discussion, speak the correction on the spot.

I hope that this brief exposition on prophecy in the New Covenant has been helpful and that you will not be inhibited from boldly (but humbly) coming forward with what you believe you have heard prophetically from God.

—CJB

## **The *Ruach HaKodesh***

*Delivered March 14, 2015*

My message today is about the *Ruach HaKodesh*—the Holy Spirit—and his ministry to mankind prior to the time of Yeshua. The message will contain relatively few words of my own and, instead, will let Scripture tell its own the story.

In Christian vernacular, the Holy Spirit is often referred to as the third person of the Godhead—“the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Listing the Holy Spirit third is probably because the Book of Acts records his powerful arrival in Jerusalem as a result of his having been sent there by Yeshua. So, God the Father is justifiably first in order, Yeshua second, and the Holy Spirit has to settle for last. It is ironic, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit makes his appearance in Scripture as early as in Genesis 1:1-2:

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was unformed and void, darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water.”*

The translated verse I just read is from the Complete Jewish Bible, where the *Ruach HaKodesh* is referred to as the “*Ruach Elohim*, or “the “Spirit of God.” For the scholars among us, I will point out that “*Ruach HaKodesh*” in its variant forms appears only three times in the *Tanakh* while “*Ruach Elohim*” appears fourteen times<sup>16</sup> and “*shekhinah*,” a term that we often hear associated with “the abiding presence of God” does not appear in the Bible at all. These statistics are interesting but largely unimportant. What is important is that the Holy Spirit is the entity of God with which men interface, and it is he, the Holy Spirit, who can be at more than one place at the same time. We say that God is omnipresent. Well, without the Holy Spirit, God would not be omnipresent, because it is the Holy Spirit that connects God the Father and God the son to wherever on earth God wants to or needs to be.

Lest we think that the Holy Spirit indwelling the bodies of men is strictly a New Covenant phenomenon, consider these Scriptures from the *Tanakh*:

Genesis 41:38: “Pharaoh said to his officials, ‘Can we find anyone else like him [Yosef]? The Spirit of God lives in him!’”

Ezekiel 36:27: “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

In the era of the Mosaic Covenant, the Holy Spirit did not dwell within the average Israelite. He dwelt within prophets (that is what made prophets prophets), he dwelt within priests (or at least within some of them), and he dwelt within certain kings. We sometimes hear talk of men and women today being “filled with the Spirit.” Well, certain men were filled with God’s Spirit even before Yeshua:

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<sup>16</sup> In Daniel 5:14, the Aramaic for “Spirit of God” (as translated in the NKJ) is “*Ruach Elahin*,” which is plural.

Exodus 31:1-3: “*ADONAI said to Moshe, I have singled out B’tzal’el the son of Uri the son of Hur, of the tribe of Y’udah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God—with wisdom, understanding and knowledge concerning every kind of artisanry.*” (see also, Exodus 35:30-31).

Deuteronomy 34:9: “*Y’hoshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit of wisdom, for Moshe had laid his hands on him, and the people of Isra’el heeded him and did what ADONAI had ordered Moshe.*”

As early as the exodus from Egypt, we read of a cloud that provided the Israelites with guidance and protection and enabled them to converse with God. The cloud is associated in Scripture with God’s glory, and I cannot help but think that the Spirit and God’s glory were either manifestations of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit himself. Consider these Scriptures:

Exodus 13:21-22: “*ADONAI went ahead of them [i.e. the Israelites] in a column of cloud during the daytime to lead them on their way, and at night in a column of fire to give them light; thus they could travel both by day and by night. Neither the column of cloud by day nor the column of fire at night went away from in front of the people.*” (see also, Exodus 14:20).

Exodus 33:9-11a: “*Whenever Moshe went out to the tent [i.e. the tent of meeting], all the people would get up and stand, each man at his tent door, and look at Moshe until he had gone into the tent. Whenever Moshe entered the tent, the column of cloud would descend and station itself at the entrance to the tent; and ADONAI would speak with Moshe. When all the people saw the column of cloud stationed at the entrance to the tent, they would get up and prostrate themselves, each man at his tent door. ADONAI would speak to Moshe face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Then he would return to the camp.*”

Exodus 40:34-38: “*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of ADONAI filled the tabernacle. Moshe was unable to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud remained on it, and the glory of ADONAI filled the tabernacle.*”

Numbers 11:27-29: “*A young man ran and told Moshe, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!’ Y’hoshua, the son of Nun, who from his youth up had been Moshe’s assistant, answered, ‘My lord, Moshe, stop them!’ But Moshe replied, ‘Are you so zealous to protect me? I wish all of ADONAI’s people were prophets! I wish ADONAI would put his Spirit on all of them!’”*

Numbers 17: 7(16:42): “*However, as the community was assembling against Moshe and Aharon, they looked in the direction of the tent of meeting and saw the cloud cover it and the glory of ADONAI appear.*”

So, the Holy Spirit was present and active among men from the very beginning—sometimes being in their midst, sometimes coming upon them, and sometimes dwelling within them. And any time the Holy Spirit came anywhere near, he brought power, wisdom, prophecy, and spiritual gifts. Consider these six Scriptures:

1 Samuel 10:6: “Then the Spirit of ADONAI will fall on you; you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man!”

1 Samuel 16:13: “Sh’mu’el took the horn of oil and anointed him there in his brothers’ presence. From that day on, the Spirit of ADONAI would fall upon David with power. So Sh’mu’el set out and went to Ramah”

2 Samuel 23:2: “The Spirit of ADONAI spoke through me, his word was on my tongue.”

Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of Adonai ELOHIM is upon me, because ADONAI has anointed me to announce good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted; to proclaim freedom to the captives, to let out into light those bound in the dark; to proclaim the year of the favor of ADONAI and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn,”

Ezekiel 37:1-4: “With the hand of ADONAI upon me, ADONAI carried me out by his Spirit and set me down in the middle of the valley, and it was full of bones. He had me pass by all around them—there were so many bones lying in the valley, and they were so dry! He asked me, “Human being, can these bones live?” I answered, “Adonai ELOHIM! Only you know that!” Then he said to me, Prophesy over these bones! Say to them, ‘Dry bones! Hear what ADONAI has to say!’”

Micah 3:8: “On the other hand, I am full of power by the Spirit of ADONAI, full of justice and full of might, to declare to Ya’akov his crime, to Isra’el his sin.”

All of this occurred during the time of the Mosaic Covenant and, even back then, the Holy Spirit could be transferred from one person to another, sometimes by the laying on of hands:

Deuteronomy 34:9: “Y’hoshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit of wisdom, for Moshe had laid his hands on him, and the people of Isra’el heeded him and did what ADONAI had ordered Moshe.”

Numbers 11:16-17: “ADONAI said to Moshe, “Bring me seventy of the leaders of Isra’el, people you recognize as leaders of the people and officers of theirs. Bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the Spirit which rests on you and put it on them. Then they will carry the burden of the people along with you, so that you won’t carry it yourself alone.”

And of course, there is the famous transference of God’s Spirit from Elijah to Elisha:

2 Kings 2:9-15: “After they had crossed, Eliyahu said to Elisha, Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away from you.’ Elisha said, ‘Please! Let a double share of your spirit be on me!’ He replied, ‘You have requested a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, you will get what you asked for; but if not, you won’t.’ Suddenly, as they were walking on and talking, there appeared a fiery chariot with horses of fire; and as it separated the two of them from each other, Eliyahu went up into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw it and cried out, ‘My father! My father!’



*The chariots and horsemen of Isra'el! Then he lost sight of him. Seizing his clothes, he tore them in half. Then he picked up Eliyahu's cloak, which had fallen off him. Standing on the bank of the Yarden, he took the cloak that had fallen off Eliyahu, struck the water and said, 'Where is ADONAI, the God of Eliyahu?' But when he actually did strike the water, it divided itself to the left and to the right; then Elisha crossed over. When the guild prophets of Yericho saw him in the distance, they said, 'The spirit of Eliyahu does rest on Elisha.'"*

Now there came a time when God decided that He would make a New Covenant with Israel to replace the one that He had made through Moses—a New Covenant that would enable the Holy Spirit to impact men in a greater way than before. And not only certain men as previously, but all men who would receive him through the Messiah whom it was also prophesied would come:

*Isaiah 11:1-2: "But a branch will emerge from the trunk of Yishai, a shoot will grow from his roots. The Spirit of ADONAI will rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and power, the Spirit of knowledge and fearing ADONAI—"*

*Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34): "'Here, the days are coming,' says ADONAI, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them,' says ADONAI. 'For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days,' says ADONAI: 'I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, [saying] "Know ADONAI"; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more.'"*

When God told the Israelites (through Jeremiah) that He would put his *Torah* within them and that they would then all know him intimately, how else but through the Holy Spirit entering and dwelling within them could that have been done? But let us continue:

*Ezekiel 36:26-27: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them."*

*Ezekiel 37:14: "'I will put my Spirit in you; and you will be alive. Then I will place you in your own land; and you will know that I, ADONAI, have spoken, and that I have done it,' says ADONAI."*

*Joel 3:1(2:28)-5(2:32): "After this, I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions; and also on male and female slaves in those days I will pour out my Spirit. I will show wonders in the sky and on earth—blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible Day of ADONAI. At that time, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved. For in Mount Tziyon and Yerushalayim there*

*will be those who escape, as ADONAI has promised; among the survivors will be those whom ADONAI has called.”*

Everything I have shown you about the Holy Spirit thus far (or rather that Scripture has shown you), happened before and up to the time of Yeshua. And, since this message intended to show just that, I guess I am about finished. But before I close, let us get a foretaste of a possible Part 2 of this message, and read of when the Holy Spirit made his grand appearance upon everyone assembled on the *Shavuot* following Yeshua’s resurrection:

*Acts 1:4-8: “At one of these gatherings, he [Yeshua] instructed them [His followers] not to leave Yerushalayim but to wait for ‘what the Father promised, which you heard about from me. For Yochanan used to immerse people in water; but in a few days, you will be immersed in the Ruach HaKodesh!’ When they were together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore self-rule to Isra’el?’ He answered, ‘You don’t need to know the dates or the times; the Father has kept these under his own authority. But you will receive power when the Ruach HaKodesh comes upon you; you will be my witnesses both in Yerushalayim and in all Y’hudah and Shomron, indeed to the ends of the earth!’”*

*Acts 2:1-4: “The festival of Shavuot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.”*

I told you that this message would be mainly Scripture. Okay, now I am finished.

—CJB

**L. Days and Seasons**  
**Writings • Vol 2**



## Between the Feasts

You may have noticed that all but one of the biblical “Appointed Times” occur during two distinct seasons of the year. The Spring Appointed Times are Passover (*Pesach*), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Chag HaMatzot*), the Day of Firstfruits (*Yom HaBikkurim*), and Weeks (*Shavuot*)—also a “day of firstfruits.” The Fall Appointed Times are the Day of Blowing (*Yom T’ruah*), commonly known as *Rosh HaShanah*, the Day of Covering (*Yom Kippur*), also known as Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles (*Chag HaSukkot*), and the Eighth Day of Assembly (*Sh’mini Atzeret*). There is much published about these special days but, other than the “days of awe” (ten days between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*), I have yet to find an article written about the significance of the days that are between the Appointed Times seasons.

Was God not interested in the rest of the year? He most certainly was, since most of the *Torah’s* commandments apply daily. Notice, however, I said “all but one” of the Appointed Times. The one that is not seasonal is the seventh day *Shabbat* that is weekly, and it is that *Shabbat* around which most of Jewish life revolves. Still, there is something about these appointed times falling within two distinct seasons of the year that got me thinking. What is it that they have in common? I think it is that they are all times of spiritual impartation and times of spiritual refreshing.

In the Spring, *Pesach* and *Chag HaMatzot* remind us of God’s protection and provision when He brought us out of Egypt with “a strong arm” to save us and make us a nation. They also remind us of the sacrificed lamb that “saved” the Israelites in Egypt, a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Yeshua that saves us. Then comes *Bikkurim*, the first grain harvest; it reminds us of God’s provision of food, and also of the firstfruit of the New Covenant resurrection, who is Yeshua. Then comes the fifty-day count to *Shavuot*, during which time Yeshua taught his disciples and created expectancy for what was to come on the fiftieth day. And on that fiftieth day, *Shavuot*—another firstfruits celebration that once again reminds us of God’s physical provisions and also reminds us of the *Ru’ach HaKodesh* whom Yeshua sent to earth on *Shavuot* to indwell us and direct us from within our beings.

In the Fall we have *Yom T’ruah* followed by *Yom Kippur*—God’s provision of a ten-day period for the early Israelites to reflect on their sins of the past year, repent, and receive to themselves the High Priest’s sacrifice of an unblemished goat that covered over their sins until the next *Yom Kippur*. We use the ten-day period of introspection in the same way today, knowing that the sacrificed goat was a foreshadow of the greater sacrifice to come—the sacrifice of Yeshua, of which we are the beneficiaries. Finally, the seven days of *Sukkot* followed by *Sh’mini Atzeret*, that together remind us of God’s provision of crops and shelter for the Israelites upon their coming into the promised land, and of Yeshua first revealing that he was the Messiah. But what about the rest of the year? The days between weekly *Shabbats* that are not within these special seasons? I think they are times for us to make use of the impartations and provisions that God gave us and continues to give us, and they are times of self-testing to find out if we will.

—September 27, 2013, CJB

## Messiah Born in the Spring? An Exegetical Argument<sup>17</sup>

This being the Spring season, I am reminded of a paper I wrote back in 1997 that sought to show that Yeshua was born in the Spring—not during *Sukkot* when many people would like to believe he was born. I confess that over the years, most people who have read my paper at first ignored it, preferring to hold to their longstanding conviction. I even received the same response from Bible scholars, and I would have conceded the matter to them long ago, except that none of the scholars could ever show me why my exegesis of the Scriptures or my logic was incorrect. So, with renewed hope that someone will either acknowledge that I am right or show me once and for all that I am wrong, I herewith present my paper to the members of Ohev Yisrael. I concede that it is technical and somewhat dry to read, but please do try to follow its logic and let me know your opinion.

The New King James Version translates [Luke 1:26-27](#) as follows:

*“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Miriam.”*

The unmodified phrase<sup>18</sup> “in the [*ordinal number, eg. 1st, 2nd, etc.*] month” appears numerous times in the *Tanakh*,<sup>19</sup> 19 and only once in the Scriptures of the *Brit Chadashah*. Since in every one of its Hebrew occurrences it refers to a numbered month of the biblical calendar, it is reasonable to suppose that its meaning in the Greek Scriptures is the same, and that [verse 26](#) in [Luke 1](#) is saying that Gabriel visited Miryam in the sixth month of the biblical calendar year.

While most commentaries are silent on the matter, the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries express an opposing view. Seemingly because [verse 24](#) states: “*Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months ...*,” Leon Morris interprets [verse 26](#) to mean the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy—not the sixth month of the year as I believe it really means.<sup>20</sup>

Although it is true from [verse 36](#) that it was also Elizabeth’s sixth month of pregnancy, I contend that it is not the meaning of [verse 26](#). If it were, [verse 26](#) would have been rendered (in the Greek) in the same manner as [verse 36](#)—in the possessive case—eg., “*in her sixth month*” or “*in the sixth month of her*.” I therefore conclude that it was both—the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy but, more important for our purposes, the sixth month of the year (the month of *Elul*).

[Luke 1:39](#) states that Miryam began her journey to visit Elizabeth “with haste” when she learned from Gabriel that she (Elizabeth) was six months pregnant; but the point that is often lost is that it

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<sup>17</sup> Derived from Sermon A2 supra.

<sup>18</sup> “unmodified” meaning that it stands alone and is not accompanied by either an adjective or an explanatory phrase.

<sup>19</sup> Acronym for the Hebrew Scriptures.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Revised edition, p. 80, (Leicester, England / Grand Rapids, Michigan: Intervarsity Press / William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).

was also the sixth month of the year. The reason for the “haste” was probably because Elizabeth was not only six months pregnant but was also “*in her old age*” ([verse 36](#)), and Miryam wanted to be with her when she gave birth. When Miryam arrived, Elizabeth had not yet given birth and Miryam stayed with Elizabeth for “*about three months*” ([verse 56](#)), the time that would have carried her through a normal pregnancy.

It is a likely assumption is that Miryam was impregnated by the Holy Spirit immediately upon Gabriel leaving her (in the sixth month of the year—*Elul*), so she would have already been pregnant when she arrived at Elizabeth’s home ([verses 40-44](#)). This would be consistent with Miryam’s conversation with Elizabeth in [verses 41-44](#):

*“And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Miriam, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! “But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? “For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.”*”

Assuming that Miryam had a normal nine-month pregnancy in a twelve-month year, Yeshua’s birth would have fallen in the third biblical month—*Sivan* on the Jewish calendar. *Sivan* is the month in which *Shavuot* occurs, and it is in the Spring. In the less likely case that it was a leap year with 13 months, Yeshua’s birth would have fallen in *Iyyar*, a month earlier, but it would still have been in the Spring.

May 10, 2019, NKJ

## Passover and Firstfruits Chronology

### Three Views Dating the Events from Yeshua's Last Passover to Pentecost

#### Bikkurim: Plan or Coincidence?

In the covenant given through Moses, God commanded the Israelites that when they came into the land God had given them, they were to sacrifice a sheaf of their *bikkurim*<sup>21</sup>—their first fruits of the harvest—as a wave offering:

*“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of its firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.’” (Leviticus 23:9-10)*

This was to be done on “the day after the Sabbath,” and was to be accompanied by a burnt offering of an unblemished male lamb:

*“He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the Lord.” (Leviticus 23:11-12)*

Then, in the New Covenant Scriptures, we read:

*“But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are Messiah's at His coming.” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)*

Are the references to “firstfruits” in both the New and Old Covenants coincidental, or are they God's intricate plan for relating events across the span of centuries? In the sections which follow, this paper demonstrates that they are no coincidence and that understanding the offering of firstfruits is prophetically important in dating the events from Yeshua's last Passover to the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

#### Bikkurim: A Season of Firstfruits

In examining these questions, we note that the *Bikkurim* (firstfruits) offering of Leviticus 23:10 is positioned in the Scriptures after the commandment to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 23: 4-8), and prior to the commandment to observe the firstfruits offering known as “The Feast of Weeks,” “*Shavuot*,” or “Pentecost” (Exodus 23:15-22). Because these two firstfruits offerings are separated by a fixed number of days, this writer views them as the two ends of a single feast season rather than as two independent feasts.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Bikkurim* is the Hebrew word for “firstfruits.”

<sup>22</sup> Rabbinical authority recognizes the first wave offering as the day to begin counting 50 days to *Shavuot*. It is referred to as “day one of counting the Omer” and is not considered to be a separate feast. Note that the two firstfruits wave offerings are different in nature. At the beginning of the 50-day period, the offering is a sheaf of grain. At the end of the period (*Shavuot*), the offering is two baked loaves made with flour and leaven (processed grain).



## About This Paper

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke present a consistent timetable of events from just before Yeshua's last Passover meal to his death and resurrection. The Book of John, however, presents what appears to be an inconsistency in dating the Passover, and will be dealt with in later sections of this paper. For clarity, this paper presents the chronology of Matthew and is supplemented by the other Gospels and *Torah* Scriptures as applicable. Verse quotations are from the New King James Version (with "Messiah" substituted for "Christ"), and references to calendar days and months are according to the Biblical lunar calendar.

This paper presumes that the word "day" as translated from the Scriptures most often refers to a biblical day that begins at sundown and ends at sundown,<sup>23</sup> whereas the civil day begins at midnight and ends at midnight. As a consequence, each Biblical day leads its corresponding civil day by a number of hours which varies according to the time of year. In some cases, "day" also means "daytime," i.e. the time of day which is light. Because each "day" begins when it is dark, "morning" begins during the dark hours, and "early in the day" includes the dark hours as well. Also, the word which is translated "evening" can mean any time from mid-afternoon to after sundown.

Throughout this paper, "*Nisan*" refers to the first month of the Biblical calendar year,<sup>24,25</sup> and *Bikkurim* refers to the first wave offering of firstfruits—the first day of a firstfruits season which ends with *Shavuot*.<sup>26</sup> Although only three views are presented, the reader should be aware that other chronologies have been theorized and published.

## Determining the Dates of Bikkurim and Shavuot

key to placing the Firstfruits season in time is our knowing which Sabbath is intended in Leviticus 23:11:

*"He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it."*

There are four Sabbaths in close proximity to the Feast of Unleavened Bread; they are:

- The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:7)
- The last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:8)

<sup>23</sup> For an explanation of a "sunrise to sunrise" theory, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection*, pp. 66-89, (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Biblical Perspectives, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the Biblical calendar, the first month of the Jewish calendar is *Tishri*. *Nisan* is then either the 7th or 8th month depending upon whether a given year has one or two months of *Adar*.

<sup>25</sup> For a concise explanation of the Jewish luni-solar calendar, see Arthur Spier, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, 3rd revised ed., pp. 1-22, (Jerusalem / New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> In Rabbinical literature, the word *bikkurim* does not refer to a particular day; it is rather a term that refers to firstfruits offerings generally. That notwithstanding, in his *Sefer HaMitzvot*, Maimonides identifies the "Offering of the Firstfruits" as his Positive Commandment #44.

- The weekly Sabbath which falls during the seven days of Unleavened Bread
- The weekly Sabbath which follows the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

The key Scripture to consider is:

*“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.” (Leviticus 23:15-16)*

The counting method prescribed for arriving at *Shavuot* would appear to eliminate the first two Sabbaths in the above list because, in order for the fifty-day count to end after the completion of seven Sabbaths (49 days), the count must begin the day after a weekly Sabbath (i.e. on a Sunday). As between the two remaining possibilities, this writer prefers the third on the list—the weekly Sabbath which falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This Sabbath is the more distinctive of the two in that it is always within the Feast period, whereas the Sabbath which follows the Feast has little distinction and would not warrant the recognition of being called “the” Sabbath.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it is shown later in this paper that only this Sabbath is consistent with Yeshua having risen on *Bikkurim* which, if true, has profound prophetic importance.

Because *Bikkurim* is defined relative to a weekly Sabbath, neither it nor *Shavuot* (which is defined relative to *Bikkurim*) falls on the same calendar date each year.<sup>28</sup>

### The Events of Nisan 14

*“Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb...”*  
(Mark 14:12)

On what calendar date was the Passover lamb killed? We find our answer in Exodus 12:6 which states:

*“Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the Congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.”*

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<sup>27</sup> Modern Rabbinical authority has proclaimed the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Nisan 15*) as the Sabbath referred to in Leviticus 23:11. This interpretation has required explaining away the seven Sabbath requirement of verse 15. Baruch A. Levine, in the *JPS Commentary to Leviticus*, p. 158, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), suggests several approaches, including defining “sabbath” as a week-long period rather than a single day. The Karaites, on the other hand, believed that the intended “Sabbath” was the seventh day Sabbath which immediately followed Passover. See *Menachoth (Men.)* 65a-65b, and also David M. Feldman, “Omer,” Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 12, p. 1383, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972).

<sup>28</sup> According to Rabbinical teaching, *Bikkurim* (day 1 of counting the *omer*) is always on *Nisan 16*, and *Shavuot* is always on *Sivan 6*. This can be verified by perusing the calendar pages of Arthur Spier, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, supra.

This rendering of the Hebrew as “twilight” in the NKJV and similar translations creates an ambiguity as to whether the lamb was killed prior to sundown in the late hours of *Nisan* 14, or after sundown in the early hours of *Nisan* 15. A literal reading of the Hebrew cures the ambiguity, however, for it states that the lamb was to be kept until the 14th day and killed “between the evenings.” It is clear, therefore, that the lamb was killed on *Nisan* 14.

An interesting question is raised by Matthew 26:17:

*“Now on the first day of the Feast of The Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Yeshua, saying to Him, “Where do you want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?””*

How did *Nisan* 14 come to be referred to as “the first day of Unleavened Bread” when Leviticus 23:6 clearly indicates that the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on *Nisan* 15?

An explanation is offered by Donna and Mal Broadhurst. In their book Passover Before Messiah and After,<sup>29</sup> they state that then as now, reference was commonly made to the entire Passover season.<sup>30</sup> For example, today’s rabbinical community speaks of the “Passover week” or the “eight days of Passover” as including Passover, the seven days of Unleavened Bread, and the added day celebrated in the Diaspora. Similarly, in the First Century, the term “eight days of Unleavened Bread” included *Nisan* 14 which was the day of preparation for the Passover—the day of killing the lamb and the day all leaven had to be removed from homes.

Biblical evidence for the correctness of this explanation can be deduced from Exodus 12:15 which states:

*“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your house.”*

Since Exodus 12:19 makes it clear that leaven has to be absent from one’s house during the seven days of Unleavened Bread (*Nisan* 15 to *Nisan* 21), the leaven must have already been removed by *Nisan* 15, and so the term “first day” in Exodus 12:15 must refer to *Nisan* 14.

Additional Biblical evidence connecting *Nisan* 14 with the first day of unleavened bread can be found in Exodus 12:18:

*“In the first month, on the 14th day of the month, at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the 21st day of the month until evening.”*

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<sup>29</sup> Donna and Mal Broadhurst, *Passover Before Messiah and After*, p. 43, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Shofar Publications, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> David H. Stern, *The Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 78, (Clarksville, Maryland: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992).

Since the 14th day of the month is the first day of a period for eating unleavened bread, one might conclude it to be the “first day of Unleavened Bread.”<sup>31</sup> But it would be wrong because the first day of the “Feast of Unleavened Bread,” can only be *Nisan* 15 (Leviticus 23:6).

### The Events of *Nisan* 15 and 16: Conventional and Alternative Views

Having determined that Yeshua’s Passover lamb was killed on *Nisan* 14, the next question is whether Yeshua ate the Passover just before dark at the end of *Nisan* 14, or after dark in the early hours of *Nisan* 15. Since all subsequent Passovers were modeled after the first Passover in Egypt, Exodus 12:8 demonstrates that Yeshua’s Passover had to be eaten after dark in the early hours of *Nisan* 15.<sup>32</sup>

*“Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.”*

The events which occurred before dawn on that day came in quick succession:

Prediction of betrayal	<b><u>Matthew 26</u></b>	<b>Verses</b>	21-25
The bread and wine	“	“	26-30
Prediction of Peter’s denial	“	“	31-35
Prayer in the garden	“	“	36-46
The arrest	“	“	47-56
The interrogation	“	“	57-68
Peter’s denial	“	“	69-75

When daylight came (still *Nisan* 15), the chief priests and elders conferred and decided to deliver Yeshua up to Pontius Pilate (Matthew 27:1-2). Later that day, Yeshua was sentenced to death and was nailed to a wooden stake. He died that same day before nightfall (Matthew 27:11-56).

Whether or not Yeshua was buried on *Nisan* 15 and which day of the week it was, is crucial to dating his resurrection. A key Scripture in defining the sequence of these events is Matthew 27:57-61:

*“Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Yeshua. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Yeshua. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb.”*

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**31** “By this period, “the Feast of Unleavened Bread” which immediately followed Passover in the Bible, had been extended in popular parlance to include the Passover itself.” Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 120, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993)

**32** The Israelites were released by Pharaoh after midnight of the same night that the lamb was eaten (Exodus 12:31-32). This was the first day of the very first Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:17) which, according to Scripture, was *Nisan* 15 (Leviticus 23:6).

The word for “evening” in the foregoing Scripture and also in Mark 15:42 is derived from the Greek word “*opsios*.” According to Thayer,<sup>33</sup> Vine,<sup>34</sup> and Arndt and Gingrich,<sup>35</sup> “*opsios*” can mean any time from late afternoon through the period after sundown. Which it is, determines the chronology of events from this point on.

**Conventional View:**<sup>36</sup> Burial was on *Nisan 15*, the 6th day of the week, and a guard was placed at the tomb on *Nisan 16*, the Sabbath.

According to this view, “*opsios*” in Matthew 27:57-58 means late afternoon. Yeshua could be buried on the 15th because there was adequate time left in the afternoon to both prepare and bury the body. This view is rounded out by another Scripture, John 19:14-16:

*“Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” But they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar!” So he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Yeshua and led Him away.”*

“*Preparation Day of the Passover*” is interpreted here to mean the 6th day of the week—the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath which fell within that week of Passover. This is a reasonable interpretation since it could not have meant the *Nisan 14* preparation which had already passed, and since the expression “preparation day” also appears in other John 19 verses (31 and 41-42) where, in this writer’s opinion, it refers to the sixth day of the week.<sup>37</sup> Those who hold this view, therefore, believe that Yeshua died and was buried on *Nisan 15*, the 6th day of the week,<sup>38</sup> and that *Nisan 16* was the Sabbath (Matthew 27:62-66).

**Alternative View: Burial was on *Nisan 16*, the 6th day of the week.**

According to this view, “*opsios*” in Matthew 27:57-58 and Mark 15:42 means evening just after sundown, when the date had changed to *Nisan 16*. Mark 15:42-43, is clear that Yeshua’s body was claimed when evening had come, on the “Day of Preparation” (6th day of the week), which therefore had to be in the early dark hours of *Nisan 16*. Since Yeshua was buried shortly thereafter, he was also buried on *Nisan 16*. Other Scriptures which confirm that Yeshua was buried on the “Day of

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *The New Thayer’s Greek—English Lexicon of the New Testament*, P. 471, (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1981)

<sup>34</sup> W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 374, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1984).

<sup>35</sup> “The context often makes it easier to decide just what time is meant, whether before or after sundown.” William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Walter Bauer), *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 606, (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 1957).

<sup>36</sup> There is no single “conventional” view. The “conventional view” presented in this paper is one which has more commonly accepted components than its counterpart “alternative view.”

<sup>37</sup> A minority view holds that these verses do not refer to the 6th day of the week, but to the *Nisan 14* day of preparation.

<sup>38</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, p. 47.

Preparation” are [John 19:41-42](#), [Luke 23:54-56](#), and [Matthew 27:59-62](#). Logically, the burial could have taken place in either the dark or the daylight hours. The dark hours better account for three nights spent in the tomb ([Matthew 12:39-40](#)).<sup>39</sup>

Because, in this view, the “Preparation Day” was not the day of Yeshua’s death, the foregoing interpretation of [John 19:14-16](#) must be thought to be incorrect and explainable in some other way.<sup>40</sup> Those who hold this view believe that Yeshua died on *Nisan* 15 (the 5th day of the week), was buried on *Nisan* 16 (the 6th day of the week), and that *Nisan* 17 was the Sabbath.

### The Events of *Nisan* 17: Conventional and Alternative Views

#### Conventional View: Resurrection on *Nisan* 17, the 1st day of the week, *Bikkurim*.

The conclusion that *Nisan* 17 was the first day of the week follows logically from the conventional view described in the previous section of this paper. [Matthew 28:1-6](#) tells how Yeshua’s tomb was found empty at dawn on the first day of the week, and of the appearance of an angel who declared that Yeshua had risen:

*“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Yeshua who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.’”*

Consequently, those who hold this view believe that Yeshua rose on *Nisan* 17, the first day of the week, during either the dark hours or the dawn of the very first light hour of the day ([Matthew 28:1-7](#); [Mark 16:2-6, 9](#); [Luke 24:1-3](#); [John 20:1-2](#)).<sup>41</sup> The dawn of the first light hour better accounts for three days spent in the tomb ([Matthew 12:39-40](#)) by allowing one to count three light periods which are “days” as distinguished from “nights.” Also, since *Nisan* 17 was the day after the weekly Sabbath which fell within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Yeshua had to have risen on the day of Firstfruits—*Bikkurim*.

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<sup>39</sup> An argument offered in support of the burial having occurred during the light hours of the 6th day of the week, is that [Luke 23:55-56](#) projects an urgency in having to bury Yeshua before the approaching Sabbath. Such haste would not have been necessary, had the Sabbath been a full twenty-four hours distant. On the other hand, the reference in Luke to the Sabbath drawing near could indeed have meant that the Sabbath was a full day away because, according to [Luke 23:55-56](#), the women who attended the burial had time to return to their homes and prepare spices and fragrant oils before the Sabbath.

<sup>40</sup> [John 19:31](#) is consistent with this view if Yeshua died on *Nisan* 15 just prior to sundown but was not noticed to have died until just after sundown when the date changed to *Nisan* 16. It was then that he was pierced with a sword, and his body was immediately claimed by Joseph of Arimathea (See in the context of [John 19:32-38](#)).

<sup>41</sup> Although the NKJV translates verse 1 “...while it was still dark...,” the Greek allows for it to be turning light with some darkness still upon the day. In order to capture this idea, Jay P. Green, Sr. translates [John 20:1](#) to read: “But on the first of the sabbaths Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, darkness yet being on it.” Jay P. Green, Sr., *The Literal Translation of The Bible* (1985) contained within *The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986).

### **Alternative View: A guard was placed at the tomb on *Nisan 17*, the Sabbath**

The conclusion that *Nisan 17* was the Sabbath follows logically from the alternative view described in the previous section. The events of *Nisan 17* are portrayed in Matthew 27:62-66:

*“On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, ‘Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.’ Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.”*<sup>42</sup>

This view raises two puzzling questions. First, if the Scripture meant to identify *Nisan 17* as Sabbath, why did it not say so instead of calling it “*the next day, which followed the day of preparation*”? Also, if *Nisan 17* was the Sabbath, why were the chief priests and Pharisees spending their Sabbath petitioning Pilate and securing Yeshua’s tomb instead of attending to Sabbath rest as commanded? Despite these unanswered questions, the chronology is supported by the weight of Scriptural evidence. Consequently, those who hold this view believe that the guard was placed at Yeshua’s tomb on *Nisan 17*, the Sabbath.

### **The Events of *Nisan 18*: Alternative View**

#### **Alternative View: Resurrection on *Nisan 18*, the 1st day of the week, *Bikkurim*.**

In the previous section of this paper, the alternative view demonstrated that the Sabbath immediately following Yeshua’s burial was *Nisan 17*. Therefore, the day after the Sabbath, the first day of the week when Yeshua arose (Mark 16:9) had to be *Nisan 18*, during either the dark hours or the dawn of the very first light hour of the day (Matthew 28:1-7; Mark 16:2-6, 9; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1-2).<sup>43</sup> The first light hour better accounts for three days spent in the tomb (Matthew 12:39-40). Moreover, since *Nisan 18* was the day after the weekly Sabbath which fell within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Yeshua had to have risen on the day of Firstfruits—*Bikkurim*.

### **John’s Timing of the Passover: Conventional and Alternative Views**

As was stated earlier, John presents an account which, on its face, appears to be inconsistent with the other Gospels:

*“Then they led Yeshua from Caiaphas to the praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.”* (John 18:28)

<sup>42</sup> References to Yeshua’s statements that he would rise in three days: Matthew 20:18-19; Mark 8:31, 10:33-34; Luke 18:32-33, 24:6-7.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 41.

The apparent inconsistency is that, according to the other Gospels, the Passover meal should already have been eaten earlier that day (during the dark hours of *Nisan* 15). Messianic Jewish author and scholar David H. Stern responds to this by suggesting that “the Passover” in [John 18:28](#) does not refer to the lamb which was eaten on *Nisan* 15, but to other food known as the *chagigah* (festival sacrifice) eaten on subsequent days of the Passover season.<sup>44</sup>

In substantial agreement with Stern, theologian Joachim Jeremias states:<sup>45</sup>

“It is true that paschal sacrifices (*hagigah*) were eaten during the seven days of the Feast (*Nisan* 15-21) sometimes called *pesah* in accordance with [Deuteronomy 16:2](#) and [2 Chronicles 35:7](#), so that [John 18:28](#) could be referred to *Nisan* 15.”

More dubious theories have also been advanced in scholarly circles of unbelief, such as that documented by anthropology professor Gillian Feely-Harnik. In his book *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity*,<sup>46</sup> he states that “some biblical scholars have argued that John altered the date to meet contemporary Jewish objections that none of these events—Yeshua's arrest, trial, and crucifixion—could have taken place on a holy day.”

None of these theories can be proven. What is important, however, is that plausible theories do exist which reconcile John with the other Gospels. In light of this fact and the overwhelming agreement of [Matthew](#), [Mark](#) and [Luke](#), there is no reason to doubt that Yeshua's last supper was a Passover meal and that it occurred on *Nisan* 15.

### **An Intriguing Speculative Third View**

Undocumented reports appear in the literature which suggest that two calendars may have been in use during the First Century.<sup>47, 48, 49</sup> In recognition of this possibility, it is herein speculated that the Pharisees followed one of these calendars, while Yeshua and his disciples followed the other. Normally, one does not publish such unsubstantiated theories. The reason for my doing so here is that if Yeshua followed a calendar whose date was one day later than each corresponding date on the

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<sup>44</sup> David H. Stern, pp. 206-207.

<sup>45</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, pp. 20-21, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966).

<sup>46</sup> Gillian Feely-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover In Early Christianity*, pp. 117-118, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

<sup>47</sup> “The contemporaries of Jesus celebrated the Passover meal on two successive days because the Sadducees and the Pharisees dated the beginning of *Nisan* differently.” Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 23, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966).

<sup>48</sup> “The Samaritans seem to have followed the northern calendar as distinct from that of the other Jews. In Hasmonean and Herodian times, the Sadducees and Boethusians each had their own calendar as did—subsequently in Talmudic and post-Talmudic periods—the Karaites and other less well-known sects.” The editorial staff, “Calendar,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5, p. 50-51, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972).

<sup>49</sup> In discussing various ways of counting to the destruction of the Temple, author Edgar Frank states: “...in those times the month of *Nissan* might have been defective or the reason was because the Karaites did not exactly follow the ruling of the Rabbanite calendar.” Edgar Frank, *Talmudic and Rabbinical Chronology: The Systems of Counting Years In Jewish Literature*, p. 42, (Jerusalem / New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1956).



Pharisees' calendar, and both calendars agreed on when the weekly Sabbaths occurred, then all of the difficulties previously encountered with the other views regarding John's timing and the term "preparation" instantly vanish.

The liberating aspects of this theory are twofold: First, as with the Alternative View, it clearly results in three calendar days or three dark and three light periods ("nights" and "days") for Yeshua's entombment. Second, it increases the span of events by one day, thereby creating a third "Day of Preparation," to-wit, one in preparation for the agreed seventh day Sabbath, and one in preparation for each of the calendars' first day of Unleavened Bread.

The timing of events of this view is produced by the same rationale as presented to form the Alternative View, except that Yeshua and his disciples would have considered each calendar date to be one day later than did the Pharisees. For consistency with the dates presented elsewhere in this paper, the Pharisaic calendar continues to be the frame of reference in this paper to which this theorized calendar of Yeshua is compared.

### **Speculative View: Yeshua's lamb killed on the Pharisees' *Nisan* 13**

Yeshua's calendar listed this day as *Nisan* 14, and therefore it was his Preparation Day for the Passover. This is consistent with the references in Matthew 26:17-19, Mark 14:12-16 and Luke 22:7-8, to the disciples preparing the Passover (There is no corresponding passage in John).

### **Speculative View: Yeshua ate the Passover, was arrested, tried and executed on the Pharisees' *Nisan* 14.**

The sequence of events is as presented in the Alternative View except that Yeshua's calendar listed this day as *Nisan* 15. To the Pharisees it was the Day of Preparation for their Passover, while to Yeshua, it was the first day of Unleavened Bread and therefore a Sabbath. It explains why John 18:28 can infer that the Pharisees had not yet eaten the Passover, for according to John 19 verses 14 and 31, it was their Day of Preparation and their time of Passover had not yet arrived. Furthermore, according to their reckoning, it was not yet the Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, and so they could lawfully arrest, interrogate and prosecute Yeshua.

### **Speculative View: Yeshua's body claimed and buried on the Pharisees' *Nisan* 15, the 6th day of the week.**

The sequence of events is as presented in the Alternative View except that Yeshua's calendar listed this day as *Nisan* 16. According to Matthew 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54 and John 19:42, this was the "Day of Preparation." Since Yeshua had already eaten the Passover a day earlier and the Pharisees were eating the Passover that very day (it was after sundown), the "preparation" mentioned in the foregoing Scriptures had to be referring to the approaching weekly Sabbath, and therefore this day had to be the 6th day of the week. In addition to its being the "preparation" day for the weekly Sabbath, the Pharisees considered it also to be a festival Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread. Yeshua's disciples did not, however, consider the day to be a festival Sabbath, and therefore could

lawfully engage in the work of burying him. Having now identified this day as the 6th day of the week, the position in the week of all previous and subsequent days can be determined with certainty.

### **Speculative View: Guard posted at tomb on the Pharisees' *Nisan* 16, the 7th day Sabbath.**

The posting of the guard is as presented in the Alternative View except that Yeshua's calendar listed this day as *Nisan* 17. Recognition of this day being the weekly Sabbath can be found in Matthew 27:62-66. The Pharisees probably justified the lawfulness of their sealing the tomb on the Sabbath by requiring the guard, who was a Gentile, to do the work.

### **Speculative View: Yeshua resurrected on the Pharisees' *Nisan* 17, the 1st day of the week, *Bikkurim*.**

The sequence of events surrounding the resurrection is as presented in the Alternative View except that Yeshua's calendar listed this day as *Nisan* 18. Both Yeshua's disciples and the Pharisees recognized it as being the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-9; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-18). As in the Alternative View, Yeshua arose during either the dark hours or the dawn of the very first light hour of the day.<sup>50</sup> The first light hour better accounts for three days spent in the tomb (Matthew 12:39-40) because it results in three light and three dark periods (three days and three nights). Moreover, since it was the day after the weekly Sabbath which fell within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as in the case of the other views, Yeshua had to have risen on the day of Firstfruits—*Bikkurim*.

### **The Pentecost Following Yeshua's Death**

Applying the fifty day count of Leviticus 23:15-16 to *Bikkurim* (either *Nisan* 17 or 18 in the year of Yeshua's death), we are able to determine that the first *Shavuot* (Pentecost) following Yeshua's death fell on the 7th or 8th day of the third month, known on the Rabbinical calendar as *Sivan* 7 or 8 respectively. It is important to remember, however, that these dates only apply to the *Bikkurim* and *Shavuot* immediately following Yeshua's death. Both of these days are defined from a weekly Sabbath and are not the same date on the calendar each year.<sup>51</sup>

### **Summary**

Taking into account that a civil day is measured from midnight to midnight and not sundown to sundown as in a Biblical day, three views of Yeshua's last hours can be presented:

#### **1. Conventional View:**

*Preparation for The Passover, Lamb Killed*

The daylight hours of *Nisan* 14; the 5th day of the Biblical week; Thursday of the civil week.

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<sup>50</sup> See footnote 41.

<sup>51</sup> According to the Book of Jubilees, *Shavuot* always falls on the 15th day of the third month. This follows from its use of a 364 day solar calendar. Jacob Licht, "Calendar," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5, p. 51, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972)

*The Passover Meal*

The early dark hours of *Nisan* 15; the 6th day of the Biblical week; Thursday of the civil week because we know, from tradition, that the meal occurred before midnight.

*His Arrest and Interrogation*

The middle dark hours of *Nisan* 15; the 6th day of the Biblical week; either Thursday or Friday of the civil week depending upon whether the events occurred before or after midnight.

*His Trial*

The daylight hours of *Nisan* 15; the 6th day of the Biblical week; Friday of the civil week.

*His Death*

The middle afternoon hours of *Nisan* 15; the 6th day of the Biblical week; Friday of the civil week.

*His Body Claimed*

The late afternoon of *Nisan* 15; the 6th day of the Biblical week; Friday of the civil week.

*His Burial*

The twilight hours of *Nisan* 15; the 6th day of the Biblical week; Friday of the civil week.

*The Guard Posted*

The light hours of *Nisan* 16; the 7th day (Sabbath) of the Biblical week; Saturday of the civil week.

*His Resurrection*

Either the dark hours or the very first daylight hour of *Nisan* 17 (*Bikkurim*); the 1st day of the Biblical week; either Saturday or Sunday, depending upon whether the event occurred before or after midnight.

*His Body Found Missing*

The daylight hours of *Nisan* 17; the 1st day of the Biblical week; Sunday of the civil week.

*Shavuot (Pentecost)*

*Sivan* 7 (the third month); the first day of the Biblical week; spans Saturday and Sunday of the civil week.

**2. Alternative View:**

*Preparation for The Passover, Lamb Killed*

The daylight hours of *Nisan* 14; the 4th day of the Biblical week; Wednesday of the civil week.

*The Passover Meal*

The early dark hours of *Nisan* 15; the 5th day of the Biblical week; Wednesday of the civil week because we know, from tradition, that the meal occurred before midnight.

*His Arrest and Interrogation*

The middle dark hours of *Nisan* 15; the 5th day of the Biblical week; either Wednesday or Thursday of the civil week depending upon whether the events occurred before or after midnight.

*His Trial*

The daylight hours of *Nisan* 15; the 5th day of the Biblical week; Thursday of the civil week.

*His Death*

The late daylight hours of *Nisan* 15 (almost evening); the 5th day of the Biblical week; Thursday of the civil week.

*His Body Claimed*

The early dark hours of *Nisan* 16; the 6th day of the Biblical week; Thursday of the civil week since it likely occurred before midnight.

*His Burial*

The dark hours of *Nisan* 16; the 6th day of the Biblical week; either Thursday or Friday of the civil week depending upon whether the event occurred before or after midnight.

*The Guard Posted*

The light hours of *Nisan* 17; the 7th day (Sabbath) of the Biblical week; Saturday of the civil week.

*His Resurrection*

Either the dark hours or the very first daylight hour of *Nisan* 18 (*Bikkurim*); the 1st day of the Biblical week; either Saturday or Sunday, depending upon whether the event occurred before or after midnight.

*His Body Found Missing*

The daylight hours of *Nisan* 18; the 1st day of the Biblical week; Sunday of the civil week.

*Shavuot (Pentecost)*

*Sivan* 8 (the third month); the first day of the Biblical week; spans Saturday and Sunday of the civil week.

**3. Speculative View:**

*Preparation for Yeshua's Passover, Lamb Killed*

The daylight hours of *Nisan* 13 (*Nisan* 14 according to Yeshua's calendar); the 4th day of the Biblical week; Wednesday of the civil week (Yeshua's Day of Preparation for Passover; no special significance to the Pharisees).

*Yeshua's Passover Meal*

The early dark hours of *Nisan* 14 (*Nisan* 15 according to Yeshua's calendar); the 5th day of the Biblical week; Wednesday of the civil week because we know, from tradition, that the meal occurred

before midnight; (Yeshua's Passover and Sabbath of Unleavened Bread; Pharisees' Day of Preparation for Passover).

*His Arrest and Interrogation*

The middle dark hours of *Nisan* 14 (*Nisan* 15 according to Yeshua's calendar); the 5th day of the Biblical week; either Wednesday or Thursday of the civil week depending upon whether the events occurred before or after midnight; (Yeshua's Passover and Sabbath of Unleavened Bread; Pharisees' Day of Preparation for Passover).

*His Trial*

The daylight hours of *Nisan* 14 (*Nisan* 15 according to Yeshua's calendar); the 5th day of the Biblical week; Thursday of the civil week; (Yeshua's Sabbath of Unleavened Bread; Pharisees' Day of Preparation for Passover).

*His Death*

The late daylight hours of *Nisan* 14 (almost evening) (*Nisan* 15 according to Yeshua's calendar); the 5th day of the Biblical week; Thursday of the civil week; (Yeshua's Sabbath of Unleavened Bread; Pharisees' Day of Preparation for Passover).

*His Body Claimed*

The early dark hours of *Nisan* 15 (*Nisan* 16 according to Yeshua's calendar); the 6th day of the Biblical week; Thursday of the civil week since it likely occurred before midnight; (Yeshua's disciples' Day of Preparation for 7th day Sabbath; Pharisees' Passover, Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, and Day of Preparation for 7th day Sabbath).

*His Burial*

The dark hours of *Nisan* 15 (*Nisan* 16 according to Yeshua's calendar); the 6th day of the Biblical week; either Thursday or Friday of the civil week depending upon whether the event occurred before or after midnight; (Yeshua's disciples' Day of Preparation for 7th day Sabbath; Pharisees' Passover, Sabbath of Unleavened Bread, and Day of Preparation for 7th day Sabbath).

*The Guard Posted*

The light hours of *Nisan* 16 (*Nisan* 17 according to Yeshua's calendar); the 7th day Sabbath of the Biblical week; Saturday of the civil week (Sabbath for both Yeshua's disciples and the Pharisees).

*His Resurrection*

Either the dark hours or dawn of the very first daylight hour of *Nisan* 17 (*Nisan* 18 according to Yeshua's calendar) (*Bikkurim*); the 1st day of the Biblical week; either Saturday or Sunday, depending upon whether the event occurred before or after midnight.

*His Body Found Missing*

Dawn of the very first daylight hour of *Nisan* 17 (*Nisan* 18 according to Yeshua's calendar) (*Bikkurim*); the 1st day of the Biblical week; Sunday of the civil week.

*Shavuot (Pentecost)*

*Sivan 7* (the third month) (*Sivan 8* according to Yeshua's calendar); the first day of the Biblical week; spans Saturday and Sunday of the civil week.

## Conclusion

This paper began with two premises, to-wit: (1) that the references to “firstfruits” found in the Old and New Covenant Scriptures are prophetically connected and not coincidental; (2) that understanding the offering of Firstfruits is prophetically important in understanding the sequence of events from Yeshua's last Passover to the arrival of the Holy Spirit. If the reader is satisfied that Yeshua rose from the dead on *Bikkurim*, the day of the firstfruits offering and the beginning of the firstfruits season, then the prophetic importance of Firstfruits has been demonstrated, and the premises upon which this paper is begun has been substantially supported. Furthermore, since God chose *Bikkurim* to be the day of Yeshua's resurrection, our annual remembrance of the resurrection is more authentic if celebrated on *Bikkurim* (which has no consistent calendar date) then on either the 18th or 19th day of *Nisan*, depending upon which chronology one adopts.

As to which of the three chronologies is more probable, this writer can only offer this observation: The Conventional View is easier to reconcile with [John 19:14-16](#) than the Alternative View, but the Alternative View results in Yeshua being in the tomb three light periods and three dark periods (days and nights), and therefore fulfills the three days and three nights required by [Matthew 12:39-40](#);<sup>52</sup> the conventional view does not as easily fulfill this requirement. The Speculative View produces perfect consistency with the Scriptures but is based upon an unverifiable hypothesis.

## A Final Observation

As one understands Yeshua's identity as “the lamb of God” and observes the remarkable parallels between the historical Passover sequence and Yeshua's final hours, one may wonder why, according to the Conventional and Alternative Views, Yeshua did not die on *Nisan 14*, the day that the Passover lamb was slain. A possible answer is that the killing of the Passover lamb was not the intended sacrifice. The noted Jewish theologian Abraham P. Bloch explains:

“The original paschal lamb (*pesach*) was not an “offering” (*Karban*) in the technical sense of the word. There were as yet no consecrated priests to perform the normal rites of an offering, nor was there any altar upon which to perform such rites.”<sup>53</sup>

Further supporting this analysis is the fact that, even after the priesthood was established, each year the Passover lamb continued to be killed by the lamb's owner and not by the Temple priest:

*“As a ritual it was unique in many respects. The lamb was slaughtered in the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan, prior to the commencement of the festival (Lev. 23:5). This was an exception*

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<sup>52</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, pp. 22-35..

<sup>53</sup> Abraham P. Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days*, p. 105, (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1978).

*to the general rule that all festival offerings are to be sacrificed on the day of the festival. Furthermore, the lambs were slaughtered by Israelites, and the priests poured the blood on the base of the altar. All other offerings were generally slaughtered by the priest.”<sup>54</sup>*

Although the killing of the lamb was, by its nature, a sacrifice, it was only incidental to the way the lamb and its blood were used. The blood was painted on the lintel and doorposts of the houses, and the lamb was eaten by the Israelites. Exodus 34:25 connects the sacrifice with the centrality of the eating:

*“You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning.”*

According to both the Conventional and Alternative Views, Yeshua died on *Nisan* 15—the same day that the Passover lambs of the Pharisees were eaten. According to the Speculative View, however, Yeshua died on *Nisan* 14, the very same day that the Passover lambs of the Pharisees were killed.

*See chart on next page.*

— March 3, 1997 NKJ

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<sup>54</sup> Abraham P. Bloch, p. 101.

### Chronology of Yeshua's Last Hours Three Views

		CONVENTIONAL	ALTERNATIVE	SPECULATIVE
Nisan 13	4th Day Wednesday		3rd Day Tuesday	
Nisan 14	5th Day Thursday		4th Day Wednesday	4th Day Wednesday
				Yeshua's lamb killed
				Yeshua's Passover meal Arrested & Interrogated
				Put on trial
Nisan 15	6th Day Friday	Lamb killed Ate Passover meal Arrested & Interrogated	Lamb killed Ate Passover meal Arrested & Interrogated	Died Body Claimed Buried
		Put on trial Died Body Claimed Buried	Put on trial Died	
Nisan 16	Sabbath Saturday		6th Day Friday	6th Day Friday
		Guard Posted	Body Claimed Buried	
Nisan 17	1st Day Sunday		Sabbath Saturday	Sabbath Saturday
		Resurrected	Guard Posted	Resurrected
Nisan 18			1st Day Sunday	
			Resurrected	



## ***Yom HaBikurim***

### **God’s Plan or a Coincidence?**

In the covenant given through Moses, God commanded the Israelites that when they came into the land God had given them, they were to sacrifice a sheaf of their *Bikurim*<sup>55</sup>—their first fruits of the harvest—as a wave offering:

Leviticus 23:9-10: “*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of its firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.’”*”

This was to be done on “the day after the Sabbath,” and was to be accompanied by a burnt offering of an unblemished male lamb:

Leviticus 23:11-12: “*He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the Lord.”*”

Then, in the New Covenant Scriptures, we read:

1 Corinthians 15:20-23: “*But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are Messiah’s at His coming.”*”

Are the references to “firstfruits” in both the New and Old Covenant Scriptures coincidental, or are they God’s intricate plan for relating events across the span of centuries? Did God, in his wisdom, plan for Yeshua’s resurrection to occur on *Yom HaBikurim*? Let us explore further.

Notice that the *Bikurim* (firstfruits) offering of Leviticus 23:10 is positioned in the Scriptures after the commandment to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 23: 4-8), and prior to the commandment to observe the firstfruits offering known as “The Feast of Weeks,” “*Shavuot*,” or “Pentecost” (Exodus 23:15-22). Because these two firstfruits offerings are separated by a fixed number of days (50), they may be viewed as the two ends of a single festival season rather than as two independent feasts.<sup>56</sup>

The key to placing the Firstfruits season on a timeline, is choosing the “Sabbath” that is intended in Exodus 23:11:

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<sup>55</sup> *Bikurim* is the Hebrew word for “firstfruits.”

<sup>56</sup> Rabbinical authority recognizes the first wave offering as the day to begin counting 50 days to *Shavuot*. It is referred to as “day one of counting the *omer*” and is not considered to be a separate feast. Note that the two firstfruits wave offerings are different in nature. At the beginning of the 50-day period, the offering is a sheaf of grain. At the end of the period (*Shavuot*), the offering is two baked loaves made with flour and leaven (processed grain).

*“He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after **the Sabbath** the priest shall wave it.”*

There are four “Sabbaths” in close proximity to the Feast of Unleavened Bread; they are:

- (a) The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:7)
- (b) The last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:8)
- (c) The weekly Sabbath which falls during the seven days of Unleavened Bread
- (d) The weekly Sabbath which follows the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Leviticus 23:15-16: *“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.”*

The Rabbinical Jewish community of today (as did the Pharisees) counts from the first Sabbath on the above list—the first day of Unleavened Bread; it is known as “counting the *omer*.”<sup>57</sup> This results in *Shavuot* falling on the same day of the Jewish calendar each year, but does not cause it to always fall on a “day after the seventh Sabbath.” Many Messianic Jewish communities follow the Sadducean practice of counting from the third Sabbath on the list—the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We choose this way of counting to comply with the additional requirement of Leviticus 23:15-16, that the fifty-day count ends on the day after a weekly Sabbath. By employing this method of counting, day 1 “of the *omer*” is always on *Yom HaBikurim* but, because *Yom HaBikurim* is defined relative to the weekly Sabbath, neither it nor *Shavuot* always fall on the same calendar date.<sup>58</sup>

I cannot (in this short paper) fully unpack the special significance of counting the *omer* in this way, but several important occurrences are tied to it, such as Yeshua’s resurrection on the first day of the week and the *Ruach HaKodesh*’s powerful appearance on earth fifty days later—both firstfruits of the New Covenant.

So, I return to my earlier question: “Did God, in his wisdom, plan for Yeshua’s resurrection to occur on *Yom HaBikkurim*?” I leave it for you to decide.

—March 27, 2007 NKJ

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<sup>57</sup> An *omer* is a measure of barley.

<sup>58</sup> According to the Rabbinical way of counting, *Bikurim* (day 1 of counting the *omer*) is always on *Nisan* 16, and *Shavuot* always falls on *Sivan* 6. This can be verified by perusing the calendar pages of Arthur Spier, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, 3rd revised ed., pp. 1-22, (Jerusalem / New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1986).

**M. Messianic Judaism**  
**Writings • Vol 2**



## **Intermarriage, Conversion and the Next Generation in Messianic Judaism**

This paper addresses the concerns among some Messianic Jews that if the non-Jews among them were to become Jews through conversion or their Jewish children were to marry Gentiles, it would not be long before Messianic Judaism would become so diluted of population and purpose as to lose its covenantal purpose. Some Messianic Jewish congregations have reacted to this by restricting Gentile participation, forbidding Gentile conversions, and discouraging Jew-Gentile intermarriages.<sup>59</sup>

### **Jewish and Gentile Believers**

According to Scripture, one is a Jew who can trace his or her ancestry to the patriarchs. Jewish identity is, therefore, inseparably linked to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose family (in later years) became known as Israel.

When Ruth (of the Bible) aspired to join Israel, she covenantally professed:

*Ruth 1:16: “Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”*

While being a Jew is primarily inherited, Ruth exemplifies (in my opinion) the process by which one can become a Jew through covenant conversion. Notice the two components of her profession: (1) acceptance of the God of Israel as her God, and (2) acceptance of the people of Israel as her people.

The apostle Paul adds to our understanding of being a Jew in his letter to the Romans:

*Romans 2:28-29: “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”*

*Romans 9:6: “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.”*

Some take these verses to mean that all believers in Yeshua are Jews because they are circumcised inwardly—of the heart. That would be a misinterpretation because Paul is speaking about men who are already circumcised in their flesh—in other words, men who are already considered by the community to be Jews. He is not challenging the legitimacy of their Jewish identity; he is merely saying that outward circumcision for the physical Jew is not enough.

These Scriptures notwithstanding, we must still ask: “Do Gentile believers become Jews merely by virtue of their faith in the Jewish Messiah?” Once again, we find our answer in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Speaking to Gentile believers he says:

*Romans 11:16-18: “For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree,*

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<sup>59</sup> The term “intermarriage” is used here to mean marriage between Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua. The Rabbinic Jewish community uses this term and the term “mixed marriage” to denote marriage between persons of two religions.

*were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.”*

Clearly, then, upon coming to faith in Yeshua, Gentiles are figuratively grafted into an olive tree belonging to Israel and become partakers of the root. They do not, however become part of the root, and so there remains a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers.

### **Corrective Covenant Conversion**

As in the *Tanakh*, the New Covenant Scriptures consider one a Jewish proselyte, one who can trace his ancestry to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or who is adopted into their family through covenant conversion (Acts 6:5). Conversion is of particular importance today because few of us who claim to be Jews can testify to having an unbroken Jewish ancestry past a few generations. That being the case, without there being de facto corrective conversion, none of us who call ourselves Jews can be sure that we are. When we think of Jewish conversion, most of us envision formal preparation followed by some kind of ceremony. While this may be the path for some, others of us who consider ourselves Jews from birth are Jews only because somewhere in our past God accepted the covenant intentions of a non-Jewish ancestor.

Hypothetical cases in point: Four circumcised men from the same congregation claim to be Jewish. The first man contends this because his mother claims to be Jewish although his father is not; the second because his father claims to be Jewish although his mother is not; the third because both of his parents claim to be Jewish but, unbeknown to him, his great grandfather on his mother’s side remained uncircumcised; the fourth because he was born of Gentile parents and adopted into a Jewish family who brought him up as a Jew. The first three men know nothing of their ancestry beyond the third generation, and the fourth man does not even know the identity of his parents. Their congregation considers them all to be Jews. Question: Is their congregation right in doing so? I believe it is right in doing so because these men’s innocent belief and declarations that they are Jews coupled with their walking it out covenantally causes any discontinuity of Jewish identity in their ancestry that may exist to be cured.

### **Gentiles Who Want to Become Jews**

Facilitating conversion for believers who know they are Gentiles but who want to become Jews is another matter entirely and should not be approved or facilitated without good reason. If a Gentile believer becomes a Jew he gains a significant identity (Romans 3:1-2), but loses an important identity as well—that of being a Gentile recipient of the oracles of God, living in community and serving in unity with his Jewish brothers (Ephesians 4:17-24; Romans 15:10).

Scripture is clear that Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua are “one in Messiah,” meaning that they are spiritually equal:

Galatians 3:28: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua.*”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The Hebrew-derived word “Messiah” is used here in place of the Greek-derived word “Christ” that is used in the New King James Version. “Yeshua” is substituted for “Jesus” because “Yeshua” is Messiah’s correct Hebrew name.

This witness of unity and equality with Jews cannot be achieved if significant numbers of Gentiles in Messianic congregations convert to become Jews.

The apostle Paul discouraged Gentile believers from converting to become Jews. Referring to circumcision and other matters, in his first letter to the Corinthians he states:

*1 Corinthians 7:17-20: “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but ‘keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.”*

And in Romans 11:29 he states:

*“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”*

One does not find the desire to become a Jewish proselyte nearly as often among Gentiles in Christian churches, as among those who fellowship in Messianic Jewish congregations. I believe that is because, in their historic search for identity, Messianic Jewish congregations have emphasized the value of being a Jew, but have taught relatively little about the value and calling of being a “Messianic” Gentile. As a consequence, some Gentiles in Messianic Jewish congregations are unclear about their role and value, and have come to believe that it is better to be a Jew.

Paul’s instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:17-20, to let each person remain in his original calling was intended as a general (but not an absolute) rule. We know this because Paul himself departed from the rule when he circumcised Timothy to legitimize Timothy’s ministry among Jews (Acts 16:1-3). In responding to requests for Gentile conversions, congregational leaders should follow Paul’s example of generally discouraging them but being willing to decide each case on its own merit.

### **Gentiles Who Want to Marry Jews (and visa-versa)**

As an increasing number of Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians fellowship together, it is inevitable that some of their young people will intermarry. There is nothing in Scripture which precludes this so long as the prospective Gentile partner is not a member of those seven nations that would influence Israel to idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Exodus 34:15-16); there are even rules in the *Torah* for intermarriage occurring subsequent to war (Deuteronomy 21:10-13). That notwithstanding, a problem suggests itself from the following well-known Scriptures:

*Genesis 2:18: “And the Lord said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’”*

*Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

*Genesis 1:28: “Then God blessed them and God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply...’”*

As we have already seen, Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles have callings that are somewhat different. How, therefore, can a husband and wife who are one flesh walk in these different callings? How can a wife who is her husband's helper, walk in a calling which is different from his? In being fruitful and multiplying, what is to become the identity and calling of their children? Can a parent train up a child in the way he should go (as a Jew) if that parent does not model both parents' Jewish calling?

While it is clearly easiest (and easiest on the children) when husbands and wives are either both Jews or both Gentiles, it is nevertheless possible for partners in mixed marriages to fulfill their respective roles if they share a common Messianic identity. By that I mean that in their respective Jewish or Gentile callings, each are committed to a biblically Jewish-rooted and thoroughly Messianic style of life. If they are so committed, one partner in the marriage will not pull against the other.

In our society, we stereotype the Gentile as being noticeably different from the Jew. Gentiles attend church on Sunday—Jews worship on the seventh day. Gentiles eat pork—Jews do not. Jews observe the commanded feasts—Gentiles outside of Messianic Jewish congregations typically do not (and so on). The fact is that differences such as these do not reflect the true biblical calling of the Gentile. If, according to [Romans 3:1-2](#), the Jew is called to preserve the oracles of God, then the Gentile's response and calling must be to receive these oracles and live according to them; how else can the Gentile be renewed in the spirit of his or her mind as Paul commands in [Ephesians 4:17-24](#)? And if Jews and Gentiles conduct their lives according to the same oracles of God, must not their lives and values be very similar? It is on this level of living a disciplined life in one's calling, that intermarriage works.

### **What About the Children?**

Being secure in our identity is important to everyone, but it is especially important to children because they are still developing their understanding of who they are in relation to others. We sometimes hear children of intermarriages refer to themselves as "half Jewish." That is an unfortunate departure from biblical accuracy because there is no such status; one is either a Jew or one is not.

So, how does a child born of intermarriage determine his or her status? Although intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles is biblically allowed and has occurred throughout the ages, in every intermarriage portrayed favorably in Scripture the Gentile partner joined Israel and the children of the marriage were counted as Jews. There is not one instance to the contrary. I believe that conversion to Israel should always be allowed where, for the sake of unity in an intermarriage, the Gentile partner seeks to join Israel.

### **The Process of Covenant Conversion**

Becoming a proselyte to Israel is not unlike becoming a citizen of an adopted country. One transfers citizenship from one's country of origin to one's country of choice and, once it is done, it cannot be undone. Ruth did this, but she did not receive her new citizenship the moment of her covenant profession. It awaited Israel's acceptance of her through Boaz and the Jewish elders receiving her in marriage ([Ruth 4:13](#)).

In a Twentieth Century Messianic Jewish congregation, Jewish elders represent Israel, with authority to either accept or decline the application of a Gentile believer who asks to become a Jewish



proselyte.<sup>61</sup> This requires a serious exercise of judgment on the part of both the elders and the applicant for all of the reasons previously mentioned. On the elders' part, they must discern whether or not God has truly called the applicant to transfer his or her "citizenship" and become a Jew. They should refuse to assist in the conversion if they believe the applicant has not been so called. The person desiring conversion must also discern whether or not God has called him or her to become a Jew. Since a Gentile believer in Yeshua has already accepted the God of Israel, all that is left is for him or her to ask to join, and be received by, the nation—not the political nation, but the people nation (of course, circumcision is required in the case of a male). This change in identity is permanent. A test that may be applied in a mixed marriage is for the Gentile partner seeking conversion to ask himself or herself: "If my husband (or wife) goes to be with the Lord before me, will I continue in my commitment to my adopted people and continue to consider myself a Jew?"

### **One More Example**

I have already alluded to the process by which Ruth became a Jewish proselyte. Although it lacks detail, another example of conversion is found in Esther 8:17:

*"In every province and city where the king's order and decree arrived, the Jews had gladness and joy, a feast and a holiday. Many from the peoples of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews had overcome them."*

I repeat that the matter of Jewish conversion is controversial, and not all who have studied and written on the subject would agree with what I have written.

—March 3, 2000, NKJ

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**61** If a congregation's eldership has no Jewish members, it must seek the assistance of Jewish elders from another congregation.

## Messianic Judaism and the Ideal Messianic Jewish Congregation

Messianic Jewish belief and practice is not entirely uniform throughout the Messianic Jewish movement. What follows are my views of the ideal

- We believe that Yeshua is our fully divine Messiah who was made flesh for a season in order to sacrifice himself for our sins, so that whomsoever of us repents and receives him as Lord, may have eternal life with God.
- We look to the Bible, both the *Tanakh* and the *K'tvey B'rit Chadashah* (New Testament) as inerrant authoritative guidance from God. We seek interpretive application of the Scriptures as well as prophetic guidance from the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit) who indwells all “born-again” believers In Yeshua.
- We consult rabbinic literature (e.g. the *Talmud*, *Midrashim*, commentaries, etc.) for cultural information and to understand Jewish points of view and practices, but we do not consider rabbinical literature to be inspired or authoritative in the same way as Scripture.
- We put a high priority on maintaining our relationship with God through prayer that is mediated by the *Ruach HaKodesh*. We believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 28 are operative today, as are the five-fold ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11-12.
- We consider the land of Israel to be our home of prophetic destiny, and we consider our homeland in the diaspora to be a kind of ambassadorial outpost from where we serve both God and our fellow man.
- Messianic Jewish congregations such as ours are generally populated by both Jews and Gentiles who, while retaining their respective identities, worship and serve together in unity and spiritual equality. We refer to the Jews in our congregations as “Messianic Jews,” and to Gentiles who are permanently committed to Jewish community and a Jewish way of life as “*K'rovei Yisrael*” (close family members of Israel). We use the term “Christian” for our Gentile brother and sister believers in Yeshua who identify more closely with Christian culture than with Jewish culture. Marriage between Jews and *K'rovei Yisrael* within our congregations is common, and the children they produce are considered fully Jewish.
- Although we acknowledge that there are certain covenantal obligations unique to Jews, we place no limitations on Gentiles regarding congregational participation, leadership, or other aspects of community life.
- Our congregations are led by a senior leader (usually a rabbi) who is accountable to a plurality of elders. The elders are, in turn, ideally accountable to an apostolic network of five-fold gift ministers (Ephesians 4:11-12) and to their congregation’s members and other leaders that include *shamashim* and leaders of *chavurot*.
- Disputes (should they arise) among our congregational members that are not resolved privately are referred for mediation and/or adjudication to our congregations’ elders (pursuant to Matthew 18:15-17), and the elders’ decisions can be appealed to our respective apostolic networks.

- Our congregations provide us with a place in which to enjoy Messianic Jewish community life. They also provide us with spiritual protection through plural elder oversight, biblical teaching, discipleship training, supportive fellowship, and assistance in fulfilling our respective Jewish and Gentile covenantal responsibilities. They are also platforms from which we study the Old and New Covenant Scriptures, worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, pray together, serve one another, and seek to bless those on the outside through preaching the *B'sorah* (Gospel) of Yeshua, and through giving service of various kinds.
- We employ elements of the Hebrew *Siddur* (Jewish prayer book) in our prayers, and we pray spontaneously as well. Our services loosely follow a Jewish liturgical format but include New Covenant elements as well such as the “*Shulchan Adonai*” (the Lord’s Table) and contemporary musical praise and worship. The *Sh'ma* and *Amidah* prayers are standard, and on *Shabbat* mornings, we read from the *Torah* and other parts of the Bible in a traditional ceremony known as a *Torah* service. The *Kaddish* is recited as a memorial prayer, and most of our services conclude with a biblical message and *Aleinu*.
- The practices in our homes and synagogues are culturally Jewish. We keep *Shabbat*, observe the commanded Feasts and Holy Days, abide by the biblical food laws (some of us keep the rabbinical food laws as well), and keep such other biblical commandments as are applicable in the New Covenant. When it appears that we cannot or should not do so, we seek the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* for interpretive guidance.
- We seek to internalize and practice God’s standard of Holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:16).
- Our communities observe the cycle of Jewish life, to-wit, *b'rit milah* (covenant circumcision), *pidyon ha-ben* (redemption of the firstborn Jewish male), *b'nei mitzvah* or their equivalent (coming of age recognitions), *chupah* (marriage), burial following death, *shivah* (mourning), and *yahr-zeiten* (annual remembrances).
- We do not celebrate the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, but we do recount the history of Yeshua’s birth and the biblical importance of his resurrection (respectively) during those times of the year. We do not display Christian symbols such as crosses, pictures of “Jesus,” etc., in our homes or synagogues for cultural reasons.
- Our congregations seek to be active in Jewish affairs. We support the Nation of Israel and oppose its enemies. We do not always agree with Israel’s political decisions, but we support its right to defend itself and to exist as the biblically prophesied Jewish homeland.
- Our primary outreach is to our Jewish people who do not yet know Yeshua as Messiah. We also seek to fulfill God’s expectation of us (as a Jewish community) to be a light to the Gentiles. This includes helping our Christian brothers to rediscover and learn about Christianity’s connection to the Jewish people that was lost in the course of the Christian Church’s early history.

—November 16, 2016, CJB

## **Messianic Judaism Is Not for Everyone**

I am not of the opinion that Messianic Judaism is God's preferred religious expression for everyone. Some Gentile believers are called to a lifelong affiliation within Messianic Judaism (we call these *K'rovei Yisrael*), and they have naturally brought their children up in it. But, as their children become older, they develop their own sense of calling (as all must do) and some have chosen the Christian Church and Christian style of life instead. It is understandably disappointing to parents when children choose a different way of expressing their faith, but it should not be too much of a disappointment if their children retain godly values, join biblically committed churches, marry believers, and otherwise follow the Lord. Ideally, Gentile believers seeking a Christian church should select one that teaches correctly about biblical practices and the Church's connection to Israel and the Jewish people.

It is not, however, the same for Jewish parents and their children. For them, affiliation with a Messianic Jewish congregation should be considered essential because that is where we find Jewish believers living out the covenants that are intended primarily for Jews. Even "churched" Jews, where possible, should at least maintain a secondary affiliation with a Messianic Jewish congregation.

In cases where attending a Messianic Jewish congregation is not geographically possible, Jewish believers (also Gentile believers who perceive the need) can communicate (sometimes even affiliate) with a Messianic Jewish congregation at a distance in order to maintain a pastoral connection and potential for Messianic Jewish fellowship. In metropolitan areas such as ours, Jewish believers have the option of driving a little further, and affiliating with whichever Messianic Jewish congregation he or she finds especially pleasing. That is entirely acceptable, and transfers of membership among our various local congregations are not uncommon. What is not acceptable, however, is for a Jewish believer (of any age) to leave the assembly of Jewish believers altogether, and exclusively immerse himself or herself in a church and lifestyle that does not make it possible to pass on his or her Messianic Jewish identity to the next generation.

Jewish and Gentile parents should understand these things, take them to heart, and bring up their children with appropriate biblical expectations for their future.

—February 24, 2013, CJB

## Outline Explaining Messianic Judaism

### The Way It Was in the First Century A.D..

- In the First Century, a minority of the Jewish community believed that Yeshua (Jesus) was the Messiah and they followed him.
- Belief that God was going to send a Messiah to save Israel was not foreign to Jews of the First Century and earlier. In fact, because certain Scriptures seemed to speak of a conquering Messiah and other Scriptures of a suffering Messiah, the idea developed that God was going to send two Messiahs.
- Yeshua was born in a miraculous way and, when he grew to manhood, he was recognized by many in the Jewish community as being the long-awaited Messiah; he was, however rejected by the Jewish leaders.
- Jews who followed Yeshua in First Century were not called “Messianic”; they were simply referred to as “Jewish followers of Yeshua.” Later terms that developed were “The Way,” and “Nazarenes.”
- Yeshua was a Jew, and never heard the name “Jesus.” All of his first followers, including those whom he personally disciplined, were Jews as well.
- Jews in the First Century who followed Yeshua thought of themselves merely as Jews who had found their Messiah. Gentiles in the First Century who followed Yeshua considered themselves to have become part of a Jewish sect.
- Yeshua was arrested by Jewish leaders, brought before the *San Hedrin* (Jewish high court), and accused of blasphemy. When the court could not convict, they brought Yeshua to the Roman authorities who found him guilty of treason and executed him in the traditional manner of the time.
- The New Covenant Scriptures reveal that Yeshua’s execution was God’s plan to sacrifice his only begotten son (an innocent “lamb”) to procure forgiveness for all who would repent of their sins and adopt Yeshua’s sacrifice as their own. The Temple sacrifices of innocent unblemished lambs and goats covered sin over, whereas Yeshua’s sacrifice accompanied by repentance resulted in a complete remission of sin and eternal life.
- In those early days, no one doubted that Jewish believers remained Jewish; in fact, the argument was whether Gentiles who were not circumcised could be saved.
- Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Yeshua met and prayed in homes but also attended synagogue, and participated in Temple affairs until the Temple was destroyed by Rome in 70 CE. Some Gentiles did so as well, to the extent that they were allowed.
- There was no New Testament in the First Century—only the *Tanakh* (Old Testament); the New Testament writings were assembled and canonized later.

### Things Are Different Today.

- Today’s Judaism is different from the Judaism of the First Century and earlier..

- First Century (i.e. Mosaic) Judaism can also be called “Temple Judaism” because its basis was sacrifice in the Temple, conducted by the Levitical priests. Today, the Temple is long-gone, and the Levitical Priesthood is not functioning.
- Today’s “Judaism” is really several “Judaisms” that have things in common and also differences. Among them are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Chasidic, Karaite, Messianic, and others..
- No Judaism today is the same as the Temple Judaism of old. The Rabbis in today’s traditional Jewish communities (Messianic Jewish congregations excluded) teach that blood sacrifice is conceptually and historically important, but not essential and not required by God today. They maintain that studying the sacrifices as they are described in the Talmud, praying during the times of the Temple’s sacrifices, and performing good works, are sufficient.
- Only Messianic Judaism retains an insistence on our continuing need for a blood sacrifice. For us, however, the authorized sacrifice is no longer an animal slaughtered in the Temple; it is Yeshua the Messiah, who sacrificed himself for us once and forever.
- Rabbinical Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform) teaches that an Oral Law was given to Moses along with the written law (the *Torah*), and that both it and the Oral Law are inspired. This “Oral” Law was written down over several centuries and came to be known as the *Mishnah*. The *Mishnah* was later joined with rabbinical content known as the *Gemarah*, and the two together came to be known as the *Talmud*.
- Rabbinical Judaism believes that Rabbis are invested by God with authority to interpret and, even on occasion, to countermand the *Torah*.
- Messianic Judaism does not believe that there is an inspired Oral Law, and does not believe that Rabbis can countermand *Torah*. It therefore does not treat the *Talmud* as inspired.
- Messianic Judaism also differs from Rabbinical Judaism by its belief in Yeshua, and in there being a New Covenant whereby we can relate to God with great intimacy through the Holy Spirit
- Messianic Jews are serious believers in God and in the Holy Scriptures, which we understand to include both the Old Testament (*Tanakh*) and the New Testament (*K’vey B’rit Chadashah*)
- Messianic Jews consider obedience to God’s commandments to be of great importance. In that regard, we rely on the *Ruach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit) for help in interpreting and applying *Torah* (the teaching of God) to the conditions of today’s world.
- Various circumstances in history have resulted in a centuries-old break in relationship between Messianic Jews and Jews who do not follow Yeshua
- Many Rabbinical Jews today refuse to accept that Messianic Jews are still Jews. Jews are often taught from childhood that we cannot believe in “Jesus” and also be Jewish, so if a Jew comes to faith in “Jesus,” he or she is no longer a Jew. It is changing slowly, but in many quarters is still the case.

### **How It All Happened**

- In the beginning when God created the first people, Jews had not yet been defined. The time of Noah—still no Jews.

- The time of Abraham—still no Jews. Abraham is not the first Jew (as some are fond of saying), but rather the first in a sequence of three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) through whom God’s covenant (given to Abraham) was conveyed. The first Jew, therefore, was Jacob.
- The covenant given to Abraham was: (1) Abraham to become a great and mighty nation and a father of many nations; (2) his name to be great (3) many descendants; (4) land; (5) circumcision; (6) blessings; (7) all people on earth blessed through him; (8) people cursed who are against him. (Genesis 12:3).
- The covenant made with Abraham was renewed through Isaac and again through Jacob. Jacob’s name was changed by God to Israel, and his descendants were thereafter called Israelites and (more recently) Jews.
- Jacob had twelve sons who were the original “children of Israel,” a designation that became synonymous with “the Jewish people” or “being Jewish.”
- An Israelite (a Jew) is anyone who traces his lineage to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the lineage that defines who is a generational carrier and conveyor of the covenant that God made with Abraham—a covenant of circumcision, blessing, and responsibility.
- The Gentile nations of the world are intended beneficiaries of the Abrahamic Covenant because God made Israel into a nation of priests to bring blessing to the world (Galatians 3:8-9).
- Later on, God brought Israel its ultimate High Priest, Messiah Yeshua of Nazareth, who was not only High Priest to Israel, but also to the Gentiles of the world (Hebrews 5:9-10).
- Gentile believers in Yeshua joined their Messianic Jewish counterparts in a New Covenant Priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:9-10), the “Commonwealth of Israel” (Ephesians 2:12 NKJ).

### **Back to Jacob!**

- Jacob (Israel) was an old man when God saved his family from famine by bringing them into Egypt under the protection of Joseph who was, by then, second in charge of the Egyptian government.
- Later, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites, and God liberated them by miraculously bringing them through the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses and his brother Aaron. Once on the other side, they were directed toward a land they would eventually possess, that was promised to them through Abraham.
- Gentile believers in God accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt, and the “mixed multitude” was led toward Mt. Sinai.
- After a diversion of wandering through the desert, the mixed multitude arrived at Mount Sinai where the Israelites (as well as the Gentiles who accompanied them) received a complete set of commandments or laws that established their government that included a Levitical Priesthood headed up by Aaron and his sons.
- Upon arriving at Mount Sinai, the wandering Israelites were solely tribal in that they had no centralized government, laws, or land. Although they had not yet arrived at or taken possession of the

land, it was theirs by promise. Therefore, once they received the *Torah*, they had land, a structured government, priests, prophets, and a Tabernacle (later a Temple) in which they could conduct sacrifices. In fact, they had everything they needed for Israel to be a nation. Hence, we can date the beginning of the Nation of Israel from when the Commandments were given at Mt. Sinai.<sup>62</sup>

- We can also count this time as the beginning of Judaism (the religion of the Jews), because many of the commandments given by God directed the Israelites in how they were to relate to God, including how to cover over their sins through animal sacrifices. We can also count this time as the beginning of Judaism.
- Who is a Jew has to do with ancestry and covenant—not belief. A Jew is anyone whose lineage is traceable to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and, if a male, is circumcised. A Jew can believe many things (even things that displease God), and he remains a Jew. “Judaism,” on the other hand, is a structured belief—a religion born of the covenant between God and the Israelites that began at Mt. Sinai and that has come to be known as the Mosaic Covenant. The religion of Judaism has, of necessity, changed over the centuries.
- The term “Jew” is a designation that today refers to all children of Israel, but is historically derived from the southern Kingdom of Judah. After the reign of King Solomon, the nation of Israel was split into two Kingdoms—the northern Kingdom was called Israel and the southern Kingdom was called Judah. The northern Kingdom was defeated and its inhabitants were dispersed by the Assyrians. Thus, only the kingdom of Judah was left with which the descendants of Israel could identify in terms of continuous land ownership in the area that we now call *Eretz Yisrael*.

### **A New Covenant was Prophesied and is Being Fulfilled**

- Over the course of history, Israel drifted away from God several times by being disobedient to his Laws and violating the Covenant He made with them (the Mosaic Covenant).
- God punished Israel for its disobedience but, in his compassion and grace, God decided to give Israel a new and better covenant—one where God’s laws would be written on their hearts and minds. This was prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34)).
- This prophecy of a New Covenant was partially fulfilled when God sent his only begotten son Yeshua, our Messiah and savior, to sacrifice himself for the sins of Israel and the world. His sacrifice happened at Passover time and the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) was sent soon thereafter.
- Final fulfillment of the New Covenant awaits Yeshua’s return and fulfillment of God’s promises that all Jewish people will come to know Yeshua, have their sins forgiven, and be restored to their land.
- Even in advance of the New Covenant’s fulfillment, Yeshua’s sacrifice provides salvation (including eternal life) to anyone who receives him as Lord. This is not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles.
- Yeshua died and was resurrected, and when he returned to his Father in Heaven, he sent back the Holy Spirit to be our counselor, comforter, and communicator to both him and the Father. This happened during the Feast of *Shavuot* (“Pentecost” in Christian vernacular).

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<sup>62</sup> Some date the beginning of the nation from when the Israelites left Egypt.



- It is through the Holy Spirit living within us that God's Law is written on our hearts, thereby enabling us to know God intimately, and thus was the Jeremiah prophecy fulfilled.

### **The Origins of Rabbinical Judaism and Christianity**

- In the First Century there was no religion called "Messianic Judaism," "Rabbinical Judaism," or "Christianity." There was just Judaism and heathenism.
- The First Century began with the institution and religion of Judaism being protected by the Romans, but that changed when, in 70 AD, Rome destroyed the Temple of God, and the Jews had to flee Jerusalem. Thus began the dispersion of Jews throughout the world, a phenomenon known as the "Diaspora."
- Jews who believed in Yeshua were among those who fled, but Gentile believers were able to stay in safety so long as they did not profess connection with the Jews.
- In 132 to 136 CE or AD, the Jews mounted a military rebellion against Rome under a man named Bar Kochba who claimed to be the Messiah.
- The Jewish believers in Yeshua would not follow Bar Kochba, nor join the revolt, because they recognized that his messianic claims were false.
- The revolt failed and many Jewish men died. This exacerbated the already existing alienation between Jewish believers and Jewish unbelievers in Yeshua because the unbelievers blamed the believers for contributing to the revolt's failure through their non-participation. They were called traitors, and that label of Jewish followers of Yeshua persists in the wider Jewish community even until today.
- Meanwhile, something else was happening among the Jews. With the destruction of the Temple, Judaism was thrown into a crisis because continued Jewish practice required animal sacrifices that could no longer be done.
- A prominent Pharisee and teacher named Yochanan ben Zakkai, based on 1 Samuel 15:22, influenced other Jewish leaders of the day to adopt the notion that God no longer wanted sacrifice but, instead, wanted obedience to Torah and the doing of good works. Thus, was born a new Jewish religion that, over time, embraced these substitute values as well as the Oral Law (the *Talmud*). This new Jewish religion is what is known today as Rabbinical Judaism in its various forms.
- Meanwhile, other things were happening among the Gentile believers in and near Rome. When Constantine became emperor, he confessed personal belief in Yeshua, which enabled the formation of a new and protected religion of Gentiles who believed similarly. Jews were not among those who were protected, even if they believed in Yeshua, so it continued to be dangerous for Gentile believers to characterize their faith as being a sect of Judaism.
- Over time, the Gentile followers of Yeshua (now called "Christians") adopted practices that were designed to distance themselves from their Jewish brothers. They discontinued many of their former Jewish practices, and veiled certain Jewish practices that they did keep, such as the use of incense, an Altar (no longer for sacrifice), the seven-branch *menorah*, an annual cycle of readings, blessings before and after reading Scriptures, and the eternal light.

- In the process, the new Christians departed from the Mosaic Law in some major ways and adopted new practices. They included establishing Sunday to replace *Shabbat* as their major day of worship, and establishing *Pascha* (Easter) as the day of resurrection.
- Continued denial by the Christians of their Jewish roots eventually led to their persecuting Jews which, in turn, resulted in an even a further separation between Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua.

### **The Lost Jewish Connections**

- When the Roman Christians separated themselves from their Jewish brethren, they cut themselves off from their historical and spiritual heritage in Israel.
- The result, even today, is that many Christians think they have no connection to the Jewish people other than historical.s.
- Christianity has falsely taught that Yeshua converted from being Jewish to being Christian, that the apostles were converts to Christianity, and that Peter (whom the Catholics call St. Peter) was the first Roman Catholic Pope.s.
- Since the “Christian” Bible talked mainly about Jews, the Christian leaders found it expedient to develop theologies to show that Christians were, in a sense, “replacement Jews”—the new people of God, and that God had washed his hands of his former connection to Israel because the Jews rejected and then killed “Christ.”s.
- The Christian Church established itself as the center of the Body of Believers and contended that whenever a Jew came to faith in Yeshua, he stopped being a Jew and became a Christian. This became the same understanding held within the Jewish Community.s.
- One of the challenges God has given Messianic Judaism is to show both Christians and Jews alike that this is not so, and that the truth explained in Romans 11 is that, when Gentiles become believers in Yeshua, they are grafted into a life-long connection with the Jewish People, Israel.s.
- Similarly, when Jews who have rejected Yeshua regain their faith, they are re-grafted in such a way that the Body of Believers is really centered in Israel—not in Gentile Christianity (Romans 11:1-27).
- Although Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua are brothers in the faith and reside on the same Romans 11 olive tree (the tree that belongs to the Jews), Jews remain Jews, and Gentiles remain Gentiles.

### **The Persecutions Continues**

- The Roman Catholic Church (the first Christian Church) was born out of the separation and political chaos previously described.
- Gentile believers in Yeshua began referring to themselves as “Christians,” while Jewish believers in Yeshua dropped out of sight when they fell into disfavor with both the Church and the Jewish establishment.

- Persecution of the Jews at the hands of Christians ensued and continued for centuries—right through the Middle ages when, ironically, they were received and protected for a time by the Spanish Moslems who came under similar persecution by the Christians.
- A major Roman Catholic Inquisition in the Iberian Peninsula of Spain and Portugal resulted in many Jews converting to Christianity—some willingly and some not willingly.
- Some Jews confessed Yeshua publicly, but continued to practice Judaism in secret. These became known as *marranos*.
- Many Jews fled the European continent to begin a new life in the Americas. Among them were Jews who believed in Yeshua, and also those who did not. When they settled in the New World (principally in Central and South America), the Roman Catholic Inquisition followed them, and many hid their Jewish identities—even from their children.
- The result of this is that there are, today, many Central and South Americans who are discovering that they are, in fact, Jews or have Jewish ancestry.

### **Messianic Judaism Reappears**

- At about the same time that Israel became a modern state in 1948, Jews who secretly believed in Yeshua but had thus far kept it hidden began to find each other.
- Jewish believers in Yeshua naturally began to fellowship and gather in homes for prayer, but they experienced confusion about who they were (or had become), because both normative Judaism and the Christian Church were teaching that Jews who confessed Yeshua were no longer Jews.
- An evangelistic effort of some Christian Churches arose, whereby the churches began to sponsor Jewish “style” services under their oversight. This movement became known as “Hebrew Christianity,” and its admitted purpose was to make Jewish “converts” and bring them into their churches.
- Jewish (but culturally Christianized) believers who attended these Hebrew-Christian meetings eventually developed discomfort with what seemed to them to be shallowness in considering Jewish ways of life and worship as mere portals to Christianity. They began to see Jewish life as legitimate for Jews to embrace, and they became increasingly convicted that Jews who receive Messiah Yeshua remain Jews.
- This brought them into conflict with Hebrew Christianity, and Messianic Judaism was thus born.
- Messianic Judaism is not really a good term for the movement because all Judaism is “messianic” in the sense that it believes in a coming Messiah. However, most of Judaism does not believe that the Messiah has already come or that he is Yeshua.
- Messianic Judaism has grown to being international, with Messianic synagogues having been established in many countries of the world, including in Israel.

### **What Modern Messianic Jewish Life is Like**

Messianic Jewish belief and practice is not entirely uniform throughout the Messianic Jewish movement. What follows are my views that are shared by many:

- We believe that Yeshua is our fully divine Messiah, who was made flesh for a season in order to sacrifice himself for our sins, so that whomsoever of us repents and receives him as Lord, may have eternal life with God.
- We look to the Bible, both the *Tanakh* and the *K'tvey B'rit Chadashah* (New Testament) as inerrant authoritative guidance from God. We seek interpretive application of the Scriptures and prophetic guidance from the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit), who indwells all “born again” believers In Yeshua.
- We consult rabbinic literature (e.g. the *Talmud*, *midrash*, commentaries, etc.) for cultural information and to understand Jewish points of view and practices, but we do not consider rabbinic literature inspired as we do Scripture.
- We put a high priority on maintaining our relationship with God through prayer that is mediated by the *Ruach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit). We believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 28 are operative today, as are the five-fold ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11-12.
- We consider the land of Israel to be our home of prophetic destiny, and we consider our homeland in the diaspora to be a kind of ambassadorial outpost from where we serve both God and our fellow man.
- Messianic Jewish congregations are generally populated by both Jews and Gentiles who, while retaining their respective identities, worship and serve together in unity and spiritual equality. We refer to the Jews in our congregations as “Messianic Jews,” and to Gentiles who are permanently committed to Jewish community and a Jewish way of life as “*K'rovei Yisrael*” (close family members of Israel). We use the term “Christian” for brother and sister believers in Yeshua who identify more closely with Christian culture than with Jewish culture. Marriage between Jews and *K'rovei Yisrael* within our congregations is common, and the children they produce are considered fully Jewish.
- Although we acknowledge that there are certain covenantal obligations unique to Jews, we place no limitations on Gentiles regarding congregational participation, leadership, and other aspects of synagogue life.
- Our congregations are led by a senior leader (rabbi) who is accountable to a plurality of elders. The elders are, in turn, accountable to an apostolic network of five-fold gift ministers (Ephesians 4:11) and congregational leaders. Disputes among our congregational members that are not resolved privately are referred for mediation and/or adjudication (pursuant to Matthew 18:15-17) to our congregation’s elders, and their decision can, in turn, be appealed to our apostolic network.
- Our congregations provide us with a place in which to enjoy Messianic Jewish community life. They also provide us with spiritual protection through elder oversight, biblical teaching, discipleship training, and assistance in fulfilling our respective Jewish and Gentile covenantal responsibilities. They are also platforms from which we are able to serve others and preach the *B'sorah* (Gospel) of Yeshua.

- We employ elements of the Hebrew *Siddur* (Jewish prayer book) in our prayers, and we pray spontaneously as well. Our services loosely follow a Jewish liturgical format and include New Covenant elements as well, such as the “*Shulchan Adonai*” (the Lord’s Supper) and contemporary musical praise and worship. The *Sh’ma* and *Amidah* prayers are standard and, on *Shabbat* mornings, we read from the *Torah* and other parts of the Bible in a traditional ceremony known as a *Torah* service. The *Kaddish* is recited as a memorial prayer, and most of our services conclude with a biblical message given by a rabbi or elder.
- The practices in our homes and synagogues are culturally Jewish. We keep the Sabbath, observe the commanded Feasts and Holy Days, abide by the biblical food laws (some of us keep the rabbinical food laws as well), and keep such other biblical commandments as are applicable in the New Covenant. When it appears that we cannot or should not do so, we seek the *Ru’ach HaKodesh* for interpretive guidance
- We seek to internalize and practice God’s standard of Holiness.
- Our communities observe the Jewish cycle of life, to-wit, *b’rit milah* (covenant circumcision), *pidyon ha-ben* (redemption of the firstborn Jewish male), *b’nei mitzvah* or its equivalent for Gentiles (coming of age recognition), *chupah* (marriage), burial following death, *shivah* (mourning), and *yahrzeiten* (annual remembrances).
- We do not celebrate the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, but we recount the history of Yeshua’s birth and the biblical importance of his resurrection. We also do not display Christian symbols such as crosses, pictures of “Jesus,” etc., in either our homes or synagogues for Jewish cultural reasons.
- Our congregations seek to be active in Jewish affairs. We support the Nation of Israel and oppose its enemies. We do not always agree with Israel’s political decisions, but we support its right to defend itself and to exist as the biblically prophesied Jewish homeland.
- Our primary outreach is to our Jewish people who do not yet know Yeshua as Messiah. We also seek to fulfill God’s expectation of us (as a Jewish community) to be a light to the Gentiles. This includes helping our Christian brothers to rediscover their connection to the Jewish people that was lost in the course of the Church’s early history.
- We offer Jewish people and Gentiles who are called to join us, congregational homes in which to enjoy supportive fellowship, study of the Old and New Covenant Scriptures, worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prayer in the name of Yeshua, and participation in outreach to serve all whom we can.

### **For More Information**

Three Messianic Jewish organizations of national and international prominence are the “Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations” ([www.umjc.org](http://www.umjc.org)), “Tikkun International” ([www.tikkunamerica.org](http://www.tikkunamerica.org)), and the “Messianic Jewish Alliance of America,” ([www.mjaa.org](http://www.mjaa.org)). Additional information about Messianic Judaism and Messianic Jewish congregations can be obtained at their web sites.

—August 23, 2016, NKJ

## The Priestly Calling of Messianic Judaism

### The Foundational Priestly Covenant

We read in Genesis that God made a Covenant with Abraham, promising to make him a “father of many nations” and to bless him and his descendants (through Isaac and Jacob) with fruitfulness, land, and the benefits of being overseen and cared for by God. This is what He said:

*Genesis 17:4-8; 22:18: “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” ... “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”*

While most covenants require the covenanting parties’ mutual agreement, it is significant that, in regard to this covenant, God dictated its terms without asking for or requiring Abraham’s consent, and seemingly without requiring any response on the part of Abraham or his descendants other than physical circumcision. Consequently, God provided no means by which the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could breach or otherwise abrogate the Covenant other than every one of them refusing circumcision.

### The Mosaic Priestly Covenant

It was God’s desire and purpose that his people Israel would be a “*kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (Exodus 19:6)—priests to each other and to the Gentiles, that the heathen might observe the people of God and choose to come to God. It was for the purpose of drawing the Gentiles—not excluding them—that God caused Israel to be set apart and to be distinguished through the Law that was given through Moses. For example, God gave Israel a weekly Sabbath of rest, unique annual feasts, food laws, special garments (fringes with cords of blue), a moral and civil code, and a sacrificial system for atonement of sin.

As part of this priestly covenant, God established a Tabernacle for sacrifice, within which were several open areas and chambers separated by partitions. Available modern sources indicate that only Israelites could pass through the outer partition into the inner court of the Tabernacle, from which position the burnt sacrifices conducted by the Levitical priests could be observed. This is analogous to, and consistent with, what we know of the structure and function of the “Second Temple,” where a wall or gate known as the “*soreg*” separated the Temple Mount (Court of the Gentiles) from the interior areas where the sacrifices were conducted and which were prohibited to Gentiles.

Despite the lack of access by Gentiles, one can derive (both from Scripture and rabbinical sources) that Gentiles were permitted to bring sacrifices to the Tabernacle and later to the Temple. In referring to animals having certain deformities, Scripture says of Gentiles who might attempt to offer them:

Leviticus 22:25: “Nor from a foreigner’s hand shall you offer any of these as the bread of your God, because their corruption is in them, and defects are in them. They shall not be accepted on your behalf.”

The interpretation derived from *Talmud* is that foreigners could offer animals for sacrifice if they were unblemished. We read in Hullin 13b of the *Talmud*:

*“Perhaps this is the meaning [of the Baraita]: As regards Israelites, you may accept sacrifices from the righteous but not from the wicked, but as regards gentiles you may not accept sacrifices from them at all? You cannot entertain such a view, for it has been taught: [It would have sufficed had Scripture stated], ‘a man,’ why does it state, ‘a man, a man’? To include gentiles, that they may bring either votive or freewill-offerings like an Israelite.”*

There is a logical way to reconcile the prohibition against Gentiles entering the sanctuary and yet being able to offer sacrifices; that way is through the priestly intercession of Israelites.

The ordinary sacrifices took place daily, with Israelites offering sacrifices for themselves, for each other, and for Gentiles through the Levitical priests who, in turn, were assisted in physical ministry by their fellow Levites. Once each year, however, the entire Levitical priesthood and all of Israel turned their attention to a special intercession. The High Priest began his spiritual and physical preparation on the third day of *Tishri*, and on the 10th of *Tishri*, on *Yom Kippur*, he donned special garments, selected a goat for blood sacrifice, another to carry Israel’s sins into the wilderness, and entered the “Holy of Holies” for his once-a-year intercession to seek atonement for the sins of the nation.

### **The New Priestly Covenant**

It came to pass that Israel fell into significant sin, breached its Covenant given through Moses, and utterly failed in its priestly responsibilities. Even so, as long as even one Israelite remained who was circumcised, Israel as a nation was not capable of abrogating the “foundational covenant”—the Abrahamic Covenant—and, therefore, God gave Israel a replacement for the covenant they violated:

Hebrews 8:6-13: “But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them,’” says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days,’ says the Lord, ‘I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

Well, this new priestly covenant (New Covenant for short) is now here, and in understanding it one must be clear on several points. First, it is established with a new sacrificial system—a system which appropriates Yeshua’s death and resurrection as the one for-all-time sacrifice, sufficient to atone for all sins—past, present and future. Second, this New Covenant replaces the Levitical priesthood with the priesthood of “Yeshua,” wherein both Jewish and Gentile believers together serve as priests under Yeshua our new High Priest. Third, the nature of the New Covenant is not to abolish God’s law but rather to establish it in our minds and on our hearts. God’s complaint with Israel under the covenant that preceded it was that the people were “lawless; the New Covenant therefore seeks to re-establish Israel as a people of law based upon their knowledge of God and their relationship with him. Fourth, the New Covenant was given to Israel—not to the church and not to the Gentiles nations. Since currently most of Israel rejects Yeshua as its Messiah, it falls to us who are the believing Jewish remnant (the Messianic Jews) to keep the New Covenant until the remainder of our people have their eyes of stupor opened ([Romans 11:8](#)).

### **Some Question a Continuing Role for Israel**

There are some who contend that, in the New Covenant, there is no longer a unique Jewish calling or role reserved for physical Israel. Those who hold this view tend to consider anything (custom, prayer, lifestyle, apparel, etc.) which makes it possible to distinguish a Messianic Jew from a Gentile believer to be tantamount to re-erecting the middle wall of partition alluded to in [Ephesians 2:14](#). The remaining sections of this paper will respond to this view with clear biblical proof of the continued calling and unique priestly role for Jewish believers in Yeshua.

### **Salvation Is of the Jews**

Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel served the Gentiles in two basic ways—(1) by being a physical people whom Gentiles could join if they wanted as complete a relationship with God as possible, and (2) by bringing the sacrifices of Gentiles before the Lord, thereby providing a means for Gentile atonement.

Since “*the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable*” ([Romans 12:29](#)), it should be no surprise to find Israel continuing these functions, with modification, under the New Covenant. The New Covenant opened a way for Gentiles to connect to Israel and receive all of its benefits without themselves being Jews. The process for this is described in [Romans 11](#), where the Gentiles, described as branches of a wild olive tree, are able to graft into a cultivated olive tree and become partakers of the root. In my opinion, the trunk of the olive tree represents a new priesthood of Yeshua believers that is referred to in Scripture as the “Commonwealth of Israel” ([Ephesians 2:12](#)). Also, [Romans 11:17](#) refers to natural branches (circumcised Israelites) which though broken off due to unbelief, can be re-grafted into “their own olive tree” ([verses 22-23](#)) by acquiring faith in Yeshua. The wild branches grafted into the cultivated olive tree (of Israel) contrary to nature ([verse 24](#)) is the principal way that Gentiles come to God in the New Covenant—through the Jewish Messiah, and therefore through Israel. Scripture is plain as to each of our need to receive Yeshua as Lord in order to have eternal life (e.g. [John 3:16](#)), but the mechanism through which this is accomplished is not by each of us connecting to God individually, but rather by grafting into [Romans 11](#) tree, the Commonwealth of Israel.

In [John 4:22](#) we read the words of Yeshua: “*for salvation is of the Jews.*” Certainly, this is so both because Yeshua who brought salvation was himself a Jew, but also because without Israel, without



the cultivated olive tree in Romans 11, there is no possibility of salvation for the Gentile. Consider this. If either every Israelite in the world refused circumcision and was subsequently cut off from his people or else every Israelite denied the Messiah and died in that condition, there would be no Israel, no olive tree, and consequently no salvation for the Gentiles. Gentile salvation depends upon connecting with Israel as much under the New Covenant as it did under the Mosaic Covenant. Salvation is, indeed, “of the Jews.”

### **Trustees of the Scriptures and Covenants**

The apostle Paul had no difficulty declaring the special calling of Israel to be trustee of the covenants and of the written Word of God:

Romans 3:1-2: *“What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.”*

Romans 9:3-5: *“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Messiah for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Messiah came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”*

As shown previously, Israel being the intended recipient of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant, gives Israelites a crucial role in priestly ministry in that their very existence is crucial to God’s blessings finding their way to the Gentiles and to the outermost parts of the earth.

### **A Beacon to Lead the Gentiles to God**

A decidedly priestly role for Messianic Jews (and one which requires that they be clearly visible and distinguishable) is the role of reflecting Messiah’s light so that the Gentiles can find Messiah by heading toward the light. The prophet Isaiah revealed this beacon-of-light ministry of Israel while Israel was still in darkness:

Isaiah 60:1-3: *“Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and his glory will be seen upon you. The gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”*

Lest one think that Israel’s responsibility to the Gentiles was only under the Mosaic Covenant, let us consider the words of Zechariah:

Zechariah 8:23: *“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”*

### **A Loyal Witness in a Satanic War**

The Scriptures which follow identify Messianic Israel (today Messianic Judaism) as a witness people, sealed by God, and called to stand firm in godly obedience even while the evil one wages war against them.

*Revelation 7:2-4: “Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four Thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed.”*

*Revelation 12:13-17: “Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness to her place where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the Commandments of God and have the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah.”*

This is the priestly calling and role of Messianic Judaism.

—September 22, 1987, NKJ

**N. Messianic Jewish Life**  
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## Friendship

One of the characteristics of friendship is our willingness to sacrifice for our friend—to put our friend’s interests before our own. We see in [John 15:15](#) of the New Covenant Scriptures that Yeshua had his Father’s capacity to be a friend to men when he told his disciples:

*“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”*

We were created in God’s image, and therefore we too have the capacity to befriend one another and receive friendship from God. In terms of human friendship, Scripture gives us the amazing example of the relationship of David and Jonathan; we read in [1 Samuel 18:1](#):

*“Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”*

In [2 Timothy 3:16](#) the Apostle Paul states that:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”*

So, the Scriptures that reveal God’s friendships with Abraham and Moses, Yeshua’s friendship with his disciples, and Jonathan’s friendship with David, are for our benefit—examples for us to emulate. Through the Scriptures, God is showing us that we are to befriend one another as they did, and that means loving one another. For [Proverbs 17:17](#) tells us:

*“A friend loves at all times.”*

And [John 15:13](#) tells us:

*“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”*

In addressing his friends, Yeshua said in [John 15:17](#):

*“These things I command you, that you love one another.”*

If we are Yeshua’s friends, that commandment is meant for us!

Our ability to be an instrument for God to use depends on our capacity for friendship even though friends do not always agree with each other. In fact, [Proverbs 27:17](#) assures us:

*“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”*

And we do not stay friends merely by saying nice things to each other, for in [Job 17:5](#) we read:

*“He who speaks flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children will fail.”*

No, we stay friends by being forthright with each other, by caring about each other, by treating each other with loving respect, and by upholding each other in the way we speak. Psalm 15:1-3 says it this way:

*“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend...”*

As friends, God expects us to depend upon one another, protect one another, and support one another, as we have need and as we can fulfill each other’s needs. In this, Proverbs 27:10 exhorts us:

*“Do not forsake your own friend or your father’s friend, nor go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity; better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.”*

—February 3, 2014, NKJ

## **Guidelines for Adopting a Tradition**

The communities in which we live, whether religious or secular, often urge and sometimes require that we conform to certain traditions. When deciding how we should respond, the first step should always be to pray and ask God for direction, wisdom, and understanding. Sometimes God speaks to us directly and the question is answered without further ado. Other times, He directs us to the Scriptures where the process of our analysis can sometimes be more important than our ultimate conclusion. When directed to the Scriptures, here are four valid approaches:

1. Embrace the tradition only if there is a direct and contextually relevant commandment, authorization, or example in Scripture. Here, the burden is on the tradition's proponent.
2. Embrace the tradition if there is no direct and contextually relevant prohibition against it in Scripture. Here, the burden is on the tradition's opponent.
3. Embrace the tradition if no persuasive Scriptural argument can be made against it, against its origin, or against its history of use. Here, the burden is on the tradition's opponent.
4. Embrace the tradition only if a fair and plausible Scriptural meaning or interpretation can be imputed to it. Here, the burden is on the tradition's proponent.

Since decisions of this kind are rarely based on only a single test, perhaps all four of the above should be considered and weighed by asking the following expanded questions:

- a. Is there a direct and contextually relevant commandment, authorization, or example in Scripture that supports the tradition? If so, how direct and how contextually relevant?
- b. Is there a direct and contextually relevant prohibition in Scripture? If so, how direct and how contextually relevant?
- c. Is there a Scriptural argument that can be made against the tradition? If so, how persuasive?
- d. Does the tradition have an unbiblical origin or history? If so, is its history such that it cannot or should not be redeemed?
- e. Considering the tradition's origin or historic meaning, is there a fair and plausible Scriptural meaning or interpretation that can be imputed to it?
- f. Would practicing the tradition violate the letter or principle of Deuteronomy 12:29-31?
- g. Is there any other factor that should be considered?

—September 25, 2006

## **Jewish Mourning and The *Kaddish***

Mourning is not the kind of subject that many of us want to hear taught on *Shabbat*, or any time for that matter. We encounter it briefly when we participate in the Mourner's *Kaddish*, but even that can be distressing to those of us who have lost loved ones, or if being reminded of our mortality is a downer. Nevertheless, it is not a subject we should ignore because, if we try to insulate ourselves from it, we will not be prepared either emotionally or practically, when personal loss occurs.

Judaism has always approached the subject of mourning in a biblically compassionate, yet methodical way. There is well-known description of death and burial in Scripture that will make my point—it is that of Yeshua. We recall the intricate procedure needed to prepare Yeshua's body for Jewish burial, and the consequent rush to entomb him before the Sabbath. We also recall the two women mourners who returned to the tomb after the Sabbath, and Yeshua's words that are recorded in Matthew 5:4—"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Yeshua himself mourned for Lazarus, and in John 11:32-35 we read:

*"Then, when Miriam came where Yeshua was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.' Therefore, when Yeshua saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to Him, 'Lord, come and see.'" Yeshua wept.*"

There are occurrences in Scripture where mourning was for a specified number of days. The *Torah* specifies that a woman captive who is about to marry an Israelite must be allowed to mourn for her father and mother for a full month (Deuteronomy 21:13), and all of Israel mourned the passing of Aaron for a similar period of time (Numbers 20:29). Also, Joseph observed seven days of mourning for his father which, even until today, remains the standard time that Jews "sit *shivah*" for the loss of a close relative.

It is not possible in the space this article to deal with all aspects of Jewish bereavement, so I will touch lightly on several, and go a little more deeply into the mourner's *Kaddish* prayer which is part of our normal *Shabbat* service. The snippets of Jewish tradition I am about to give you come from Orthodoxy, so it is important that you keep in mind that different communities and individuals apply them in different ways and to different degrees.

In Jewish orthodoxy, immediately upon a person's death, his or her body is ritually washed and otherwise prepared, and burial is without delay in a plain, undecorated, wooden box; the body is never left unattended from the time of death until the time it is lowered into the ground. A man is often buried in a plain white robe (*kittle*) and wrapped in his *Tallit* from which one fringe is removed as a reminder that it is not serving its usual purpose; there is also no viewing of the body. All of this emphasizes the equality of all persons in death; a rich man and a poor man are buried in exactly the same way. One of the several customs that illustrate this principle of equality and simplicity is the absence of flowers at the funeral, the burial site, or in a mourner's home. Burials are always beneath ground, reminiscent of how God buried Moses (Deuteronomy 34:6); cremation is not authorized in Jewish law under any circumstance.



After the burial, there is a period of seven days of “sitting *shivah*,” during which time the closest family members of the deceased do not leave their homes. They wear plain dark clothing, go without shoes, and sit on wooden stools, boxes, or even on the floor. They also cover all mirrors in the house with sheets or rags to keep themselves from being concerned about their personal appearance, lest they be tempted to make themselves attractive to guests and others. Because it is expected that the mourners will not have the heart or will to prepare their own food, it is the tradition for more distant family members, friends, and neighbors to visit and bring food in the form of both full meals for the mourners and snacks and refreshments for their guests; fruit, cakes, and nuts are common gifts. Guests often visit for hours, but do not engage the mourners in uninvited conversation.

After the seven-day *shivah* period is over, mourners typically return to their normal schedules. However, in the case of a son losing his parent, the son sometimes continues in a state of mourning for a year, and during the first 11 months may seek a *minyan* (ten Jewish men) with whom he can pray the Mourner’s *Kaddish*. At the end of one year, a gravestone or marker is unveiled and, from that time and each anniversary thereafter, the departed person is remembered by children, brothers, sisters, spouses, and parents, by lighting special *Yahrtzeit* candles and by reciting the *Kaddish*.

Visiting the grave site of a family member is also a Jewish custom and, at the time of each visit, a small stone is left on the grave as a remembrance. It is even customary for individuals who have never known the deceased to leave a stone; flowers are not brought or used to decorate a gravesite.

There is one tradition of remembrance I do not recommend—reciting the prayer known as *Yizkor*. The reason is that it asks God to remember and have mercy on the soul of a deceased person in exchange for the person who is praying promising to give charity on the deceased’s behalf; clearly, this is based on unbiblical premises. Although the *Yizkor* prayer in the Joseph H. Hertz’s “Daily Prayer Book” does not include the element of a charitable promise, it is still theologically problematic because it asks mercy for a deceased person whose heart and life history are already in God’s hands and awaiting judgment.

Already mentioned but of great importance is the *Kaddish* prayer. Next to the *Sh`ma*, the *Kaddish* is probably the best known and one of the oldest prayers in Judaism. Although there are indications that elements of it date back as far as Yeshua, one can at least trace it back to the institutions of the middle ages where the teacher of *Torah*, speaking in Aramaic and echoing [Ezekiel 38:23](#), would dismiss his students with a praise to God and a brief petition that God send Messiah soon. The students responded “*Amen. Y’hey shmey raba m’varakh l’alam ulamey almaya* (Let his great name be blessed forever and forever eternally).” This response, a variation of what was originally recited in the Temple, was adopted by Jewish mystics and, prompted by a legend about Rabbi Akiba redeeming a soul by teaching the son of a deceased man to recite the *Kaddish*, this otherwise fine praise to God was used in an unbiblical way. It is not used in that way today.

During the *geonic* period, the two paragraphs of the *Kaddish* beginning with “*Yitbarakh v’yishta-bach*” were added, and the Ashkenazim removed the words of Messianic hope that are still found in Separdic *siddurim*: “*V’yatzmach purkaney viykareyv m’shiychev. Ameyn.*” (“And cause his salvation to sprout and bring near his Messiah. Amen”).

The Mourner's *Kaddish* is sometimes referred to as a prayer for the dead. Recognizing that there is nothing in it that refers to death or dying and that praying for deceased persons is biblically indefensible, I have, for years, objected to that description of it. Recently, however, someone pointed out to me that the *Kaddish* benefits both the one who prays it and the deceased as well—the one who prays it by connecting him to his loved one's memory, and the deceased, by causing him or her to be remembered by several future generations. The identity of being a Jew is linked to generational transmission in a way that no other identity is. To that end, the *Kaddish* is the quintessential means by which Jews keep the memory of those who preceded us alive, and by which we are reminded that we are not only individuals, but the product of those who came before us, birthed us, loved us, provided for us, and taught us.

—April 3, 2008, NKJ

## **Keeping *Torah***

In our attempt to explain how our Messianic Jewish lifestyle is different from that of the Christian church, we sometimes say things like: “We keep the *Torah*” or “We keep the Mosaic Law.” Well, I do not want to make the explanation more difficult for us, but we keep neither and we had better not unless, by “*torah*,” (lower case “t”), we mean keeping God’s teaching or his will broadly. If your response to what I have said is: “Of course we cannot keep those things of the *Torah* that require the Holy Temple and its animal sacrifices,” then try keeping these two commandments that require neither:

Exodus 31:13-15: *“Tell the people of Isra’el, ‘You are to observe my Shabbats; for this is a sign between me and you through all your generations; so that you will know that I am ADONAI, who sets you apart for me. Therefore you are to keep my Shabbat, because it is set apart for you. Everyone who treats it as ordinary must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it is to be cut off from his people. On six days work will get done; but the seventh day is Shabbat, for complete rest, set apart for ADONAI. Whoever does any work on the day of Shabbat must be put to death.’”*

Deuteronomy 21:18-21: *“If a man has a stubborn, rebellious son who will not obey what his father or mother says, and even after they discipline him he still refuses to pay attention to them; then his father and mother are to take hold of him and bring him out to the leaders of his town, at the gate of that place, and say to the leaders of his town, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he doesn’t pay attention to us, lives wildly, gets drunk.’ Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death; in this way you will put an end to such wickedness among you, and all Isra’el will hear about it and be afraid.”*

I think you get my point, which is that no one keeps the Mosaic Law today—not the church, not us, and not the Orthodox synagogue down the street. The real difference in the way that much of the church approaches the *Torah* and the way that we do is that the church tends to ignore what was commanded prior to Yeshua, while we seek to adapt it. And try we must, for 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reminds us:

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work.”*

So, how do we adapt Scriptures of the Mosaic Law given under the Mosaic covenant? We utilize what is unique to the New Covenant—we consult the Holy Spirit for application. Remember that the word “*torah*” (lower case) means God’s teaching, so we, the church, and the synagogue down the street should all be seeking to keep *torah*.

—January 28, 2016, CJB

## ***L’Dor VaDor***

*L’dor vador* (“from generation to generation”) is a concept that is foundational in Jewish life because it professes that, though we be individuals, we are the product of those who came before us and contributors to those who will come after us. Scripture is replete with multigenerational references; for example:

Daniel 3:33(4:3): “*How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.*”

Exodus 3:15: “*Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’”*

And even this profound truth uttered in the midst of cynicism:

Ecclesiastes 1:4: “*One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever.*”

The cycle of life and death, of receiving from our parents and passing on to our children, is central to God’s plan for redeeming mankind. Jewish generational preservation (i.e. preserving Jewish identity) is particularly important because Israel was called to be a nation of priests (Exodus 19:6) and a light to the nations (Isaiah 60:3). Were Jews to disappear through assimilation or other means, there would be no “olive tree” into which Gentiles could be grafted (Romans 11:16-25) and Israel, as a nation, could not fulfill its destiny to be saved (Romans 11:26) and to herald Yeshua’s return by proclaiming: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord (Matthew 23:39; Luke 13:35).”

In all biblical references to *l’dor vador*, preserving ourselves from generation to generation is of secondary importance to preserving God’s dominion, his influence, and his work among us and through us. Yes, our generational integrity must be preserved—but not for our own sakes; rather, because we are a people chosen for servanthood, that the world may be blessed through us.

Over the years, *l’dor vador* has become thoroughly imbedded in the Jewish way of life and its traditions. It is especially true of traditions that implement God’s commandments to all generations such as the annual festivals / appointed times (*moedim*), and the weekly Sabbath. There is nothing that connects Jewish generations as warmly as memories of one’s family gathered around the Sabbath table—lighting the *Shabbat* candles, blessing the bread and wine, reciting Psalms, singing Sabbath songs, enjoying good food, and experiencing the love of one’s father blessing his wife and children (Proverbs 31:10-31). Although not commanded in Scripture, these Sabbath traditions were adopted by Jewish communities over the millennia in order to give substance to God’s commandment to observe the Sabbath—to keep it holy—and the same is true of the traditions surrounding the *moedim* and the sights and sounds of the synagogue.

One way that Jews promote *l’dor vador* is by implementing God’s commandment to honor our father and mother (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 19:19), and the Scriptures that instruct us to bring up our children in the ways of the Lord:

Genesis 18:17-19: “*And the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.”*”

Psalms 34:12(11): “*Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*”

Proverbs 22:6: “*Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.*”

And of course, Deuteronomy 6:6-7:

*“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”*

The Jewish way of implementing Scriptures such as these is through education, prayer, acknowledging the prior generations that have blessed us, and being proactive in blessing the generations that come after us:

Proverbs 17:6: “*Children’s children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father.*”

It is in the spirit of remembering and honoring generations that we encounter traditions such as calling readers to *Torah* by their names linked to their father’s names (e.g. *Miycha’eil ben Tzvi*), reciting the *Kaddish* prayer during times of mourning, and honoring the memory of departed loved ones on the anniversaries of their deaths (*yahrtzeits*), and at other times. It is also why we have such *simcha* (joy) over births.

Deepening our appreciation of the Jewish traditions that enhance our *l’dor v’dor* walk with God and with each other is not only for the Jews in our midst, but for our Gentiles as well. How we go about doing it is key, and we must be discerning about which traditions to adopt and the level of importance we give them (Mark 7:9). Let us proceed with happy anticipation that, as we follow God’s leading, He will continue to use us to “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers,” *l’dor vador* (Malachi 3:24(4:6)).

—September 15, 2006, NKJ

## Understanding what Is Jewish

In a way, this article begins in the middle of the subject because it assumes the reader has already decided that Jewish traditions, in some form and to some degree, have a place in his or her life. Because many Messianic believers do not venture into and participate in the wider Jewish world, their knowledge and only examples of that which is Jewish often comes from within their own congregations. A common mistake made as a result, is believing that a certain practice observed within the congregation is prevalent within Judaism broadly as well, whereas the truth may be the opposite. The way to know what is Jewish and what is not comes through involvement in the Jewish community, through Jewish education, and by asking questions.

Permit me to highlight a Jewish practice in our congregation that can cause some confusion if it is misapplied; it is wearing white on *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. It is a tradition practiced in Orthodox Judaism but, even there, not uniformly. What is more uniform throughout all forms of Judaism is that the leaders of a service—principally the rabbi and the cantor—wear white robes, white head coverings, and white *talitot*. Except in Orthodox circles, it is unusual for women to wear predominantly white clothing to services, so if a small group of our all-white-wearing women decided to visit a Conservative or Reform synagogue during one of the High Holy Days, instead of blending in they would more likely stand out. Please understand that I am not criticizing our women wearing white or our men wearing the white *kittle*. I like the practice because it reminds us of our New Covenant priestly identity and of our sins being washed clean (Isaiah 1:18) in Yeshua. Still, anyone who wears predominantly white clothing on the High Holy Days should know that it is not a practice that is uniform throughout Judaism.

As a second example, there is a tradition in some Messianic Jewish congregations that appears to be Jewish but is absolutely prohibited in Orthodox and in some Conservative synagogues. It is blowing the *shofar* on Sabbaths that are on or closest to the new moon. The Orthodox Jewish practice is that the *shofar* is never blown on *Shabbat*, and not even on *Rosh HaShanah* when it falls on a weekly Sabbath. Most Messianic Jewish congregations do not hesitate to blow the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShanah* even when it falls on a Sabbath. We are entitled to our local custom, but do not think to bless a non-Messianic synagogue by blowing your *shofar* there on *Shabbat*.

I could continue with other examples where we depart from uniform Jewish practice, such as non-Jews wearing the *talit*, our offering *B'nei Mitzvah* to Gentile members, and our standing during the *Sh'ma* (the Orthodox custom is to remain seated). But completeness is not the object of this article. The lesson intended is that we ought to educate ourselves in Jewish cultural matters and not make assumptions about the Jewishness of customs that see practiced in Messianic Jewish congregations.

—October 11, 2012

## Who Do We Worship? To Whom Do We Pray?

For years, I experienced discomfort every time I heard someone pray to Jesus rather than to God. Being a believer in Yeshua's deity, I attributed my response to Jewish prejudice and the foreign sound of "Dear Jesus" to my Jewish ears. As I grew in faith and this reaction did not subside, I decided to research the Scriptures to determine the biblical correctness of praying to Yeshua.<sup>63</sup>

What I found, was that although prayer and worship<sup>64</sup> was most often directed to "God" or the "Father," there were a significant number of times when Yeshua did receive worship. A sampling of these are:<sup>65</sup>

Acts 7:59: "*Lord Yeshua, receive my spirit.*"

Revelation 5:8: "*Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb...*"

Revelation 1:17-18: "*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead...'*"

John 9:38: "*Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!' And he worshiped Him.*"

Matthew 28:9: "*And as they went to tell His disciples, behold Yeshua met them, saying, 'Rejoice!' And they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.*"

Here are examples of prayers and worship to "God" or the "Father:"

Luke 11:1-2: "*...one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples.' So he said to them, 'When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven...'*"

Matthew 4:10: "*...You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.*"

Colossians 3:17: "*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Yeshua, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*"<sup>66</sup>

Ephesians 5:17, 20: "*Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah...*"<sup>67</sup>

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63 Bible quotations throughout this paper are from *The New King James Version, The Holy Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), with the words "Christ" replaced by "Messiah," and "Jesus" replaced by "Yeshua."

64 By "prayer," I mean petition. By "worship," I mean falling on one's face in adoration.

65 See also, Mark 5:6; Matthew 2:11, 8:2, 9:18, 14:33, 15:25, 28:17.

66 "...there are two new factors at the very heart of the NT which bring about a decisive reorientation. The first of these is that Christian worship is in its very core and essence the worship of God the Father through God the Son."

67 Ibid.

Revelation 22:9: “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

Philippians 3:3: “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Messiah Yeshua, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

John 4:23: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

Hebrews 13:15: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

As I prayed for wisdom in reconciling these two groups of Scriptures, an analogy came to me. In a court of law, we do not choose our judge. It would be considered disrespectful to the Chief Judge sitting with his junior associate, were we to address our case to the junior associate or, while in the Chief Judge’s presence, to give the junior associate deferential attention. The elder Judge would likely admonish us: “Gentlemen, you are before the Court—not merely before one or another judge! On the other hand, if the Chief Judge were to appoint his junior colleague to hear our case and we consequently found ourselves standing before him only, it would then be proper to give that junior judge our undivided attention.

I have come to believe that it is the same with God the Father and his son Yeshua. As I studied the Scriptures, I was struck by the pattern that each time Yeshua received worship (or in Stephen’s case: prayer), the worshiper was directly before him either in vision or in fact. Stephen was overtaken by a vision of Yeshua, the twenty-four elders in John’s vision were also before Yeshua, and those who worshiped Yeshua during his incarnate life were face to face with him physically. Yet in cases where the worshiper was directing his prayer heavenward and there was no reason to favor Yeshua over the other personages of God, the worshiper always addressed his prayer and worship to “God” or to “God the Father.”<sup>68</sup>

I cannot fathom that anyone, myself included, if confronted by Yeshua, would not fall at his feet and give him unfettered worship. Still, just as judge-shopping is not condoned, neither is God-shopping; for to seek out one personage of God over another, treats the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as though they were separate Gods. For this reason, whenever I call upon the name of the Lord in prayer, I may address it to “God” or the “Father,” but it is to God in his entirety that I am praying, remembering Deuteronomy 6:6: “Hear O Israel, the Lord Your God, the Lord is One!”

—March 18, 1992 NKJ

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<sup>68</sup> Scripture nevertheless directs us to give Yeshua glory and honor; this is distinguished from prayer and worship in that when we give him honor, we are not addressing him, but are rather lifting him up in the eyes of men (Mark 11:7-10; Luke 4:15; John 5:22-23; Revelation 5:11-13).



**O. Messianic Jewish Theology**  
**Writings • Vol 2**



## **Are All Believers in Yeshua Jews? A Defense of Jewish Conversion**

There are some who profess that all believers in Yeshua are Jews. This view is almost the reverse of replacement theology, which holds that Israel has fallen from grace through its rejection of Yeshua, and that Christian believers have therefore replaced Jews as God's chosen people. The "Gentile believers are Jews" theory likewise blurs Jewish identity but, instead of directing all believers to identify as Christians, it directs them to identify as Messianic Jews. Interestingly, this is also the reverse of the Jewish anti-missionary claim that believers in Jesus cannot be Jewish (even if they are).

Permit me to go on record regarding my own view. It is that Gentiles may become Jewish proselytes through covenant conversion (as did Ruth),<sup>69</sup> but they do not become Jews merely by believing in Yeshua or by affiliating with Messianic Judaism.

Ruth is our quintessential biblical example of how a Gentile can become a proselyte and join Israel in a physical way. When Naomi, a Jewess, prepared to leave Moab to return to Bethlehem, Ruth said to her:

*Ruth 1:16-17: "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."*

Since Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah and the fullness of the deity in bodily form, Gentiles who accept him as their Messiah (like Ruth) are saying (as did Ruth):

*"Your God is my God."*

But unless, like Ruth, they also say:

*"Wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and where you die I will die."*

...and a representative of the Jewish people receives them, they do not become Jewish proselytes.

Not all Gentile believers are called to make such a statement, so it should not pose a problem for them unless they think that being a Jew is a preferred status that brings them closer to God. It isn't, and it doesn't. Scripture makes this clear in Romans 10:12:

*"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."*

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<sup>69</sup> See Esther 8:17

And similarly, in Galatians 3:28:

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua.”*

Ironically, these Scriptures are two of the ones most commonly used to incorrectly support the notion that Gentile believers are Jews. After all, does not Galatians 3:28 say that there is neither Jew nor Greek? Yes! But it also says there is neither male nor female. If this Scripture were meant to be taken literally, it would lead to an absurd result (similarly, Colossians 3:11). What is actually true is stated in the very next verse, Galatians 3:29:

*“And if you are Messiah’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

But, you say, “If I become the seed of Abraham by faith in Messiah, doesn’t that make me Jewish?” Romans 4:16 shows that it is not so, for it distinguishes between the two kinds of seed:

*“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all...”*

Yes, Gentile believers in Yeshua become Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise—his seed by faith, that is—not his physical seed. This connection to Israel is further explained in Ephesians 2:11-13:

*“That at that time you were without Messiah, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation...”*

The NIV translation uses the term “citizenship in Israel” rather than “commonwealth of Israel” as does the NKJ. Breaking down the middle wall of partition has allowed Gentile believers to draw near—not become physical Israel but become part of the commonwealth—citizens if you will. Consider an analogy to the Commonwealth of Great Britain. Canadians are members of the Commonwealth—in fact, as head of the Commonwealth, the Queen of England is their queen. However, Canadians are not English and cannot become English without renouncing their Canadian citizenship and taking on English citizenship by saying to England: “From now on, your people are my people.”

Finally, the apostle Paul demonstrates that there exists a distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers, for in Romans 11:13-14 he speaks to Gentile believers about Jews while calling those to whom he is speaking “Gentiles:”

*“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.”*

He then goes on to explain in verses 18 and 19 that Gentile believers in Yeshua are grafted into an olive tree belonging to a new entity that I contend is the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12 (NKJ)). Although they become partakers of the root, they do not become natural branches:

*“And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.”*

Although Gentile believers are not automatically Jews by virtue of their coming into the Commonwealth of Israel, they do, alongside their brother Jewish believers, become citizens:

Romans 9:24-26 “...even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea: “I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved.” And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There they shall be called sons of the living God.”

So, if Gentile believers in Yeshua are not Messianic Jews, what are they? They are Gentiles who have joined the Commonwealth of Israel through their faith in Yeshua.<sup>70</sup> These “Messianic Gentiles” (as they are sometimes called), remain Gentiles unless they take the additional step of saying to Israel “Your people are my people,” and the Jewish remnant responds by receiving them as proselytes. That step is known as “conversion.”

Those who would convert to Judaism should not do so lightly, for Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 7:18-20:

*“Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.”*

This is a caution, not a prohibition, for Paul circumcised Timothy in circumstances he considered appropriate. Why the caution? Because men are prone to run to do that which God has not told them to do. Being a grafted-in wild branch has a special calling of its own, since such a branch testifies to the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Messiah. True, if a Gentile becomes a Jew he gains a calling, but he loses one as well. That is why he should not take the step of conversion unless he is certain that God approves.

Conversion to Judaism is a topic of controversy both in and out of the Messianic Jewish community. Gentile readers of this paper who are considering such a step should pray for God’s guidance and consult their spiritual leaders for advice and confirmation. Meanwhile, they should enthusiastically walk in their calling as grafted-in Gentiles and not refer to themselves as Jews.

—March 17, 2001, NKJ

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<sup>70</sup> It is a priestly attribute of Israel (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:8) to be the host olive tree into whom Gentiles are grafted when they become born-again in Yeshua (Exodus 19:6; Romans 3:1-2).

## Grafting: A Closely Held Secret

*Shhh! Don't tell anyone!*

We suspect an ulterior motive to the Jewish sages for choosing to not include Isaiah 53 in the *Haftarah* readings, so what is the Christian Church's excuse for not teaching Romans 11's account of how Gentile believers in Yeshua are grafted into the "olive tree" of Israel? But that is not the secret I am shushing you for! The secret is that much of Messianic Judaism avoids it as well! You will seldom find grafting spoken of or written about in Messianic Jewish literature except for glancing references. Why? I think because neither the Christian Church nor the Messianic Jewish world delight in highlighting the biblical truth that Christian believers are covenantally connected to Jews—not only to Yeshua-believing Jews, but to all Jews, because the olive tree in Romans 11 into which they are grafted belongs to Israel. The Christian Church has had no problem teaching that Messianic Jewish believers are joined to *it*, because it sees *itself* as the *ekklesia*—the body of believers. Today's comparatively large and prestigious Gentile "Church" has not wanted to accept the biblical truth that it derives its identity from being covenantally joined to a small minority nation, and an even smaller Yeshua-believing remnant of the Jewish people called Messianic Jews.

To help correct this, we might want to create a tradition of using Christianity's season for celebrating Messiah's birth to teach on Romans 11 and on how Christian believers are grafted into Israel's olive tree. To help us think about it, I will summarize my understanding of how grafting works.

Let us begin with verses 26 and 27:

*"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'"*

If we remember that Israel's destiny as a nation is to receive Yeshua as its Messiah, it helps us to understand the earlier verses 17 and 18:

*"And if some of the branches [Jews who did not believe in Yeshua] were broken off, and you [Gentiles who came to believe in Yeshua], being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root [Israel] and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you."*

And Romans 11:19-24:

*"You will say then, 'Branches [Jewish unbelievers in Yeshua] were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural [Jewish] branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they [Jewish unbelievers] do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you [Gentiles] were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by*

*nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these [Jews], who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?”*

There is another place in Scripture that speaks of an olive tree with broken branches, and that is [Jeremiah 11:16](#), words spoken to Israel:

*“The LORD called your name, Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit. With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken.”*

So, what is the Romans olive tree into which Yeshua-believing Jews and Gentiles are grafted? I suggest that the trunk of the tree onto which all branches are attached is representative of the Commonwealth of Israel referred to in [Ephesians 2:11-13](#) and [19](#):

*“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Messiah, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah.”*

*“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...”*

I further suggest that the root of the tree that owns and supports the trunk and branches is representative of Israel—not only Messianic Israel, but all of Israel. Gentiles, who are originally part of a wild olive tree become grafted into Israel’s tree at the raw places where Jewish branches have been broken off due to their unbelief. The Gentile branches do not become Jewish when they join the tree, but they rather become connected to Israel (the root) through the Commonwealth that is created by the blood of Yeshua’s sacrifice. The root consists of all Jews—those who believe, and those who do not. Stated another way, the tree is wholly Jewish-owned, but the branches that reside on it consist of only believers in Yeshua (both Jewish and non-Jewish).

It is important that Gentile believers know that they are citizens of the Commonwealth and are covenantally joined to Israel—all Israel—not to just the believing Jewish remnant. Their citizenship is often kept secret and it should not be, and that is why I suggest that there be a set time each year when the [Romans 11](#) message is taught. December 25 is a time when the Christian world celebrates the birth of Yeshua and recalls the meaning of all that he brought to the world. What better time is there than that?

### **Alternative Models**

An alternative to the [Romans 11](#) model presented above is to consider the trunk as being Yeshua, and the root as being Israel (all Jews regardless of their beliefs). Another alternative is that the root is Yeshua, but that view leaves no special place for Israel as a kingdom of priests ([Exodus 19:6](#)) and a light to the Gentile nations ([Isaiah 42:6](#); [49:6](#); [52:10](#) and [60.3](#)).

—May 3, 2019, NKJ

## He's Right and He's Also Right

At the recent UMJC dinner, those dining at each table were asked to share with each other, the one person in their life that most contributed to their spiritual growth and understanding. When it came my turn, I shared three (I just could not limit myself to one) but, had I more time to think about it, I would have included a fourth because of this exchange:

*Townsperson: Why should I break my head about the outside world? Let the outside world break its own head...*

*Tevye: He is right...*

*Perchik: Nonsense. You can't close your eyes to what's happening in the world.*

*Tevye: He's right.*

*Rabbi's pupil: He's right, and he's right. They can't both be right!*

*Tevye: (Pause). You know, you are also right.*

Yes, I would have included Reb Tevye the milkman.<sup>71</sup> I am serious. Tevye's teaching in his dialogue with the Rabbi's *talmid* is so profound, that it has affected my tolerance for diverse opinions to this very day. It essentially says that two people, looking at the same thing can derive from it seemingly inconsistent opinions, and they can both be right!

I am not saying that there is more than one truth (in the eternal sense) so that God's Word in Scripture cannot be trusted. No, I am referring to the application of God's Word as interpreted in context. Take, for example, when Moses and Aaron came into conflict because they discerned God's will differently in Leviticus 10 regarding a sacrifice. Presumably the same day that God slew Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu for making "profane fire," God gave Moses detailed instructions to pass on to Aaron and his surviving sons for how they were to conduct an important sacrifice that Aaron was to eat, after it had been roasted on the altar. We pick up on the story in verses 16-20:

*"Then Moses made careful inquiry about the goat of the sin offering, and there it was—burned up. And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron who were left, saying, "Why have you not eaten the sin offering in a holy place, since it is most holy, and God has given it to you to bear the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? See! Its blood was not brought inside the holy place; indeed you should have eaten it in a holy place, as I commanded." And Aaron said to Moses, "Look, this day they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and such things have befallen me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been accepted in the sight of the LORD?" So when Moses heard that, he was content."*

We must assume that God was content as well, because we hear no more about it. Both Moses and Aaron knew the detailed instructions God gave as to how the sacrifice was to be conducted. Moses was right to chastise Aaron for not following God's instructions to the letter, but Aaron was also right to not eat the sin offering while he was heart-sick in distress about his two lost sons. Moses and Aaron initially disagreed because they were seeing things from different perspectives, but each of them was right from his own perspective.

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<sup>71</sup> Sholem Aleichem, Tevye the Dairyman (later dramatized as *Fiddler on the Roof*).



Then there is the dispute between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-39:

*“Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.” Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus...”*

Both Paul and Barnabas knew that Mark had declined to go with them on a certain ministry mission, yet they gave it such different weight when it came to receiving him back among them, that Paul and Barnabas could not agree and had to separate. That notwithstanding, there is no doubt that each of them had good reasons for their respective opinions and that the truths of what they saw in Mark were both right.

See also, Romans 14:5:

*“One person considers some days more holy than others, while someone else regards them as being all alike. What is important is for each to be fully convinced in his own mind.”*

So yes, Tevye was correct that two people can disagree, and they can both be right. I am grateful to Tevye because he taught me the principle before I saw it in Scripture. And, because of what he taught me, I have since been slow to judge as wrong, opinions that disagree with my own. Instead, I look for logic and redeeming truth in the other person's position while remembering Tevye's words that while I may be right, the other person may also be right.

—July 27, 2012, NKJ

## Of Course, *Torah* is for Gentiles!

It is often taught that *Torah* is only for Jews and not for Gentiles. After all, did James not proclaim (and the Assembly agree) that Gentile believers in Messiah need only keep the Noahic Laws?

*Acts 15:19-20: “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.”*<sup>72</sup>

In this paper, I posit that the above was intended as a minimum requirement only, and was not meant to limit Gentiles’ adherence to *Torah* nor to infer that *Torah* is not applicable to them. I then proceed to show that, not only has *Torah* always been for Gentiles, but that they were its first recipients.

### Torah is God’s Teaching

The word *Torah* has several definitions but, in its broadest definition, *Torah* (תּוֹרָה—Strong’s number 8451) means God’s teaching. According to the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament:<sup>73</sup>

*“The word tôrâ means basically “teaching” whether it is the wise man instructing his son or God instructing Israel. The wise give insight into all aspects of life so that the young may know how to conduct themselves and to live a long blessed life (Prov 3:1f.). So too God, motivated by love, reveals to man basic insight into how to live with each other and how to approach God. Through the law God shows his interest in all aspects of man’s life which is to be lived under his direction and care. Law of God stands parallel to word of the Lord to signify that law is the revelation of God’s will (e.g. Isa 1:10). In this capacity it becomes the nation’s wisdom and understanding so that others will marvel at the quality of Israel’s distinctive life style (Deut 4:6). Thus there is a very similar understanding of the role of teaching with its results in the wisdom school, in the priestly instruction, and the role of the law with its results for all the people of the covenant.”*

In another lexical reference, “The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon,” the primary definitions of “*Torah*” presented are: “direction,” “instruction,” and “law.”<sup>74</sup> From both of these sources, it is apparent that the meaning of “*Torah*” is broad and is not limited to the Scriptures of the Mosaic Law or even to the *Pentateuch*.

### “Torah” and “Commandment” Are Not the Same

“Law” and individual “laws” are related but different. “Law” refers to a body of “laws,” usually legislated statutes. In the same way, God’s law (*Torah*) is revealed through individual “laws” called commandments (*mitzvot*), statutes, judgments, or terms that are similar:

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<sup>72</sup> All Scriptures in this paper are quoted from the *New King James Version*.

<sup>73</sup> R. Laird Harris, editor, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, TWOT No. 910, p. 404, Moody Press (Chicago, Illinois: 1980).

<sup>74</sup> Francis Brown, editor, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, “Torah,” p. 435-436, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1979).

Leviticus 18:5: “You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.”

“In this light law is often considered to consist of statutes, ordinances, precepts, commandments, and testimonies.”<sup>75</sup>

God’s body of Law (*Torah*) is his revealed will that all must obey as applicable, while his commandments are specific directions given to specific persons and categories of persons at specific times in the course of history. So, *Torah* is what God wants, and his *mitzvot* are specific commandments that He speaks in order to get us to do his will. The consequence of this difference is that God’s broad body of law (*Torah*) applies to everyone, while specific commandments of his law applies to certain persons and not to others.<sup>76</sup>

### **Torah Pre-existed Creation**

That the *Torah* existed before the creation of the world is strongly suggested in the *Tanakh*, was written about in ancient Jewish texts, and is specifically stated in the New Covenant Scriptures. Writing for The Encyclopaedia Judaica, Warren Harvey references Ben Sira and makes the following point:

“‘Moses received the Torah from Sinai’ (*Avot 1:1*). Yet there is an ancient tradition that the Torah existed in heaven not only before God revealed it to Moses, but even before the world was created (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 15, p. 1236 (Keter Publishing House: Jerusalem, 1971)).”

He (Harvey in agreement with other Jewish writers) also believes that Proverbs 8:22 ff, written as a personification of wisdom, is actually the personification of a pre-existent *Torah*:

Proverbs 8:22-36: “The LORD possessed<sup>77</sup> me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primeval dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men. Now therefore, listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the LORD; but he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death.”

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<sup>75</sup> Harris, supra.

<sup>76</sup> Even when commandments do not apply literally, they nevertheless have application (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

<sup>77</sup> קָנָה {kaw-naw’} (Strong’s 7069) is also translated “to get, acquire, create.”

Harvey's conclusion of a pre-existent *Torah* is heavily influenced by ancient writings in both *Talmud* and *Midrash*:

*“Surely it was taught: Seven things were created before the world was created, and these are they: The Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of Messiah. The Torah, for it is written, ‘The Lord made me [sc. The Torah<sup>78</sup>] as the beginning of his way” (Pes 54a).<sup>79</sup>*

*“Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, ‘In the beginning God created’ (1, 1), ‘beginning’ referring to the Torah, as the verse, ‘The Lord made me in the beginning of His way (Prov 8:22)” (Gen. R. 1:4).<sup>80</sup>*

John 1:1 refers to God as the spoken “Word” and one who embodies and speaks the “Word:”

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>81</sup>*

And the verses that follow John 1:1 clearly identify Messiah Yeshua as also being the “Word:”<sup>82</sup>

John 1:2-14: *“He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>83</sup>*

When the *logos* spoke, the result was νόμος {*nomos*} (Strong's 3551), the same Greek word used in Hebrews 8:10 to mean *Torah* when the Book of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:32(33) in translation. Since the *logos* was pre-existent, it is logical that the *nomos* or *Torah* (Hebrew) came into existence when the *logos* spoke it, and so *Torah* must have either pre-existed or at least come into existence during the creation.

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78 Referring to Proverbs 8:22.

79 *The Babylonian Talmud*, I. Epstein, ed., vol. Moed 2, p. 265 (Pesachim 54a) (The Soncino Press: London, 1938).

80 *The Midrash Rabbah*, H. Freedman and M. Simon, transl., vol. 1, p. 1 (verse 1:4) (The Soncino Press: Jerusalem, 1977).

81 “Word,” in John 1:1 is the Greek word Λόγος {*logos*} (Strong's 3056), which is the spoken Word or one who embodies it.

82 Also λόγος {*logos*}.

83 See also, John 14:6.

### Gentiles Were There First

So, *Torah* existed “in the beginning” and, some time thereafter, there were people—nations of them (גוֹיִם {*goy*} (Strong’s 1471), pl. *goyim* meaning Gentiles)<sup>84</sup>—but no Jews. Why? Because God had not yet “invented” Jews (Genesis 17:4). Yet, these Gentiles knew all about God’s *Torah*, for we read numerous accounts in Scripture of their compliance and/or lack thereof (e.g. Genesis 3:6, 4:3-4, 5:5, 6:9, etc.).

The word גוֹיִם {*goyim*} appears in Scripture for the first time in Genesis 10:5, inferring that Gentiles existed prior to God’s covenant with Abraham, yet after *Torah* had already been spoken into existence. Additional evidence for *Torah*’s existence before there were any Israelites is found in the Genesis 26:5 where God, referring to *Torah*, speaks to Isaac at a time prior to his promise to Jacob (Genesis 28:12-15), and prior to Jacob’s encounter with the Angel of the Lord who named him “Israel” (see, Genesis 32:25(24)-29(28)):

Genesis 26:5: “because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws {תּוֹרָתִי and my *Torah*}.”

Finally, *Torah* is mentioned seven times in Scripture prior to Israel receiving its covenant of nationhood at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:3-8). These occurrences (Genesis 26:5; Exodus 12:49, 13:9, 16:4, 16:28, 18:16, and 18:20) demonstrate that God’s *Torah* was operative among the Gentiles long before there was a Mosaic Covenant or Mosaic Law.

### The New Covenant Resolves All Doubt

Jeremiah prophesies a New Covenant wherein God’s law will be written on men’s hearts:

Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34): “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Since the word for “law” in this Scripture is תּוֹרָה (*Torah*), Jeremiah is quoting God as saying “I will put my *Torah* in their minds, and write it on their hearts.” Granted that the New Covenant was made with the houses of Israel and Judah; nevertheless, through faith-grafting (Romans 11:17, 24), *Torah* written on the heart was now available to Gentiles as well:

Romans 2:14-15: “for when Gentiles, who do not have the law {*nomos*}, by nature do the things in the law {*nomos*}, these, although not having the law {*nomos*}, are a law {*nomos*} to themselves, who

<sup>84</sup> The word גוֹיִם {*goyim*} appears in Scripture for the first time in Genesis 10:5, proving their existence prior to God’s covenant with Abraham, yet after *Torah* was spoken into existence.

*show the work of the law {nomos} written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.*” (see also, [Ephesians 3:6](#); and [Galatians 3:14](#)).

### **Torah Is Not a Unique Jewish Distinctive**

Since we have shown that *Torah* predated Israel and the Mosaic Covenant, obedience to *Torah* cannot possibly be claimed by Judaism as a unique Jewish distinctive. That notwithstanding, particular requirements of *Torah* and the manner in which they are obeyed may indeed be identity-dependent. For example I, being male, cannot obey the commandment to “not wear anything that pertains to a man” and, if I were a woman, I could not decline to “put on a woman’s garment” ([Deuteronomy 22:5](#)). As a non-*Cohen*, I could not have obeyed commandments of *Torah* that directed priests to conduct certain burnt offerings (e.g. [Leviticus 17:6](#)), and if I were a *Cohen*, I could not have obeyed the commandment to allow my land to rest every seven years ([Leviticus 25:4](#)). In the same way, certain commandments apply only to Israelites (Jews), certain ones only to Gentiles, and many to both.

One identity-dependent factor for me is that I am living in the twenty-first century and under the New Covenant. Had I lived during the time of Moses or Joshua, I would have been required to bring animal sacrifices to the Tabernacle; today, there is no Tabernacle or Temple, and I am therefore prohibited from sacrificing any animal whatsoever. On the other hand, Scripture teaches that there is a need for blood atonement, so I gratefully receive Messiah Yeshua’s sacrifice as my own. Applying Mosaic commandments in the New Covenant requires wisdom from the Holy Spirit and, in a large sense, that is what Jeremiah meant when he said that the *Torah* would be placed in our minds and written on our hearts.

In the New Covenant, both Jews and Gentiles need to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit in order to know how to apply commandments that were given centuries ago under the Mosaic Covenant. Some commandments can be obeyed today exactly as in the day of Moses, and some need to be applied differently to accommodate our new situation.

—April 5, 2005, NKJ

## Proselytes to Israel In a Messianic Jewish Congregation

### Introduction

Ruth, the Moabitess, became a member of Israel through her offer of covenant: “*Your God will be my God, and your people will be my people*” (Ruth 1:15-17). Israel accepted Ruth’s offer by Boaz (an Israelite) taking Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:13) and, that day, Israel added to its number this proselyte who was destined to be in the direct line of the descendants of King David and Messiah Yeshua (Ruth 4:13-22; Matthew 1:1-6). Throughout history, countless Gentiles have joined themselves to the community of Israel (Isaiah 56:1-8; Ezra 6:21) and some (as did Ruth) as proselytes (Esther 8:17; Acts 6:5, 13:43).<sup>85</sup> The question often raised among New Covenant believers is, however, whether changing one’s identity from being a non-Jew to a Jewish proselyte is proper (or even biblically possible) now that salvation through Yeshua has come to both Jew and non-Jew alike (John 3:16; Ephesians 3:6; Acts 11:18).

In his letters to the Romans and the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul establishes the spiritual equality of Jews and non-Jews in Messiah (Romans 10:12-13; Ephesians 3:6). Nevertheless, he says of Israel:

Romans 3:1-2: “*What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way. First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.*”

and

Romans 9:3-5: “*Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Messiah, who is God all over, forever praised!*”

From these and other scriptures (Exodus 19:1-6; Deuteronomy 14:1-2; Isaiah 61:6), we see that being a Jew is a desirable identity, for Israel has been called to serve God as a holy and a priestly nation (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 49:6, 60:3, 61:6); Romans 15:7-13.

Through Yeshua’s sacrificial death, life came to both Jew and non-Jew alike (John 3:16; Ephesians 3:6). Yeshua and the disciples at first ministered exclusively to Jews (Matthew 15:22-24; Acts 3:26), but after his death, the disciples carried the news of Yeshua’s salvation to the Gentiles as well (Romans 1:16, 11:13; Acts 9:15, 10:1-35). Those Gentiles who accepted Yeshua became grafted-in partakers of God’s covenant with Abraham (Romans 9:22-26, 11:13-22; Ephesians 2:11-13), but the wild olive shoot referred to in Romans 11 did not become the root. In other words, the Gentiles who received the Messiah of Israel did not automatically become Jews, and they were therefore exempt from being required to keep much of the Jewish law (Acts 15:1-21). In the same way that many Jewish and non-Jewish believers of the first century lived together in communities that were distinctively Jewish in worship and lifestyle, so also today, Messianic Jewish congregations have drawn significant numbers of Gentile believers who desire to worship and fellowship alongside their Jewish brethren. Many of these individuals have taken on Messianic identities and adopted Messianic Jewish practices, and some have even offered their sons and daughters in marriage to the sons and daughters of Jewish believers.

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<sup>85</sup> 1 L. H. Feldman, “The Omnipresence of the God-Fearers,” pp. 58-69, *Biblical Archaeology*, Sept./Oct. 1986.

From time to time, Gentile believers such as those heretofore described, have perceived that God was calling them to make their relationship with the Jewish people permanent by becoming proselytes (converts). Responses from their respective congregations have ranged from supportive to prohibitive, with most Messianic Jewish congregations unsure as to how they ought to respond. This paper explores various considerations and criteria important in the recognition of proselytes by Messianic Jewish congregations and concludes that such recognition is consistent with Scripture when responding to the authentic call of God.

### Defining “Jew” Genetically

Genetic definitions of “who is a Jew” are several and, as one might expect, proponents of such definitions tend to resist the practice of proselytization. The following list illustrates the main inconsistencies which result from defining a “Jew” in purely genetic terms:

- (1) By rabbinical *halachah*, one is considered to be a Jew if one’s mother is a Jew despite belief in Yeshua or any other Messianic belief.<sup>86, 87, 88</sup>
- (2) The above notwithstanding, the weight of Scripture teaches that Jewish identity is transmitted through the father—not the mother (Genesis 17:15-19, 27:26-29; Exodus 3:5-6; Hebrews 11:8-9) again, regardless of belief.<sup>89</sup>
- (3) The above notwithstanding, followers of Yeshua are not currently considered to be Jewish under Israel’s Law of Return.<sup>90, 91, 92</sup>
- (4) Rabbi Akiba ben Yosef, probably a proselyte and one of Judaism’s most highly esteemed rabbis, declared Bar Kochba to be the messiah, an error that cost the lives of many Jews during his military campaign against Rome.<sup>93</sup> Despite this, Rabbi Akiba’s identity as a Jew has never been challenged.
- (5) No known Jewish authority has ever challenged the Jewish identity of Sabbatai Zevi, one of history’s most notorious false messiahs who, in addition, converted to Islam.
- (6) No living person can, with certainty, trace his genetic lineage as far back as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and therefore no one can be absolutely certain he is a Jew by any genetic definition.
- (7) The Apostle Paul defined limits to genetic definitions of Judaism when he said: “*For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel*” (Romans 9:6), and “*A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one*

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86 *Hullin* 5a (refers to Israelite apostates); *Avodah Zarah* 26a,b; *Gittin* 45b (*meshummadim* listed separately from non-Jews)

87 L. H. Schiffman, “Who Was A Jew?,” pp. 9-17, 41-49, *KTAV*, 1985.84

88 Apostacy,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 3, p. 209, *Keter*,

89 D. Juster, “Jewish Roots,” pp. 191-192, *DAVAR*, 1986

90 Law of Return, 5710-1950 (Israel), as amended 1954

91 Application of Rufeisen v. The Minister of the Interior (1963), 54-55, High Court Case (Israel) 72/62, PD 16:2428-55

92 “Apostacy,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 3, pp. 209-210, 214

93 A. J. Kolatch, *Who’s Who in the Talmud*, pp. 68-71, Jonathan David, 1981



*inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code” (Romans 2:28-29).*

### **An Analogy**

The foregoing is not to say that Jewish identity has no Genetic basis, for God said to Abraham:

*Genesis 17:9: “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.”*

Since being an Israelite is not unlike being a citizen of a political state, the following analogy is presented as an aid to understanding the relationship between genetic and covenant Jewish identity.

A baby who is born within the borders of a country usually receives automatic citizenship in that country. Although the youngster has had no voice in the location of his birth, he comes into a covenant whereby he receives certain citizenship benefits and owes certain obligations of loyalty. The evidence (sign) of this covenant is the baby’s birth certificate, without which he cannot prove his citizenship. His acceptance of the covenant is assumed, as is his obligation of continued loyalty to the country. The child is not required to ratify or affirm the covenant when he comes of age, but he can lose his citizenship if he disaffirms it or commits certain acts of disloyalty. Similarly, persons who are not citizens by birth can become citizens through a covenantal process known as “naturalization.” Applicants for naturalization must affirmatively agree to the covenant, for as to them, commitment cannot be assumed.

The analogy is that a child who is born of Jewish parents is born into the Abrahamic Covenant as his natural identity. He carries his covenant membership throughout his life, and his covenant sign is circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14). A Jewish child can be cut off from the covenant if he is not circumcised at some time during his life. Also, a person who is not born of Jewish parents can opt to join the covenant and become a “Jew by choice” if, at his or her request, the Jewish community accepts him/her as a proselyte, and if he is male he is circumcised. It is the analogy to naturalization, and what is called “conversion.”

### **Common Objections**

There are two often-made objections to allowing Gentiles to become proselytes in a Messianic Jewish congregation. They are:

(1) In referring to circumcision and other matters, Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians states: *“A man should remain in the situation God called him to.” (I Corinthians 7:17-24).*

(2) Allowing proselytization in Messianic Jewish congregations would open the floodgates to large numbers of gentile converts thereby diluting the Messianic Jewish witness and causing a loss of Jewish authenticity.

To the first objection, one may point out that in the context of I Corinthians 7:16-17, Paul is speaking of marriage between a man and a woman; then, beginning with verse 18, Paul establishes a general rule, employing circumcision as an illustration. Paul did not intend this to be a teaching on circumcision, nor did he consider the rule to be absolute, for he himself departed from it when he circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). Thus, we deduce that the principle Paul taught is contentment to be in the center of God’s will for our lives which, in most (but not all cases, reflects our condition at the

time we enter the Kingdom. Finally, Paul prefaces the entire discussion with his qualifying remark: “*I, not the Lord,*” suggesting that he considered the aforesaid rule to be of a more pragmatic nature as compared with the other things he taught in the same epistle.

To the second objection, one may point out that at no time in history have large numbers of Gentiles sought to become proselytes to the extent that it has ever caused a problem of reverse assimilation or dilution. In point of fact, the ordeal of male circumcision, having to adhere to the law (see, Ephesians 3:6; and Galatians 3:14), a reluctance to abandon one’s existing identity, and the specter of antisemitic persecutions, have effectively deterred most Gentiles “God Fearers” (John 12:20; Acts 17:4) from becoming proselytes; these factors are still deterrents today.<sup>94</sup>

All of this having been said, weight must nevertheless be given to Paul’s admonition to remain in the situation in which one is called. It is also clear that God’s intention that Israel be a light and a witness to the nations (Genesis 18:18, 22:18; Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 2:1-5, 61:6) would certainly be undercut by the assimilation of great numbers of non-Jews and, for that reason, large-scale proselytization could not possibly be God’s design (Zechariah 14:16-19; Romans 15:7-13).<sup>95</sup>

### **Proselytes Already Recognized**

Finally, it must be pointed out that despite polemics, Messianic Jewish congregations already recognize proselytization in two ways. First, Messianic Jewish congregations generally accept as Jewish proselytes, those Gentile believers who submit to, and are declared proselytes by, non-Messianic rabbinical authorities—a strange delegation of authority to those we consider apostate due to their rejection of Yeshua.<sup>96</sup> Second, Messianic Jewish congregations, acting without uniformly agreed-to standards, receive as Jews those who claim Jewish identity although none of us today can prove our lineage past several generations. In truth, if we did not recognize a process by which we become Jews through covenant declaration and commitment, none of us could, with any certainty, call ourselves Jews.

### **Conclusion**

From time to time, God calls a non-Jew in a Messianic Jewish congregation to establish a lifelong tie to Israel by becoming a proselyte. The most natural situation where this occurs is when a non-Jew marries a Jew, and the couple recognizes that their becoming “one flesh” enhances their equal commitment to, and membership in, the House of Israel. As representatives of Israel, congregational leaders have a solemn responsibility to consider every case where a member of the community requests recognition as a proselyte. In the case of a non-Jew proposing to marry a Jew, unity of calling is always a subject of their premarital counseling. As to others, congregational leaders’ observations over time plus proven commitment within a congregation are sufficient safeguards to enable those in authority to discern who in their midst are truly called by God to become proselytes.

—August 6, 1988, NKJ

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94 C. L. Feinberg, “Proselyte,” vol. 4, pp. 908-909, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, M. C. Tenny, Gen. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976)

95 R. K. Harrison, “Gentiles,” vol. 2, p. 696, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

96 Entitlement to “Moses’ seat” (Matthew 23:1-3) can no longer belong to those who reject Messiah Yeshua because, with the destruction of the Temple and the replacement of Temple worship with Messiah’s sacrifice, the foundation of the Mosaic Covenant (not the validity of the law or the Old Testament Scriptures) passed away and was replaced by a New Covenant in Yeshua (Hebrews 8:6-13).

## Tithing

Occasionally, every Messianic Jewish congregation should have its understanding about tithing refreshed. This is particularly so because tithing is the way that most of us contribute financially to the work of the Kingdom. Unfortunately, the tithe has been taught improperly with enough regularity, that many of us in congregational leadership are reluctant to address it head—on lest we be perceived as self-serving.

In modern times, tithing one's income is commonly understood to mean giving one tenth of it to the Lord's work and, most often, to one's local congregation. Tithing does not, however, have its origins in modern times or even in Mosaic times. The first biblical mention of tithing is found in Genesis where Abram (later called Abraham) is seen giving a tithe to Mechizidek:

*Genesis 14:18-20: "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' And he gave him a tithe of all."*

The tithe being ten percent, is gleaned from a later incident in [Genesis 28:20-22](#) where Jacob vowed a tenth of all to God, and it is also confirmed in [Hebrews 7:4](#) (see also, [Numbers 18:25-26](#)). Who is this mysterious Melchizedek to whom Abraham tithed, who was both king and priest of God? We get a clearer picture of him in [Hebrews 6:19—7:17](#) which I will quote in part:

*'This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Yeshua, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils...For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."'*

So, Abraham tithed to the King of whose order Yeshua has become High Priest. Since we know from [1 Timothy 6:15](#) and elsewhere in Scripture that Yeshua is "King of kings," it follows that Yeshua is High Priest of his own order, and it becomes almost a certainty (in my opinion) that Abraham tithed to pre-incarnate Yeshua.

While this background is interesting, it does not explain why we should be tithing today. The apostle Paul taught in [Galatians 3:24](#) that "the Law was our tutor," so let us be tutored and see how God instructed his people Israel regarding the tithe during the time of Moses. In the *Torah* we read:

Leviticus 27:30: “*And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD’s. It is holy to the LORD.*”

Deuteronomy 26:12-13: “*When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled, then you shall say before the LORD your God: ‘I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.’*”

“Income” back then was not money; for most Israelites it was what the land produced when it was cultivated, so the tithe was generally fruits, vegetables, grains, wine, and sometimes animals. There was a complex structure in *Torah* as to the distribution of the tithe, with most of it going to the Levites, the priestly tribe that had no land of its own. So, although perhaps over simplistic, it is fair to say that the Israelites tithed to God by giving to the priests. Perhaps the most clear and concise statement of God’s insistence that the Israelites tithe, can be found in Malachi 3:8-10:

*“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” Says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.’”*

If the Mosaic Law is a tutor, then the above Scriptures teach that, in the same way as the Israelites of the Mosaic Covenant tithed by giving to their priests (the Levites), so does God expect us of the New Covenant to tithe to our High Priest Yeshua. It is true that we have no Temple storehouse where to bring our tithes, but we do have congregational storehouses that use our tithes and offerings to support Yeshua’s priestly work. In most congregations, that includes the salaries of rabbis and other, rent or mortgage payments, libraries, activity expenses, and *tzedakah*.

The bottom line on tithing is that there is a clear history of it as an act of worship and priestly offering going all the way back to Abraham. Today’s tithe is as vital to God’s work as it has always been, and it has always been understood to be ten percent of one’s income. Those who would criticize tithing in the twenty-first century as unauthorized because the New Testament contains no such commandment are missing the point that there is a need, and that “Messiah is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). They are also missing the point of God saying through Jeremiah 31:32b(33b):

“I will put My *Torah* in their minds, and write it on their hearts”

Finally, as distinct from other methods of giving, tithing is an act of faith and surrender to God because the person tithing has no control over its amount or the use to which it is put. Offerings are different. They are freewill and can be designated for specified purposes, but the tithe cannot. So, if you are already committed to a life of tithing, let this short article be a reminder of its foundations. If you have not yet committed to tithing, pray and ask God to guide you in your decision; I am confident that He will.

—September 28, 2007, NKJ

## **Torah and the New Covenant**<sup>97</sup>

### **Meaning of Torah**

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament defines “*Torah*” (תּוֹרָה—Strong’s number 8451) as follows:<sup>98</sup>

*“The word tôrâ means basically “teaching” whether it is the wise man instructing his son or God instructing Israel. The wise give insight into all aspects of life so that the young may know how to conduct themselves and to live a long blessed life (Prov 3:1f.). So too God, motivated by love, reveals to man basic insight into how to live with each other and how to approach God. Through the law God shows his interest in all aspects of man’s life which is to be lived under his direction and care. Law of God stands parallel to word of the Lord to signify that law is the revelation of God’s will (e.g. Isa 1:10). In this capacity it becomes the nation’s wisdom and understanding so that others will marvel at the quality of Israel’s distinctive life style (Deut 4:6). Thus there is a very similar understanding of the role of teaching with its results in the wisdom school, in the priestly instruction, and the role of the law with its results for all the people of the covenant.”*

*“Specifically law refers to any set of regulations; e.g., Exo 12 contains the law in regard to observing the Passover, Some other specific laws include those for the various offerings (Lev 7:37), for leprosy (Lev 14:57) and for jealousy (Num 5:29). In this light law is often considered to consist of statutes, ordinances, precepts, commandments, and testimonies.”*

*“The meaning of the word gains further perspective in the light of Deut. According to Deut 1:5 Moses sets about to explain the law; law here would encompass the moral law, both in its apodictic and casuistic formulation, and the ceremonial law. The genius of Deut is that it interprets the external law in the light of its desired effect on man’s inner attitudes. In addition, the book of Deut itself shows that the law has a broad meaning to encompass history, regulations and their interpretation, and exhortations. It is not merely the listing of casuistic statements as is the case in Hammurabi’s code. Later the word extended to include the first five books of the Bible in all their variety.”*

In addition, The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon gives “direction, instruction, law”<sup>99</sup> as the primary definitions of “*Torah*,” and the Encyclopaedia Judaica states:<sup>100</sup>

*“Torah is derived from the root ירה which in the hifil conjugation means “to teach” (cf. Lev. 10:11). The meaning of the word is therefore “teaching,” “doctrine,” or “instructions”;* the

<sup>97</sup> Included in *The Law of Messiah* by Michael Rudolph in collaboration with Daniel C. Juster.

<sup>98</sup> R. Laird Harris, editor, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, TWOT No. 910, p. 404, Moody Press (Chicago, Illinois: 1980).

<sup>99</sup> Francis Brown, editor, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, “Torah,” p. 435-436, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1979).

<sup>100</sup> Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “Torah,” vol. 15, pp. 1235-36, Keter Publishing House Ltd. (Jerusalem: 1971).

*commonly accepted “law” gives a wrong impression. The word is used in different ways but the underlying idea of “teaching” is common to all.*”

There are basically two ways in which “*Torah*” is used in the *Tanakh*. In its narrowest usage and in a minority of cases, “*Torah*” refers to parts of God’s legal code which provide instructions on specific matters. Examples of this usage are:

- “burnt offering...” (Leviticus 6:2(9)ff)
- “grain offering...” (Leviticus 6:7(14)ff).
- “sin offering...” (Leviticus 6:18(25)ff).
- “trespass offering...” (Leviticus 7:1ff).
- “peace offering...” (Leviticus 7:11ff).
- “leprous plague...” (Leviticus 13:59ff).
- “jealousy...” (Numbers 5:29ff)

In most cases, though, “*Torah*” (or *torah*) refers to God’s teaching—his universal and eternal standard for conduct and life. This is made clear in many verses of Scripture where *Torah* as teaching is distinguished from *Torah* as law by being accompanied by other Hebrew words having to do with law. Examples of such accompanying words are:

מצוה *mitzvah* (commandment—Strong’s 4687)<sup>101</sup>  
 חקקה *khukah* (statute or ordinance—Strong’s 2708)<sup>102</sup>  
 משפט *mishpat* (judgment—Strong’s 4941)<sup>103</sup>

The following translation examples contain the word “*Torah*” and one or more of the above words, showing that “*Torah*” is distinguishable from commandments, statutes, ordinances and judgments:

“This is the **ordinance** of the **Torah** which the LORD has commanded, saying...” (Numbers 19:2). Here, “*Torah*” cannot mean “ordinance.”

“This is the **ordinance** of the **Torah** which the LORD **commanded** Moses:” (Numbers 31:21). Here also, “*Torah*” cannot mean “ordinance.”

“...if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His **commandments** and His **statutes** which are written in this Book of the **Torah**...” (Deuteronomy 30:10). Here, “*Torah*” cannot mean either “commandment” or “statute.”

“If his sons forsake My **Torah** and do not walk in My **judgments**, if they break My **statutes** And do not keep My **commandments**...” (Psalms 89:31(30)-32(31)). Here, “*Torah*” cannot mean “judgments,” “statutes,” or “commandments.”

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**101** A commandment is an order from, and enforceable by, a singular authority such as a king. Francis Brown, editor, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, “mitzvah,” p. 846, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, Massachusetts: 1979).

**102** A *statute* is a legislated directive, generally enforceable by a branch of government. An ordinance is similar, but at a lower level.

**103** A *judgment* is law created by a decision made in a case in controversy or a specific situation.

Another way of distinguishing “*Torah*” (teaching) from “commandment,” “statute,” “ordinance,” and “judgment,” is by its context. The following Scriptures are best understood when “*Torah*” means “teaching.”

Exodus 13:9: “*It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD’s **Torah** may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.*”

Exodus 16:4: “*Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My **Torah** or not.’*”

Psalms 1:2: “*But his delight is in the **Torah** of the LORD, And in His **Torah** he meditates day and night.*”

Psalms 37:31: “*The **Torah** of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.*”

Psalms 40:8(7): “*I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your **Torah** is within my heart.*”

Proverbs 6:23: “*For the commandment is a lamp, And the **Torah** a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life.*”

Proverbs 7:2: “*Keep my commands and live, And my **Torah** as the apple of your eye.*”

Proverbs 13:14: “*The **Torah** of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death.*”

### **Torah in the New Covenant**

The New Covenant was prophesied in Jeremiah 30(31):31-33(34).<sup>104</sup>

*“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

Since in the Hebrew text of this Scripture, the word for “law” is תּוֹרָה (*Torah*), Jeremiah is quoting God as saying: “I will put My *Torah* in their minds, and write it on their hearts.”

Handily, the above Scripture is repeated in the Greek New Covenant Scriptures, in Hebrews 8:8-12. There, the Greek word corresponding to “*Torah*” (verse 10) is “*nomos*” (Strong’s No. 3551). This word is defined as “*Torah*” by Friberg’s “New Testament Lexicon”<sup>105</sup> as follows:

“νόμος, ου, ὁ ν. a basic mng. of what is assigned or proper law; (1) gener. any law in the judicial sphere (RO 7.1); (2) as rule governing one’s conduct principle, law (RO 7.23); (3) more specif. in the NT, of the Mosaic system of legislation as revealing the divine will (**the Torah**) the law (of Moses) (LU 2.22); in an expanded sense, Jewish relig. laws developed fr. the Mosaic law (Jewish) law (JN 18.31; AC 23.29); (4) as the collection of writings considered sacred by the Jews; (a) in a narrower sense, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, as comprising the law (MT 12.5; GA 3.10b); (b) in a wider sense, the OT scriptures as a whole (MT 5.18; RO 3.19); (5) fig. as the Christian Gospel, the New Covenant, as furnishing a new principle to govern spiritual life law (RO 8.2a; HE 10.16).”

A word related to “*nomos*,” the Greek root word, “*nomotheteo*” (νομοθετέω—Strong’s No. 3549), occurs in Hebrews 8:6 as νενομοθέτηται. This word is translated “established” in the New King James Version:

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was **established** on better promises.”

Stern recognizes the equivalence of “*nomotheteo*” and “*Torah*” in his translation of Hebrews 8:6 in his “Jewish New Testament.”<sup>106</sup>

“But now the work Yeshua has been given to do is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as **Torah** on the basis of better promises.”

In support of Stern’s thesis that “*nomotheteo*” and “*Torah*” are equivalent, consider that νομοθετησασι “*nomotheteo*” is also found in Exodus 24:12 of the Septuagint,<sup>107</sup> and that very same word in the Hebrew text is יהוה־תורה—“*v’ha-Torah*.”

Employing these definitions, one may confidently modify Hebrews 8:6 in the New King James Version to be rendered:

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was given as *Torah* (based) on better promises.”

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<sup>105</sup> Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, “no,moj,” BibleWorks 4.0, Hermeneutica Bible Research Software (Big Fork, Montana: 1999).

<sup>106</sup> David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament*, 1st ed., p. 302, Jewish New Testament Publications (Clarksville, Maryland: 1991).

<sup>107</sup> George Morrish, editor, *A Concordance of the Septuagint*, p. 166, Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1988).



Since the “better covenant” in Hebrews 8:6 is the “New Covenant” which is referred to in Jeremiah 31:30(31) and Hebrews 8:8, one must conclude that the New Covenant writings were given as *Torah*, and therefore are *Torah* (God’s teaching).<sup>108</sup>

### **What Makes the Pentateuch Torah?**

Since “*Torah*” is God’s teaching, there is a sense in which all Scripture is “*Torah*.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17: “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*”

Nevertheless, Yeshua himself recognized a distinction between the *Torah* of the *Pentateuch* and other classifications of Scripture:

Luke 24:44 : “*Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the **Law** (nomos) of Moses and the **Prophets** and the **Psalms** concerning Me.*”

Why then, are the first five books of the Bible traditionally classified as “*Torah*,”<sup>109</sup> whereas the remaining Hebrew Scriptures are not? It cannot be their inspiration, for by definition, all Scripture is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16). No, the uniqueness of the *Pentateuch* is that it contains God’s major covenants prior to Yeshua. The other books of the *Tanakh* expound on these covenants, teach about them, prophesy about them, and present their history, but they do not themselves contain the covenants.

### **The Gospels as Torah**

This paper concludes that the New Covenant is a covenant of *Torah*—God’s teaching written on our hearts. Now let us see if any of the New Covenant books are *Torah* analogous to the *Pentateuch*. If the test for “*Pentateuchal*” *Torah* is whether a New Covenant book contains the Covenant itself—the “*Torah*” put in our minds and written on our hearts—then the Gospel books Mathew, Mark, Luke and John pass the test. In further support of this conclusion, consider the many similarities between the *Pentateuch* and the Gospels:

1. The *Pentateuch* contains the life of Moses, who was used by God to deliver the Sinai Covenant to Israel (Exodus 34:27).<sup>110</sup> The Gospels collectively contain the life of Yeshua, who was used by God to deliver the New Covenant to Israel (Hebrews 8:6).
2. The *Pentateuch* contains the event in which Moses proclaims the blood of the Sinai Covenant (Exodus 24:8). The Gospels collectively contain the event in which Yeshua proclaims his blood of the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28).

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**108** “According to MJ 8:6, the New Covenant itself ‘has been made Torah.’” David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 1st ed., p. 498, Jewish New Testament Publications (Clarksville, Maryland: 1992). See also, p.220 and p. 466.

**109** Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 23, William Morrow and Company, Inc. (New York: 1991).

**110** The *Pentateuch* also contains the lives of the patriarchs of earlier covenants.

3. The *Pentateuch* contains the teachings and the commandments of the Sinai Covenant conveyed through Moses (Deuteronomy 4:13). The Gospels collectively contain the teachings and the commandments of the New Covenant conveyed through Yeshua (Matthew 5:1-7:29).

4. The *Pentateuch* contains the means by which men must atone for their sins through animal Sacrifice. The Gospels collectively contain the means by which men must be forgiven for their sins through Yeshua's sacrifice.

5. The *Pentateuch* initiates a new priesthood and the appointment of Aaron as High Priest. The Gospels collectively initiate a new priesthood and the appointment of Yeshua as High Priest (described in Hebrews 7:20-28).<sup>111</sup>

6. The *Pentateuch* contains shadows of things to come. The Gospels collectively contain the prophetic fulfillment of those shadows.

7. The *Pentateuch* ends with the death of Moses. The Gospels collectively end with the death and ascension of Yeshua.

Yeshua's life and blood are the substance of the New Covenant—its "*Torah*" (John 1:14, 14:6), and Yeshua's sacrificial death and resurrection mark both the New Covenant's beginning (John 19:30) and its fulfillment. It is in the Gospel books that we find this New Covenant substance, and therefore the New Covenant itself.

### Conclusions

The Gospels are analogous to the *Pentateuch*, in the same way as the remaining New Covenant books are analogous to the *Nev'im* (Prophets) and the *Ketuvim* (Holy Writings). Because the Gospels (like the *Pentateuch*) contain their respective covenant, they and not the other New Covenant books, are classifiable as *Torah*.

The Book of Acts, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation (like the Prophets and the Holy Writings of the *Tanakh*), support their respective Covenants through prophecy, wisdom, Godly truths and the presentation of history. Because of this supportive role, these books may be appropriately classifiable as *Haftarah*.

—January 13, 2000 NKJ

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<sup>111</sup> Yeshua's priesthood begins with his resurrection.

## Torah, Covenant, and the Law of Messiah<sup>112</sup>

### Definitions

First, “Covenant:” A covenant is a relationship between persons that includes one or more obligations. A covenant relationship can originate in several ways. Sometimes it is imposed on us such as our covenant as Jewish people if our ancestry is through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We call this the Abrahamic Covenant and, if we are in it, we are in it whether or not we want to be. As for its obligations, they include our serving as priests in a kingdom of priests and our being a light to the nations of the world. We call such covenants “unilateral covenants” because we had no say in it. Unilateral covenants are sometimes placed upon us by the intention of another and sometimes they are the subtle byproduct of a relationship we find ourselves in such as parenthood. Sometimes we unintentionally create a unilateral covenant when we voluntarily take upon ourselves an obligation, such as when we promise someone that we will do something for him with nothing expected in return. In such a case, the obligation is ours alone, but the covenant that is created belongs to the other person as well because he can expect us to be true to our word and can morally (albeit not legally) hold us to our promise. We typically do not think of such a relationship as a covenant, but it is one, nevertheless.

A covenant can also be bilateral when, for example, each party to the covenant promises something in order to obtain a promise from, or action by, the other. An example of a bilateral covenant is found in Exodus 19:3b-6 in which God offers himself to the Israelites and says to Moses:

*“Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya’akov, to tell the people of Isra’el: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”*

And then we read in Exodus 19:8:

*“All the people answered as one, ‘Everything ADONAI has said, we will do.’”*

God’s promise in exchange for the Israelites’ promise created what we call the “Mosaic Covenant.” It was bilateral.

Our next definition is of “Commandment:” A commandment, in our context, is an explicit command (or order) issued by God. It creates a covenant (i.e. a relationship of obligation to obey) but it is not itself a covenant. Commandments are statutory laws (i.e. laws that are decreed or legislated and usually committed to writing) which are to be distinguished from laws that are implied or created through communal practice or tradition. When we refer to the Mosaic Law, we are referring to God’s Commandments (statutes and ordinances) spoken from Mount Sinai or given through Moses.

Our next definition is of “Torah:” There is “*Torah*” and “the *Torah*.” “The *Torah*” is either the *Pentateuch* (i.e. the first five books of the Bible) or the “Mosaic Law,” or just “the Law” (assuming Mo-

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<sup>112</sup> Reprinted from: Michael Rudolph, *Torah, Covenant, Priesthood, and Leadership* (Montgomery Village: Tikkun, 2019).

saic). The generic word “*Torah*” (without the article “the”) means God’s teaching broadly. It includes God’s teachings in “the *Torah*” but generic “*Torah*” can be found in every part of the Bible either explicitly commanded or implied. I consider “*Torah*” synonymous with “the will of God.”

### **Torah in the New Testament**

Why then, are the first five books of the Bible traditionally classified as “*Torah*,” whereas the remaining Hebrew Scriptures are not? It cannot be their inspiration, for by definition, all Scripture is inspired. No, the uniqueness of the *Pentateuch* is that it contains God’s major covenants prior to Yeshua. The other books of the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) expound on these covenants, teach about them, prophesy about them, and present their history, but they do not themselves contain the covenants. I previously said that generic *Torah* can be found in in the New Testament. Consider the many similarities between the *Pentateuch* and the Gospels:

1. The *Pentateuch* contains the life of Moses who was used by God to deliver the Sinai Covenant to Israel (Exodus 34:27). The Gospels collectively contain the life of Yeshua, who was used by God to deliver the New Covenant to Israel (Hebrews 8:6).
2. The *Pentateuch* contains the event in which Moses proclaims the blood of the Sinai Covenant (Exodus 24:8). The Gospels collectively contain the event in which Yeshua proclaims his blood of the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28).
3. The *Pentateuch* contains the teachings and the commandments of the Sinai Covenant conveyed through Moses (Deuteronomy 4:13). The Gospels collectively contain the teachings and the commandments of the New Covenant conveyed through Yeshua (Matthew 5:1—7:29).
4. The *Pentateuch* contains the means by which men must atone for their sins through animal sacrifice. The Gospels collectively contain the means by which men must be forgiven for their sins through Yeshua’s sacrifice.
5. The *Pentateuch* initiates a priesthood and the appointment of Aaron as High Priest (Exodus 28:1-3). The Gospels collectively initiate a new priesthood and the appointment of Yeshua as High Priest (described in Hebrews 7:20-28).
6. The *Pentateuch* contains shadows of things to come. The Gospels collectively contain the prophetic fulfillment of those shadows.
7. The *Pentateuch* ends with the death of Moses. The Gospels collectively end with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Yeshua.

Yeshua’s life and blood are the substance of the New Covenant—its “*Torah*” (John 1:14, 14:6), and Yeshua’s sacrificial death and resurrection mark both the New Covenant’s beginning (John 19:30) and its fulfillment. It is in the Gospel books that we find this New Covenant substance, and therefore the New Covenant itself.

## Early Torah

Now a little history: It is strongly suggested in the *Tanakh* and ancient Jewish writings, and is specifically stated in the New Covenant Scriptures, that the *Torah* existed before the creation of the world. Writing for *The Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Warren Harvey references Ben Sira and Proverbs 8:22 ff in order to make his point; he writes:

*“Moses received the Torah from Sinai’ (Avot 1:1). Yet there is an ancient tradition that the Torah existed in heaven not only before God revealed it to Moses, but even before the world was created (Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 15, p. 1236 (Keter Publishing House: Jerusalem, 1971).”*

Harvey (in agreement with other Jewish writers) believes that Proverbs 8:22 ff, written as a personification of wisdom, is actually the personification of a pre-existent *Torah*:

Proverbs 8:22-31: *“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primeval dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.” (NKJ)*

Harvey’s conclusion of a pre-existent *Torah* is heavily influenced by ancient writings in both *Talmud* and *Midrash*:

*“Surely it was taught: Seven things were created before the world was created, and these are they: The Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of Messiah. The Torah, for it is written, ‘The Lord made me as the beginning of his way’ (Pesachim 54a).*

*“Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, ‘In the beginning God created’ (Gen. 1:1), ‘beginning’ referring to the Torah, as the verse, ‘The Lord made me in the beginning of His way (Prov 8:22)’ (Gen. R. 1:4).*

John 1:1 refers to God as the spoken “Word” and one who embodies and speaks the “Word:”

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

And the verses that follow John 1:1 clearly identify Messiah Yeshua as being the Word:

John 1:2-14: *“He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And*

*the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (See also, John 14:6)*

When the *logos* spoke, the result was *nomos*, the same Greek word used in Hebrews 8:10 to mean *Torah* when the Book of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:32(33) in translation. Since the *logos* was pre-existent, it is logical that the *nomos* or *Torah* came into existence when the *logos* spoke it, and so *Torah* must have either pre-existed or at least come into existence during the creation.

### **Torah in Judaism**

Adherence to the *Torah* and *Torah*-observance has been a characteristic of Judaism ever since Moses. So, when the Holy Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD and Jews fled from Jerusalem, Judaism was thrown into a crisis and, influential rabbis of the time (notably Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai), in an attempt to save the Pharisaic Judaism that they knew, led the Jewish people into changing their beliefs of what was required to satisfy God. Whereas animal sacrifices in the Temple used to be the basis for atonement of sin, good works and keeping the commandments of the *Torah* were now said to be acceptable substitutes and, although the Holy Spirit had already made himself available on the *Shavuot* following Yeshua’s death, he was not received by the majority of the Jews of the day in the same way that Yeshua was not received. That is why the Judaism that resulted and that comes down to us today as Rabbinical Judaism relates to God in a way that is (for the most part) rule-keeping and not oriented to expecting and interacting with God’s presence. In short, the Holy Spirit ceased to be on the radar screen of normative Jewish life and practice.

Now I said “normative.” The Jews who believed in and followed Yeshua prior to this time were just beginning to organize, and when they (as all other Jews) fled from Jerusalem, they were less able to regroup. They continued in their faith individually (some probably secretly) but we have no record of a Yeshua-believing body of Jews coming together again until the late Nineteenth Century. Nevertheless, there is no record of any animosity between them and the rest of the Jewish community until after the Bar Kokhba revolt of circa 132-135 AD. Simon Bar Kokhba was widely regarded by the Jewish community as Messiah so, when he led a military revolt against Rome, the majority of Jews followed him into battle. Those who believed in Yeshua as Messiah did not, however, so when the Jews were disastrously defeated with the loss of many of its young men, those who did not go to war due to their faith in Yeshua were viewed as traitors to the Jewish people, and thus began the animosity that exists (even until today) between rabbinical Judaism (in its various forms) and Yeshua-believing Judaism that we today call Messianic Judaism.

### Attempts at Torah Codification

There have been several attempts among classical Jewish scholars to codify God's Word into numbered *mitzvot*. The earliest of these was *Hilchot Gedolot*, a work by Simon Kairo published sometime in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. By that time, a principle had already been established in the *Talmud*, that the total number of *mitzvot* in the *Torah* was *Taryag* (six hundred thirteen); and of these, two hundred forty-eight (248) were positive (*mitzvot aseh*), and three hundred sixty-five (365) were negative (*mitzvot lo ta'aseh*).

Anyone who attempts to enumerate *mitzvot* in the *Torah* soon realizes that there are decisions to be made. What, for example, should one consider to be a *mitzvah*? What level of departure from the plain meaning of the biblical text is permissible? What level of inference is allowable? How does one count similar expressions of God's will that are stated differently at different places in the Scriptures? Do we count as two *mitzvot* those that are expressed both in the positive and in the negative in different verses of Scripture, or do we count them as one? It is not surprising that those who have attempted this work have sometimes come to different conclusions. To bring consensus, Judaism needed a scholar of such prestige that he could define six hundred thirteen *mitzvot* that would be acceptable to a majority of the Jewish community.

### The Classical Codifiers

Such a scholar emerged in the person of Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides, aka "the RAMBAM") who, sometime prior to 1170 AD wrote his compilation of *Torah* law in Arabic under the title *Kitab Al-Fara'id* (The Book of Divine Precepts). He subsequently revised his work, and by the end of his life there were two Arabic texts or versions of *Kitab Al-Fara'id* in existence. Unlike his predecessors, Maimonides was careful to follow fourteen defined principles to justify his conclusions. This made all the difference, and his work received almost universal acceptance.

Three contemporaries of Maimonides translated his texts into Hebrew, and these translations became known as *Sefer haMitzvot*. Abraham ibn Chasdai made his translation from Maimonides' first version. Maimonides' second text (translated into Hebrew by Solomon ibn Job of Granada and separately by Moses ibn Tibbon) is, however, considered the "standard Arabic text" today. More recently, Dr. Chaim Heller published a "corrected" Hebrew text in which he compared and reconciled Maimonides' Arabic texts with that of ibn Job, and an even more recent translation called the "Jerusalem Hebrew Text" was made by Rabbi Joseph Kapach.

As an academic achievement, Maimonides' enumeration of *mitzvot* was huge. However, it was too exhaustive to be a convenient tool in the post-Temple era when many of the *mitzvot* dealing with sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood could no longer be performed.

Enter Rabbi Yisrael Meir haKohen (aka the *Chafetz Chaim*). In 1931, Rabbi Meir published *Sefer haMitzvot haKatzar* ("The Concise Book of *Mitvoth*") in which he extracted from Maimonides' list, Two Hundred Ninety Seven (297) *mitzvot*—Seventy-seven (77) positive, One Hundred Ninety-four (194) negative, and Twenty-six (26) applicable only in the Land of Israel. Rabbi Meir intended his book to be a compilation of *mitzvot* that could be observed by Jews in the post-Temple era and, particularly in the Diaspora.

Besides listing fewer *mitzvot* than Maimonides, Rabbi Meir differs from him in other ways as well. To begin with, the two compilers number their *mitzvot* differently and present them in a different order. As a consequence, it is not always easy to determine which one of Meir's *mitzvot* corresponds to a given *mitzvah* of Maimonides. Second, while they usually agree on the Scriptures that define a given *mitzvah*, it is not always the case, nor is it the case with other commentators. It is also important to note that, while both Maimonides and Meir quote Hebrew Scripture as proof texts for their respective *mitzvot*, neither of their original writings give supportive chapter and verse numbers, and their quotations are not always of the entire verses as they appear in modern Hebrew Bibles. Translators and editors of both of their works added chapter and verse citations that did not appear in the originals and, in some cases, they quoted entire verses of Scripture where the original writings quoted only parts of verses.

Finally, Maimonides and Meir do not always agree on the statement of the *mitzvah* that they extract from a given Scripture. For example, in response to Exodus 12:18 which reads:

*“From the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month until the evening of the twenty-first day, you are to eat matzah.”*

...Maimonides' Positive *Mitzvah* #158 states that we are to eat unleavened bread on the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, while Meir's Positive *Mitzvah* #23 states that we are to eat unleavened bread on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> day of *Nisan*. Presumably, the interpretive difference is in whether “evening” is understood to be before or after sundown. Another example is presented by Deuteronomy 6:13 which reads:

*“You are to fear ADONAI your God, serve him and swear by his name.”*

Notwithstanding that fearing God is the subject of the verse, Maimonides' Positive *Mitzvah* #5 interprets it as “worshipping” God, while Rabbi Meir's Positive *Mitzvah* #7 says it means to “pray” to God. Clearly, the ways the two commentators interpret the Scripture and write their respective *mitzvot* reflect both their judgment and their theology.

Codifications that were written after Sefer haMitzvot have added to our overall understanding of God's commandments, but no other codifier ever attained the prestige and influence of Maimonides. However, Yisrael Meir haKohen's work Sefer haMitzvot haKatzar provides a major comparison to Maimonides because he attempted to limit his list of commandments to those that he deemed performable in the Twentieth Century. Although a complete listing and in-depth discussion of other codes of law are beyond the scope of this teaching, several nevertheless deserve special mention:

- (a) Mishneh Torah, written by Maimonides, is a fourteen-book compilation of laws gleaned from both Scripture and Talmud. It is reputed to be complete but takes no account of a law's applicability in the post-Temple era. Maimonides built Mishneh Torah around his Sefer haMitzvot, so he reiterated all the *mitzvot* in an introductory list.
- (b) Sefer Mitzvot Gadol (Big Book of Commandments), Moses of Coucy (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century).



- (c) *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* (Little Book of Commandments), Isaac ben Joseph of Corveil (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century).
- (d) *Sefer HaChinuch* (The Book of Education) is attributed to Aaron haLevi of Barcelona (c. 1257) and is still in common use today. It was most probably based upon Abraham ibn Chasdai's translation of Maimonides' first Arabic edition and, although basically organized according to the chapter and verse sequence of the *Tanakh*, his first manuscript retained some positive and negative commandment groupings as part of its order. In contrast, the *Sefer HaChinuch* version that is in print today contains none of the positive and negative groupings, and so are listed from *Mitzvah* #1 to *Mitzvah* #613. This is the result (according to Charles Wengrov) of an early printer's decision to re-order the *mitzvot*, causing them to appear in exactly the same sequence as the verses in the *Tanakh*; and so it remains today.
- (e) Most other codifications of Jewish law such as the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* combine Scriptural and rabbinical elements.

There is one other thing that happened in the history of our people that I should mention. When it became uncomfortable for Yeshua-believing Jews to thrive within the various Jewish communities, some of them joined with their Gentile Christian counterparts, and assimilated into the Christian Church. We know of the forced conversions to Christianity, but I am speaking of where the joining was voluntary. This did little to endear Rabbinical Jews to Yeshua-believing Jews because many of the persecutions of Jews over the centuries were either caused by or allowed by the Christian Church. That is what has led to the common view among rabbinical Jews today that one is either a Jew or a Christian but cannot be both.

### **Torah Observance and Messianic Judaism**

Enter now Twentieth Century Hebrew-Christianity—a Jewish rediscovery of Yeshua and the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant, but without an understanding of the Jewish call to a *Torah*-observant life. But it is understandable for, as I said earlier, many Jews had become part of a Christianity that did not understand the Jewish calling to *Torah*—a Christianity that saw *Torah* law as in opposition to the grace and salvation of Yeshua and also in opposition to what it termed “New Covenant liberty”—a Christianity that, over the millennia, did all it could to distance itself from Jewish practices of the *Torah*, even to the extent of ignoring the Bible's definition of the New Covenant which, according to [Jeremiah 31](#), is that it would be written on Jewish hearts and imbedded in Jewish minds. But God would not be denied and so, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, Hebrew-Christianity gradually became Messianic Judaism and respect for *Torah*-observance was re-established among Yeshua-believing Jews.

### **Applying Mosaic Torah in the New Covenant**

Now if I stop right here it might seem that this article is complete, but it is not. What do we mean by *Torah*-observance? We are acutely aware that because of the absence of the Holy Temple, the absence of an operating Levitical priesthood, and the sacrifice of our Messiah Yeshua, that literal obedience to the majority of Mosaic Commandments is either impossible or improper. Many of us (including yours truly) have considered the matter in prayer and have written papers on the subject. In my writings on the subject I refer to the Commandments given under Moses as either “covenant-

dependent” or “covenant-transcendent.” Some years ago, a young man (whom I shall call Thomas) was trying to understand what I meant by the terms, and I think it will be instructive that I share my correspondence with Thomas as a way of imparting the same understanding.<sup>113</sup>

Thomas wrote this to me:

*“I do not understand the basis for your argument that there are two types of law—“covenant-dependent,” and “covenant-transcendent.” I understand what you are getting at, and almost agree, but you offer no reasoning for your argument.”*

My statement to which Thomas referred is:

*“There are two categories of statutes commanded by God under the Mosaic Covenant—those whose literal compliance depends upon the Covenant’s continued existence, and those whose literal compliance does not. We shall call the first of these, ‘covenant-dependent,’ and the second of these, ‘covenant—transcendent.’”*

The two terms that Thomas questioned (“covenant-dependent” and “covenant-transcendent”) are expressions that are meant to explain Mosaic Commandments whose literal application depends upon whether the Mosaic Covenant is still alive and well. I wanted to help Thomas understand, so I wrote back:

*“Commandments that I call “covenant-dependent” are the ones that could be obeyed to the letter of how they were written only so long as the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant continued to exist. The key conditions that have to exist to support covenant-dependent commandments are (1) a standing Jerusalem Temple in which animals are sacrificed, (2) a functioning Levitical Priesthood to conduct the sacrifices, and (3) a government (of Israel) that is led by a man of God’s choosing. The other commandments—those that do not need those conditions—those I call “covenant transcendent.”*

I gave Thomas examples of both kinds of commandments. For a typical “covenant-dependent” commandment, I offered Leviticus 7:1-5, which reads:

*“This is the law for the guilt offering: it is especially holy. They [meaning the cohanim (the priests) in behalf of individual Israelites] are to slaughter the guilt offering in the place where they slaughter the burnt offering, and its blood is to be splashed against all sides of the altar. He [meaning a priest] is to offer all its fat—the fat tail, the fat covering the inner organs, the two kidneys, the fat on them near the flanks, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. The cohen will make them go up in smoke on the altar as an offering made by fire to ADONAI; it is a guilt offering.”*

It is obvious that we cannot obey this commandment literally today. We have no functioning Levitical priests, nor a functioning Holy Temple or Altar. And even if we had those things, we would not

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113 Reprinted from Sermon B8 supra.

be burning up animals as guilt offerings because Yeshua's sacrifice has become our guilt offering. Clearly, this commandment is "covenant-dependent" because it depends on the existence of the Mosaic Covenant.

I then went on to give Thomas examples of commandments that are "covenant-transcendent," and quoted Exodus 20:12(13)-14(17):

*"Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land which ADONAI your God is giving you. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false evidence against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."*

This passage of Scripture contains several commandments, each of which transcends the Mosaic Covenant because we can obey every one of them today exactly as written. None of them need the Temple or the Levitical Priests or the Altar.

### **What Comprises the New Covenant?**

Thomas then came back with an intriguing question; he asked:

*"I don't see anywhere in Scripture that tells us what is in the New Covenant. What, in your opinion, comprises the New Covenant?"*

I told him that his question was a good one, and I gave him an answer. But why am I telling you all of this? It is because the kind of questions Thomas was asking touches what I believe God wants us all to know about *Torah* in the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is best described prophetically in Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34), that I will read to you from the New King James Version because it is expressed there so beautifully; it says:

*"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (NKJ)*

During Mosaic Covenant times, all the commandments given to Moses that he passed on to the Israelites were doable in every detail exactly as stated. However, Jeremiah prophetically foresaw a change in covenant where God's law would continue to exist, but where we would receive and respond to it differently than before.

The prediction in [Jeremiah 31:33\(34\)](#), *“For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more,”* can only be explained by Yeshua’s sacrifice; there is no other event in history that can explain it. According to [Hebrews 9:24-26](#), Yeshua’s sacrifice resulted in so complete an eradication of our sins that, for those who receive him, our *“sins are remembered no more.”* The [Hebrews](#) passage that describes this reads as follows:

*“For the Messiah has entered a Holiest Place which is not man-made and merely a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, in order to appear now on our behalf in the very presence of God. Further, he did not enter heaven to offer himself over and over again, like the cohen hagadol who enters the Holiest Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer death many times—from the founding of the universe on. But as it is, he has appeared once at the end of the ages in order to do away with sin through the sacrifice of himself.”*

Also, [1 John 2:2](#) informs us:

*“Also, he is the kapparah [covering] for our sins—and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.”*

And [Romans 4:24-25](#) tells us:

*“They were written also for us, who will certainly have our account credited too, because we have trusted in him who raised Yeshua our Lord from the dead—Yeshua, who was delivered over to death because of our offences, and raised to life in order to make us righteous.”*

So, I believe that the first New Covenant element that God sent to us was none other than God himself (in the person of Yeshua), and it paved a way for the second—the Holy Spirit—also God himself. We read of this second element in [John 16:5-7](#):

*“But now I am going to the One who sent me. Not one of you is asking me, ‘Where are you going?’ Instead, because I have said these things to you, you are overcome with grief. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I don’t go away, the comforting Counselor will not come to you. However, if I do go, I will send him to you.”*

Also, in [Acts 2:1-4](#):

*“The festival of Shavu’ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh [the Holy Spirit] and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.”*

Now, jumping ahead to [Acts 2:14-21](#) (refers to [Joel 3:1\(2:28\)-5\(2:32\)](#)):

*“Then Kefa stood up with the Eleven and raised his voice to address them: ‘You Judeans, and all of you staying here in Yerushalayim! Let me tell you what this means! Listen carefully to me!*

*These people aren't drunk, as you suppose—it's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken about through the prophet Yo'el: 'ADONAI says: "In the Last Days, I will pour out from my Spirit upon everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my slaves, both men and women, will I pour out from my Spirit in those days; and they will prophesy. I will perform miracles in the sky above and signs on the earth below—blood, fire and thick smoke. The sun will become dark and the moon blood before the great and fearful Day of ADONAI comes. And then, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved.'"*

So, in response to the question, “What comprises the New Covenant?” My answer is that the New Covenant is a new way that God has provided for us to have a relationship with him—a closer relationship—a one-on-one relationship; Hebrews 8:6 explains it this way:

*“But now the work Yeshua has been given to do, is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as Torah on the basis of better promises.”*

What are those better promises? Well, instead of our having to communicate with God by way of consulting with prophets, we can now be cleansed of our sins by Yeshua's sacrifice and can communicate with God directly through the Holy Spirit who, because of the cleansing, is able to reside within us. We are told in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

*“...don't you know that your body is a temple for the Ruach HaKodesh who lives inside you, whom you received from God? The fact is, you don't belong to yourselves; for you were bought at a price. So use your bodies to glorify God.”*

### **The Mosaic and New Covenants Are Different**

According to Hebrews, the two covenants—the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant are different. In the First Covenant, God spoke commandments to Moses from on high and, through Moses, told the Israelites in Exodus 19:5:

*“Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine.”*

Then in Exodus 19:8 we read:

*“All the people [of Israel] answered as one, [and said] 'Everything ADONAI has said, we will do...'”*

But the Israelites did not do what they promised, and they broke God's covenant.

In the New Covenant, God does not have different moral expectations of us than in the previous covenant. That notwithstanding, the New Covenant is indeed “new” in the way that God communicates his will to us. In the Mosaic Covenant, God was more distant, and his will was conveyed through his commandments and through the prophets. In the New Covenant, by comparison, God has made him-

self near to us through the Holy Spirit who lives within us, and He speaks to us individually. In those two ways, the two covenants are indeed different.

God's expectation of us in the way we respond to the two Covenants is different as well. In the Mosaic Covenant, our response was:

*“Everything ADONAI has said, we will do.”*

That is good for us as well but, in the New Covenant, our response should also be:

*“Lord, we now know you intimately because the Holy Spirit lives within each of us, and you speak to each of us as a father speaks to his son. In this new close relationship, we know your desire for us, and we obey you—not because we fear punishment—but because we love you and want to please you.”*

So, in our seeking to keep God's Commandments in the New Covenant, our approach should not be one of “rule-keeping,” but rather one of looking to his Commandments to guide us in knowing his will. The knowledge that we acquire through the Scriptures is then interpreted and explained to us by the Holy Spirit so we can understand God's will for us in each of our special circumstances. Although the statutes of the Mosaic Covenant are no longer enforced in the same way as they were under Moses, they are, however, exceedingly useful in helping us to know, understand, and appreciate God's law that has now (as Jeremiah prophesied) been put in our minds and hearts by the Holy Spirit.

### **The Law of Messiah is Not Statutory**

One final thought: “*Torah*” is too often thought of as consisting merely of the statutes and ordinances. Actually, “*Torah*” is much broader than that. The literal meaning of “*Torah*” is “God's teaching” and, from a New Covenant perspective, it includes everything in God's written Word (i.e. the entire *Tanach* and New Testament), as well as everything He reveals to us by way of explanation and direction prophetically. A New Covenant believer in Yeshua cannot, therefore, separate the keeping of *Torah* from discerning the will of God through the Holy Spirit.

The “covenant-dependent” and “covenant-transcendent” commandments that I quoted earlier were clear and unambiguous, but that is not always the case. Consider (for example) Exodus 23:19:

*“You are not to boil a young animal in its mother's milk.”*

Is it intended to be taken literally? The rabbis have broadened its meaning to not cooking or eating dairy and meat during the same meal or within hours of each other. I, on the other hand, think it was intended to be literal, in opposition to a perverted heathen practice. How do we decide? We consult the Holy Spirit.

Consider also Deuteronomy 6:6 and 6:8:

*“These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart...” ... “Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead.”*

Does this commandment mean that God wants us to pray while wearing *tefillin* (black boxes housing Scripture) on our arms and foreheads? That is the Orthodox interpretation. I, on the other hand, do not believe that the commandment is intended to be literal, but rather intended as an exhortation for us to think and do according to the Word of God! How do we decide? Once again: We consult the Holy Spirit.

There are many such commandments in the Bible that need interpretation from the Holy Spirit. We could simply adopt whatever practices we find convenient or embrace the practices of one authority or another, but I believe that God wants us to consult him directly. There may, in fact, be different applications according to the communities in which we live, and each of our particular circumstances. We cannot know unless God reveals it to us, and He normally will not reveal it to us unless we ask him.

That is the way I believe God wants us to keep *Torah* in the New Covenant. Relying on the Holy Spirit is the key. We cannot keep *Torah* in the New Covenant by following rules. We need the Holy Spirit for discernment and application

### **Back to Abraham**

Now earlier I said that the terms “covenant-dependent” and “covenant-transcendent” are expressions that are meant to explain Mosaic Commandments whose literal application in the New Covenant depends upon whether the Mosaic Covenant is still alive and well. It is a matter of some controversy within Messianic Judaism, but I contend that it is not alive and, if it is, it is not well. To completely explain my position on this, I must refer back to the covenant that preceded the Mosaic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant.

We read in [Genesis 15:17-21](#) how God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised to give him and his descendants land—land that we now call Israel. On the one hand, it was unilateral because Abraham was not asked to agree:

*“After the sun had set and there was thick darkness, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared, which passed between these animal parts. That day ADONAI made a covenant with Avram: “I have given this land to your descendants—from the Vadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River—the territory of the Keni, the K’nizi, the Kadmoni, the Hitti, the P’rizi, the Refa’im, the Emori, the Kena’ani, the Girgashi and the Y’vusi.””*

God then tested Abraham, and subsequently broadened the Covenant to include Abraham’s descendants after him as parties. These descendants were later called “the children of Israel” and much later “the Jewish People.” God also made the Covenant everlasting, promised Abraham that He would be God to Abraham’s descendants, and promised Abraham that he would be the “father of many nations.” Then God issued a Commandment connected to the Covenant that required Abraham and the males of his household and descendants after him to be circumcised in the foreskins of their flesh; anyone who was not circumcised would be cut off from the Covenant and the covenant people. I previously said that the Covenant was unilateral, but it is arguable in that this condition made the Covenant bilateral because Abraham could have refused circumcision. We read about this in [Genesis 17:4-14](#):

*“As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you. I will give you and your descendants after you the land in which you are now foreigners, all the land of Kena’an, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God.” God said to Avraham, “As for you, you are to keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. Here is my covenant, which you are to keep, between me and you, along with your descendants after you: every male among you is to be circumcised. You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Generation after generation, every male among you who is eight days old is to be circumcised, including slaves born within your household and those bought from a foreigner not descended from you. The slave born in your house and the person bought with your money must be circumcised; thus my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who will not let himself be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin—that person will be cut off from his people, because he has broken my covenant.””*

### **Onward to Moses**

Notice that the Abrahamic Covenant was a step in the direction of redeeming mankind from the death that resulted from Adam’s disobedience. Why God chose to proceed in this way (i.e. redeem mankind through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the Jewish people) I do not know, but many years later we come to another great covenant given through Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai that we call the Sinaitic or Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was most certainly bilateral in that God declared it with the expectation that the Israelites would accept and they did

As we already know, as part of the Mosaic Covenant God gave the Israelites commandments that are collectively known as the “Mosaic Law.” Eventually, the Mosaic Covenant was breached by the Israelites by their disobeying the commandments connected to it. We read of that in [Jeremiah 31](#) and we also read of it in [Hosea 6:7](#):

*“But they, just like men, have broken the covenant, they have been faithless in dealing with me.”*

Jeremiah prophesied that because the Mosaic Covenant had been violated by the Israelites, God would one day provide a New Covenant that would be different. And [Hebrews 8:6](#) says:

*“But now the work Yeshua has been given to do is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as Torah on the basis of better promises.”*

### **The New Covenant Overtakes the Old**

When Israel breached the Mosaic Covenant God could have ended it abruptly, but He did not. Instead, God decided to phase the Mosaic Covenant out but maintain it until such time as the New Covenant would come into existence and fully take its place. We read of how the Mosaic Covenant was on its way to vanishing in [Hebrews 8:13](#) which says:



*“By using the term, “new,” he has made the first [Mosaic] covenant “old”; and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether.”*

Well, the promised New Covenant did come, ushered in with the incarnation, sacrifice and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua, and with the Holy Spirit who now indwells all who are willing to receive him. That is what the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:32b(33b)-33a(34a) meant by:

*“I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, [saying] ‘Know ADONAI’; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest...”*

Is the Mosaic Covenant now completely gone or is it still in the process of vanishing? When the Hebrews epistle was written, the Temple was still standing, and the animal sacrifices were still being performed by the Levitical Priests. Neither of those conditions exist today which (at the very least) supports the likelihood that the Mosaic Covenant is no longer fully operative. Whether the Mosaic Covenant is in a diminished state or is already fully gone, it is clear that the covenants that are most strong and most effective today are the New Covenant and the Abraham Covenant running alongside it. We can disagree as to whether or not the Mosaic Covenant has now fully ended or is still in the process of vanishing, but it is clear that most of what was commanded as part of the Mosaic Covenant cannot be complied with today literally because much of it relies on the Temple sacrifices and a God-led government of Israel—neither of which currently exist.

Because of Hebrews 8:13 and the subsequent destruction of the Temple, I contend (although some do not agree) that the Mosaic Covenant has already come to an end. The *Torah* (as distinguished from the Covenant) has not, however, because *Torah* is God’s fundamental teaching—God’s law (his will for man’s morality, wisdom, and conduct) that transcends all covenants. As a matter of fact, according to Matthew 5:18, none of God’s *Torah* will come to an end until “heaven and earth pass away:”

*“Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah—not until everything that must happen has happened.”*

### **Where Oh Where Has the Torah Gone?**

So, if the Mosaic *Torah* has not passed away, where did it go? It is my opinion that it transcended the Mosaic Covenant, passed into the New Covenant, and became New Covenant *Torah* which needs now to be reinterpreted. How am I willing to make such a declaration? Partially because of Scriptures such as Proverbs 1:8-9 and Proverbs 3:1-4:

Proverbs 1:8-9: *“My son, heed the discipline of your father, and do not abandon the teaching [Torah] of your mother; they will be a garland to grace your head, a medal of honor for your neck.”*

Proverbs 3:1-4: *“My son, don’t forget my teaching [Torah], keep my commands in your heart; for they will add to you many days, years of life and peace. Do not let grace and truth leave you—bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and esteem in the sight of God and of people.”*

Notice that the underlying Hebrew word translated as “teaching” in these two Scriptures is “*Torah*.”

Also, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states:

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to God may be fully equipped for every good work.”*

What this tells me is that when there are Mosaic Commandments that no longer can (or no longer should) be complied with literally due to changes in covenant, because Mosaic Commandments are Scripture, we are assured that there are components derived from them that are continuously valuable—that transcend the Mosaic Covenant, pass into the New Covenant, and become New Covenant Law. Those components are *Torah*—God’s foundational teaching.

Consider the commandment prohibiting adultery that we spoke of earlier. If during the Mosaic Covenant period an Israelite committed adultery, his offense was that he violated the commandment of Exodus 20:13b(14):

*“Do not commit adultery.”*

In that case, Leviticus 20:10 would apply as the remedy:

*“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife, that is, with the wife of a fellow countryman, both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.”*

Now if a Jew (or non-Jew) in today’s western world were to commit adultery, his offense would not be that he violated Exodus 20:13b(14) because the capital punishment required by Leviticus 20:10 cannot be applied in today’s secular law. His biblical offense would be that he violated New Covenant *Torah*, and the Holy Spirit (not the secular authorities) would have to see to his punishment.

### **Applying the Mosaic Mitzvot in the New Covenant**

It is not always easy to know what the underlying *Torah* of a Commandment is so, when I am unsure, I consult the Holy Spirit through prayer. An example of one I wrestled with is Numbers 15:38-40:

*“Speak to the people of Isra’el, instructing them to make, through all their generations, tzitziyot on the corners of their garments, and to put with the tzitzit on each corner a blue thread. It is to be a tzitzit for you to look at and thereby remember all of ADONAI’s mitzvot and obey them, so that you won’t go around wherever your own heart and eyes lead you to prostitute yourselves; but it will help you remember and obey all my mitzvot and be holy for your God.”*

I was practicing law at the time and was wearing *tzitziyot* (fringes) that showed from under my jacket and looked (I thought) unkempt when I appeared in court. I asked the Lord to allow me an alternative to wearing fringes that would accomplish the same thing; perhaps a Star of David on a chain

around my neck. “No,” said the Lord.<sup>114</sup> *“That may be acceptable for some, but I want you to stand out as a Jew who believes in Yeshua.”* I have worn fringes ever since.

Because God’s instructions and will for man are expressed and often even clarified in the New Covenant Scriptures, I consider all *Torah* today to be “New Covenant *Torah*” even if its origin is Mosaic. As for the application of *Torah* to Gentiles, according to Numbers 15:14-16, there is one *Torah* for all who live together in a Jewish community:

*“If a foreigner stays with you—or whoever may be with you, through all your generations—and he wants to bring an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for ADONAI, he is to do the same as you. For this community there will be the same law for you as for the foreigner living with you; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations; the foreigner is to be treated the same way before ADONAI as yourselves. The same Torah and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the foreigner living with you.”*

That of course applies to Gentiles in a Messianic Jewish congregational community as well but, lest one think that I am espousing what has become known as “one law theology,” I am not, so permit me to explain the difference. “One law theology” proclaims that there is only one *Torah*; that much is true. However, it also proclaims that all facets of the one *Torah* are applied the same to the Jew and the Gentile. That is the part that is not true. God’s *Torah* is (and always has been) a single body of law that has multiple components, each of which must be applied correctly according to the circumstance and the identity of the person(s) subject to it. So, for example, certain parts of God’s New Covenant *Torah* apply to men, certain parts to women, and most parts to both. Similarly, certain parts of God’s New Covenant *Torah* apply to Jews, certain parts to Gentiles, and most parts to both. So, for example, while Jews are required to circumcise the males among them throughout their generations, it is only optional for Gentiles.

Another example is keeping the Sabbath. According to Exodus 31:13-14, Jews are required to keep God’s Sabbaths, and a Jew may expect punishment if he does not. It is not the same for Gentiles, however. According to Isaiah 56:4-7, Gentiles are encouraged (not required) to keep God’s Sabbaths, and they are rewarded if they do but are not punished if they do not.

—November 3, 2019 CJB

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114 I heard God’s inaudible still small voice.



**P. Messianic Jewish Ministry**  
**Writings • Vol 2**



## **Disputes, Discipline and Reconciliation<sup>115</sup> in the Body of Believers— A Handbook of Procedure and Theology**

### **I. Private and Public Offenses**

A private offense is a sin of one individual committed against one or more other individuals.<sup>116</sup> This kind of offense is the biblical equivalent of a civil offense recognized in the secular courts. A public offense is a sin committed by an individual against society broadly—e.g. the local congregation, the larger government, or the community of believers at large. This kind of offense is the biblical equivalent of a criminal offense in secular law.

Only aggrieved parties (individuals for private offenses and community authorities for public offenses) have standing to pursue an offender's repentance, and to require restitution of him where appropriate.

### **II. Two Kinds of Forgiveness**

#### **Personal Forgiveness**

**Mark 11:25-26 <sup>117</sup> And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.**

Personal forgiveness applies only to private offenses, i.e., where sins are committed against individuals.<sup>118</sup> This kind of forgiveness is not conditioned on the offender's repentance; it is unconditional and must be given as soon as possible after the offense or offenses are committed. Our granting personal forgiveness to others opens the way for God to forgive us. In the same way, if we do not grant personal forgiveness to others, God will not forgive us. Bitterness is lingering personal "unforgiveness."

There are two steps for exercising personal forgiveness:

- (1) Recognize that a sin has been committed against us.
- (2) Rid ourselves of all personal animosity by giving the matter over to God.

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**115** Published separately as a handbook.

**116** When a sin is committed against a local congregation or other organizational entity of the body of believers, the organization sinned against becomes an injured "person" for purposes of this paper and may partake of all remedies available to natural persons in similar circumstances.

**117** Verse 26 does not appear in the CJB.

**118** Public offenses may also injure individuals, in which case they are simultaneously private offenses. For example, robbery has historically been considered a public offense, but it is also a private offense to the individual who has been robbed..

The following Scriptures also apply:

**Matthew 6:12, 14-15** **And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors....For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.** *(This teaches that we must unconditionally forgive others so that God will forgive us.)*

**Luke 6:27-32** **But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.** *(This teaches that we must love our enemies and be willing to bless them even if we make ourselves vulnerable to being abused.)*

**Luke 6:37** **Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.** *(Here, God's forgiveness of us is linked to our forgiving others.)*

**Luke 23:34** **Then Yeshua said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."...** *(This is an example of Yeshua exercising personal forgiveness.)*

**Ephesians 4:31** **Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.** *(This teaches that bitterness must not be retained.)*

**Hebrews 12:15** **Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;** *(This teaches that if we are not careful, a root of bitterness can arise and cause much trouble.)*

### **Judicial Forgiveness<sup>119</sup>**

Judicial forgiveness applies to both private and public offenses, and is termed "judicial" because, prior to its being granted, the injured party must judge the offender's repentance. This kind of forgiveness differs from personal forgiveness in that while personal forgiveness must be given unconditionally, judicial forgiveness is only granted if the offender repents:

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<sup>119</sup> Sometimes termed "transactional forgiveness."



**Luke 17:3-4** Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. “And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”

Whether judicial forgiveness is in the hands of individuals (in the case of private offenses) or a judicial body such as a court of elders (in the case of public offenses), God forgives the offender in heaven if he is forgiven here on earth. Similarly, God withholds forgiveness in heaven if the offender is not forgiven here on earth—another justification for the term “judicial.”<sup>120</sup>

**John 20:21-23** So Yeshua said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained.” (Here, Yeshua (Yeshua) grants his disciples judicial authority and discretion to forgive sin.)

The following Scriptures also apply:

**Matthew 18:21-22** Then Peter came to him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Yeshua said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

(This Scripture is categorized as “judicial forgiveness” rather than “personal forgiveness” because it is part of a process beginning with Matthew 18:15, which seeks to obtain repentance from an offender.)

**Ephesians 4:32** And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Messiah forgave you. (God’s forgiveness of us was conditioned on repentance in Messiah.)

**Colossians 3:13** ...and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Messiah forgave you, so you also must do. (We know from elsewhere in Scripture that Messiah’s forgiveness of us was conditioned on our repentance.)

**1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (Here, God’s forgiveness is conditioned on our confessing our sins.)

### III. Responding to a Private Offense

As previously shown, the first step in dealing with a private offense is to exercise personal unconditional forgiveness toward the offending brother (Mark 11:25-26). This is vital because, unless we purge ourselves of unholy attitudes, we cannot be in a proper spiritual condition to make the decisions and take the actions required of us by Scripture.

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<sup>120</sup> Since God is just, we must assume His willingness to forgive in heaven if forgiveness is improperly withheld on earth

### **Deciding Whether to Overlook an Offense**

Even when we are authorized to seek redress for a sin committed against us, we need not do so:

**Proverbs 19:11 The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory is to overlook a transgression.**

This is in keeping with God's desire that we take upon ourselves his holy nature, for He himself has been known to overlook sin.<sup>121</sup>

**Acts 17:29-30 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent..."**

Some private offenses are easily overlooked—especially those that are unintentional, have done no great harm, and are unlikely to be repeated. Although it may seem that overlooking an offense is always the loving thing to do, it is not necessarily so. One's decision should always be based upon what is best for the offender, and what is best for others against whom the offender may sin if he is not made accountable. If, however, the offense is overlooked, it must not be brought up again unless the offense is repeated.

### **Bringing Correction to an Offending Brother**

If our decision is to not overlook the offense, we must confront the offending brother with his sin:

**Matthew 18:15 Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.**

**Galatians 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Messiah.**

There are three things in the foregoing Scriptures which stand out. First, when we go to our brother to tell him his fault, our attitude must be pure and our demeanor proper. The operative expression in the Galatians Scripture is "a spirit of gentleness."

Second, we are to go to our brother alone. That means we are not to share our complaint with others before first giving our brother the opportunity to repent and make things right. This principle assumes two things: (1) The parties are relatively equal in their ability to deal with one another, and (2) There is no impropriety in the parties meeting privately. An example of inequality would be a

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<sup>121</sup> Consider also, how Moses pleaded with God to overlook the sins of Israel (Deuteronomy 9:27)

child having to confront an adult; an example of improper privacy would be a male and female meeting alone to confront one another concerning sexual sin. In these and similar cases, the Scriptures should be interpreted broadly enough to permit chaperoning and for allowing the weaker of the two adversaries to be accompanied by a suitable protector.

Third, our purpose for confronting our brother must be to restore him to righteousness, and our hope must be for reconciliation. Although in cases involving damage or loss we may also seek restitution as part of the reconciliation process, we are not to sue our brother in a secular court as a first resort:

**1 Corinth. 6:1-7** **Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated?**

The aforesaid Scripture is not a prohibition against a believer utilizing the public courts against a brother under all circumstances. There are cases where the public courts and ecclesiastical courts have simultaneous jurisdiction such as in matters of divorce, and times when they have exclusive jurisdiction such as in matters of real property ownership. Where there is simultaneous jurisdiction, believers must first utilize the ecclesiastical court, and only afterwards utilize the public court in cases where the ecclesiastical court could not provide a suitable remedy, or the judgment of both courts is needed for a valid reason. Where the public court has exclusive jurisdiction, a believer may apply directly to it, although it is prudent to first apply to an ecclesiastical court for leave to do so.

### **Returning with Witnesses**

If the offending brother agrees with our complaint and repents, the matter is, of course, concluded, and we forgive him. If he does not agree or refuses to meet privately, we must then elect whether to pursue the matter further, or to belatedly overlook his sin ([Proverbs 19:11](#)) while being content that we have complied with [Galatians 6:1-2](#). Although overlooking the sin at this point is possible, its appropriateness is unlikely. If there remains un-reconciliation, we are obligated to go to our brother again, and this time, bring one or two witnesses:

**Matthew 18:16** **But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.**

These need not be witnesses to the original offense complained of (although they may be), but rather to our second meeting with our brother.<sup>122</sup> Our usual concept of witnesses is that they are silent observers. In this case, however, Matthew 18:17 authorizes these witnesses to determine which of the parties to the dispute is wrong, and to urge that person to listen to reason and repent:

**Matthew 18:17 And if he refuses to hear them...**

As before, if the parties come to agreement or the offending brother repents, the matter is concluded. If however, the attempt at reconciliation is unsuccessful, the matter must be brought for adjudication to the *ekklesia*.

**Bringing the Dispute to the *Ekklesia***

**Matthew 18:17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church.**

The word “church” in the Greek text is ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), which means “a gathering,” “an assembly (for worship),” “a deliberative council.” According to Matthew 18:17, if the complainant and the witnesses are unsuccessful in convincing the offender to repent, the matter is to be brought to the *ekklesia* for adjudication. Since the entire *ekklesia* of the body of believers (and even the membership of a single congregation) is too large a group hear and judge cases, it is the prevailing view that a court of assembled elders acts as a *beit din* in behalf of the *ekklesia*.

Although Scripture does not provide instructions as to exactly which elders ought to be assembled to hear a Matthew 18 case, a natural venue is one’s own congregation. That works particularly well when the disputants are from the same congregation, and the elders are not parties to the dispute.

As with most of God’s instructions, the Matthew 18 process is designed to operate in an ideal biblical environment. In the First Century, congregational elders oversaw entire cities, and sought to be in unity with the elders of other cities. This is rarely the case today, for the *ekklesia* of believers is fragmented, and local congregations often do not communicate with each other. When this creates a problem for being able to convene a court of elders to hear a Matthew 18 case, the author recommends the following:

1. If the parties are from the same local congregation, their own elders should hear the case unless there is a legitimate reason to the contrary.
2. If the parties are from different local congregations, they should confer and try to reach agreement as to the composition of a court of elders to hear the case. One possibility is to petition the elders of both congregations to convene into a single court.
3. If the parties cannot agree, then the complainant should request that his own congregation’s eldership invite the respondent’s elders to join them in adjudicating the case. This presumes, of course, that the other congregation is doctrinally sound.

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<sup>122</sup> Although not addressed in Scripture, fairness probably allows the offending brother to invite his own witnesses to observe the meeting as well.

4. If a complainant's eldership refuses to convene a Matthew 18 court without a biblically valid reason, the complainant should appeal to his congregation's denominational or apostolic oversight and, if none exists, he should petition the respondent's congregation directly.

5. If the respondent is not a member of a congregation or his eldership declines to participate without a biblically valid reason, the complainant's congregation should assume jurisdiction, and hear the case, even over the objection of the respondent, or in his absence.

The controlling principles are; (1) A believer should not be able to remove himself from the judicial jurisdiction of the body of believers; (2) Neither a party to a controversy nor a party's congregation, should be allowed to frustrate the convening of a Matthew 18 tribunal; (3) A congregation always has jurisdiction over matters affecting its own members; (4) The refusal of a party to recognize and submit to the authority of a congregation's elders is not a sufficient reason for their refusing to hear a case.

### **Procedure and Due Process**

Due process is procedural fairness leading to truth and justice. The importance of due process is that truth and justice are both attributes of God, and both are required of us by God's law:

**Deuteronomy 32:4** *He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.*

**Micah 6:8** *He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?*

Truth points to what is right, and justice leads to a right result. The question for our purpose is, how do we achieve these procedurally in the context of a Matthew 18 adjudication? A good place to begin is with Scriptures that teach that judicial decisions are to be made by a *beit din* (judicial tribunal) hearing witnesses and weighing evidence:

**Deuteronomy 19:15-18** *One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established. If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother...*

**Ex 22:11(12)-12(13)** *But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn.*

**Deuteronomy 22:15** *then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate.*

Although American statutory law is not always aligned with Scripture, its tradition of procedural due process is both biblical and exemplary. Consequently, the following recommendations for conducting Matthew 18 hearings (*batei din*) are borrowed from American jurisprudence:

1. The complaint to be adjudicated should be brief, concise, and in writing, and include the relief being sought from the *beit din*.
2. The aforesaid should be followed by a written statement of admissions or denials of each element of the complaint and include the disposition (e.g. dismissal) that is being sought by the respondent.
3. Preliminary proceedings should allow for discovery and other motions filed by the parties or the *beit din sua sponte*.
4. If the complaint is not disposed of as a result of preliminary proceedings, a date, time, and place of hearing should be set and served on all parties.
5. The parties should be allowed representation because many people have difficulty expressing themselves verbally—especially in their own defense.
6. The parties should be instructed to summon whomsoever they will as witnesses to testify in their behalf. Witnesses can be either eyewitnesses, or experts;<sup>123</sup> they should not be present in the room when the testimony of other witnesses is heard.
7. Matthew 18 hearings need not be public, but they should be recorded.
8. The hearing room should be set up in a dignified manner. The judging elders should sit at a table facing the parties and their representatives, and one of the elders should be selected to preside.
9. Prior to testimony being taken, each party should be allowed (but not required) to make an opening statement. The purpose of such a statement is to explain the nature of the case, and to state in advance what each party intends to prove.
10. Testimony should first be received from the complainant's witnesses, including the complainant himself. Each witness is asked questions by the complainant or his representative; this is termed direct examination. Immediately following the direct examination of each witness, the opposing party or his representative is allowed to cross-examine. When all of the complainant's witnesses have testified, it is the respondent's turn to do similarly.
11. Exhibits such as documents, recordings, objects, photographs, etc., may be offered as evidence after first being identified and testified to by witnesses.

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**123** Expert witnesses may testify as to their professional opinion. However, before being allowed to testify, the court must agree that their special knowledge and experience qualifies them as experts.

12. If a party raises an objection to either a posed question or an item of evidence, the judging elders must rule on the propriety of the question or the admissibility of the evidence sought to be admitted.

13. After both parties have presented all of their witnesses and evidence (their cases in chief), they then have an opportunity to present rebuttal testimony. For rebuttal, the same procedure is used as before (i.e. direct examination followed by cross-examination), except that during this phase of the hearing, all testimony presented must only be for the purpose of contradicting or rehabilitating the testimony of a previous witness.

14. When all testimony has been taken and all evidence entered, the parties should be invited (but not required) to make a closing statement. During the closing statement, each party, or his representative, sums up the evidence, and tries to persuade the elders that his case was stronger than that of his opponent.

15. After the parties rest their cases, the elders retire to deliberate. If the matter is complex, the proceeding may be adjourned for the elders to render their decision at a later date; in most cases, however, they return and announce their decision shortly after the hearing. The decision may be either verbally or in writing, but if given verbally, it should be reduced to writing without delay. The decision should include the elders' findings of fact and conclusions of law and give a rationale for why the elders ruled as they did.

### **Judgment, Compliance and Enforcement**

Immediately after the elders render their judgment, the party ruled against is required to repent and comply with any orders issued by the tribunal, including orders of restitution. If he refuses to do so, he commits a new offense—that of disobeying the lawful orders of an elder tribunal. This new offense is public in nature because the disobedience is against the public authority.<sup>124</sup> When this occurs, the judging elders are required to inform the body of believers of the respondent's disobedience, and order that he henceforth be treated as one who is no longer a believer:

**Matthew 18:17 But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.**

This is sometimes referred to as a decree of “disfellowship” or “excommunication.”

It is a common misunderstanding that when a brother is excommunicated pursuant to Matthew 18, he must necessarily be ejected from the congregation. On the contrary, after a judgment of excommunication, the former brother must be treated as an unbeliever in every way. Although he must be refused holy communion with the brethren, unless he is also a violator of 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (walking in immorality while calling himself a believer) or Titus 3:10-11 (divisive or otherwise harmful to the body), he should be encouraged to attend congregational services and other events where he is likely to hear the Word of God and be encouraged to repent.

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<sup>124</sup> Change Section IV infra: “Responding to Public Offenses.”

One consequence of a Matthew 18 excommunication is that the complainant is released from the constraint of 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 and is free to sue the unrepentant respondent in a secular court. This has special ramifications for persons seeking to divorce their excommunicated spouse.

Another common misunderstanding is that a decree of excommunication applies only to the excommunicating congregation or denomination. Biblically, that is not so. Judgments arising from Matthew 18 proceedings apply across the entire body of believers, and so long as correct biblical doctrine is applied and due process is afforded, congregations of all denominations are biblically required to recognize the judgment. What is more, God himself recognizes and honors the judgment:

**Matthew 18:18 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**

Unfortunately, the current state of the body of believers is such, that a valid excommunication by one congregation is often ignored by others, and excommunicated persons are allowed to re-enter the body without being repentant.

### **Restoring a Brother to Fellowship**

A judgment of “disfellowship” is reversible in the same way as the status of being an unbeliever is reversible. What is required is that the sanctioned brother repent of his former sin, comply with all orders of the convicting tribunal, and receive Yeshua (Yeshua) again as his Lord and savior. Ideally, the same court that ruled previously is convened to judge the repentance and, if it is deemed genuine, the tribunal sets aside its prior judgment and publishes a decree of restoration. This restoration which is bound on earth, is also bound in heaven (Matthew 18:17-20).

### **When the Offender is You!**

**Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, “leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**

If we know or suspect that we have sinned against a brother, we are not to wait until the brother comes to us (pursuant to Matthew 18:15-17); we are to go to him. Jay Adams has been known to say that ideally, the offender and the offended should meet in the street between their respective homes, each on his way to seek the other. If we believe we have sinned, we must repent. If we conclude that we have not sinned but the brother does not agree, we should invite him to bring 1 or 2 witnesses to another meeting, in compliance with Matthew 18:16. The brother may either elect to do so, or choose to overlook what he believes to be your sin.

### **Pastoral Considerations**

Accusations of sin are sometimes sustainable and sometimes not, for both substantive and procedural reasons. In either case, at all stages of the Matthew 18 process, all the parties to a conflict are likely



hurting and in need of counsel and personal care. Whether they are the stage two witnesses or the stage three elders, all third parties who have been called to assist should consider, not only the legal aspects of their duties, but also the human and pastoral. Even if the biblically mandated procedures of fact-finding and judging have been executed flawlessly, the parties may remain unreconciled in their hearts toward one another and may even have developed anger and bitterness toward the decision makers, the witnesses, and the other participants. For this reason, during formal proceedings, everyone should remain aware of how their speech and conduct may be affecting others, and after the proceedings, everyone's attention should turn to evaluating and repairing relationships, and offering help in every appropriate way possible.

### **Resolving Private Disputes that Do Not Involve Sin**

The Matthew 18 *beit din* is employed in cases where there is an accusation of sin against a brother believer, but not all disputes between believers involve sin. Elders have had general jurisdiction to resolve private disputes between brothers via *batei din* ever since Moses' appointment of judicial elders recorded in Exodus 18:13-27 and Deuteronomy 1:9-18. Scripture does not give us procedures to follow in convening or leading such *batei din* so, the general principles of biblical due process and judicial procedure apply.

### **IV. Responding to a Public Offense**

A public offense is a sin committed by an individual against society broadly, i.e., against the local congregation, or believers at large. This kind of offense is the biblical equivalent of a criminal violation of secular law.

Public offenses pose a danger to the community, so the primary responsibility of the community's leaders is to protect the flock and minister correction to the offender. The goal here is clearly different than in the case of private offenses, where promoting reconciliation through the Matthew 18 process is paramount.<sup>125</sup> The following Scripture reveals how the apostle Paul would deal with one such public offense:

**1 Corinth. 5:1-2, 5** **It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you ... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Yeshua.**

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<sup>125</sup> The author is of the opinion that Matthew 18:15-17 applies exclusively to private offenses—those in which the complainant is a victim of the perpetrated sin. This is the conclusion of translations influenced by Stephanus' Greek text of 1550 (e.g. *King James Version*), which includes the words εἰς σέ. (against you). Translations influenced by the 1881 Greek text of Westcott & Hort (e.g. *New American Standard*) do not include these words, leading some to conclude that Matthew 18:15-17 applies to all who observe the sin of another, whether or not the observer himself is a victim. The author's conclusion is not based upon preference for Stephanus' text per se, but upon his observation that the alternative would empower any observer of the sin to preempt the victim's prerogatives by prosecuting or forgiving the offender himself.

## Prosecuting Public Offenses

An important difference between public and private offenses is that, in the case of public offenses, it is the community's guardians—its elders—who are responsible for correcting wrongs and administering justice (Hebrews 13:17). That notwithstanding, an individual congregant is often the first person to become aware that a public offense has or may have been committed. Although, according to Galatians 6:1-2 he may confront the perpetrator for the purpose of ministering correction and urging his brother to repent, he is not authorized to act for the community in either judging the matter, or deciding what remedial action should be taken. Therefore, in all but trivial cases, the congregant-citizen's duty is to report the suspected offense or the evidence thereof, to the elders.<sup>126, 127</sup>

The procedure of choice for prosecuting public offenses is a modification of the Matthew 18 process previously discussed for private disputes. In the case of a public offence, however, the complainant is not an individual; rather, it is the corporate body of believers, so the confronters are one or more elders representing the body (Matthew 18:15). If the initial confrontation does not produce repentance, the next step is to meet again, this time taking one or two additional witnesses who should also be elders (Matthew 18:16).<sup>128</sup> If, after this meeting, the elder delegation still believes that the accused has committed sin but the accused does not repent, then just as in the case of a private offence, a formal hearing of the *ekklesia* is convened. This conclave consists of the elder witnesses, preferably joined by other elders. which may consist of themselves, or themselves joined by other elders (Matthew 18:17).<sup>129</sup> Then, as in the case of a private offence, if the elders rule against the accused and he does not repent, they are to declare him to be an unbeliever, and no longer part of the body (Matthew 18:17).

A special case which should be mentioned, is where a person has reason to believe that his brother in the faith has committed a significant trespass against the criminal law of secular society. Although a prudent and covenantal first step would be to consult elders of the body for their wisdom in how to proceed, the informing brother may, nevertheless, go directly to the secular governing authorities, provided his reason for doing so is concern for public safety, and to comply with Romans 13:1-7.

**Romans 13:1-7 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a**

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<sup>126</sup> A gentle covenantal approach to doing this is to urge the offender to go to the elders himself, and confess his transgression. If he is unwilling to do so, he should be invited to be present when the informant tells the elders.

<sup>127</sup> According to Deuteronomy 19:15, one may not bring an accusation, except by the testimony of two or three witnesses. This does not preclude one from informing the elders that an offense may have been committed; it does, however, define the level of proof needed for a verdict of “guilty.”

<sup>128</sup> The reason that the witnesses should be elders, is so that if there is disagreement among them, non-elders will not be put in a position of disputing with elders.

<sup>129</sup> The elder-witnesses may try the case themselves without the addition of other elders. Even if they do, this final procedure is not duplicious, since it is presumed that the first two steps were informal, and did not include the methodical taking of testimony.

**terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.**

1 Corinthians 6:1-7 does not apply in this case, because that Scripture only prohibits suing brothers in the public courts for redress of private grievances:

**1 Corinth, 6:7 Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?**

### **Compliance and Enforcement**

The only proper response for having committed a public offense is to repent and obey all remedial orders issued by a properly constituted tribunal of elders. Although there are a myriad of possible public offenses which may be gleaned from Scripture, there are two categories of them which, if not repented of, result in separation from the body of believers; they are:

- (a) sins which can lead to excommunication
- (b) sins which can lead to being shunned.

The first of these categories (a) has already been alluded to in the section immediately preceding this one; it is refusing to repent for a sin after being ordered to do so by an elder tribunal in the aftermath of a Matthew 18 judicial proceeding. As previously explained, excommunication is a judgment by a court of elders that a person, once considered to be a brother in the faith, is no longer so. When this occurs, the excommunicant is to be treated as an unbeliever and, except in the cases specified below, is not to be shunned or banned from the congregation. On the contrary, he is to be ministered to with Scripture, and continuously encouraged to repent and return to the faith. It is important to emphasize here that excommunication does not result from the underlying sin itself, but from the disobedience of refusing to repent after being ordered to do so.

The second of these categories consists of five behaviors for which a person must be banned from fellowship with believers:

- (1) A person considered a believer, who is walking in unrepentant immorality:

**1 Corinth. 5:1-5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that**

he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Yeshua.

**1 Corinth. 5:9-13** I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

(2) A person representing himself to be a believer, who is in gross doctrinal error, and not in accord with the Gospel and with Apostolic doctrine:

**2 John 1:9-11** Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Messiah does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Messiah has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

**Galatians 1:8-9** But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

(3) A brother who is disorderly in his lifestyle.

**2 Thess. 3:6-15** But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those

**who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Yeshua Messiah that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as *for you*, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.**

(4) A divisive person who has been warned twice:

**Titus 3:10-11 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.**

**Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.**

(5) A rebellious person who scoffs at the Word of God:

**Proverbs 22:10 Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; Yes, strife and reproach will cease.**

In the first three cases, the danger to the body comes from the offender holding himself out, or being considered to be, part of the body—a believer, yet being in significant sin, professing heretical doctrines, or walking in a disorderly manner. While these traits are expected in unbelievers, a believer or professing believer with such characteristics brings discredit to the body. Such behaviors can also present a stumbling block for new believers who are not yet fully disciplined, and whose discernment is not yet fully developed.

The fourth and fifth cases apply to all persons who sow discord, whether or not they are members of the body. It makes no difference that the divisiveness or rebellion is unconscious or unintended; it is dangerous and contagious in the community of believers, and those who practice it must be excluded.

In all five cases, repentance restores the offending brother to fellowship, and the unbeliever to being welcome. Restoration is not automatic, however, for whether or not an offender's repentance is genuine, is a matter to be judged by the same elders who judged and disciplined him originally.

### **Accusations Against Elders**

Some believe that Scripture establishes a more stringent standard for bringing an accusation against an elder; otherwise, it might be asked, why were the following verses written by Paul?

**1 Timothy 5:19-20 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.**

Actually, the foregoing Scripture establishes the same standard for bringing an accusation against an elder as does Deuteronomy 19:15 which applies to an accusation brought against anyone else. A

plausible explanation for why there exists a special Scripture for elders, is that the verses which precede 1 Timothy 5:19 speak of the awesome responsibility which leaders have to their flock. The flock is therefore exhorted to obey their leaders so as to assist them in performing their function with joy. Because leaders are highly visible and their actions sometimes controversial, they are specially vulnerable to accusations and criticisms in the form of whispers or gossip. These are damaging to an elder's reputation and ability to lead, and so the above verses of Scripture are a reminder to us that we must apply to our elders, the same high standard that we apply when we bring public accusations against others.

## V. Appealing Decisions

Unless a congregation's eldership is subject to denominational or apostolic oversight, the only practical way to appeal a decision of an elder tribunal is to lodge a Matthew 18 complaint against the tribunal itself and hope that there exists an appropriate authority that will hear it. Such an appeal must allege that the wrong decision was the result of sin on the part of the tribunal; it cannot be based upon mere dissatisfaction with its ruling. We all hope that judicial sin never occurs, but one can conceive the possibility of miscarriages of justice resulting from denial of due process, undisclosed bias, conflict of interest, misapplication of Scripture, or outright corruption.

Elders sitting as judges are subject to discipline just as everyone else, so if an appeal is sought, the appellant should first return to the tribunal and present his basis for appeal via a Motion to Reconsider (Matthew 18:15). If the motion is denied, he must try once more, this time bringing one or two witnesses (Matthew 18:16). Only after his or her second motion has been denied, is the aggrieved person released to appeal for relief to a more senior or otherwise suitable tribunal if one can be found (Matthew 18:17).

Finding a suitable appeal tribunal can be a daunting task, because some congregations do not recognize judicial authorities other than their own.<sup>130</sup> Many do, however, and in those cases, there is often an established appeal route to an oversight authority such as a bishop, a presbytery, an apostle, a *beit din*, or a ministry association. In such a case, it is usually sufficient for the appeal to allege error,<sup>131</sup> not sin, on the part of the original tribunal and, even if the oversight authority does not have a standing appellate body, the appellant may be successful in having one specially convened.

## VI. Appendix: Handling Conflict Outside the Body of Believers

In disputes with non-brethren, the believer is constrained to act biblically, while no such limitation is can be enforced on his opponent. Some may see this as disadvantageous, but it is actually strength, because God's peace and wisdom come from submitting one's self to the Word of God.

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**130** Some don't even recognize their own.

**131** A true appeal does not retry the facts of the case; the appellate tribunal reviews the original proceeding to determine whether there existed an error of procedure or Scriptural application (law) that should either cause a reversal of the original ruling or a new trial.

**Proverbs 16:8-9** **Better is a little with righteousness, than vast revenues without justice. A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.**

To begin with, the believer is not to cause conflict by his own improper conduct. Rather, he is to live in peace with all persons as much as it is possible:

**Romans 12:18** **If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**

**Proverbs 16:7** **When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.**

Once an issue of conflict has arisen, the believer is not to respond out of vengeance, but out of love:

**Romans 12:19-21** **Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

As with conflicts between brethren, the exercise of personal forgiveness is mandatory (see "Personal Forgiveness," supra):

**Mark 11:25-26** **And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.**

Also, there are occasions when an offense may or should be overlooked (see section 2A supra):

**Proverbs 19:11** **The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.**

If the offense is not overlooked, the first step in the Matthew 18 process should be considered even though it is not required in disputes with unbelievers.

Scripture also teaches the advisability of settling disputes quickly:

**Matthew 5:25-26** **Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.**

If going to your opponent does not solve the problem, suing an unbeliever in the public courts is authorized:

**Romans 13:1-2 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.**

This is especially true since believers are not to judge unbelievers and, besides, it is unlikely that an unbeliever would submit to a court of the brethren:

**1 Corinth. 5:12-13 For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges...**

The following Scripture is often misunderstood:

**Matthew 5:37-41 You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.**

Some would say that this Scripture commands believers to be pacifistic toward those who would hurt them, enslave them, or take their property. To understand this better, let us focus on verse 39:

**Matthew 5:39 “But I tell you not to resist an evil person....”**

The word “resist” is ἀνθίστημι *anthistemi* {anth-is’-tay-mee} can refer to passive resistance but one of its recognized meanings is “to set one’s self against (Strong’s Greek Lexicon, word 436)—decidedly, an aggressive definition. Which definition is meant can be deduced from the next sentence:

**“But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”**

According to Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary, p. 60, Intervarsity Press (Downers Grove, Illinois: 1993), “The blow on the right cheek was the most grievous insult possible in the ancient world...” (e.g. 1 Kings 22:24). What the Scripture is actually saying is that we should not retaliate against an evil person. For example, if he tries to provoke us by insulting us, rather than meeting his challenge with our own aggression, we should accept the insult or even a second insult (present our other cheek). This does not mean that we should not protect ourselves from harm either physically or legally.

**“If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.”**

This is hyperbole which is directed toward our attitude regarding ownership. It teaches that where someone is unjustly suing us, we should prefer to bear the injustice, and even give him more than he wants, than become a defendant in a lawsuit.



**“And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.”**

This is also a teaching about our attitude regarding ownership—in this case, ownership of our time and freedom. It is a reference to the Roman soldier’s right to impress a person into service (e.g. Mark 15:21). The Scripture teaches that we should prefer to bear the injustice of servitude, and even give more than required, rather than diminish our witness as ones who, in obedience to God, love our enemies (ibid).

—March 8, 2019, NKJ

## **Holy Spirit Ministry Proof of the Pudding**

As I looked over the hundreds of people at a recent conference, I noted three kinds of demeanors among the worshippers. There were those who were in quiet meditative worship, those who were exhibiting great emotion and excitement, and those who were looking around trying to figure out what to make of it all. Years ago, I was among those who were easily distracted and annoyed by exhibitions of emotion and strangeness during Holy Spirit ministry. I suspected that it was of the flesh, and it sure did not look Jewish. I was right about some of it; in fact I documented, by what some people admitted to me, that some of the behavior I observed was “put on” because of pressure they felt to comply with others’ expectations of them. However, over time, I observed another thing, and that was that some of those whom I saw acting strangely seemed to accelerate in their spiritual development soon afterwards. Some received spiritual gifts they did not have previously, and some seemed to mature in the Galatians 5:22-23 fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” The last of the fruit listed is self-control, and I am amazed to tell you that it resulted from exhibitions that appeared to lack self-control.

Now, I have always believed the biblical proverb “the proof of the pudding is in the eating” (well, if it is not in the Bible, no doubt something like it is). Anyway, I began to see good fruit from those Holy Spirit ministries and, although I did not understand them and was still uncomfortable with them, I had to admit that God was using them for good. Over time, I became more comfortable with emotional ministry, and developed a theory of why Holy Spirit ministry and emotions so often seemed to go hand in hand. Here is my latest thinking on it:

First, the God who created the world and maintains it is so powerful that we humans cannot even stand up in the shadow of his presence. Although we ought not to intentionally lose control of ourselves, it is easy to do, and it is understandable when we are in the presence of such power. That accounts for part of the emotion. The other part is that many of us are so self-controlled in our way of being and our daily walk that, without meaning to, we refuse to release control to God even when in his awesome presence. In order to break through, God meets us with power during times of ministry when we are willing to open ourselves to him “even slightly” by letting go of some of our inhibitions. When we do that, God gets inside us without forcing himself on us, and the combination of God’s power and our openness to him produces the emotional responses that we sometimes see and experience.

Now that I have all but endorsed emotional behavior in the midst of Holy Spirit ministry, here comes the caveat:

*It is important that we do not judge God’s presence or the fruit of his ministry by our feelings or by emotional behaviors we observe in others.*

As I have said, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and it can take days or even weeks to consume this pudding. There are manifestations of the flesh (or worse) manifestations that are fraudulent and not caused by the Holy Spirit, so in the days and weeks following what has appeared to be a powerful move of the Spirit we should prayerfully discern what has happened and ask ourselves:

1. Has anyone who was ministered to repented of life-dominating sins to which he was previously in bondage?
2. Has anyone who was ministered to let go of some of his flesh, put off the old man and put on the new man of the Spirit?
3. Has anyone who was ministered to received Holy Spirit gifts that he did not previously have?
4. Has anyone who was ministered to acquired more of the “Fruit of the Spirit?”—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control?”

There is a bottom-line lesson here, and it is this: When we are in a properly-led and overseen meeting where ministry of the Holy Spirit is being invited, we should be discerning but not easily put off by emotional behaviors we see or experience. On the other hand, we should not seek manifestations, act falsely, or feel pressured to copy behaviors we see in others; we will work against the Spirit if we do. Also, we need to come to such meetings with repentant attitudes—expecting to be touched—changed in some way by the Holy Spirit. Finally, regardless of what we may feel or experience, we should not judge a ministry’s value until we allow some time to go by, to determine whether permanent godly changes have resulted. That—not emotion—is the proof of the pudding.

—June 17, 2009



**Q. Messianic Jewish Leadership**  
**Writings • Vol 2**



## Government and Leadership in a Messianic Jewish Congregation

Standing astride the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, Messianic Jewish congregations are often laboratories for testing competing views of government and leadership. Some congregations are ruled by elders, others by pastors, and still others by the democratic vote of their members. “Pastor,” “rabbi,” and “spiritual leader” are but some of the terms commonly used to refer to the heads of Messianic Jewish congregations.

Were only nomenclature the issue, this subject would be trivial for it would matter little which title or leadership model were embraced. The fact is, however, that each model of congregational government and leader title makes a statement of biblical importance and, regrettably, some of those which are commonly employed are neither biblically authorized nor culturally authentic. It is the author’s hope that this paper will clarify the Bible’s position and the Jewish tradition in regard to leadership and be a help to those who wish to conform more closely to those Jewish practices which are consistent with biblical teaching and example.<sup>132</sup>

### Servant Leadership

In both the Mosaic and New Covenant Scriptures, one clearly sees that God’s ideal of leadership is servanthood (Deuteronomy 10:12; Mark 10:43-44).<sup>133</sup> Only God is to be elevated—not even the most prominent human leader (1 Peter 4:11). When Moses arrogantly scolded the Israelites and struck a rock to which he was only instructed to speak, God punished him (Numbers 20:2-12); this stands as a warning that when God elects to work through us, it is He, and not we, who must receive the glory. Even Yeshua, during his earthly reign, said:

*John 5:19, 12:49: “...Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.” ... “For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.”*

Throughout history, God chose men and women to serve him, and empowered them for their special tasks. Most often, these tasks involved ministering to the needs of others, so that those others also might come to the place of serving God.<sup>134</sup> When one considers God’s New Covenant servants of old, one realizes that no matter how empowered of the Spirit, the servant possessed nothing which was not also freely available to those whom he served. Yeshua illustrated this when he said to his disciples:

*Matthew 21:21: “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.”*

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**132** Bible quotations throughout this paper are from *The New King James Version, The Holy Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), with the words “Christ” replaced by “Messiah,” “Jesus” replaced by “Yeshua,” and “church” replaced by “assembly.”

**133** See also, Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:27; John 13:4-5, 13:14, 21:16.

**134** Examples of divine appointments to serve others: John 15:16; Acts 9:15, 20:35; 2 Corinthians 3:6, 5:18; Ephesians 3:7-9; 1 Timothy 1:12.

John 14:12: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.”

Some servant leaders work in ministry full time and are financially supported therefrom, while others pursue economically productive occupations and serve God around and within the constraints of those occupations. The most striking example of a secularly-employed leader of great renown is the apostle Paul, who made tents to support himself (Acts 18:3) so as not be a burden to others (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Clearly, whether or not one’s ministry provides one with financial sustenance is not an indicator of its importance.

### **Priestly Leadership**

Priestly leadership is that which furthers the communication and reconciliation between man and God. Abraham can be said to have performed a priestly role because he fathered the nation that was appointed by God to be a light to the rest of the world (Genesis 12:1, 17:1-4). God planned that his Covenant with Abraham would eventually be the vehicle for reconciling mankind to himself through covenant bonding with Messiah Yeshua.

Under the Sinai Covenant, Aaron and his sons served as God’s appointed priests to the Israelites (Exodus 28:1). They consulted with *Urim* and *Thummim*, judged, taught, and ministered to the community in a variety of ways, especially through the sacrificial system of the Tabernacle and later the Temple.<sup>135</sup> And just as Aaron and his sons served as priests to the Israelites, so also, God made Israel a kingdom of priests to the rest of the world (Exodus 19:6).<sup>136</sup>

Under the New Covenant, responsibility for the priesthood was transferred to Yeshua, who was made High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), and we who are his spiritual offspring and disciples were made priests under him (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:5-6). Under Yeshua, the former priesthood was broadened to include both Jews and non-Jews (1 Peter 2:9-10) under a new “Commonwealth of Israel” (NKJ), and the recipients of priestly ministry were also expanded to include both Israelites and Gentiles (Acts 10:44-45). When Yeshua sent his disciples out to “the ends of the earth” to preach, witness, and exhibit the power of God (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-18), it was a priestly commission that was imparted. And in the same way that Aaron (the High Priest of the Levitical priesthood) sacrificed unblemished animals for the atonement of Israel, so also did Yeshua, the High Priest of the Melchizedek priesthood (Hebrews 7:15-17), sacrifice himself—the ultimate unblemished lamb—for the atonement of the world (John 1:29).

### **Governmental Leadership**

At every stage of history, God repeated his same basic plan of government—either himself (directly), or his chosen anointed<sup>137</sup> at its helm.

The family is the most foundational governmental entity, both in its being the smallest, and also in its being the unit upon which larger governmental units are modeled. As with all governments, the family has a defined leadership and rules for conducting its affairs. God placed the man (husband) in charge of the family (Ephesians 5:22-24, 6:4), and gave him a woman (wife) for a helper (Genesis

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<sup>135</sup> “Priests and Priesthood,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Menahem Haran, vol. 13, pp. 1076-1080 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971)

<sup>136</sup> See also, Isaiah 49:6, 60:3, 61:6; Romans 15:7-13.

<sup>137</sup> When God anointed a person for leadership, it was always with the expectation that the anointed person was to act under God’s direction. For Yeshua expressing this principle in regard to his own mission, see John 5:19 and 12:49.



2:18-25) so that together they could govern their children. God continued patriarchal rule through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jacob's sons, and then their sons as heads of the twelve tribes.

With the appointment of Moses, there came a new group of helpers called elders.<sup>138</sup> Elder assistance to Moses was first suggested by Moses' father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 18:14-27), but the totality of Scripture demonstrates that the institution of eldership was God's idea.<sup>139</sup>

Numbers 11:16-17: "So the Lord said to Moses: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.'"

From that event and throughout Old Covenant history, elder rule under an anointed head-of-government<sup>140</sup> was God's best for Israel. Joshua followed Moses,<sup>141</sup> and then came a succession of judges, kings, members of tribunals and others.<sup>142, 143</sup> All of these leaders worked with and received counsel from local elders<sup>144</sup> who reportedly were ordained by the laying-on of hands in an unbroken chain from the original seventy.<sup>145, 146</sup> The New Covenant continued the pattern of elder rule (1 Timothy 5:17)<sup>147, 148</sup> under an anointed head-of-government, the very large difference being that the head-of-government was now the Messiah himself (Isaiah 9:5(6)).<sup>149</sup>

### Equipping Leadership

Equipping means imparting to another something that enables or assists the other in performing a task. Scripture reveals that throughout history, God himself has been our principal equipper, and has provided for us both through the natural phenomena of his creation, as well as through selective sovereign acts. The earth, which produces food when worked and planted, is an example of sustenance provided through the creation (Genesis 1:29), while the manna (Exodus 16:4) and water (Exodus 17:6) which God gave to the Israelites during their travels in the desert, exemplify the many sovereign acts of provision that God brought about contrary to the natural expectation of his creation. God not only equips his people physically and materially, but also spiritually. Some examples of God's spiritual equipping include the "Glory of the Lord" that filled the Tabernacle and led Israel through the desert (Exodus 40:34-35); God's recorded Word (his Scriptures) that teaches us about him, commands us according to his law, and guides us in his wisdom (Exodus 32:15-16); the Messiah who became flesh to walk among us, teach us and then die for us (John 1:14, 3:16); the Holy

<sup>138</sup> *Zaqen*, Hebrew singular; πρεσβυτερος, Greek.

<sup>139</sup> For examples of elder rule in Deuteronomy, see verses 19:12; 21:3, 6, 19; 22:15 and 25:9.

<sup>140</sup> See footnote <sup>137</sup> above.

<sup>141</sup> For Moses imparting a portion of his Spirit to Joshua by the laying on of hands, see Numbers 27:22-23, read along with Deuteronomy 34:9.

<sup>142</sup> *Pir'key A'vot* 1:1

<sup>143</sup> The establishment of judicial bodies (such as the Great Sanhedrin and smaller tribunals) is commanded in Scripture (Deuteronomy 16:18). See also, Maimonides, *Yad*, Sanhedrin 1:1-3.)

<sup>144</sup> "Elder," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Moshe Weinfeld, vol. 6, p. 578 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971).

<sup>145</sup> Maimonides, *Yad*, Sanhedrin 4:2.

<sup>146</sup> See also, "Mantle of Leadership" and *s'miychah*, infra.

<sup>147</sup> See also, Titus 1:5; Hebrews 13:17.

<sup>148</sup> For examples of elders serving in New Covenant functions, see Acts 15:2; James 5:14.

<sup>149</sup> See also, Jeremiah 23:5; Daniel 7:14; John 1:49, 18:37; Revelation 7:14, 19:16

Spirit who indwelt prophets of old, and now indwells all disciples of Yeshua, giving them comfort, counsel and spiritual gifts (Acts 1:4-5);<sup>150</sup> and finally, God’s unfailing love for us, for which reason He provided all of the aforementioned and more (1 John 4:9-11).

In addition to being our provider, God is also our example of an equipping leader. After equipping us, God nurtures us to maturity, and then exhorts us to likewise equip others (Leviticus 10:8-11).<sup>151</sup> His plan is to achieve world redemption through regenerated mankind—his original creation.

Once again, the family unit is the principal place where leadership originates:

Proverbs 22:6: *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

Deuteronomy 6:4-9: *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”*

Scripture reveals the kinds of equipping leaders that God has given us:

Ephesians 4:11-12: *“And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the body of Messiah.”*

The continuing verses of Scripture explain that these gifted leaders are needed by the body of believers until it matures to the place where it is no longer susceptible to false doctrine and deception, and until all the members of the body carry their share of ministry and the body grows and becomes edified in love (Ephesians 4:13-16).

The author proposes that the five Ephesians 4 ministries fall into two categories—pastoral and prophetic. The prophetic ministries are prophet and teacher,<sup>152</sup> and the pastoral ministries are pastor, apostle and evangelist.<sup>153</sup> Before Yeshua, apostles and evangelists were not identified as ministry categories per se; however, Israel was well-known for its dissemination of knowledge about God and for proselytizing the Gentile nations.<sup>154</sup> The prophetic gift, the teaching gift, and the pastoral gift, were, however, in obvious operation; Moses, for example, possessed all three.

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**150** See also, Ezekiel 36:27; John 14:17; 1 Corinthians 3:16.

**151** See also, Ezekiel 44:23; John 21:15-17; 2 Timothy 2:24.

**152** The prophet receives revelational messages from God and delivers them to whom they are intended. The gift teacher receives revelational understanding of Scripture and transmits that understanding to others.

**153** Pastors are shepherds—caretakers of sheep; the word “pastor” also refers to congregational leaders who care for men within the congregation. Evangelists care for men by preaching the Word of God to the world outside of the congregation, in the hope that those who hear may come to belief. Apostles establish new congregations of those who have come to faith, and temporarily act as the congregation’s only leader until other leaders are raised up.

**154** Joseph R. Rosenbloom, *Conversion to Judaism: From the Biblical Period to the Present*, pp. 3-31 (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978).

### Mantle of Leadership

Ordination to leadership is often understood as merely “installing a special officer of the congregation.”<sup>155</sup> True Biblical ordination, on the other hand, is always accompanied by anointing—that is, a transference of God’s mantle of the Holy Spirit who not only identifies God’s chosen leader, but also gives him authority and power to serve effectively.<sup>156</sup>

This anointing, or impartation of Holy Spirit power comes about in various ways. On occasion, God himself cloaks an individual with his Spirit; other times, He ordains with man’s participation. Priests, for example, were ordained with oil (Leviticus 8:30), while the Levites were ordained by *s’ michah*,<sup>157</sup> the laying on of hands (Numbers 8:10-12).<sup>158</sup> Kings and prophets too were anointed—probably with oil (1 Kings 19:15-16), while Elisha was ordained by being covered with Elijah’s cloak (1 Kings 19:19-21).<sup>159</sup> After the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai, God sovereignly transferred a portion of Moses’ spirit to seventy elders (Numbers 11:16-26). After that, transfers of spirit and authority continued from elder to elder by *s’ michah*:

*“The elders ordained by Moses ordained their successors, who in turn ordained others, so that there existed an unbroken chain of ordination from Moses down to the time of the Second Temple”* (Maim Yad, Sanh 4:2).<sup>160, 161</sup>

Ordination under the New Covenant has some similarities and some differences from ordination under the Mosaic. One similarity is the variability of how God’s anointing can be acquired. Disciples of Yeshua are given a new spirit and are immersed by the Holy Spirit into the New Covenant Priesthood. Ordination of New Covenant prophets is not specifically mentioned in Scripture, nor is ordination mentioned for any of the other Ephesians 4 ministries.<sup>162</sup> In one case, spiritual gifts were imparted through prophecy and the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 6:7; 2 Timothy 1:6); therefore, one may justifiably conclude that men may, on occasion, participate in the impartation of spiritual gifts. There is, however, no New Covenant Scriptural precedent for men ordaining individuals into Ephesians 4 gift ministries.<sup>163</sup> As for the ordination of kings, it is now un-needed, since Yeshua has become our only king.

The manner of appointing New Covenant elders and deacons is in marked contrast to the previously mentioned ministries. Every example in Scripture depicts elders installing other elders (or deacons) (Acts 6:3-7, 14:23; Titus 1:5), and almost certainly with the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 5:17-

**155** Ordain,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, W. White, Jr., vol. 4, p. 543 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).

**156** There is no single word in Scripture for “ordination” that would convey a certainty of its official existence. The word  $\chi\epsilon\delta\rho\omicron\tau\omicron\nu\epsilon\nu$  translated “appointed” in Acts 14:23 has been understood to mean “ordained.” Reference: “ordination,” *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Arthur John MacLean, vol. II, p. 114, Ed.: James Hastings (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973).

**157** Literal meaning: “leaning of the hands.”

**158** For uses of *s’ michah* other than in ordinations, see Leviticus 1:4; Acts 8:14-17, 28:8.

**159** A play on words. The Hebrew word for “cloak” is *aderet*, also translated “mantle.”

**160** “*Semikhah*,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Aaron Rothkoff, vol. 14, p. 1140 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971).

**161** See also, *Pirke Avoth* 1.1 for alleged similar transmission of the oral law.

**162** The sending out of Saul and Barnabus with fasting, prayer and the laying on of hands, was for their mission—not for initiation into office (Acts 13:1-3).

**163** One may reach an opposite conclusion if one considers analogous Old Covenant examples, eg., Joshua, Elisha, David, etc.

22).<sup>164</sup> So central is human participation in the appointment of elders, that elders who ordain others are warned that they are accountable for the sins of the men they place in office (1 Timothy 5:22).

### **The Local Congregation: History, Organization and Function**

In the years before exile, life for an Israelite centered around his tribal community and the Holy Temple. Beginning with the Babylonian exile and later the Second Temple's destruction, the focus of Jewish community life shifted to two newly-formed institutions—academies (*y'shiyvot*),<sup>165</sup> and synagogues.<sup>166, 167, 168</sup> Academies were schools for study of the oral law, and eventually became centers for authoritative opinions concerning community *halachah*. Although we know little of these early academies, the later academies generally included a court (*beit din*),<sup>169</sup> and it is not unlikely that the Jewish judicial council of Yeshua's time (*Sanhedrin*) could trace its beginnings to the Babylonian academies. Synagogues were institutions developed solely for prayer and study.<sup>170, 171</sup> Although overseen by elders,<sup>172</sup> its prayer services functioned through the general participation of all its male members, with coordination and administration by a specially appointed elder known as the *ρχισυνωγος* (*Archisynagogus*) or *Rosh haK'nesset*.<sup>173</sup> Every educated man in the congregation was deemed qualified to serve and lead in every capacity, and was expected to do so.<sup>174</sup>

After Yeshua's death and resurrection, his apostles formed local congregations that had greater authority than the synagogue, for they were the places from which New Covenant elders governed the community and judged the controversies of its members. The following Scriptures exemplify the judicial function of the New Covenant congregations:

*Matthew 18:15-20: "Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the assembly. But if he refuses even to hear the assembly, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

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164 The subject of 1 Timothy 5:17-22 is eldership. Verse 22, therefore, contemplates the appointment of elders by laying on of hands.

165 Some authorities date the *y'shiyvah* earlier.

166 Hayim H. Donin, *To Pray As A Jew*, p. 12 (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980).

167 Abraham Millgram, *Jewish Worship*, p. 67 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971).

168 "Synagogue," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, vol. 15, p. 580 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971), 165 expresses the view that the synagogue originated during the Babylonian exile, but notes that Talmudic sources attribute the synagogue's origin to Moses.

169 "Academies in Babylonia and Erez Israel," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Moshe Beer, vol. 2, pp. 201-202 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971).

170 Hayim H. Donin, p. 12.

171 Abraham Millgram, p. 67.

172 Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. 2, pp. 434-5, T and T Clark, Ltd. (Edinburgh: 1986).

173 In *Acts 13:15*, Paul and Barnabas are addressed by the *Archisynagogus*.

174 Emil Schurer, vol. 2, pp. 434-5.

1 Corinthians 6:1: “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?”

The Gospel Scriptures use the Greek word *ἐκκλησία* “*ekklesia*” for when Yeshua taught about New Covenant congregations. This Greek word for “congregation” appears three times in the Gospel Scriptures (Matthew 16:18, 18:17), and Strong’s Greek Dictionary defines it as:

“a calling out, *ie.* a popular meeting, *espec.* a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Chr. community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both)—assembly, church.”

Yeshua’s words in Matthew 18:15-20 were spoken prior to the establishment of the first New Covenant congregation, and prior to anything that could be considered culturally “Christian.” Therefore, the only part of the foregoing definition of “*ekklesia*” which can possibly apply to Yeshua’s teachings about his congregation is:

“a calling out, *ie.* a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue)—assembly.”

Considering this definition along with the previously mentioned characteristics of the New Covenant congregation, one can make a strong case that Yeshua modeled his congregation after the existing synagogue, and incorporated the judicial function of the *Sanhedrin*.<sup>175</sup> If this is so, two historically extrabiblical institutions may have combined to become biblical through Yeshua’s endorsement.<sup>176</sup>

The part of Judaism that rejected Yeshua as Messiah continued along a different path. After 70 A.D., the destruction of the Temple and the displacement of the *Sanhedrin*<sup>177, 178</sup> left Judaism in crisis, with the synagogue being the only surviving Jewish institution. Soon, new courts (*batei din*) and academies (*y’shivot*) arose to provide foci for theological and philosophical debates and training, but the synagogue continued to develop as the center of Jewish life.

By the Fourteenth Century, institutional Judaism had progressed to where certain rabbis were placed in charge of congregations, and some were even elevated to preside over towns, cities, and other geopolitical entities.<sup>179</sup> The *Chasidim* of middle Europe carried the idea of a Head Rabbi or *tzaddik* even further by creating the concept of “*Rebbe*,”<sup>180</sup> a rabbi elevated to be in charge of the community because he supposedly had special revelation, powers, and authority from God.<sup>181</sup>

### **Synagogue Headship and Authority**

Synagogue headship evolved from the administrative oversight of a *Rosh HaK’nesset* to the spiritual leadership of a Head Rabbi. Modern synagogues are generally governed administratively by a Board of Directors led by a President, and there is generally a clear demarcation between spiritual and business matters. On the spiritual side, the Head Rabbi is sometimes assisted by other rabbis and a cantor, and the entire leadership cadre is set in office by vote of the membership. While the Head

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<sup>175</sup> See footnote 143.

<sup>176</sup> The believers’ “meeting” or “assembly” is referred to as a synagogue (James 2:2).

<sup>177</sup> Emil Schurer, vol. 2, p. 209.

<sup>178</sup> “Sanhedrin,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Hugo Mantel, vol. 14, p. 836 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971).

<sup>179</sup> “Rabbi, Rabbinate,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Ed., vol. 13, p. 1447, Jerusalem, 1971.

<sup>180</sup> A *Yiddish* word.

<sup>181</sup> Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, pp. 216-217, William Morrow and Company, Inc. (New York: 1991).

Rabbi's opinions are influential within his congregation, authoritative decisions on Jewish law (*halachah*) and writs of divorce are generally carried out by a regional Jewish court (*beit din*). Spiritual discipline of congregational members and adjudication of conflicts between individuals is rare, if it exists at all, and discipline of disorderly members is generally carried out by the synagogue's Board. Programmatic leadership is usually accomplished through committees, with input from the Rabbi, and approval of the Board.

### **New Covenant Congregations**

New Covenant congregations developed differently. Most Messianic Jewish congregations recognize a head leader and refer to him as the Rabbi, Congregational Leader, Pastor, or a similar term. In some congregations, this head leader has virtually no accountability; in others, he is accountable to elders, to the general membership, to apostolic oversight, or to all three.

The biblical example emphasizes leadership by a plurality of elders who are the governing authorities of their congregations:<sup>182</sup>

*1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine."*

*Hebrews 13:17: "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."*

In the New Covenant Scriptures, in most cases, no one elder is identified as a congregation's titular head.<sup>183</sup> An exception is seen in relatively new congregations led by their founding apostle until such time as elders were recognized and ordained. When that was accomplished, the apostle generally moved on, but continued to have a fatherly relationship with the congregation and would sometimes return to teach, advise, and correct. Not all of the ordained elders fulfilled the same functions, and sometimes one of them rose to prominence. It is natural and healthy for elders to recognize one another's' giftings and to defer to those who are anointed or gifted in specific areas of service. It is also natural for one to take the lead. According to Ephesians 4:11 et seq., some elders can be expected to have an apostolic gifting, and they should be released to serve in that way. Other elders may be specially gifted to equip the body through teaching. It is the same for the other gifts.

The pastoral gift needs special mention because of the frequency with which pastors today are made the titular heads of congregations. Not only is there no biblical example of it, except for the

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<sup>182</sup> See "Governmental Leadership", supra.

<sup>183</sup> Some believe that the "angels of the seven churches" (Revelation 1:20-3:22) is a reference to elders, pastors or other officials who are the authoritative titular heads of their local congregations (John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1983)). More recent commentaries set forth other views which characterize the "angels" as heavenly guardians or the prevailing spirit of the churches (Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition, pp. 56-57 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988)). See also, Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, p. 82 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984); R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, The International Critical Commentary, p. 34 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985). The author's view is that each of these angels or messengers is an apostle with spiritual responsibility for all the congregations of a designated city or region.

Ephesians 4 reference, there is no further mention of the term “pastor” in all of the New Covenant Scriptures. This would hardly seem to be sufficient biblical authority to justify elevating those who have the pastoral gift to a position superior to other elders and other gift ministers. Yet, ironically, the gift which is spoken of least in New Covenant Scriptures is the one which receives the most attention in today’s ecclesiastical world.

Who then are the pastors that have been given to us, and what is their biblically authorized function? The following Scriptures offer strong evidence that a congregation’s elders are its pastors, and that the authorized role of a pastor is to lead by example and equip God’s flock with knowledge and understanding:

Acts 20:28: *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the assembly of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

1 Peter 5:1-3: *“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Messiah, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”*

Jeremiah 3:15: *“And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.”*<sup>184</sup>

Historically, pastors who fell into sin have brought spiritual ruin to many a new believer who followed and trusted. This is warned against in Jeremiah 23:1-2, and one cannot but surmise that the prominence which has been given to pastors in modern times has been a contributing factor.

### **Leadership Titles and Descriptive Designations**

The first thing which must be said of leadership titles and designations, is that if their use causes men to stumble—i.e. to be lifted up in pride or to be the object of adulation by others—they must be avoided. In the Bible, men of God are seldom observed using titles; they most often are referred to just by name. So it was, for example, that Moses is referred to as “Moses,” David as “David,” Saul as “Saul,” and so forth. Occasionally, it was (and still is) an optional practice to add a title ahead of a person’s name; thus, we find in Scripture titles such as “King David” (1 Kings 1:31) and “King Saul” (1 Samuel 18:6). Similarly, in the modern Jewish community, we hear of “Moshe Rabenu,” and the title Rabbi is in common usage. The Apostle Paul sometimes referred to his offices descriptively:

Colossians 1:1: *“Greeting (from) Paul, an apostle of Yeshua the Messiah by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.”*

2 Timothy 1:11: *“...to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.”*

Although Paul does not refer to himself as “Preacher Paul,” “Apostle Paul,” or “Rabbi Paul,” others may have addressed him in such a manner.<sup>185</sup> There appears to be no biblical basis for either promoting or precluding the use of titles and descriptive designations for congregational leaders.

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<sup>184</sup> See also, Jeremiah 23:4, Ezekiel 34:23 and John 21:17.

<sup>185</sup> Similar to John’s disciples addressing Yeshua as “Rabbi” (meaning teacher) in John 1:38.

The titles “*Rav*” and “*Rabbi*”<sup>186</sup> need special mention. They are universally used by all branches of Judaism and, for that reason, a growing number of Messianic Jewish leaders have adopted it as a positive statement of cultural identification. Those who oppose such usage usually give one or more of the following reasons: (a) the titles imply special training prior to ordination; (b) the titles imply an adherence to rabbinic authority; (c) the titles can mislead by inferring that those who hold them are non-messianic; (d) Matthew 23:6-8 seems to instruct against their use.

As to the first objection, if “*rav*” and “*rabbi*” are limited to congregational elders, specialized training (or its equivalent) and ordination should have already occurred. The content and length of rabbinical training is far from being uniform among the various branches of Judaism, and there is therefore no existing standard. As to the second objection, rabbinical authority has nothing to do with the term “*rabbi*”; it has to do with how one interprets Deuteronomy 17:8-11.<sup>187</sup> As to the third objection, if “*rav*” and “*rabbi*” become widely used by Messianic Jewish leaders, the term will lose its exclusive association with rabbinical Judaism.

Answering the fourth objection requires additional perspective. “*Rabiy*” derives from “*rav*” which, in biblical Hebrew, literally means “great.”<sup>188</sup> By the generation after Hillel, the meaning of “*rav*” had become “master” as distinguished from “slave,”<sup>189</sup> and so “*rabiy*” literally meant “my master.” The titles “*rav*” and “*rabiy*” were used similarly, except that “*rabiy*” inferred ordination (*s’michah*), whereas “*rav*” did not.<sup>190</sup>

When the literal meaning of a word is not the meaning intended, the word is said to be an idiom. Such is the case for the word *ραββι*, the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word *rabiy* and the English word “*rabbi*.”

John 1:38: “*Then Yeshua turned, and seeing them following, said to them, “What do you seek?” They said to Him, “Rabbi” (which is to say, when translated, teacher), “where are you staying?”*”

In this verse of Scripture, the title “*Rabbi*” (whose literal meaning has been shown to be “my master”) is used idiomatically to mean “teacher.”<sup>191</sup> Yeshua knew of this dual meaning of “*Rabbi*” and that its use was perfectly proper, so he chose to teach a lesson through the irony of seeming to forbid it.<sup>192</sup> Referring to the scribes and the Pharisees, Yeshua exclaimed:

Matthew 23:6-8: “*They love...greetings in the market places, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Messiah, and you are all brethren.*”

We get a further indication of Yeshua’s irony from the next verses:

Matthew 23:9-10: “*Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for one is your Teacher, the Messiah.*”

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<sup>186</sup> Transliterated spelling.

<sup>187</sup> Deuteronomy 17:8-11 is the basis of rabbinic authority in interpreting Scripture. See Joel Roth, *The Halakhic Process: A Systematic Analysis*, pp. 115-116 (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1986).

<sup>188</sup> “*Rabbi, Rabbinate*,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, vol. 13, pp. 1445-6 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971).

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*. *Rabi* was used in the land of Israel, whereas *rav* was used by the sages in Babylonia.

<sup>191</sup> The Greek word is a derivative of *διδσκαλος*.

<sup>192</sup> This is not the prevalent opinion of most commentators.



The Greek words for “father” and “teacher” in the foregoing Matthew 23:6-10 verses are derived from *πατρ* and *καθηγητης* respectively. Although translated “teacher” in the New King James Version,<sup>193</sup> neither *καθηγητης* nor any of its possible derivatives appear elsewhere in the New Covenant Greek text. Most of the other occurrences of “teacher” (including the parenthetical definition for “Rabbi” in John 1:38) are translated from derivatives of *διδσκαλος*:

1 Timothy 2:7: *“I am speaking the truth in Messiah and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”*

2 Timothy 1:11: *“...to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle and a teacher of the Gentiles.”*

Also, as expected from the ironic use of these verses, there are several instances in Scripture where “father” (*πατρ*) is clearly a proper descriptive term:

John 8:56: *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”*

Ephesians 6:2-3: *“Honor your father and mother...And you, fathers...”*

James 2:21: *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?”*

1 John 2:13-14: *“I write to you fathers...I have written to you fathers...”*

Finally, Yeshua explained the point he was making in Matthew 23:11-12:

*“But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted...”*

Clearly, Yeshua was not forbidding use of the term “Rabbi,” but was rather using the term to teach against self-exaltation.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

1. It is God’s protective wisdom that congregations be governed by a plurality of elders who are also its pastors—not by a single head-leader, unless the leader is in accountable submission to elder authority.
2. Elders are ordained by the laying-on of hands, to receive the transmitted anointing of the Holy Spirit. Their functions are to exercise priestly, governmental, pastoral, and equipping leadership, and to set an example of biblical conduct in their communities.

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<sup>193</sup> The *King James Version* translates *καθηγητης* as “master.”

3. In all facets of congregational leadership—structures, titles, leaders’ attitudes—anything that promotes the exaltation of men is wrong! With that proviso, the use of descriptive designations and titles (including “Rabbi”) is permissible.

**Bibliographical Supplement**

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—January 4, 2012, NKJ

## Kingdom Government and Spiritual Gifts

### Three Levels of Government

There are three levels of government described in the New Covenant Scriptures. The first and highest level is that of the King (King Messiah) who rules from heaven and extends his Kingdom to earth. The King rules directly through the Holy Spirit. He is assisted by angels and earthly servants, chief of whom are apostles and prophets ([Luke 11:49](#); [Ephesians 3:1-7](#)).<sup>194</sup>

The next level is the level of inter-congregational government headed by apostles. In addition to being individually gifted (at minimum apostolically gifted), apostles are sent by the King (e.g. [Galatians 1:1](#)) to plant or strengthen congregations, bring them under the King's authority, and govern them in the King's name. In their capacity as inter-congregational elders, apostles are the King's emissaries for uniting and unifying the body of believers.<sup>195</sup> Apostles rarely minister alone. To govern effectively, they gather to themselves persons such as prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, and others who have gifts that complement their own ([1 Corinthians 12:28](#); [Ephesians 4:11-12](#)).

Third is the level of congregational government headed by congregational elders. Elders are overseers or rulers ([1 Timothy 5:17](#)). Ideally, a congregation's initial elders are appointed by apostles and groomed to take over the governance of their respective congregations ([Acts 14:23](#); [Titus 1:5](#)).<sup>196</sup> As with apostles, in order to complement their own gifts and govern effectively, congregational elders gather to themselves persons such as prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, and others ([1 Corinthians 12:28](#); [Ephesians 4:11-12](#)). Congregational elders may also appoint subordinate officers known as deacons ([Acts 6:1-6](#)). Deacons, like elders, are individually and variously gifted, and it is natural for congregational elders to utilize them in the areas of their gifts. Deacons are, first and foremost, servants in their respective congregations.

### Governing Ministers and Spiritual Gifts

Scripture teaches that there is a difference between governing ministers and gifted or gift ministers.<sup>197</sup> This is illustrated in [Acts chapter 15](#), in which a controversy regarding doctrine was brought before a council of apostles and elders at Jerusalem ([verse 2](#)). In their deliberations, Scripture from the Old Covenant was invoked ([verses 15-17](#)), and prophecy was employed ([verse 28](#)). Although New Covenant prophets were in attendance ([verses 30-32](#)), the controversy was judged by apostles and elders only ([Acts 15:6](#), [16:4](#)). The Council's decision was then proclaimed by James, who was an apostle

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<sup>194</sup> The uniqueness of apostles and prophets is that apostles minister in governmental authority, while prophets minister in the revelation of God. Together, these form the foundation for all the other gifts in the household of God ([1 Corinthians 14:1-4](#); [Ephesians 2:19-20](#)).

<sup>195</sup> These conclusions are drawn from observing the activities of the apostles as they are described in the New Covenant Scriptures. After planting congregations, they would move on, but continue to exercise oversight through correspondence and sometimes through return visits ([Acts 15:36](#)).

<sup>196</sup> In Scripture, after the apostle moved on, the elders who were appointed continued to govern with only occasional intervention. One new responsibility they had was to appoint their own successors.

<sup>197</sup> There are some ways in which they are also the same. For example, in [Acts 20:28](#) and [1 Peter 5:1-2](#), one sees that elders have responsibility for pastoring. Also, in [James 5:14-15](#), one sees that elders have responsibility for prayer for the sick.

(Acts 15:13-21), and it was confirmed by the other apostles and elders (Acts 15:22). Only the apostles and elders had authority to decide the matter; others who were present, even those with gifts, did not.

### **Gift vs. Gifted**

The reader may have noticed this paper's repeated reference to "gifted" or "gift" ministers. Scripturally, there is a difference. All believers are commissioned to minister (Matthew 28:16-20), and all who pray can expect to receive one or more gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7, 12:7-10; 1 Timothy 4:14). Anyone who receives a spiritual gift may be said to be "gifted," and is expected to use the gift to serve others (1 Corinthians 14:12; 1 Peter 4:10). There are, however, some who are specially appointed for the service of equipping the body of believers, almost to the extent of occupying an office in their gift. These are the so-called "gift" ministers referred to in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11-12.<sup>198</sup> These ministers are not only "gifted"—they are themselves God's "gifts" to the body of believers.

### **A Common Mistake**

When governing authority and giftedness reside in the same person, we sometimes make the mistake of presuming that his authority comes from his gift or gift office rather than from his eldership. The most common example of this today is the prevalent belief that pastors are necessarily the heads of their congregations. A pastor (or any other gift or gifted minister) may indeed also be an elder<sup>199</sup> and, if he is, it is by virtue of his eldership and not his pastoral gift or pastoral office that he has the authority to govern.<sup>200</sup> If he is not currently a sitting elder,<sup>201</sup> he may nevertheless serve his congregation as a shepherd (Jeremiah 3:15),<sup>202</sup> provided he is authorized to do so by the congregation's governing elders to whom God has given the primary responsibility for shepherding (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2).<sup>203</sup> A pastor who is not an elder may not exercise governmental authority and should not be the head of his congregation.

What has been said concerning pastors is also true of prophets, gift teachers, evangelists, and the other gift ministers. Unless they are also apostles or elders, they have no governmental authority and must exercise their gifts under those who do.

### **Headship and Plurality in Government**

Scripture reveals that apostles sometimes ministered in groups and sometimes alone. Peter ministered with John (Acts 3:1-10), and Paul with Barnabas until they separated (Acts 13:1-3). Then, Barnabas traveled with Mark (Acts 15:39), and Paul with Silas (Acts 15:40).<sup>204</sup> There were also

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<sup>198</sup> The list in Ephesians 4:11-12 is sometimes referred to as "the five-fold gift ministries."

<sup>199</sup> The Lord Himself is both king and shepherd (Psalm 23).

<sup>200</sup> For Scriptures which show that shepherding and governing are distinct functions, see 2 Samuel 5:2, 1 Chronicles 11:2, Jeremiah 51:23 and Acts 20:28.

<sup>201</sup> A person may be an elder in spiritual maturity without sitting on a congregation's governing board.

<sup>202</sup> A shepherd (Greek word *poima-ino* and the Hebrew word *ra'ah*) is one who feeds or takes care of sheep (Genesis 46:32; Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:2). An elder (from the Greek word *presbuteros* or *episkopos* and from the Hebrew word *zaqen*) is an overseer of mature age—one who guards or watches over the welfare of others (Hebrews 13:17).

<sup>203</sup> See also, Matthew 2:6.

<sup>204</sup> Before Sinai, and until Aaron was anointed high priest, Moses and Aaron ministered together apostolically.

times when larger groups of apostles ministered together (Acts 4:33, 5:12), and times when apostles ministered alone. (Acts 9:17-20, 32-43; 18:24-28).

Except for when congregations were in the midst of being planted, there are no examples in Scripture where individual elders governed alone. There are, however, some verses of Scripture in which their ambiguous language has been given as evidence for the existence of head or lead elders.

The first such Scriptures reveal captains, rulers, and officers<sup>205</sup> being made heads over groups of from 1000 down to 10 men (Exodus 18:19-21; Deuteronomy 1:12-15; 1 Chronicles 26:26, 27:1). While it is unlikely that more than one person was put in charge of a group as small as 10, the Hebrew syntax unquestionably allows for more than one leader being assigned to any of the groupings.

A second group of Scriptures describes how God anointed seventy elders of Israel with the Spirit taken from Moses, thereby enabling them to assist Moses in bearing the people's burdens (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25). Scripture does not, however, reveal the size of the groups in which these elders served.

A third group of Scriptures reveals the special leadership role of James<sup>206</sup> (Acts 12:16-17, 15:13-21), and still another verse of Scripture reveals that, as between Paul and Barnabas, Paul was the chief speaker (Acts 14:12). Paul could not, however, have had greater authority than Barnabas, for had that been the case, Barnabas could not have left Paul and gone his separate way (Acts 13:1-3). A reference which is sometimes offered to support the existence of headship in groups of elders or apostles is Revelation 1:20-3:22; it is uncertain here as to who the "messengers" to the seven congregations are.

The Scriptures referenced above comprise little evidence that God intends there to be a head apostle for each group of apostles and a head elder for each congregation's eldership. That notwithstanding, Scripture does not preclude such cases of prominence either, and it is reasonable to expect, as a result of special anointing and gifting, that certain elders will rise to prominence and recognition beyond that of their peers. When that happens and the Lord leads, such gifted elders need not hesitate to move individually and powerfully in their gifts. In so doing, however, they must not forget that their authority for governing is only to be used in conjunction with their fellow elders.

It may happen, from time to time, that a non-elder is recognized to have special anointing and gifting. He too may operate powerfully and prominently in his gift, but he has no governing authority and must exercise his gift in submission to the elders who have the oversight.

—December 7, 1997 NKJ

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<sup>205</sup> Derived from the Hebrew words *sar*, *ro'eh*, and *shoter*.

<sup>206</sup> James was an apostle.

## The Pastor and His Wife as Spiritual Parents

It has come to my attention that some pastors and their wives do not understand and embrace their God-ordained roles to be spiritual parents in their congregations. The word “pastor” (in Greek ποιμήν *poimen* {*poy-mane*}) means “shepherd,” or “herdsman”—one who leads sheep. Ephesians 4:11-16 states:<sup>207</sup>

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Messiah—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

Notice the elements contained in the above passage—“equipping,” “edifying,” “leading to knowledge” and to “fullness” so that we are no longer “children,” and instead “grow up.” This is the description and role of a parent.

Seminaries, being academic institutions, effectively teach aspiring pastors to equip and edify their future flocks in the realm of biblical knowledge, but they are typically weak in teaching the broader parenting skills of helping their congregants to “grow up.” As a consequence, many pastors perceive their roles as being technicians of the Word, and their only domain to be in the pulpit and the classroom. They do not consider their flock to be their children, nor do they perceive themselves as fathers.<sup>208</sup>

Pastors’ wives face their own special challenges. They often entered into their marriage knowing that their husbands-to-be were (or would become) pastors. They may even have been warned prior to marrying that, because of their husbands’ profession they would have to share their husbands’ time and attention with others. But what many a pastor’s wife did not consider or come to terms with, is how marrying a pastor defines her own role; for if her husband becomes a congregation’s father then, as his helper<sup>209</sup> (and almost by definition), she becomes its mother.<sup>210, 211</sup>

The problem with a man and his wife entering pastoral ministry without consciously embracing congregational parenthood is that they cannot fully meet their congregants’ needs. Congregants, often parents themselves, look to their pastors and pastors’ wives as surrogate parents, expecting no less from them than to be Scripture’s depiction of the perfect father and mother—not only to their natural children, but to them as well. They will seek them out for counsel in the most intimate of life’s circumstances and will hold them accountable for how well they fulfill their parental role.

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<sup>207</sup> *New King James Version.*

<sup>208</sup> The Apostle Paul describes his role of giving comfort and instruction as that of a father, in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-11.

<sup>209</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>210</sup> The Apostle Paul analogizes his gentle nurture as that of a mother, in 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

<sup>211</sup> Consider the implications of Titus 2:3-4.

As with natural children, congregants behave well at times and misbehave at times. Misconduct is sometimes willful, and sometimes results from ignorance of God's standards. As with natural children, congregants must be prayed for, taught the way they should go, be given praise when it is earned, and be corrected, chastened, and even punished when it is required. And as with natural children, there will be habits to break, habits to form, and repentances to pursue. The pastor and his wife must expect this and be proactive in their congregational "parenthood." And just as natural children sometimes rebel against their parents, so too, congregants sometimes rebel against their pastors, potentially causing hurt and disappointment. Yet, just as natural parents are called to love and serve their children through thick and thin, so are pastors likewise called. A pastor's role, like a parent's role, is to love sacrificially so, therefore, a congregant's problems and even aberrant behaviors ought to be approached, not with dread, but as opportunities to minister in faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit to set their congregational "children" back on the right road. If the pastor and his wife struggle against this or give in to its disappointments, they will eventually become embittered and burned out.

Now that I have stated the problem, I would like to offer some guidance for men who are pursuing (or are already engaged in) pastoral ministry.

First, if you are currently studying for or pursuing the pastorate, seek counsel with others and prayerfully consider your readiness to undertake the role of being a father. If you are a young man, you must be prepared to father others who may be older than yourself. In this you must be bold in the Spirit and assured of your commission from God. If God has sent you, He will give you a mantle of fatherhood that others will recognize and acknowledge. If you do not have faith for it, you are either not ready or you are not called.

If you are an unmarried man who is about to undertake the fatherly role of pastoring, be aware that the woman God wants you to marry must likewise be called. You must make her aware of the expectation of congregational motherhood that will be thrust upon her, and she must be willing to embrace it; if she is not willing, although she may be ideal in many ways, she is either not ready or is not called to be your wife.

If you are already a pastor or are the wife of a pastor, and either or both of you are distressed by discovering that God expects you to parent your flock, even now you should go before the Lord and ask him whether He called you to continue pastoring or whether He would have you do something else. If you are certain that you are properly called, then step out in faith, accept the responsibility of your parenthood, and expect that God will give you all you need to fulfill it. If you are unsure of some of the particulars of good parenting, consult the Scriptures that teach the relational attributes of our Father in heaven, and also seek the counsel of a pastor and his wife whom you believe are gifted and successful in their pastoral parental roles.

Choosing to be a pastor or to continue being one is a critically important decision because it affects the lives of others. We can consider our options, seek advice, and test for skills, but the only assurance we can ever have that we have chosen correctly is when we hear it from God himself. As with other things in life, if we step out without God's pre-approval, we can easily start down a path that He did not intend. God may bless it even then, or He may re-direct us but, either way, we will be

fulfilled and successful if God is in it. If God is not in it, our ministry will not prosper and those for whom we are responsible will not be well served.

So, let us earnestly seek the Lord and be obedient to his leading. If He intends us to pastor, then He intends us to be fathers to our flock, and for our wives to be mothers. We can expect then that He will move in us, and gift us, so that our congregational parenting will be natural, joyful, and fulfilling.

—January 6, 2012, NKJ



## **Rules of Procedure for Conducting a *Matthew 18 Beit Din*<sup>212</sup>**

The following rules for conducting a *Beit Din* are recommended:

### ***1. Caption of Documents***

Each written document in a *Beit Din* should contain a standardized caption that includes:

- The name of the presiding congregation.
- The name(s) of the Complainant(s) followed by the word “Complainant.”
- The name(s) of the Respondent(s) followed by the word “Respondent.”
- The title of the document (e.g. “Complaint,” “Answer,” “Motion for...”).
- The body of the document (text that explains the document’s purpose). Numbered paragraphs containing no more than two sentences each is recommended.
- A conclusion (a paragraph that summarizes the document’s’ purpose.
- A line containing the writer’s signature.
- A statement of service (the means by which a copy of the document was transmitted to the opposing party (e.g. email, U.S. mail, personal delivery, etc.)

### ***2. Pre-hearing Proceedings***

#### **a. Complaint filed.**

The complaint is a written statement of numbered paragraphs setting out the jurisdiction of the *Beit Din* to hear and judge the case, the wrong that is being complained of (e.g. marital abandonment, non-support, etc.), the facts supporting the Complaint, and/or the relief being sought (e.g. financial support, etc.)

#### **b. Answer to Complaint filed.**

The Answer is a written response consisting of numbered paragraphs responding to (admitting or denying) each numbered paragraph of the complaint, and a concluding statement of the relief being sought (e.g. that the complaint be dismissed)

#### **c. Pre-hearing Motion(s) filed with or without oral argument**

(e.g. motion for discovery, motion to dismiss, motion to change venue, etc.)

A word should be said about Discovery. Discovery is a process by which a party gains access to things or knowledge that is exclusively in the possession of the other party. A *Beit Din* does not have subpoena power as does a public court, but it can accomplish everything a subpoena can by ruling against a party that does not comply. Typical pre-hearing motions are (a) motion for admission of facts; (b) motion to answer interrogatories; (c) motion for oral deposition; and (d) motion to produce physical evidence.

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**212** Based upon the Rules of Civil Procedure of Anglo-American tribunals.

### **3. Hearing**

#### **a. Rule on Witnesses**

Witnesses are excluded from the hearing room until it is time for them to testify.

#### **b. Complainant's opening statement**

The Complainant orients the judicial officers as to his complaint and the evidence he expects to present to support it.

#### **c. Respondent's opening statement**

An opening statement by the respondent is optional or can be deferred until after the Complainant rests his case.

#### **d. Complainant's case in chief**

The Complainant questions witnesses and/or testifies himself. This is termed "direct examination" and cannot include leading questions. After a witness testifies on direct examination, the Respondent questions the same witness; this is termed "cross-examination" and can include leading questions. The judicial officers can question at any time if they so desire.

#### **e. Respondent's case in chief**

Same as above.

#### **g. Recalling Witnesses**

If a witness for either party is to be recalled he must leave the hearing room after he testifies. If not, he can remain to observe the remainder of the hearing.

#### **k. Motions for Judgment**

Motions for Summary Judgment, Judgment on the Pleadings, and a Directed Verdict are similar in that they ask that a party to the *Beit Din* be granted judgment without the hearing going any further. A Motion for Summary Judgment may (for example) be requested by the Respondent after the Complainant has produced all his evidence if the Respondent believes that a *prima facie* case has not been made. Lack of a *prima facie* case is one in which there is insufficient evidence to support a Complaint even if no defense is offered. If the *Beit Din* agrees, the Complaint will be dismissed.

### **4. Post-hearing Proceedings**

#### **a. Final Motions.**

Either or both parties can offer final motions. The most common final motion is a "Motion to Dismiss Complaint." Motions for dismissal are predicated on their being no need for the *Bet Din* to render a verdict because the case is fatally flawed and therefore deliberating on the evidence would make no difference in the outcome.

**5. Closing Arguments**

- a. Complainant's Closing Argument.
- b. Respondent's Closing Argument
- c. Complainant's Supplementary Closing Argument.

The Complainant is allowed a second closing argument because he has the burden of proving his case.

**6. Judgment of the Bet Din**

- a. The judicial officers retire to consider their judgment.
- b. The hearing officers either deliver their judgment verbally and follow it up in writing or take what they have heard under advisement and communicate their judgment in writing at a later date.

—April 19, 2017, CJB

## Women Teachers and Preachers in Messianic Jewish Congregations

The term “Bible difficulty” has come to mean a portion of Scripture which, when translated into a modern language, seems to say something contradictory, false or outlandish. Let us examine whether the following verses from two of Paul’s letters, as translated into the New King James Version, pose such a “difficulty:”

*1 Co 14:34-35: “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.”*<sup>213</sup>

*1 Ti 2:11-14: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”*<sup>214</sup>

Paul appears to restrict women to a role of total silence in the assembled body of believers, thereby forbidding them from any activity, including teaching, which would require public speech. It would further appear from Paul’s comment concerning women not having “authority over men,” that his reason for requiring women to be silent is related to the presence of men.

The “difficulty” here is that the apparent prohibition is out of character for Paul who, in other places in Scripture, shows a high regard for women’s abilities in ministry. On a practical level, if we misinterpret these verses of Scripture and, as a result, unnecessarily limit the ministry of gifted women, we deprive ourselves and God of a mighty resource, and we frustrate the fulfillment of women in our midst who are called to preach and teach. Messianic Jewish congregations have, for the most part, adopted a conservative middle ground—that is, their women are permitted to speak and pray publicly, teach women and children, prophesy, and, in some cases, serve in the office of “Deaconess.” These same congregations usually prohibit women from holding the office of “pastor,” “rabbi,” and “elder,” and from teaching or preaching from the *bima* (pulpit) when men are present to listen. This paper explores the validity of this last prohibition.

### Definitions of “Teaching” and “Preaching”

Webster’s Third New International Dictionary<sup>215</sup> defines the regular verb “to teach” as follows:

*“1. show, guide, direct; 2a. to cause to know a subject; b. to cause to know how to do something; c. to accustom to some action or attitude; d. to make one know the disagreeable consequences of some action; 3. to direct as an instructor; guide the study of; conduct through a course of studies; give instruction to; 4a. to impart knowledge of; b. to present in a classroom lecture or discussion; c. to instruct in the rules, principles or practices of; 5a. to direct, instruct or train by*

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<sup>213</sup> *The New King James Version*, The Holy Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1982).

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1976).

*precept, example or experience; b. to seek to make known and accepted; implant; preach; 6. to conduct instruction regularly.”*

This same dictionary defines the regular verb “preach” as follows:

*“1. to proclaim the gospel; discourse publicly on a religious subject or from a text of Scripture; deliver a sermon; 2. to urge acceptance or abandonment of an idea or course of action; to exhort in an officious or tiresome manner.”*

It is completely appropriate to seek a modern definition for teaching and preaching, since it is the modern practice of these activities which is being scrutinized. We may glean from the previous definitions as well as from our experience, that biblical teaching and preaching are identical in most regards. In both cases, there is a conveyance of purported truth regarding the Word of God, and in both cases (although perhaps more-so in preaching) there is exhortation to persuade the hearer to adopt and implement that which is preached (taught) in his or her life. We commonly associate “preaching” with exhortation from the pulpit, whereas it is more common to think of “teaching” as being conducted in a classroom setting.

In modern usage, teaching or preaching to adults does not generally cloak the speaker with governmental or personal authority over listening students; this was not, however, always the case; during Yeshua’s life on earth and for many years thereafter, teachers were considered to have authority over their students:<sup>216, 217</sup> In this regard, consider this definition of “rabbi:”

*“A rav or rabbi in the Judaism of the time of Christ had the task of expounding the torah and of giving rulings in matters of the law. He had pupils (talmidim) who studied his expositions and his rulings and were duty bound to respect and obey their teacher.”<sup>218</sup>*

When Yeshua said to his disciples “*But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’*” (Matthew 23:8) and “*do not be called teachers*” (Matthew 23:10), he was speaking against the Pharisaic practice of self-exaltation—that is, presenting oneself as an authority.

### **Examples in Scripture of Women Speaking Publicly**

Scripture is not lacking examples of Godly women speaking in public. Clearly, both men and women were praying together in the upper room as they awaited the promised comforter (Acts 1:13-14). Also, in explaining the first public occurrence of tongues, Peter quotes the prophet Joel:

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<sup>216</sup> The *Mishnah* depicts the honor due one’s teacher as above that due one’s father (*M. Baba Metzia* 2.11).

<sup>217</sup> Referring to the Greek word *didasko* as used in the New Testament: “it does not convey the idea of developing a person’s abilities, but rather of instructing him in how to live; it also involves addressing him personally with commands based on the interpretation and declaration of God’s will.” D. Furst, “Teach,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, Gen. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986, Vol. 3, p. 763).

<sup>218</sup> D. Furst, *ibid.*, pp. 766-767.

*Acts 2:17-18: “Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and on My menservants and on my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.”*

A reference to women prophesying in public may also be found in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians:

*1 Corinthians 11:5: “But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head...”*

### **Examples in Scripture of Women Teaching Men**

In Acts 18:24-26 we read the plainly written account of how Aquila and his wife Priscilla taught Apollos:

*“...the way of God more accurately.”*

Then, in Psalms 68:11(12), we read:

*“The Lord gave (happy) tidings: they are published by the female messengers, a numerous host.”* <sup>219</sup>

*“The Lord giveth the word; the women that proclaim the tidings are a great host.”* <sup>220</sup>

*“The Lord gives a command; the women who bring the news are a great host.”* <sup>221</sup>

The English translations quoted above correctly render the Hebrew as being female messengers or proclaimers of the Word(s) of the Lord.

As further examples of women teaching men, one may recall the examples of women prophesying in public which were cited in the previous section of this paper. Prophecy is informative, instructive and/or corrective, and therefore its public proclamation constitutes public “teaching.” Finally, who can deny that when God created woman to be a helper to man (Genesis 2:18-24), part of her role was to give her husband verbal help? And what is verbal help but a mode of teaching?

### **A Probable Explanation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14**

Strictly speaking, providing an alternative explanation for 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 is not necessary in order to show that Paul did not relegate women to silence in all public situations; it is only necessary to show (and the previous sections have shown) that other Scriptures exist that unambiguously show otherwise. Nevertheless, a probable and logical explanation for the two Scriptures does exist and adds to the strength of this paper’s conclusions.

To begin with, notice that 1 Corinthians 14:35 begins with:

*“...let them ask their own husbands at home...”* (NKJ, emphasis provided)

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<sup>219</sup> Isaac Leeser, translator, *The Holy Bible* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1845).

<sup>220</sup> *The Holy Scriptures*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1955.

<sup>221</sup> *The Writings. A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1982.

This verse of Scripture refers, not to ANY husbands, but to “their OWN husbands.” The obvious implication here is that the women referred to by Paul were married, and their public inquiries were objectionable because they were addressed to the husbands of other women.<sup>222</sup> This quite likely resulted in public embarrassment to their own husbands who were expected to be able to teach their wives at home.<sup>223, 224</sup>

Consistent with this view, Kenneth Hagin writes that in New Testament Greek, the word “*gyne*” is used to mean either “women” or “wives.”<sup>225</sup> The fact is, the root Greek word for “woman” or “wife,” appearing in its various forms throughout the New Testament Scriptures is “*gune*.” Similarly, the root Greek word for “man” or “husband” is “*aner*.” Since the context alone determines which meaning is intended, A. S. Worrell’s translation renders the pertinent portions of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as follows:<sup>226</sup>

*“Let the wives keep silence in the assemblies; ...let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is a shame for a wife to speak in an assembly.”*

Similarly, 1 Timothy 2:11-12 may be rendered as follows:

*“Let a wife learn in silence [in the assemblies] with all submission [to her husband]. And I do not permit a wife to teach or have authority over [another woman’s husband] ...”* (Extracted and amplified from the NKJ)

Consider also, that Paul’s remarks that follow in verses 13-14 refer to the relationship of Adam and Eve, the world’s first husband-wife couple.

### Conclusion

Galatians 3:26-28 makes clear the spiritual equality of men and women. Nevertheless, the weight of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation teaches a subordinate and submissive role for wives, both in the context of their family lives as well as in public. Scripture wisely does not permit a change of roles when married women appear publicly with their husbands.<sup>227</sup> It would seem, therefore, that a wife cannot teach either her own husband or any other husband in a circumstance that would require her to exercise governmental or personal authority over him. On the other hand, Scripture does not prohibit a woman from teaching men in a non-authoritative way, especially when supported and overseen by woman’s husband, unless the manner or substance of her teaching would bring disgrace

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<sup>222</sup> *Meg. 23a*: “Our Rabbis taught: All are qualified to be among the seven (who read), even a minor and a woman, only the sages said that a woman should not read in the Torah out of respect for the congregation.” (*The Soncino Talmud, Seder Moed*, Vol. 4, p. 140, The Soncino Press, 1938).

<sup>223</sup> S. B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ*, Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1980, pp. 187-189. 220

<sup>224</sup> Note that Ephesians 5:22 and Colossians 3:18 contain similar exhortations: “Wives, submit to your *own* husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (NKJ, emphasis provided).

<sup>225</sup> K. E. Hagin, *The Woman Question*, pp. 28-30, Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1983.

<sup>226</sup> A. S. Worrell, translator, *The Worrell New Testament*, Gospel Publishing House, Springfield, Missouri, 1904, republished 1980.

<sup>227</sup> Clark, pp. 183 ff

upon husbands who are assembled to hear. A single woman would necessarily be released from needing a husband's oversight, however, most single women have the potential for marriage, and so it is important to maintain her appearance of propriety and not applying a double standard. To ensure this, a single woman should be overseen in her public ministry by mature men who are in congregational leadership.

If adequate precautions are taken, our vast resources of anointed women may be released to powerful preaching and teaching ministries. If done properly, our congregations will benefit greatly, both from their good fruit, and from maintaining a right spiritual order.

*—February 12, 1988, NKJ*



**R. Messianic Jewish Prayer and Worship**  
**Writings • Vol 2**



## A Call to Priestly Worship

### Sacrifice a Form of Worship

Throughout the centuries, God has consistently designated sacrifice as the form of worship through which we received atonement and ultimately salvation (Hebrews 9:22). We see a foreshadowing of this from Isaac's near encounter with being a sacrifice himself (Genesis 22:1-14), and from Israel's liberation from Egyptian slavery through the blood of a sacrificed lamb (Exodus 12:1-30).

God directed the building of a Tabernacle (Exodus 25:8-9) where worship in the form of animal sacrifice was to occur, and He established a priesthood (Exodus 40:12-16) to conduct the sacrifices, the chief one being to atone for sin (Leviticus 1:1-4, 16:15-22; Numbers 15:22-29). God demonstrated the seriousness of sacrificial worship by prescribing minute details for its implementation (Leviticus 1:1-17) and by visiting grave consequences upon those who violated his orders (Leviticus 10:1-3, 16:2). Upon the Tabernacle's completion, the Glory of God entered (Exodus 40:34-35), and it became the only approved place for sacrificial worship.

Despite the new law, sacrifices that had previously been conducted upon altars elsewhere did not completely cease when the Tabernacle commenced its operations. Not only were such sacrifices unauthorized, they became increasingly offensive to God as idolatrous heathen elements were introduced (Leviticus 26:30). Instances of worship in the "high places" became more frequent and were still occurring when Solomon finished construction of the First Holy Temple (1 Kings 11:7-8).

### The Beginning of Institutional Prayer

Prayer was always basic in the lives of God's children. We first encounter formal prayer in Genesis 4:26: "*Then men began to call on the name of the Lord.*" The patriarchs, Moses, David, and others are examples of men maintaining fellowship with God through prayer. Prayer was not only for the chosen few, but was practiced by all of Israel; this is illustrated during Solomon's dedication of the Temple when he prayed:

1 Kings 8:30: "*And may You hear the supplication of your servant and of Your people Israel. When they pray toward this place, then hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive.*"

Although Isaiah refers to the Temple as a "House of Prayer" (Isaiah 56:6-8), there is little indication that prayer or study unconnected with sacrifice was conducted prior to or during the period of the First Temple;<sup>228, 229, 230</sup> although such prayer would certainly have been beneficial, it nevertheless was not commanded, whereas sacrifice was.

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<sup>228</sup> White, Jr., "Synagogue," Vol. 5, pp. 555-556, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, M. C. Tenney, Gen. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976).

<sup>229</sup> Abraham Millgram, *Jewish Worship*, p. 64, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971).

<sup>230</sup> The traditional view is that Moses founded the synagogue. "Synagogue," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 15, p. 579, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971). See also, *Josephus*, "Apion II." 227

By c. 637 B.C.E., Temple worship and the spiritual life of God's people had fallen to a record low, and open idolatry was being practiced throughout the land. However, after the Book of the Law was discovered and read, King Josiah destroyed the altars on the high places and temporarily brought an end to idolatrous practices in all of Israel and Judea (2 Kings 22:1—23:25). In 586 B.C.E., once again in the grip of widespread idolatry, Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, the Temple was desecrated, and most of the population was carried off into captivity (2 Kings 25:1-21).

The prophets had warned the people of this impending disaster, but their warnings were not heeded (Jeremiah 34:1-7). When in captivity, the people repented and their hearts returned to the one true God.<sup>231, 232</sup> Unable to atone for their sins through Temple sacrifice, the Israelites in Babylonia, to their credit, did not establish local shrines. Instead, they came together in prayer, looking toward the time of their return to Jerusalem, when the Temple could be re-established and sacrifices to God could be resumed.

Upon their release from the Babylonian captivity, the Israelites established a goal of never again worshipping other gods. They continued meeting for prayer and study, and the practice slowly became institutionalized.<sup>233, 234</sup> By the time the Temple was rebuilt and sacrificial worship was restored under the Levitical priesthood, the prototype of the early synagogue (*bet k'neset*) had become ingrained in Israelite society and continued to co-exist alongside the Temple system.<sup>235</sup>

### **The Synagogue—A Competitor**

At the time of Yeshua's ministry, a turn of events was having a profound and progressive impact on Jewish attitudes toward Temple sacrificial worship. The Pharisees who, with initial pure intent that encouraged Israel toward priestly conduct modeled after the prescribed rituals of the Temple,<sup>236</sup> now found themselves in leading synagogue positions. Synagogues sprang up both in and out of Jerusalem, and the pharisees assumed spiritual leadership and authority over much of the Jewish population. Being advocates of priestly behavior but not having priestly anointing, it was not long before the Pharisees fell into excessive legalism, pride of position, and Scriptural error (Matthew 23:1-39; Mark 7:1-13). While the Temple priests continued to perform their unglamorous daily routine of animal sacrifice, the Pharisees conducted teachings and worship (prayer and reading Scripture) at the same times as the daily Temple sacrifices.<sup>237</sup>

Although in principle the synagogue was not in competition with the Temple, the draw of the populace toward synagogue worship fueled by the souliness of the Pharisees was great. While no one challenged the Temple's supremacy, by the time of the Second Temple's demise in 70 A.D., a clear seed of ambivalence toward the need for sacrifice had been sown.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Vol. 1, pp. 336-339, ( Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891).

<sup>232</sup> Millgram, pp. 65-66.

<sup>233</sup> Hayim H. Donin, *To Pray As A Jew*, Chapt. 1, p. 12, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980).

<sup>234</sup> Millgram, p. 67

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76-79

<sup>236</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud*, pp. 23-26, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

<sup>237</sup> Millgram, pp. 76-77. 234.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

### A Two-edged Sword

While the Rabbinical Jewish establishment credits synagogue worship with ingeniously providing a substitute mechanism by which Judaism could survive the loss of the Second Temple,<sup>239</sup> it is clear that it also worked against directing the Jewish people toward accepting the atoning sacrifice offered by Yeshua. The following excerpts from scholarly Jewish sources illustrate the interpretive violence that was done to God's system of sacrifice set forth in Scripture; Jewish scholar and historian Abraham Millgram writes:

*“One of the decisive acts of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai and his Sanhedrin was to pronounce the principle that the utterance of prayer, the study of Torah, and the performance of good deeds were as acceptable to God as the sacrifices of the Temple.”*<sup>240</sup>

Referring to the synagogue's salvific place in diaspora Judaism, Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, the late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, writes:

*“In Judaism itself, the synagogue proved of incalculable importance. Through it, the Sabbath and the Festivals penetrated more deeply into the Jewish soul, and the Torah became the common property of the entire people. Because of it, the cessation of the sacrificial cult, which cessation would in any other ancient religion have meant the end of that religion, was not in Judaism an overwhelming disaster. The reason is clear. Long before the fall of the Second Temple the synagogue had become the real pivot of Jewish religious life, especially so among the Jews outside of Palestine.”*<sup>241</sup>

Should we therefore conclude that, because the synagogue provided an avenue for Judaism to re-define itself without sacrifice there must be something inherently wrong with it? Should we also conclude (because there is no clear evidence that God initiated the synagogue as he did the Temple) that in order to be acceptable, institutional worship must include animal sacrifice? No, we should not conclude either. It is significant that there is not one criticism of synagogue worship recorded in all of the New Covenant Scriptures. What must be appreciated, however, is that those who historically promoted the synagogue moved Israel away from forgiveness of sins through Yeshua's sacrifice, and ultimately into error. Similarly today, anyone who advocates that prayer and study replaces sacrifice is leading away from Yeshua.

### The Synagogue Works Well for Non-Priests

Priestly worship and synagogue worship are different in both origin and purpose. Priestly worship concerns itself with sacrifice and intercession, while the synagogue involves prayer, study, and fellowship. The Temple priests were expected to work in the presence of the *Shechinah* of God; the rabbis of the synagogues were not.

<sup>239</sup> The early synagogue, known as the *bet kneset*, functioned mainly for prayer. After the loss of the Second Temple, the synagogue, renamed *bet hamidrash*, took upon itself increased community authority, and included the study of Talmud and Torah.

<sup>240</sup> Millgram, p.81.

<sup>241</sup> Joseph H. Hertz, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, p. xvii, (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1975).

Since Scripture is silent on the matter, we have no way to be sure to what extent God endorsed the early synagogue. On the one hand, we know that Yeshua and his disciples after him attended synagogue on the Sabbath and were not critical of it (Luke 4:16, Acts 17:1-3, 18:1-4). On the other hand, each such recorded instance shows them to be ministering in the synagogue rather than receiving. It is also noteworthy that the Temple priests paused during the day in order to attend synagogue, and it is widely believed among scholars, that a synagogue was operating somewhere within the confines of the Second Temple.<sup>242</sup> One thing which was surely true of the synagogue in those days is that it served a complementary function that was entirely unlike that of the Temple, and that its participants still depended upon the Temple sacrifices for their atonement and standing before God.

After the Second Temple was destroyed, the Rabbinic leaders salvaged what they could by adding priestly elements to the synagogue service.<sup>243</sup> The synagogue was, after all, their familiar domain since most of the Rabbis were not *Kohanim*. So, we find reminders of the Temple skillfully and smoothly woven into the synagogue's service, a service created and led mostly by non-priests, and devoted mainly to prayer and the reading of Scripture.

### **A New Priesthood in Messiah**

From its very foundation in history, God intended Israel to be a nation of priests—holy and set apart as a witness to the world that there is only one true God (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 49:6, 60:3, 61:6; Romans 15:7-13). In Tabernacle and early Temple times, the power for an ordinary Israelite to perform as a priestly witness (not a Levitical priest) came (1) from the Spirit of God who resided in the Holy of Holies, and (2) from the atoning sacrifices through which his sins could be forgiven. When Aaron and his sons were ordained, they served as priests to the Israelites, and the Israelites were, in turn, to be a priestly people to the rest of the world (Genesis 18:18, 22:18; Isaiah 2:1-5; Zechariah 8:20-23). Today, all who have received Yeshua have been made priests under him who is High Priest:

*Revelation 1:5-6: “To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and made us kings and priests to His God and Father...”*

*Hebrews 4:14: “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Yeshua the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”*

The Temple priests performed various ministry functions, but the daily sacrifices were at the heart of them all; this was so, because without the shedding of blood there was no redemption from sin either for the priests, the Israelite worshipers, or the nation (Leviticus 17:11, Hebrews 9:22). It is no different for us today for both Jews and non-Jews who are priests in Yeshua's service.

Speaking to congregations of mostly Jews, the Apostle Peter is quoted in 1 Peter 2:5 and 2:9-10 to have said:

*“...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Yeshua the Messiah.”*

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<sup>242</sup> Millgram, p. 77.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

*“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”* <sup>244</sup>

The relevance of blood sacrifice has not changed. In his giving us a New Covenant, God removed the need to continuously sacrifice animals, and he gave us instead a great one-time sacrifice—the blood of his son and our Messiah Yeshua ([Hebrews 9:11-15](#)). The Spirit of God, once operative in the Temple, is now poured out upon both Jewish and Gentile believers, empowering us to walk in our respective priestly callings ([Luke 24:49](#); [Acts 1:4-5, 2:16-21](#)). In a sense, each New Covenant priest is now a walking Temple, and God’s power can now go wherever the priest can go ([1Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19](#)).

Just as the Tabernacle and Temple sacrifices were not effective without the ministering Spirit, so it is for us today; Yeshua’s priests must be immersed in the Holy Spirit in order to be continually in the presence of Yeshua, who is today’s sacrificed lamb, resurrected. Yeshua was concerned that, after he returned to the Father, his disciples might forget him as the source of their god-given power. He therefore instructed them to take bread and wine as a frequent remembrance of his sacrifice and to continually renew their priestly power and authority by identifying with his shed blood ([Luke 22:14-20](#)). In more than a symbolic sense, when we who are New Covenant priests minister the elements of Yeshua’s sacrifice (the *Seudat HaAdon*) to one another, each recipient is renewed in his spirit and is refreshed in his priestly identity.

### **The Temple (Not the Synagogue) Our Priestly Heritage**

Most synagogues today are (as they were in the first century) strictly for prayer and are not houses of priestly worship. So, why do we Messianic Jews (priests in the New Covenant) sometimes characterize our houses of worship as synagogues? There are probably two reasons: (1) We want to emphasize that Jews who follow Yeshua remain Jews, and (2) we want to identify with the wider Jewish community. But there is a need for caution. First, we ought not to be defensive about our identity as Jews. God takes care of our identity. Second and more important, our memory of what is foundationally Jewish is far too short. While none of us living today experienced the sacrifices and the priesthood of the Second Temple, Yeshua and his disciples most certainly did. They lived in that era. They worshiped in the Temple ([Acts 3:1](#)), and the animal sacrifices were central to their spiritual lives. The Temple—not the synagogue—fills page upon page of our Bibles, and the Temple—not the synagogue—is the model from which God gave us a sacrificed Messiah ([Hebrews 10:1-14](#)).

### **Conclusion**

If Messianic Judaism is to be of value as a witness, it must witness to what others do not already know. Rabbinical Judaism and rabbinical synagogues do not acknowledge the New Covenant or their need for priestly worship and an atoning sacrifice. It is regarding these matters, that Messianic Judaism is unique among other Jewish expressions and has much to offer. Let us not, however, believe that we must expunge all rabbinical and synagogue elements from our worship, but let us also

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<sup>244</sup> Reminds Israel that it once was not a people but is now a people of God and a royal priesthood ([Exodus 19:6](#); [Isaiah 61:6, 66:21](#)). See also, [Hosea 2:21\(19\)-22\(20\)](#) and [Romans 9:24-27](#).

not hesitate to let them go whenever they hinder our priestly responsibilities under Yeshua. Let us openly proclaim that ours is a priestly Judaism, ordained by God, Messiah-centered, and Holy Spirit dependent. Let us boldly embrace our priestly identity as Messianic Jews (and affiliated Gentiles), and be open to God as He moves Judaism toward its destiny of faith, salvation, and priesthood in Yeshua.

—January 2, 2012, NKJ



**S. Holy Living**  
**Writings • Vol 2**



## Our Response to Moral Decline

Our country was founded on biblical values, yet today the moral fabric of our society appears to be collapsing with increasing rapidity everywhere we look. It is right to be distressed by it but let us not think that it is the first time in history that it has happened. We need only to reflect on the Nazis and before them the Romans, to realize that evil has been in the world throughout the ages. Centuries ago, the Apostle Paul wrote:

*Romans 1:18-32: “What is revealed is God’s anger from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth; because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities—both his eternal power and his divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse; because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened. Claiming to be wise, they have become fools! In fact, they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for mere images, like a mortal human being, or like birds, animals or reptiles! This is why God has given them up to the vileness of their hearts’ lusts, to the shameful misuse of each other’s bodies. They have exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, by worshipping and serving created things, rather than the Creator—praised be he for ever. Amen. This is why God has given them up to degrading passions; so that their women exchange natural sexual relations for unnatural; and likewise the men, giving up natural relations with the opposite sex, burn with passion for one another; men committing shameful acts with other men and receiving in their own persons the penalty appropriate to their perversion. In other words, since they have not considered God worth knowing, God has given them up to worthless ways of thinking; so that they do improper things. They are filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and vice; stuffed with jealousy, murder, quarrelling, dishonesty and ill-will; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God; they are insolent, arrogant and boastful; they plan evil schemes; they disobey their parents; they are brainless, faithless, heartless and ruthless. They know well enough God’s righteous decree that people who do such things deserve to die; yet not only do they keep doing them, but they applaud others who do the same.”*

Sounds familiar, doesn’t it! Still, it is the first time in these United States, that the institutions and authorities upon which we once depended to set us straight seem to now be declaring what is right to be wrong, and what is wrong to be right. We should not be surprised though, because the Bible predicts that it will happen as the end-time approaches:

*2 Timothy 3:1-5: “Moreover, understand this: in the acharit-hayamim [the last days] will come trying times. People will be self-loving, money-loving, proud, arrogant, insulting, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, uncontrolled, brutal, hateful of good, traitorous, headstrong, swollen with conceit, loving pleasure rather than God, as they retain the outer form of religion but deny its power.”*

We cannot change that which is prophesied, but God does not want us to lie down and let it happen either. Yeshua knew what his end was to be, yet he thought it not a waste to preach godly truth and

morality unceasingly while he was able. And so must it be with us. We tend to think that we have no authority to oppose the ungodly things we are seeing happen, but it is not so. Most of us are not government officials and do not have authority of that kind, but we do have biblical authority:

Luke 10:19: *“Remember, I have given you authority; so you can trample down snakes and scorpions, indeed, all the Enemy’s forces; and you will remain completely unharmed.”*

And Scripture also says:

Zechariah 4:6: *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”* (NKJ).

I do not think that the snakes and scorpions we are to trample down are just those that slither and crawl on the ground.

—June 12, 2015, CJB

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Gen 5:24 . . . . .	C4,16, D12, G8, H23, K3	Gen 22:1-13 . . . . .	A8,9, J9, R1
Gen 6:2 . . . . .	E1	Gen 22:14 . . . . .	A8,9, R1
Gen 6:5-8 . . . . .	H15	Gen 22:15-17 . . . . .	A8,9
Gen 6:9 . . . . .	G8, O4	Gen 22:18 . . . . .	A8,9, B3, E14, M5, O1,5, R1
Gen 6:14-16 . . . . .	H19		

Gen 22:19.....	A8,9	Exo 12:9-14.....	R1
Gen 24:16.....	E1	Exo 12:15.....	L3, R1
Gen 24:67.....	D3	Exo 12:16.....	R1
Gen 26:1-4.....	E2	Exo 12:17.....	L3, R1
Gen 26:5.....	O4	Exo 12:18.....	A2, L3, R1
Gen 26:7.....	E1	Exo 12:19.....	L3, R1
Gen 27:26-29.....	O5	Exo 12:20-28.....	R1
Gen 28:10-11.....	E2	Exo 12:29-30.....	A5, R1
Gen 28:12.....	E2, O4	Exo 12:31-32.....	A5, L3
Gen 28:13-14.....	C14, E2, O4	Exo 12: 33-36.....	A5, B6
Gen 28:15.....	C14, O4	Exo 12:37-38.....	A5, B3,6
Gen 28:16-19.....	C14	Exo 12:39.....	A5
Gen 28:20-22.....	C14, O6	Exo 12:43-48.....	B6
Gen 32:25(24)-29(28) ..	O4	Exo 12:49.....	B6, C11, G5, O4
Gen 35:9-12.....	E2	Exo 13:2.....	K1
Gen 40:20.....	A4	Exo 13:9.....	O4,7
Gen 41:38.....	K4	Exo 13:17-18.....	H19
Gen 44:30-34.....	D2	Exo 13:21-22.....	K4
Gen 46:32.....	Q2	Exo 14:14.....	B9, H3
Gen 48:3-4.....	E2	Exo 14:20.....	K4
Gen 48:10-12.....	E12	Exo 15:11.....	B9
Gen 48:13-19.....	E12,16	Exo 15:20.....	G4, E7
Gen 48:20.....	E16	Exo 15:21.....	G4
Gen 49:8-14.....	C13	Exo 15:25.....	H6
Gen 50:16-18.....	H7	Exo 15:26.....	H6,11,14
Gen 50:19.....	C5, H7, J4,6	Exo 16:4.....	H19, O4,7, Q1
Gen 50:20.....	C5, H7, J4,5,6	Exo 16:28.....	O4
Gen 50:21.....	H7	Exo 16:29-30.....	D18
Gen 50:24-25.....	E2	Exo 17:6.....	Q1
.....		Exo 18:9-21.....	Q2
<b><u>Sh'mot (Exodus)</u></b>		Exo 18:13.....	O2, Q4
Exo 3:5-6.....	O5	Exo 18:14-15.....	O2, Q2,4
Exo 3:13.....	D5	Exo 18:16.....	O2,4, Q1,4
Exo 3:14.....	D5,12	Exo 18:17-19.....	C9, O2, Q1,4
Exo 3:15.....	N5	Exo 18:20.....	C9, O2,4 Q1,4
Exo 4:22.....	E18	Exo 18:21-23.....	C9, O2, Q1,4
Exo 4:24-26.....	E7	Exo 18:24.....	O2, Q1
Exo 12:1.....	A9, H15, R1	Exo 18:25-26.....	O2 Q1,4, Q1
Exo 12:2.....	A9, H15,16, R1	Exo 18:27.....	O2, Q1
Exo 12:3-5.....	R1	Exo 19:1-20:17 <sup>245</sup> .....	A11
Exo 12:6.....	L3, R1	Exo 19:1.....	A11, O5
Exo 12:7.....	R1	Exo 19:2.....	A11, D4, O5
Exo 12:8.....	L3, R1		

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Exo 19:3-4 . . . . .	A11, B6, D4, H15,19, K1, O4,5	Exo 31:1-3 . . . . .	B2, D17, K4
Exo 19:5 . . . . .	A11, B3,5,6,8, C1,12,13, D4, E11,14, H15,19, K1, O4,5	Exo 31:4-5 . . . . .	D17
Exo 19:6 . . . . .	A11,15, B3,5,6,8, C1,9,12,13, D4, E7,8,11,12,14, G3, H15,19, K1, M5, N5, O1,4,5 P1, Q1, R1	Exo 31:13 . . . . .	A14, D4, N4
Exo 19:7 . . . . .	A11, D4, O4	Exo 31:14 . . . . .	A14, D4,18, N4
Exo 19:8 . . . . .	A11, B8, D4, O4	Exo 31:15 . . . . .	N4
Exo 19:9 . . . . .	A11, H11	Exo 32:15-16 . . . . .	Q1
Exo 19:10-20:1 . . . . .	A11	Exo 32:25-29 . . . . .	K1
Exo 20:2 . . . . .	A11, H14	Exo 33:9-10 . . . . .	K4
Exo 20:3-4 . . . . .	A11	Exo 33:11 . . . . .	E2, H8, K4, G8
Exo 20:5-6 . . . . .	A11, D5,11	Exo 34:5-7 . . . . .	D11
Exo 20:8-11 . . . . .	A11,14, D18	Exo 34:8 . . . . .	G6
Exo 20:12 . . . . .	N5	Exo 34:15-16 . . . . .	M1
Exo 20:12(13) . . . . .	B8, E7, A11	Exo 34:25 . . . . .	L3
Exo 20:13(13) <sup>246</sup> . . . . .	B8	Exo 34:27 . . . . .	O7
Exo 20:13(14) . . . . .	B8, D4, H11	Exo 35:3 . . . . .	D18
Exo 20:13(15-16) . . . . .	B8	Exo 35:30-31 . . . . .	K4
Exo 20:14(17) . . . . .	A11, B8	Exo 40:12-16 . . . . .	R1
Exo 20:15(18) . . . . .	A11	Exo 40:34-35 . . . . .	K4, Q1, R1
Exo 20:16(19) . . . . .	H3, Q4	Exo 40:36-38 . . . . .	K4
Exo 20:17(20) . . . . .	A11		
Exo 21:18-27 . . . . .	Q4	<b><u>Vayikra (Leviticus)</u></b>	
Exo 22:12-13 . . . . .	O2	Lev 1:1-3 . . . . .	E16, R1
Exo 22:24(25) . . . . .	C11	Lev 1:4 . . . . .	E12,16, Q1, R1
Exo 23:1 . . . . .	H3, Q4	Lev 1:5-17 . . . . .	R1
Exo 23:2-3 . . . . .	Q4	Lev 5:1 . . . . .	Q4
Exo 23:4-5 . . . . .	L3,4	Lev 5:4-5 . . . . .	Q4
Exo 23:6-8 . . . . .	L3,4 Q4	Lev 6:2(9) . . . . .	O7
Exo 23:10-11 . . . . .	L4	Lev 6:7(14) . . . . .	O7
Exo 23:15 . . . . .	H15, L3,4	Lev 6:18(25) . . . . .	O7
Exo 23:16-18 . . . . .	L3,4	Lev 7:1 . . . . .	B8, O7
Exo 23:19 . . . . .	B8, D10, L3,4	Lev 7:2-5 . . . . .	B8
Exo 23;20-22 . . . . .	H11, L3,4	Lev 7:11 . . . . .	O7
Exo 24:8 . . . . .	O7	Lev 7:37 . . . . .	O7
Exo 24:12 . . . . .	O7	Lev 8:30 . . . . .	Q1
Exo 25:1-2 . . . . .	C14	Lev 10:1-3 . . . . .	D18, F1, R1
Exo 25:8-9 . . . . .	R1	Lev 10:4-5 . . . . .	D18, F1
Exo 28:1 . . . . .	Q1	Lev 10:6-7 . . . . .	F1
Exo 30:13-14 . . . . .	C14	Lev 10:8-10 . . . . .	F1, Q1
		Lev 10:11 . . . . .	F1, O1,7
		Lev 10:12-13 . . . . .	D18, F1
		Lev 10:14-15 . . . . .	F1
		Lev 10:16 . . . . .	D18, F1, O3
		Lev 10:17-20 . . . . .	B1, D18, F1, O3

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Lev 13:59.....O7  
 Lev 14:57.....O7  
 Lev 16:1.....D18  
 Lev 16:2.....D18, R1  
 Lev 16:3-8.....A15, D18  
 Lev 16:9-10.....A15  
 Lev 16:15-16.....R1  
 Lev 16:17.....A15, R1  
 Lev 16:18-19.....R1  
 Lev 16:20.....E16, R1  
 Lev 16:21-22.....A15, E16, R1  
 Lev 16:29.....A2, A8  
 Lev 16:30-31.....A8  
 Lev 17:6.....O4  
 Lev 17:11.....E1, R1  
 Lev 18:4.....B1  
 Lev 18:5.....B1, O4  
 Lev 19:2.....O7  
 Lev 19:15.....Q4  
 Lev 19:16.....E6, H3,13  
 Lev 19:17.....H7  
 Lev 19:18.....D2,13, E2,6, J5  
 Lev 20:10.....D4  
 Lev 22:10.....H11  
 Lev 22:25.....M5  
 Lev 23:2-3.....A14  
 Lev 23:4.....A5,11  
 Lev 23:5.....A5,11, D10, L3  
 Lev 23:6.....A5,11, D10, L3  
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 Lev 23:9.....A5, B5, D10, L3,4  
 Lev 23:10-11.....A5,11, B5, D10, L3,4  
 Lev 23:12.....A11, B5, D10, L3,4  
 Lev 23:13.....D10  
 Lev 23:14.....A11,12, D10  
 Lev 23:15-16.....A11,12, C10, D10, L3,4  
 Lev 23:17-21.....A11, D10  
 Lev 23:23.....A8,9  
 Lev 23:24.....A8,9, H16  
 Lev 23:25.....A8,9  
 Lev 23:26.....A8,15  
 Lev 23:27.....A8,15 B1, D18  
 Lev 23:28-29.....A8,15  
 Lev 23:30-32.....A15  
 Lev 23:33-36.....A10,12

Lev 23:37-43.....A12  
 Lev 24:5.....H11  
 Lev 24:9.....H11  
 Lev 25:4.....O4  
 Lev 25:35-37.....C11  
 Lev 26:1.....H2  
 Lev 26:30.....R1  
 Lev 26:33.....D9  
 Lev 27:30.....O6

**B'midbar (Numbers)**

Num 3:12-13.....D10  
 Num 5:6-7.....C11, Q4  
 Num 5:29.....O7  
 Num 8:10.....E12,16, Q1  
 Num 8:11.....E12, Q1  
 Num 8:12.....Q1  
 Num 8:17-19.....K1  
 Num 11:16-17.....D17, K4, Q1,2  
 Num 11:18-23.....Q1  
 Num 11:24.....Q1,2  
 Num 11:25.....D17, Q1,2  
 Num 11:26.....D17, Q1  
 Num 11:27-29.....D17, K4  
 Num 11:30.....D17  
 Num 12:1-2.....H3,13  
 Num 12:6.....H3,11,13, K3  
 Num 12:7-8.....H3,13, K3  
 Num 12:9-10.....H3,13  
 Num 13:17-20.....H6  
 Num 14:2-4.....H6  
 Num 14:7-9.....H6  
 Num 14:18.....D11  
 Num 15:14-15.....B6, D4  
 Num 15:16.....B6, D4, G5  
 Num 15:22-29.....R1  
 Num 15:38-40.....C2, D4, H14  
 Num 15:41.....C2  
 Num 17:7(16:42).....K4  
 Num 18:15-16.....K1  
 Num 18:20-24.....C14  
 Num 18:25-26.....C14, O6  
 Num 20:2-6.....Q1  
 Num 20:7-12.....C9, Q1  
 Num 20:29.....N3

Num 22:9-21	K2	Deu 6:18	E13, H6
Num 22:22	C4, K2	Deu 6:19	E13
Num 22:23-35	K2	Deu 7:1-4	M1
Num 23:19	B9	Deu 7:9	B9
Num 24:2-5	D17	Deu 7:13-14	B9
Num 27:16-17	E16	Deu 8:11-18	J5
Num 27:18-19	D17, E16	Deu 9:9-17	A11
Num 27:20-21	E16	Deu 9:18	A11, G4
Num 27:22-23	E12,16, Q1	Deu 9:19	A11
Num 28:26	A11	Deu 9:27	O2
Num 29:12	A10	Deu 10:1-5	A11
Num 29:35-40	A10	Deu 10:10	A11
Num 31:21	O7	Deu 10:12	H19, Q1
Num 32:22-23	H22	Deu 10:20	E21
Num 35:30	Q4	Deu 11:13-15	A12
		Deu 11:16-17	A12, E15
<b><u>D'varim (Deuteronomy)</u></b>		Deu 11:22-23	H14
Deu 1:5	O7	Deu 11:32	H14
Deu 1:9-11	O2, Q4	Deu 12:28	H6
Deu 1:12	O2, Q2,4	Deu 12:29-31	N2
Deu 1:13	B2, O2, Q2,4	Deu 13:2(1)-4(3)	H4,5, K3
Deu 1:14-15	O2, Q2,4	Deu 13:5(4)	H11,14, K3
Deu 1:16-17	O2, Q4	Deu 13:6(5)	K3
Deu 1:18	O2	Deu 14:1-2	O5
Deu 4:6	O4,7	Deu 14:22-23	C14
Deu 4:7	B9	Deu 14:28	C14
Deu 4:13	O7	Deu 15:7-9	C11,14
Deu 4:32-33	H11	Deu 15:10-11	C14
Deu 5:1-8	A11	Deu 15:26	H14
Deu 5:9-10	A11, D11	Deu 16:2	L3
Deu 5:11	A11	Deu 16:13-15	A12
Deu 5:12-15	A11,14, D18	Deu 16:16-17	A12, C14
Deu 5:16-19(22)	A11	Deu 16:18	Q1,4
Deu 6:2	H22, L3	Deu 16:19	Q4
Deu 6:3	H22	Deu 17:6	Q4
Deu 6:4	B9, C2, E8, H14,22, Q1	Deu 17:8-10	Q1
Deu 6:5	B9, C2, 4, D15, G4, H2,22, Q1	Deu 17:11	Q1,4
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Deu 6:7	B2,7, C2, D15, E7,8, H22, N5, Q1	Deu 18:15-16	H16, K1
Deu 6:8	B2,8, C2, D15, H22, Q1	Deu 18:17	H11,16
Deu 6:9	B2, C2, D15, H22, Q1	Deu 18:18	H11,16, K2
Deu 6:17	E13	Deu 18:19	H16, K2
		Deu 18:20-21	K2
		Deu 18:22	K2,3
		Deu 19:12	Q1

Deu 19:13.....	Q4	Deu 31:13.....	A12
Deu 19:15.....	E4, H13, O2, Q4	Deu 32:4.....	O2
Deu 19:16.....	O2, Q4	Deu 34:6.....	N3
Deu 19:17.....	O2	Deu 34:7-8.....	F1,3
Deu 19:18.....	O2, Q4	Deu 34:9.....	E12,16, F1,3, K4, Q1
Deu 19:19.....	Q4		
Deu 19:21.....	Q4	<b><u>Y'hoshua (Joshua)</u></b>	
Deu 21:3.....	Q1	Jos 1:6-7.....	H10
Deu 21:6.....	Q1	Jos 1:8.....	G6, H10
Deu 21:10-12.....	M1	Jos 1:9.....	B9, H10, J2
Deu 21:13.....	M1, N3		
Deu 21:18.....	B1, H11, N4, O2	<b><u>Shoftim (Judges)</u></b>	
Deu 21:19.....	B1, H11, N4, O2, Q1	Jud 4:4-5.....	E7
Deu 21:20-21.....	B1, H11, N4, O2		
Deu 22:1-2.....	H19	<b><u>Sh'mu'el Alef (1 Samuel)</u></b>	
Deu 22:5.....	O4	1Sa 2:3.....	B2
Deu 22:15.....	O2, Q1	1Sa 9:2.....	E1
Deu 23:3(2).....	E14	1Sa 10:6.....	K2,4
Deu 23:21(20).....	C11	1Sa 10:7-13.....	K2
Deu 24:1.....	D3, H11	1Sa 15:22.....	G5, M4
Deu 24:2-3.....	D3	1Sa 15:35.....	C4
Deu 24:5.....	H18	1Sa 16:1.....	F1,3
Deu 24:16.....	D11, H22	1Sa 16:10-12.....	F1,3
Deu 24:17.....	Q4	1Sa 16:13.....	K4
Deu 25:5.....	B1	1Sa 17:33-37.....	H10
Deu 25:9.....	Q1	1Sa 18:1.....	H8, N1
Deu 26:12-13.....	O6	1Sa 18:6.....	Q1
Deu 27:1.....	B1	1Sa 25:40-42.....	D3
Deu 27:10.....	H11,14		
Deu 27:26.....	D8	<b><u>Sh'muel Bet (2 Samuel)</u></b>	
Deu 28:1.....	H11,14	2Sa 5:2.....	Q2
Deu 28:2.....	H11	2Sa 6:14-16.....	G4
Deu 28:9.....	B5	2Sa 7:13.....	A13
Deu 28:13.....	B5	2Sa 11:2.....	E1
Deu 28:64.....	D9	2Sa 12:13.....	C3
Deu 29:9(10)-12(13) ..	A14, B3,6, E14	2Sa 23:2.....	K4
Deu 29:13(14)-14(15) ..	A14, E14		
Deu 30:9.....	C4	<b><u>M'lakhim Alef (1 Kings)</u></b>	
Deu 30:10.....	O7	1Ki 1:31.....	Q1
Deu 30:11-14.....	H21, J1,J5	1Ki 2:1-2.....	F1, F3
Deu 30:15-16.....	H14	1Ki 2:3.....	C13, F1,3
Deu 30:19.....	B10, D6, E3,15	1Ki 2:4.....	C13
Deu 31:6.....	H10	1Ki 2:10-12.....	F1,3
Deu 31:9.....	A12	1Ki 8:1-5.....	A12
Deu 31:10-12.....	A12, E14	1Ki 8:30.....	R1



1Ki 9:12 . . . . . H14, J7  
 1Ki 11:7-8 . . . . . R1  
 1Ki 19:11 . . . . . H23  
 1Ki 19:12 . . . . . H11,14,23, J7  
 1Ki 19:15 . . . . . Q1  
 1Ki 19:16 . . . . . F1,3, Q1  
 1Ki 19:19-21 . . . . . Q1  
 1Ki 22:24 . . . . . O2

**M'lakhim Bet (2 Kings)**

2Ki 2:9-15 . . . . . F1,3, K4  
 2Ki 10:30 . . . . . H6  
 2Ki 22:1-13 . . . . . R1  
 2Ki 22:14 . . . . . E7, R1  
 2Ki 22:15-20 . . . . . R1  
 2Ki 23:1-25 . . . . . R1  
 2Ki 25:1-7 . . . . . R1  
 2Ki 25:8-9 . . . . . A13, R1  
 2Ki 25:10-21 . . . . . R1

**Yeshayahu (Isaiah)**

Isa 1:4 . . . . . A13  
 Isa 1:10 . . . . . O4,7  
 Isa 1:16 . . . . . H9  
 Isa 1:18 . . . . . N6  
 Isa 2:1-2 . . . . . O5, R1  
 Isa 2:3 . . . . . A13, O5, R1  
 Isa 2:4-5 . . . . . O5, R1  
 Isa 3:5-9 . . . . . H4  
 Isa 3:10-11 . . . . . H22  
 Isa 5:20-21 . . . . . H4  
 Isa 6:1-4 . . . . . C3, G4  
 Isa 6:5 . . . . . C3,9, G4  
 Isa 7:14 . . . . . E8, H16  
 Isa 8:16 . . . . . E5  
 Isa 9:5(6) . . . . . D5, Q1  
 Isa 11:1-2 . . . . . K4  
 Isa 12:2 . . . . . J3, J6  
 Isa 12:3 . . . . . A12  
 Isa 12:6 . . . . . G4  
 Isa 33:22 . . . . . B9  
 Isa 35:4 . . . . . J5  
 Isa 40:11 . . . . . Q2  
 Isa 41:8 . . . . . H8, K3  
 Isa 41:13 . . . . . B9

Isa 42:6 . . . . . C9, P1  
 Isa 42:7 . . . . . C9  
 Isa 42:8 . . . . . B9  
 Isa 43:11 . . . . . B9  
 Isa 43:18-19 . . . . . H15  
 Isa 44:24 . . . . . D5  
 Isa 49:5 . . . . . E7  
 Isa 49:6 . . . . . E7, O5, P1, Q1, R1  
 Isa 50:4 . . . . . B2, E19  
 Isa 52:10 . . . . . P1  
 Isa 53:1-2 . . . . . E2, H16  
 Isa 53:3 . . . . . E2, H16, J5  
 Isa 53:4 . . . . . E2,18, H16,19, J5  
 Isa 53:5 . . . . . E1,2, E18, H16,19, J5,  
 Isa 53:6 . . . . . E2, E1, J5, H16, H19  
 Isa 53:7 . . . . . E1,2, F1, H3,16,19, J5  
 Isa 53:8 . . . . . E1,2, H16  
 Isa 53:9-12 . . . . . E2, H16  
 Isa 54:5 . . . . . C8,15  
 Isa 54:13 . . . . . B9  
 Isa 55:1-2 . . . . . J1  
 Isa 55:8-9 . . . . . B9  
 Isa 56:1-3 . . . . . A14, O5  
 Isa 56:4-5 . . . . . A14, D4,18, O5  
 Isa 56:6-7 . . . . . A14, D4,18, O5, R1  
 Isa 56:8 . . . . . O5, R1  
 Isa 58:13-14 . . . . . A14, C7  
 Isa 59:1-2 . . . . . E1  
 Isa 60:1-2 . . . . . M5  
 Isa 60:3 . . . . . M5, N5, O5, P1, Q1, R1  
 Isa 61:1 . . . . . K4  
 Isa 61:6 . . . . . C1, E11, O5, Q1, R1

**Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah)**

Jer 3:15 . . . . . Q1,2  
 Jer 10:6 . . . . . B9  
 Jer 10:14 . . . . . B2  
 Jer 11:4 . . . . . H11  
 Jer 11:16 . . . . . P1  
 Jer 16:14-15 . . . . . D9  
 Jer 17:7-8 . . . . . J1  
 Jer 20:13 . . . . . B9  
 Jer 23:4-5 . . . . . Q1  
 Jer 23:23 . . . . . C4  
 Jer 29:12-14 . . . . . G1



Zec 14:17 . . . . . A10,12, O5

Zec 14:18-19 . . . . . A12, O5

**Malakhi (Malachi)**

Mal 2:7 . . . . . B2

Mal 2:10 . . . . . E18

Mal 2:15-16 . . . . . D3

Mal 3:8-9 . . . . . O6

Mal 3:10 . . . . . C14, O6

Mal 3:24(4:6) . . . . . N5

**T'hilim (Psalms)**

Psa 1:2 . . . . . O7

Psa 2:11 . . . . . E21

Psa 2:12 . . . . . E1

Psa 4:1 . . . . . J2

Psa 4:5(4) . . . . . J2

Psa 5:9(8)-10(9) . . . . . H3

Psa 8:4(3)-5(4) . . . . . E21, G7

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 Rev 12:13-17 .....M5  
 Rev 12:21.....J7  
 Rev 13:11-18 .....H17  
 Rev 16:15-21 .....E15  
 Rev 19:16.....Q1  
 Rev 20:11-15 .....D16  
 Rev 21:3-5 .....H15  
 Rev 22:9.....N7  
 Rev 22:18-19 .....K1



## Appendix

# Hebrew Word Glossary

### A\*

<i>'Amora</i> . . . . .	Gomorra
<i>'Aved-N'go</i> . . . . .	Abed-Nego
<i>acharit-hayamim</i> . . . . .	latter (end of) days
<i>Adar</i> . . . . .	month on the lunar calendar
<i>Adonai</i> . . . . .	Lord
<i>ADONAI-Tzva'ot</i> . . . . .	LORD of Hosts
<i>Aharon</i> . . . . .	Aaron
<i>ahavah</i> . . . . .	love
<i>Akeidah, the</i> . . . . .	the binding of Isaac in Genesis
<i>Al Chet</i> . . . . .	prayer of confession
<i>aliyah</i> . . . . .	ascent (literal); also, ascending to the <i>bima</i> ; emigration to Israel
<i>aliyot</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>aliyah</i>
<i>am ha-aretz</i> . . . . .	people of the land
<i>Amidah</i> . . . . .	a prayer in the <i>Siddur</i> (also called the <i>Sh'moneh Esreh</i> )
<i>Ashkenazi</i> . . . . .	middle European Jewish ( <i>Yiddish</i> ) culture
<i>Ashkenazim</i> . . . . .	Jewish residents of middle Europe
<i>Av</i> . . . . .	a month on the lunar calendar
<i>Aved-N'go</i> . . . . .	see, <i>'Aved-N'go</i>
<i>Avimelekh</i> . . . . .	Abimelech
<i>Avigayil</i> . . . . .	Abigail
<i>Avihu</i> . . . . .	Abihu
<i>Aviv</i> . . . . .	The season of Spring (an agricultural reference)
<i>avon</i> . . . . .	iniquity, offenses
<i>Avraham</i> . . . . .	Abraham
<i>Avram</i> . . . . .	Abram
<i>Az'azel</i> . . . . .	an evil spirit to where the <i>Yom Kippur</i> scapegoat is sent

### B\*

<i>B'midbar</i> . . . . .	Book of Numbers (in the desert)
<i>b'nei mitzvah</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>bar mitzvah</i>
<i>b'not mitzvah</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>bat mitzvah</i>
<i>b'rakhah</i> . . . . .	blessing
<i>B'rakhot</i> . . . . .	blessings; also, a tractate of the <i>Talmud</i>
<i>B'reshit</i> . . . . .	Book of Genesis (in the beginning)
<i>b'rit</i> . . . . .	covenant
<i>B'rit Chadashah</i> . . . . .	New Covenant (sometimes meaning New Covenant Scriptures or New Testament)

<i>b'rit milah</i> . . . . .	covenant circumcision (cutting)
<i>B'sorah</i> . . . . .	see, <i>Besorah</i>
<i>B'tzal'el</i> . . . . .	Bezalel
<i>Ba'al</i> . . . . .	Ugaritic reference to foreign gods
<i>bar</i> . . . . .	son (Aramaic)
<i>Bar'chu</i> . . . . .	a liturgical prayer (Let us praise)
<i>Bar Kochba</i> . . . . .	a false Messiah
<i>Bar-Nabba</i> . . . . .	Barnabas
<i>Bar/Bat Mitzvah</i> . . . . .	time of becoming accountable as an adult, and assuming adult responsibilities in the synagogue (literally: "Son/Daughter of Commandment")
<i>Baruch HaShem</i> . . . . .	Bless the Lord (literally "the Name")
<i>bat; bas</i> . . . . .	daughter (Aramaic)
<i>batei din</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>beit din</i>
<i>Bat (Bas) Mitzvah</i> . . . . .	coming of age status (also, ceremony) for a Jewish girl
<i>Bavel</i> . . . . .	Babylon
<i>Beis HaMikdash</i> . . . . .	Jerusalem Temple (also, " <i>Beit HaMikdash</i> ")
<i>beit din</i> . . . . .	see, <i>bet din</i>
<i>Beit K'neset</i> . . . . .	synagogue
<i>Beit-Lachmi</i> . . . . .	Bethlehemite
<i>Beit-Lechem</i> . . . . .	Bethlehem
<i>Beit Midrash</i> . . . . .	house of study
<i>Beit T'filah</i> . . . . .	house of prayer
<i>Bereishit</i> . . . . .	see, " <i>B'reishit</i> "
<i>Besorah</i> . . . . .	the Good News in Scripture (literally "tithings")
<i>bet din</i> . . . . .	Jewish court of law
<i>Bet-Lechem</i> . . . . .	Bethlehem
<i>Bikkurim</i> . . . . .	firstfruits
<i>bimah</i> . . . . .	raised platform and table from which the <i>Torah</i> scroll is read
<i>brit</i> . . . . .	see, " <i>b'rit</i> " and " <i>B'rit</i> ..."

## C\*

<i>Chabad</i> . . . . .	aka " <i>Chabad-Lubavitch</i> ," a <i>Chasidic</i> sect
<i>Chafetz Chayim</i> . . . . .	Rabbi Meir Kagan, aka Yisroel Meir HaCohen, writer, teacher, and codifier of Jewish law
<i>chag</i> . . . . .	holiday
<i>Chag HaMatzot</i> . . . . .	Feast of Unleavened Bread
<i>Chag HaSukkot</i> . . . . .	Feast of Tabernacles
<i>challah</i> . . . . .	a special kind of bread (also <i>hallah</i> )
<i>Chanukah</i> . . . . .	Feast of Rededication
<i>chanukiyah</i> . . . . .	Eight branch candle or oil lamp used during <i>Chanukah</i> ; plural: " <i>chanakeyot</i> "
<i>Chasid</i> . . . . .	an individual member of the <i>Chasidim</i>
<i>Chasidim</i> . . . . .	a strictly orthodox Jewish sect in 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> centuries BC; also, a modern ultra-orthodox sect of Judaism originating in Eastern Europe in the second half of the 18 <sup>th</sup> century

<i>chaverim</i> . . . . .	friends
<i>chavurah</i> . . . . .	friendship group
<i>chavurot</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>chavurah</i>
<i>Chazak!</i> . . . . .	Be strong!
<i>chazan (chazzan)</i> . . . . .	cantor
<i>cheider</i> . . . . .	Yiddish for Hebrew School
<i>Chumash</i> . . . . .	Book that contains the <i>Torah</i> and <i>Haftarah</i> (traditionally related weekly readings from other parts of the Bible)
<i>chuppah</i> (also <i>chuppah</i> ) . . . . .	wedding, wedding canopy
<i>chutzpah</i> . . . . .	Yiddish for “flagrant audacity”
<i>cohanim</i> . . . . .	priests (also <i>kohanim</i> )
<i>cohanim g’dolim</i> . . . . .	high priests (also <i>kohanim g’dolim</i> )
<i>cohen</i> . . . . .	priest (also <i>kohen</i> )
<i>Cohen Gadol</i> . . . . .	High Priest (also <i>Kohen Gadol</i> )
<i>Cohen HaGadol</i> . . . . .	the High Priest (also <i>Kohen HaGadol</i> )

**D\***

<i>d’rash</i> . . . . .	see, “ <i>drash</i> ”
<i>D’varim</i> . . . . .	Book of Deuteronomy (words)
<i>Dammesek</i> . . . . .	Damascus
<i>daven</i> . . . . .	Yiddish for a way of praying
<i>D’vorah</i> . . . . .	Deborah
<i>dor l’dor</i> . . . . .	generation to generation
<i>drash</i> . . . . .	exegesis of a biblical text
<i>dreidel (dreidl)</i> . . . . .	four-sided spinning top used on <i>Chanukah</i>

**E\***

<i>ekkllesia</i> . . . . .	a Greek word meaning “body of believers” or “church”
<i>El’azar</i> . . . . .	Eleazar, Lazarus
<i>Elisheva</i> . . . . .	Elizabeth
<i>Eliyahu</i> . . . . .	Elijah
<i>Elohim</i> . . . . .	God
<i>El Shaddai</i> . . . . .	God Almighty
<i>Elul</i> . . . . .	month on the lunar calendar
<i>Elyon</i> . . . . .	the Most High
<i>emet</i> . . . . .	truthfulness, honesty and propriety
<i>Emmanuel</i> . . . . .	see, “Immanuel”
<i>Emori</i> . . . . .	Amorites
<i>eretz</i> . . . . .	land
<i>Eretz Yisrael</i> . . . . .	Land of Israel
<i>erev</i> . . . . .	evening
<i>erev Shabbat</i> . . . . .	Sabbath evening (after sundown on Friday)

**F\*****G\***

<i>gabbai</i> . . . . .	leader in a <i>Torah</i> service who determines <i>aliyot</i>
<i>Galil</i> . . . . .	Galilee
<i>Gat-Sh'manim</i> . . . . .	Gethsemane
<i>Gavri'el</i> . . . . .	Gabriel
<i>Gei-Hinnom</i> . . . . .	Gehenna, Valley of Hinnom; Hell
<i>Gemara</i> . . . . .	a component of the <i>Talmud</i>
<i>get</i> . . . . .	a Jewish writ of divorce, aka bill of divorcement
<i>gimilut chasadim</i> . . . . .	acts of lovingkindness
<i>Girgashi</i> . . . . .	Girgashites
<i>Goy</i> . . . . .	Gentile
<i>Goyim</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>goy</i> (Gentiles)
<i>Goyishe</i> . . . . .	Gentile (adjective)

**H\***

<i>Ha'Elyon</i> . . . . .	the Most High
<i>ha-almah</i> . . . . .	the young woman (also, “the virgin”)
<i>HaAretz</i> . . . . .	the Land (usually referring to the Land of Israel)
<i>Haftarah</i> . . . . .	selections of books from the <i>Nev'im</i> and <i>Ketuvim</i> of the <i>Tanakh</i> that are traditionally read in the synagogue along with the <i>Torah</i> during services and as part of personal devotions
<i>hachnasat orchim</i> . . . . .	welcoming strangers
<i>haderekh</i> . . . . .	the way
<i>Ha'Elyon</i> . . . . .	the Most High God
<i>hagaddah / hagaddot</i> . . . . .	guide book used to conduct a Passover <i>seder</i>
<i>hagigah</i> . . . . .	the pascal sacrifices
<i>halachah</i> . . . . .	law; body of Jewish law; legal interpretation of the <i>Talmud</i>
<i>halachic</i> . . . . .	adjective referring to <i>halachah</i>
<i>halachically</i> . . . . .	adverb referring to <i>halachah</i>
<i>hallah</i> . . . . .	<i>challah</i> • a kind of bread
<i>hamvashrot</i> . . . . .	messengers (female plural)
<i>Hanokh</i> . . . . .	Enoch
<i>HaShem</i> . . . . .	substitute name for God (literally: “The Name”)
<i>Hasidim</i> . . . . .	see “ <i>Chasidim</i> ”
<i>Havdalah</i> . . . . .	separation (usually refers to a ceremony commemorating the end of the Sabbath and beginning of the workweek)
<i>Hevel</i> . . . . .	Abel
<i>Hevron</i> . . . . .	Hebron
<i>Hilchot Gedolot</i> . . . . .	a work by Simon Kairo published in the 8 <sup>th</sup> Century
<i>Hitti</i> . . . . .	Hittite(s)

<i>Horev</i> . . . . .	Horeb
<i>hoshanah</i> . . . . .	hosanna (literally “save”)
<i>Hoshanah Rabbah</i> . . . . .	the seventh day of <i>Sukkot</i>
<i>Hoshianu</i> . . . . .	save us now

**I\***

<i>Immanuel</i> . . . . .	God with us (also, Emmanuel)
<i>ish</i> . . . . .	man
<i>ishi</i> . . . . .	my husband
<i>Itamar</i> . . . . .	Ithamar
<i>Iyar (Iyyar)</i> . . . . .	Second month on the biblical Jewish calendar; comes after <i>Nisan</i>
<i>Iyov</i> . . . . .	Job; Book of Job

**J\*****K\***

<i>K'far-Nachum</i> . . . . .	Capernaum
<i>K'nizi</i> . . . . .	Kenizzites
<i>K'rov Yisrael</i> . . . . .	a Gentile who identifies closely with the Jewish Community
<i>K'rovei Yisrael</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>K'rov Yisrael</i>
<i>k'ruvim</i> . . . . .	cherubim
<i>Kabalah</i> or <i>Kabbalah</i> . . . . .	an ancient mystical interpretation of the Bible
<i>Kadmoni</i> . . . . .	Kadmonites
<i>Kaddish</i> . . . . .	a liturgical prayer of praise to God
<i>kapparah</i> . . . . .	atonement (also spelled “ <i>kaparah</i> ” and “ <i>kapara</i> ”)
<i>karban</i> . . . . .	see, <i>korban</i>
<i>Kasdim</i> . . . . .	Chaldeans
<i>kashrut</i> . . . . .	the practice of keeping <i>kosher</i>
<i>kavanah</i> . . . . .	attitude of focused intention of the heart in prayer
<i>kavod horim umorim</i> . . . . .	honoring parents and teachers
<i>Kayin</i> . . . . .	Cain
<i>Kefa</i> . . . . .	Peter
<i>kehillah / kehillah</i> . . . . .	congregation, assembly, community
<i>Kena'an</i> . . . . .	Canaan
<i>Kena'ani</i> . . . . .	Canaanite(s)
<i>Keni</i> . . . . .	Kenites
<i>kippah</i> . . . . .	a brimless cap (also, “yarmulke”)
<i>Kislev</i> . . . . .	month on the lunar calendar
<i>Ki Tissa</i> . . . . .	a <i>parashah</i>
<i>ki-tov</i> . . . . .	good
<i>ki-tovat</i> . . . . .	beautiful
<i>kittle</i> . . . . .	a white robe

<i>Kitvey B'rit Chadashah</i>	New Covenant Scriptures (New Testament)
<i>Kitzur Shulchan Aruch</i>	abbreviated Code of Jewish Law
<i>kodesh</i>	holy
<i>kohanim</i>	priests (also <i>cohanim</i> )
<i>kohanim g'dolim</i>	high priests (also <i>cohanim g'dolim</i> )
<i>kohen</i>	priest (also <i>cohen</i> )
<i>Kohen Gadol</i>	High Priest (also <i>Cohen Gadol</i> )
<i>Kohen HaGadol</i>	the High Priest (also <i>Cohen HaGadol</i> )
<i>kol</i>	all, the whole
<i>Kol Simcha</i>	a Messianic Jewish Music Group
<i>korban</i>	animal sacrifice
<i>kosher</i>	ceremonially clean for eating, according to biblical or rabbinical standards

## L\*

<i>L'cha Dodi</i>	song welcoming the Sabbath
<i>l'dor vador</i>	from generation to generation
<i>L'hitra'ot</i>	a parting greeting (see you later)
<i>l'shanah tovah</i>	to a good year
<i>l'snay</i>	to hate or of hate
<i>L'vi'im</i>	Levites
<i>lashon hara</i>	evil or negative speech
<i>Lehitra'ot</i>	see, <i>L'hitra'ot</i>

## M\*

<i>m'chitzah</i>	partition; curtain of separation
<i>m'zuzah</i>	scroll containing words of <i>Torah</i> attached to doorpost
<i>m'zuzot</i>	plural of <i>m'zuzah</i>
<i>Ma'ariv</i>	evening prayer service
<i>macher</i>	Yiddish for a person who makes things happen
<i>machzor</i>	High Holy Day prayer book
<i>machzorim</i>	plural of <i>maczor</i>
<i>malahah</i>	hard work
<i>Malki-Tzedek</i>	Melchizedek
<i>marranos</i>	Jews forcefully converted to Christianity in the Middle Ages
<i>mashiach</i>	messiah
<i>Ma Tovu</i>	a liturgical prayer (How goodly)
<i>matzah</i>	unleavened bread (plural " <i>matzot</i> ")
<i>Matzot</i>	Feast of Unleavened Bread
<i>mazel</i>	star constellation
<i>mazel tov</i>	congratulations (literally "good constellation")
<i>megillah</i>	scroll (refers to several books of the Bible, especially Esther and Ruth); also refers to the tenth tractate of the <i>Mishnah</i>
<i>Meishakh</i>	Meshach

<i>menorah</i> . . . . .	multi-arm lamp for oil or candles
<i>meshumed</i> . . . . .	Yiddish for “traitor” or “apostate”
<i>meshumadim</i> . . . . .	plural of “ <i>meshumed</i> ”
<i>mezuzah</i> . . . . .	see <i>m’zuzah</i>
<i>mezuzot</i> . . . . .	see <i>m’zuzot</i>
<i>Midrash</i> . . . . .	biblical exegesis by ancient Jewish authorities; sometimes used to describe Jewish exegesis today (plural: <i>midrashim</i> )
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> . . . . .	a <i>midrash</i> of the <i>Torah</i> and the five <i>Megillot</i>
<i>mikveh</i> . . . . .	bath for ritual immersion
<i>Minchah</i> . . . . .	Jewish afternoon service
<i>minhagim</i> . . . . .	customs (singular: “ <i>minhag</i> ”)
<i>minyán</i> . . . . .	ten Jewish men assembled for prayer
<i>Miryam</i> . . . . .	Miriam, Mary
<i>mishegas</i> . . . . .	Yiddish for “craziness”
<i>Mishna</i> . . . . .	alternative transliterated spelling of “ <i>Mishnah</i> ”
<i>Mishnah</i> . . . . .	a component of the <i>Talmud</i>
<i>Mishneh Torah</i> . . . . .	a compilation of laws gleaned from both Scripture and <i>Talmud</i>
<i>Mizrachim</i> . . . . .	<i>Mizrachi</i> Jews • Easterners
<i>mitzvah</i> . . . . .	commandment (either God’s exact words or a restatement of them, e.g. Maimonides’ “ <i>Sefer HaMitzvot</i> ”); in another context, an act of kindness or compassion
<i>mitzvot</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>mitzvah</i>
<i>mitzvot aseh</i> . . . . .	positive commandments
<i>mitzvot lo ta’aseh</i> . . . . .	negative commandments
<i>Mo’av</i> . . . . .	Moab
<i>Mo’avi</i> . . . . .	Moabite
<i>Moed</i> . . . . .	festivals; second order of the <i>Mishnah</i>
<i>Moedim</i> . . . . .	Appointed Times
<i>Moriya</i> . . . . .	Moriah
<i>Moshe ben Maimon</i> . . . . .	Maimonides
<i>Motza’ei-Shabbat</i> . . . . .	Saturday night (time immediately following <i>Shabbat</i> )
<i>Musaf</i> . . . . .	extra Jewish service on <i>Shabbat</i> afternoon
<i>musar</i> . . . . .	Jewish ethical instruction (literally reproof or instruction)

## N\*

<i>N’vukhadnetzar</i> . . . . .	Nebuchadnezzar
<i>Nadav</i> . . . . .	Nadab
<i>Nakdimon</i> . . . . .	Nicodemus
<i>Natzeret</i> . . . . .	Nazareth
<i>Nebuchadnezzar</i> . . . . .	king of Babylon
<i>nigunim</i> . . . . .	Jewish tunes sung by groups without words, and vocalized with sounds such as “bim bim bam,” “lai lai lai,” etc.
<i>Nisan</i> . . . . .	The first month of the biblical Jewish calendar
<i>Nissan</i> . . . . .	alternative spelling of <i>Nisan</i>

*No'ah* . . . . . Noah

*Noach* . . . . . Noah

## O\*

*olam* . . . . . to a far distant time

*omer* . . . . . a measure of grain (associated with counting 50 days to *Shavuot*)

*oneg Shabbat* . . . . . a Sabbath meal (literally “Sabbath delight”)

*Oved* . . . . . Obed

*ozrim* . . . . . helpers

## P\*

*P'lishti* . . . . . Philistines

*P'lishtim* . . . . . Philistines

*P'rizi* . . . . . Perizzite(s)

*P'rushim* . . . . . Pharisees

*parashah* . . . . . weekly *Torah* reading (singular)

*parashiyot* (or *parashot*) . . . . . weekly *Torah* readings (plural)

*Pesach* . . . . . Passover (also, *Pesah*)

*plotz* . . . . . Yiddish for “collapse” or “burst”

*pokeid avon* . . . . . visiting the iniquity of

*pur* . . . . . lot

*Purim* . . . . . Feast of Esther (literally “lots”)

## Q\*

## R\*

*rachamim* . . . . . mercy and compassion

*Rav* . . . . . Rabbi

*Re'uveni* . . . . . Reubenites

*Reb* . . . . . honorific title (non-rabbinic) for a Jewish man

*Rebbe* . . . . . the spiritual leader of a *Chasidic* sect

*Refa'im* . . . . . Rephaim

*Refidim* . . . . . Rephidim

*rekhilut* . . . . . gossip

*Rosh Chodesh* . . . . . see *Rosh-Hodesh*

*Rosh HaK'nesset* . . . . . presiding officer of a synagogue

*Rosh HaShanah* . . . . . Jewish term for *Yom T'ruah* (literally: “Head of the Year”); an “appointed time” and “High Holy Day” that falls on the first day of the seventh month (*Tishrei*)

*Rosh-Hodesh* . . . . . New Moon, first day of the month

*ruach* . . . . . spirit

*Ruach Elohim* . . . . . Spirit of God

*Ruach HaKodesh* . . . . . Holy Spirit

*Rut* . . . . . Ruth, also Book of Ruth



**S\***

<i>s'lichah</i> . . . . .	forgiveness
<i>s'micha</i> . . . . .	rabbinical ordination
<i>S'dom</i> . . . . .	Sodom
<i>Sanhedrin</i> . . . . .	Supreme Court of ancient Israel; a tractate of <i>Talmud</i>
<i>schlemiel</i> . . . . .	Yiddish for incompetent fool
<i>seder</i> . . . . .	ritual Passover meal (literally: "order")
<i>sefer</i> . . . . .	book
<i>Sefer HaMitzvot</i> . . . . .	Book of Commandments (also title of Book authored by Maimonides)
<i>Sefer haMitzvot</i>	
<i>haKatzar</i> . . . . .	Concise Book of Mitzvot
<i>seifer</i> . . . . .	see <i>sefer</i>
<i>Sephardim</i> . . . . .	Original meaning: Jews from the Iberian Peninsula; today's usage includes Jews from North Africa and the Middle East
<i>Seudat HaAdon</i> . . . . .	Table of the Lord (The Lord's Supper; Holy Communion)
<i>Sh'khinah</i> . . . . .	Shechinah, the presence (glory) of God
<i>sh'ma</i> . . . . .	hear
<i>Sh'ma</i> . . . . .	a major Jewish prayer/proclamation quoted from <u>Deuteronomy 6:4-9</u> ; literally means "Hear"
<i>Sh'mini Atzeret</i> . . . . .	annual Sabbath day following the seventh day of <i>Sukkot</i> ; often called the eighth day of <i>Sukkot</i>
<i>sh'mittah</i> . . . . .	release, discharge (of debts)
<i>Sh'mitah</i> . . . . .	the Sabbatical Year
<i>Sh'muel</i> . . . . .	Samuel
<i>Sh'ol</i> . . . . .	Sheol / Hades (grave pit, a place awaiting eternal judgment)
<i>Shabbat</i> . . . . .	Sabbath
<i>Shabbat Shuvah</i> . . . . .	<i>Shabbat</i> of return; falls during Days of Awe
<i>shachah</i> . . . . .	worship
<i>Shachrit</i> . . . . .	traditional morning service
<i>Shadrakh</i> . . . . .	Shadrach
<i>Shafat</i> . . . . .	Shafat
<i>shaliach</i> . . . . .	apostle; emissary; agent
<i>shalom</i> . . . . .	godly peace; hello / goodbye
<i>Shalom aleikhem</i> . . . . .	Peace be to you!
<i>shamash</i> . . . . .	servant, deacon, synagogue official
<i>shamashim</i> . . . . .	plural of " <i>shamash</i> "
<i>shamashot</i> . . . . .	deaconesses
<i>shammashim</i> . . . . .	see <i>shamashim</i>
<i>Sha'ul</i> . . . . .	Saul (Paul)
<i>Shavuot</i> . . . . .	Feast of Weeks; appointed time (annual Sabbath) 50 days from <i>Yom HaBikkurim</i> ; aka "Pentecost" within Christianity (literally: "Weeks")
<i>shekel</i> . . . . .	a monetary coin (one-fifth of an ounce of silver)
<i>shem</i> . . . . .	name

<i>Shema</i> . . . . .	see, <i>Sh'ma</i>
<i>Shemittah</i> . . . . .	see, “ <i>sh'mittah</i> ”
<i>Shim'on</i> . . . . .	Simeon, Simon
<i>shivah</i> . . . . .	see, “sitting <i>shivah</i> ”
<i>Shlomo</i> . . . . .	Solomon
<i>Shmittah</i> . . . . .	see, “ <i>sh'mittah</i> ”
<i>shofar</i> . . . . .	a musical instrument (trumpet) made from the hollow horn of an animal
<i>shofarot / shofrot</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>shofar</i>
<i>Shulchan Adonai</i> . . . . .	Table of the Lord (The Lord's Supper; Holy Communion)
<i>Shulchan HaAdon</i> . . . . .	Table of the Lord (The Lord's Supper; Holy Communion)
<i>Shulchan Aruch</i> . . . . .	Code of Jewish Law (literally: “set table”)
<i>Shulkhan Aruch</i> . . . . .	see, <i>Shulchan Aruch</i>
<i>shva</i> , also <i>shvah</i> . . . . .	Hebrew <i>niqqud</i> (vowel) “:” beneath a letter
<i>Sichon</i> . . . . .	Sihon
<i>Siddur</i> . . . . .	traditional Jewish prayer book
<i>Sila</i> . . . . .	Silas
<i>simcha</i> , also <i>simchah</i> . . . . .	joy, a happy event
<i>Simchat Torah</i> . . . . .	Joy of the <i>Torah</i> (day that ends the annual cycle of <i>Torah readings</i> and begins a new cycle)
sitting <i>shivah</i> . . . . .	a practice of Jewish mourning
<i>Sivan</i> . . . . .	a month on the lunar calendar
<i>snay</i> . . . . .	hate
<i>sofer / soferim</i> . . . . .	scribe / scribes
<i>soreg</i> . . . . .	wall of partition in the Jerusalem Temple
<i>suf</i> . . . . .	reeds (as, “Sea of Reeds” or “Red Sea”)
<i>sukkah</i> . . . . .	the singular form of <i>sukkot</i> ; literally, a booth or tabernacle
<i>Sukkot</i> . . . . .	Feast of Tabernacles (literally: “Booths”); an appointed time consisting of 8 days that fall soon after <i>Yom Kippur</i> ; the 1 <sup>st</sup> day of

## T\*

<i>t'fillin</i> . . . . .	phylacteries
<i>T'oma</i> . . . . .	Thomas
<i>t'ruah</i> . . . . .	blowing (a series of short broken notes)
<i>tallit</i> . . . . .	Jewish prayer shawl; garment with fringes (tassels)
<i>tallit gadol</i> . . . . .	prayer shawl having fringes on the corners (literally: “large <i>tallit</i> ”)
<i>tallit katan</i> . . . . .	under-garment having fringes on the corners (literally: “small <i>tallit</i> ”)
<i>tallitot</i> . . . . .	plural of “ <i>tallit</i> ”
<i>talmid</i> . . . . .	disciple
<i>talmidah</i> . . . . .	female disciple
<i>talmidim</i> . . . . .	disciples
<i>Talmud</i> . . . . .	extra-biblical writing of the “Oral Tradition”
<i>Talmud Bavli</i> . . . . .	Babylonian <i>Talmud</i>
<i>Talmudic</i> . . . . .	adjective referring to the <i>Talmud</i>

<i>Talmud Torah</i> . . . . .	Hebrew study of the <i>Torah</i> ; a Jewish elementary school
<i>Tamuz</i> . . . . .	month on the lunar calendar
<i>Tanach</i> . . . . .	alternative transliteration spelling of <i>Tanakh</i>
<i>Tanakh</i> . . . . .	the Hebrew Scriptures ( <i>Torah</i> , Prophets, Writings); aka “Old Testament”
<i>tanta</i> . . . . .	Yiddish for “aunt”
<i>taryag</i> . . . . .	six hundred thirteen (613)
<i>Tashlich</i> . . . . .	ceremony of throwing bread in water on <i>Rosh Hashanah</i>
<i>tefilah</i> . . . . .	prayer
<i>tefillin</i> . . . . .	see <i>t’fillin</i>
<i>teshuvah</i> . . . . .	repentance
<i>tikkun ha-olam</i> . . . . .	world restoration
<i>Tisha B’Av</i> . . . . .	ninth day of Av (a day of mourning)
<i>Tishrei</i> . . . . .	seventh month on the biblical Jewish calendar
<i>Tishri</i> . . . . .	alternative transliterated spelling of “ <i>Tishrei</i> ”
<i>Torah</i> . . . . .	Pentateuch; Mosaic Law
<i>torah</i> . . . . .	God’s teaching
<i>tov</i> . . . . .	good, beautiful
<i>tovat</i> . . . . .	beautiful
<i>tractate</i> . . . . .	a treatise; a book (major division) of the <i>Talmud</i>
<i>Tu B’shvat</i> . . . . .	New Year of the Trees
<i>tz’dakah</i> . . . . .	see “ <i>tzedakah</i> ”
<i>tzaddik</i> . . . . .	righteous man
<i>tzedakah</i> . . . . .	charity
<i>Tziyon</i> . . . . .	Zion
<i>tzitzit</i> . . . . .	fringe
<i>tzitziyot</i> . . . . .	plural of “ <i>tzitzit</i> ”

**U\*****V\***

<i>V’ahavta</i> . . . . .	literally “and you shall love,” refers to the <i>Sh’ma</i> prayer
<i>V’nit-chazeik!</i> . . . . .	And may we be strengthened!
<i>V’shamru</i> . . . . .	a liturgical prayer quoted from Scripture (And they shall ...)
<i>verdrey mein kopf</i> . . . . .	Yiddish for “make me crazy”

**W\*****X\*****Y\***

<i>Y’hoshua</i> . . . . .	Joshua, Book of Joshua
<i>Y’hudah</i> . . . . .	Judah, Judas

<i>y'shivot</i> . . . . .	plural of “ <i>yeshiva</i> ”
<i>Y'vusi</i> . . . . .	Jebusite
<i>Ya'akov</i> . . . . .	Jacob; James
<i>yahrzeit</i> . . . . .	annual remembrance of a departed loved one
<i>yahrzeiten</i> . . . . .	plural of <i>yahrzeit</i>
<i>Yamim Noraim</i> . . . . .	Days of Awe
<i>Yarden</i> . . . . .	Jordan
<i>yarmulke</i> . . . . .	see, “ <i>kippah</i> ”
<i>Yericho</i> . . . . .	Jericho
<i>Yerushalayim</i> . . . . .	Jerusalem
<i>Yeshiva</i> . . . . .	Jewish college or seminary
<i>Yeshua</i> . . . . .	Jesus (literally: “salvation”); a variation of the name <i>Y'hoshua</i>
<i>Yidishkeit</i> . . . . .	<i>Ashkenaz</i> culture
<i>Yishai</i> . . . . .	Jesse
<i>Yishma'el</i> . . . . .	Ishmael
<i>Yisrael</i> . . . . .	the land or people of Israel; Jacob's new name
<i>Yitro</i> . . . . .	Jethro
<i>Yitz'chak</i> . . . . .	Isaac (laughter)
<i>Yochanan</i> . . . . .	John
<i>Yo'el</i> . . . . .	Joel
<i>Yom Habikkurim</i> . . . . .	Day of Firstfruits
<i>Yom HaKippurim</i> . . . . .	see <i>Yom Kippur</i>
<i>Yom HaShoah</i> . . . . .	Holocaust Remembrance Day
<i>Yom HaShofar</i> . . . . .	Feast of Trumpets; aka <i>Yom T'ruah</i> ; aka <i>Rosh HaShanah</i> ; aka <i>Zich'ron T'ruah</i> ; aka <i>Yom HaDin</i> (literally: “Day of the <i>Shofar</i> ”)
<i>Yom Kippur</i> . . . . .	Day of Atonement (the 10 <sup>th</sup> day of <i>Tishrei</i> )
<i>Yom Kippurim</i> . . . . .	see <i>Yom Kippur</i>
<i>Yom T'ruah</i> . . . . .	Feast of Trumpets; aka <i>Rosh HaShanah</i> ; aka <i>Yom HaShofar</i> aka <i>Zich'ron T'ruah</i> ; aka <i>Yom HaDin</i> (literally: “Day of Blowing”)
<i>Yom Tov</i> . . . . .	Jewish holiday
<i>Yoreh De'ah</i> . . . . .	a section of the <i>Shulchan Aruch</i>
<i>Yosef</i> . . . . .	Joseph

## Z\*

<i>Z'kharyah</i> . . . . .	Zechariah
<i>Zavdai</i> . . . . .	Zebedee

