

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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Calvinist-Arminian Controversy: Does your ministry have a position on Calvinism or Arminianism?

Hebrews 6:4-6 tells us, “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

These verses have probably had the most overall impact on theological discussions and debates outside of the text of Hebrews. What does it mean concerning “those who have once been enlightened” who “have tasted the good word of God”? As many of you are probably aware, this is a strongly debated Scripture among Calvinists and Arminians in Protestant Christian theology pertaining to concepts such as predestination, the free will of humans, and God’s elect. Is it possible for the emerging Messianic movement to have its “own” position on the Calvinist-Arminian controversy?

The major issue of man’s responsibility and God’s redemptive power in the salvation experience actually goes back to the Fifth Century with the Pelagian Controversy. The British monk Pelagius (354-415) advocated that human beings were embodied with a complete free will, and he completely denied the sovereignty of God in worldly affairs. Salvation in the Pelagian schema is solely a human work, and something that is not in any capacity accomplished by God. Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo, refuted Pelagius’ heresies, but in so doing focused extensively on God’s sovereignty and His work in salvation. Augustine was right to emphasize that salvation was a work of God, largely focusing on John 15:5: “apart from Me you can do nothing.” As Alister E. McGrath summarizes, “Augustine understood grace as the real and redeeming presence of God in Christ within us, transforming us; something that was internal and active” (*Christian Theology: An Introduction*, p 447). Augustine rightly rejected Pelagius’ view that grace was something outside of us that was passive.

Moving forward to the Protestant Reformation, the French Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) was largely influenced by Augustine’s view of Divine grace, with his followers often emphasizing it as “irresistible grace,” something that one could not refuse. Calvin was certainly a brilliant scholar and able exegete of the early Reformation, and much is to be gained by examining his works. Calvin’s theology is noted by his emphasis on the sovereignty of God and His predestination of all human events. Followers of Calvinistic theology believe that salvation is entirely a work of God. However, the Calvinistic theology of election emphasizes that God has chosen only some to be redeemed, and others He has selected to be damned. In the schema of God having predestined all events in human history is the debate over whether God is the author of the Fall and thus the author of sin (*supralapsarianism*), or God’s predestined choices come after the Fall (*infralapsarianism*). Calvin’s system of theology is generally known as Reformed, and in America is largely adhered to in the Presbyterian Church and many sectors of the Baptist Church.

A major issue arose in the Reformation when challenges to Calvin’s theology of specific foreknowledge arose in Holland. Dutch pastor Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), who had been trained as a strict Calvinist, was asked to refute Dirck Koorenhert, who did not believe in specific foreknowledge. Arminius examined his beliefs and became convinced that Yeshua the Messiah did not just die for the elect, but for all the world. Justo González summarizes Arminius’ principal view that “the final destiny of each individual was based, not on the sovereign will of God, but rather on divine foreknowledge, by which God knew what each person’s response would be to the offer of salvation” (Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 2, p 180). Arminius argued for a general foreknowledge in that God has certainly predestined particular events to take place in human history, but has left individuals to decide for themselves whether or not they want to receive His salvation or reject it. The Remonstrance movement in the Netherlands issued what

would become known as “the open decree of predestination.” While often confused with Pelagianism, the Remonstrance movement emphasized “that humans can do nothing good on their own account, and that the grace of God is necessary in order to do good” (Ibid., 181). In America today, forms of Arminian theology are largely present in the Methodist Church, and various Pentecostal denominations and sects such as the Assemblies of God.

The major difference between Calvinists and Arminians today pertains to the issue of salvation. Did Yeshua die only for the elect? Or, did He die for all the world? Both views rightly emphasize that salvation is to be a work of God via His Holy Spirit. But Calvinists largely emphasize that salvation is something that remains permanent and cannot be lost, often referred to in the vernacular as “once saved, always saved.” They frequently base this on John 10:27-29: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.” Calvinists argue that God knows who His chosen ones are, and no one is capable of removing them from Him—even the people themselves.

Arminians, in stark contrast to this, will argue on the basis of Hebrews 6:4-6 that an individual can be enlightened and spiritually regenerated, having received salvation, but can then reach a point where this salvation is lost. Arminians argue that salvation is a work of God, but that the free will of humans can interrupt that salvation. Case studies such as Ancient Israel in the wilderness, Judas Iscariot, Simon Magus, and perhaps even King Solomon can be offered as examples of those who experienced God's salvation, but then at a later point rejected it because of sin. Arminians are generally in agreement with Calvinists over the fact that God has certainly decreed particular events to occur through the prophecies of His Word, but would not make the argument that God has decreed that every event of every single second has been decreed from eternity.

We are infrequently asked if there is a distinct Messianic view of the Calvinist-Arminian debate. Based on our family's experience in the Messianic movement since 1995, there *is no distinct view* at this point in time. Almost anyone taking a position as either a Calvinist or an Arminian is taking that position because he or she was raised or trained in a denominational setting that adhered to a Calvinist theology or an Arminian theology. Sometimes Calvinistic or Arminian theology is moderated by Messianics as the “nature of God's universe” is something that cannot be fully understood by us as humans. As a former United Methodist and student of the teachings of John Wesley (1703-1791), **the editor is no exception to being affected by this debate**, having been in an Arminian environment. He believes in the general foreknowledge of God, but also that people can lose their salvation. Wesleyan-Arminianism, however, does emphasize the personal holiness and sanctification of the individual—concepts that should be emphasized in today's Messianic movement through Torah observance—as well as experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit. In stark contrast to most Calvinists, Wesleyan-Arminians believe in the continuance of the gifts of the Spirit, but may not emphasize it to the same degree of many of the new “charismatic” movements today.

While we should respect some of the theological tenets of Calvinism and the benefits that it has brought to Western society—in particular its emphasis on hard work—we have two principal problems with Calvinism. Our first problem with Calvinism is its doctrine of limited atonement. This is the belief that Yeshua the Messiah *only* died for the elect, and thus He did not die for all mankind. Surprisingly, this teaching is actually based on the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 9-11 on the olive tree of Israel, where he writes that “those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened” (Romans 11:7). Wesleyan-Arminianism does differ from other forms of Arminianism in that it does advocate that certain individuals may be chosen by God for damnation, such as Pharaoh, Judas Iscariot, and the coming antimessiah/antichrist, but this is few and far between. A question each of us has to ask is whether or not Yeshua the Messiah died for the whole world, or only a small sector of chosen. Some in the Messianic movement believe that

Yeshua died *only to save Israel*, and not the whole world, and in their own way are actually supporting some form of Calvinist dogma.

Our second major problem with Calvinism is its emphasis on eternal security, lived out in much of modern Christendom by people “making decisions for Christ” and then living ungodly lives inconsistent with that of our Lord. Many believe that salvation is not something that needs to be maintained by holy living and the sanctification process, much like one would maintain one’s own car, house, or yard. Where is the evidence of our salvation? John Wesley summarizes it well for us by stating, “we know that we truly and savingly know him—As he is the advocate, the righteous, the propitiation. If we keep his commandments—Particularly those of faith and love.” Our faith is to be evidenced by our works, and those works—most importantly love for God and one’s neighbor, emphasized by Yeshua (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28)—are to give us the assurance we need that we are in the Lord.

Calvinists are right to a degree, in that Yeshua died only for the elect, or we might even say “only for Israel”—but in a somewhat different sense. The Prophet Isaiah attests that “You are My Servant, Israel, in whom I will show My glory” (Isaiah 49:3). Yeshua the Messiah is this “Israel.” We as Believers become a part of Israel by becoming one with Him who is the epitome of Israel. In other words, we become the elect by becoming one with Him who is the elect, Yeshua the Messiah.

The argument over whether or not a person can lose his or her salvation, however, may ultimately be solved by personal experience. Many moderates on the issue believe that it is pointless trying to figure out whether or not someone falling away was once “saved,” or had a false conversion, because the point of Hebrews 6:4-6 is to never be in the position of even thinking of leaving the faith. We generally agree with this statement, because most who deny Yeshua the Messiah have never known Him as their personal Lord and Savior or have experienced the Holy Spirit. Still, does this mean that every single person who denies Him *never knew Him*? In the Messianic community today, we sadly encounter an increasing number of people who question and deny the Divinity of, and later the Messiahship of, Yeshua. Are they all “unconverted”? We must see to it that these people never question the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

It is notable that the debate over God’s foreknowledge and man’s free will is not given as much attention in Jewish theology as it is in Protestant Christian theology. There are certain examples of these two facets of existence that are often given for discussion, such as Abraham’s binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) and the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 9). *The Jewish Philosophy Reader* notes, “In the volume of the Mishnah known as the *Pirke Avoth* (‘Sayings of the Fathers’) Rabbi Akiba proclaimed: ‘Everything is seen, yet freedom is given’ (3.19). It is clear from this brief statement that already in the 2nd century Jewish theology had at least recognized, if not solved, the apparent incompatibility between divine omniscience and human freedom” (Seymour Feldman, “The Binding of Isaac: A Test-Case for Divine Foreknowledge,” in *The Jewish Philosophy Reader*, p 122). When it comes to the issues as presented by both Calvin and Arminius, the Jewish position is much more “**let God be God.**”

Messianics who are either Calvinist or Arminian in their orientation are often so because of their upbringing or theological training. Certainly, we have the responsibility to foster a Messianic environment where those leaning toward Calvinism or Arminianism are both welcome, so a more distinct Messianic viewpoint can be developed over time. One’s ultimate decision regarding the loss of salvation may have to be experiential, which was a critical part of Wesley’s theology (Scripture, tradition, reason, experience). This is an old debate, and *only time* will determine if developing a distinct Messianic position is possible. In the meantime, we need to make sure that people truly do have salvation in Messiah Yeshua, have experienced the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit, and are strong in their faith so that they do not even consider abandoning the Lord.

(This entry has been adapted from the Excursus “Calvinism, Arminianism, and the Emerging Messianic Movement” in the editor’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic.*)

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Chanukah, Actions of Antiochus: In what way did Antiochus Epiphanes commit the “Abomination of Desolation”? I thought this was a future event.

The event describing the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus, even though it actually was carried out by an Athenian senator (2 Maccabees 6:1), was in fulfillment of the Prophet Daniel’s words in Daniel 11:31: “Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.” It may seem confusing for us because the eschatological term that often describes “the Abomination of Desolation” in most pre-millennial prophecy circles is used to refer to another event, that of Daniel 9:27:

“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

Without a doubt, what happened in the period of the Maccabees was an abomination before the God of Israel. But it was not the final abomination spoken of by Daniel that occurs at the end of the seventy-weeks prophecy. A future leader, much like Antiochus, eager to unite the world as one people worshipping him, will make all of the previous abominations that have occurred on the Temple Mount seem like nothing. The text uses the plural *kenaf shiqutzim* (כַּנְפֵי שִׁקְצִים), indicating that there have been *multiple abominations* committed,^a but this one will be the *extreme abomination*, topping all the others. This is perhaps reflected in the NLT rendering, “And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration.” The Apostle Paul describes this in greater detail in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4:

“Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”

From Paul’s vantage point, the Abomination of Desolation has yet to occur; and from our view today, it likewise has yet to occur. Yeshua the Messiah makes this clear in His Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24:

“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath” (Matthew 24:15-20).

Some have claimed that the Abomination of Desolation occurred in ancient times when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in 70 C.E. But that is contingent on several things. While Yeshua has Daniel’s description of the Abomination in mind, His statement is preceded by the ever-critical, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). Even today, almost 2,000 years later, this word has yet to be fulfilled. Furthermore, we see the statement “let the reader understand” inserted into the text, presumably by Matthew when he composed his Gospel. When Matthew wrote his Gospel also tells us quite a bit as to whether or not this has occurred. If Matthew’s Gospel post-dates the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., as most conservative and liberal scholars believe, then it is indeed an indication that this Abomination of Desolation is to occur in the future.

There has been no leader like Antiochus, or even an emissary of his, who has entered into the Temple in Jerusalem to be worshipped as God. In fact, there is no Temple in Jerusalem today where this prophecy could even be fulfilled. The seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel has yet to be completely fulfilled, as when it is all over we are to see the restoration of God’s Kingdom on Earth, stated clearly in Daniel 9:24:

^a While many interpreters connect *kenaf* (כַּנְפֵי) or “wing” (NASU) to a part of the Temple, it can also relate to the extremity of a garment or the wing of a bird (BDB, 489). Because of the ambiguity of prophecy, while *kenaf shiqutzim* has most often been interpreted as “a wing of the temple” (NIV), we should be inclined to remember how *kenaf* is used to speak of a cloak spread out or the extreme ends of the Earth (H.F.W. Gesenius: *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 406), connecting it to how this final Abomination of Desolation will stretch far over the other abominations previously committed on the Temple Mount.

“Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*.”

We are still awaiting to see everlasting righteousness established in the Earth. That has not happened, and any claim by theologians or teachers that it has is totally misguided.

The example of Antiochus Epiphanes is very, very important to understand. It lays the historical precedent as being one of the many abominations that has occurred on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This abomination in 167 B.C.E. was followed by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., and the subsequent erection of a temple to Jupiter. Likewise, when Islam expanded throughout the Middle East the Dome of the Rock was built on the Temple Mount. Today, we await the reconstruction of the Temple by many of the Temple Mount faithful groups in Israel, and then we can see the climax of all of these abominations. Unlike those who committed abominations in the past, though, the man of lawlessness will be able to broadcast himself to the world, so everyone, not just those in Jerusalem, will be able to see him declare himself as God. Do you think Antiochus Epiphanes would have liked to do this? Well, the same spirit of antimessiah that was in him will be in someone else in the future.

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Virtual Chanukah

Chanukah, Celebrated instead of Sukkot: What can you tell me about the Feast of Dedication being celebrated in place of *Sukkot* by the Maccabees when they rededicated the Temple?

When the Seleucid Greek invaders occupied the Land of Israel, it was forbidden for any of the Biblical holidays to be celebrated, possibly under the threat of death. Obviously, this would have included *Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles. Many Jews continued to celebrate the appointed times in secret, or in some limited way without being caught.

Some in the independent Messianic community, who largely frown on observing *Chanukah*, say that when the Maccabees rededicated the Second Temple that the eight-day festival they celebrated was Tabernacles, which they were unable to celebrate prior to this time. They base it on statements made in 2 Maccabees 10:5-6:

“It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. And they celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the feast of booths, remembering how not long before, during the feast of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals.”

The REB actually says “they recalled how, only a short time before, they had kept that feast while living like wild animals in the mountains and caves.” Did the Maccabees actually try to “keep *Sukkot*” while evading the Seleucid armies in the wilderness? We might never have an answer to this question. But what we do know is that while there were various elements and themes of *Sukkot* brought into the first Festival of Dedication, it was celebrated and mandated as its own unique holiday. The text continues, clarifying what the Jews assembled in Jerusalem were actually doing:

“Therefore bearing ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year” (2 Maccabees 10:7-8).

We are told that this new holiday, commemorating the rededication of the Temple, was “decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year” (NRSV). This makes *Chanukah* something new and unique that was not intended to be a substitute for *Sukkot*, even though *Sukkot* may have served as a template for much of it to be based upon.

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Virtual Chanukah

Chanukah, Eight Days of Oil: Where can I find information about the *menorah* being lit for eight days, on one cruse of oil, following the Maccabees' rededication of the Temple?

The Maccabees drove the Seleucids out of the Land of Israel in the month of Kislev 165 B.C.E., which is in about the month of December. They had the task of cleaning up the mess that the Seleucids had left, notably in the city of Jerusalem and in the Temple complex. Antiochus' forces had completely ransacked the Temple and made it into a haven of idolatry. The Temple needed to be cleansed of its defilement and restored to its previous position so proper sacrifices could once again be performed. Of all of the items of Temple furniture that had to be cleansed and rededicated, one of the most important was the great lampstand or *menorah*. The *menorah* required special consecrated oil in order to be lit. Some historical traditions actually indicate that the Maccabees had to setup a "makeshift *menorah*" out of iron bars covered with zinc (Scholium to *Megillat Ta'anit*),^b while a new gold *menorah* (מְנוֹרָה) was being crafted.

The Festival of Dedication or *Chanukah*, as attested in the historical record, was mandated as a national celebration so that the community could remember the sacrifice of the Maccabees, and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem:

"Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev" (1 Maccabees 4:59).

The historian Josephus wrote about the establishment of *Chanukah* as a new, national celebration for the Jewish people in his work *Antiquities of the Jews*:

"Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days; and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon: but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored God, and delighted them, by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival" (12.323-325).^c

The Greek name for this holiday as recorded by Josephus was *phōta* (φῶτα), meaning "Lights." The connection of *Chanukah* to the lighting of the *menorah* goes all the way back to the First Century B.C.E. Talmud tractates b.*Shabbat* 21b and 23a detail various *halachic* rulings from this period regarding the lighting of the *chanukia*, and debates between the Rabbinical Schools of Hillel and Shammai. These rulings date anywhere from 50-100 years before Messiah Yeshua.

The wonderful story that enlivens our *Chanukah* celebration concerns the fact that when the Maccabees were cleansing the Temple, only one cruse of consecrated oil was found to light the *menorah*. The Torah says that the oil used in the Tabernacle/Temple service was to be "clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually" (Exodus 27:20; cf. Leviticus 24:2), and the prevailing *halachah* of the day required eight days for this oil to be produced. While there was plenty of olive oil present to use in the Land of Israel, only special consecrated oil could be used for burning in the *menorah*. The miracle of the eight days of oil is spoken of in the Talmud, in the midst of the arguments about how the *chanukia* was to be lit:

"What's the point of Hanukkah? It is in line with what our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev the days of Hanukkah, which are eight, begin. On these days it is forbidden to lament the dead and to fast.

"For when the Greeks entered the sanctuary, they made all of the oil that was in the sanctuary unclean. But when the rule of the Hasmonean house took hold and they conquered them, they searched but found only a single jar of oil, lying with the seal of the high priest. But that jar had enough oil only for a single day. But there was a miracle done with it, and they lit the

^b Cf. Moshe David Herr, "Hanukkah," in *EJ*.

^c *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 328.

lamp with it for eight days. The next year they assigned these days and made them festival days for the recitation of Hallel psalms [Psa. 113-118] and for thanksgiving” (b.*Shabbat* 21b).^d

This story can be certainly deduced from the historical events recorded for us in 1-4 Maccabees, the writings of Josephus, and others. While some people today brand the miracle of the oil remaining lit for eight days as only a “legend,” the fact of the matter remains that Orthodox Jews, most Conservative Jews, and the vast majority of the Messianic Jewish community today, believe with great faith that it actually happened. The challenge for some in the independent Messianic Two-House movement today is the fact that many are unwilling to accept Jewish works like the Mishnah or Talmud as having any valid history (or for that same matter, the writings of the Church Fathers). Many are disrespectful to Jewish custom and tradition, and assert that it has no place in their interpretation and application of God’s Word.

The social *Sitz im Leben* (Ger. situation in life) of the Biblical text plays no part in the hermeneutics of some in the independent Messianic community, which is very sad because a critical part of returning to the faith of the First Century Disciples and Apostles of Yeshua is knowing the history of the times. In order to do this we have to piece together information from the Biblical texts, Jewish history, Greco-Roman history, early Christian writings, and archaeology. We also have to take much on faith, and make some value judgments. For some, custom and tradition are not important in determining how we should live our lives. But for many, especially in the Jewish community, custom and tradition are very important factors. As Messianic Believers who live in the Twenty-First Century, we have to ask ourselves what the Apostles would do regarding *Chanukah* if they lived in our time. **We believe that they would celebrate it.** Others believe that they would not. The debate is not going away until Yeshua returns.

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Virtual Chanukah

Chanukah, Nine-Branched Menorah: Why is there a nine-branched *menorah* used for *Chanukah*, when there was a seven-branched *menorah* used in the Temple?

By and large in Judaism, there is a prohibition on recreating objects used in Tabernacle/Temple worship to be used in the local synagogue. This tradition developed during the time when the Temple was still in operation, and the synagogue was largely a place of assembly for teaching. As *Chanukah* developed as a holiday, the *chanukia* was formulated as an emblem that looked substantially similar to the seven-branched *menorah*, but it was intended to be lit for eight days to memorialize the miracle of the oil, mimicking the *menorah*, but not to be exactly like it. Today, of course, there are many kinds of *chanukias*, which range from traditional ones looking similar to the Temple *menorah*, to others that only allow eight candle spaces for lighting that are anything but traditional.

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Virtual Chanukah

Christianity, Negativity Toward Two-House Teaching: When I share the Two-House teaching with my evangelical Christian friends, they do not seem to “get it.” Why can I not get my Christian friends to be reasonable and sit down and examine the Scriptures?

As is frequently the case, getting a Messianic Jew to sit down and examine the prophecies of Israel’s restoration is often difficult enough—so getting an evangelical Christian to examine the same prophecies is usually much more difficult. Why this is the case has an entire host of varied reasons, most often relating to how a Christian sees himself related to—or not related to—Israel. Christians who obviously believe that “the Church” has replaced Israel in God’s economy will probably not see the relevance of examining prophecies that relate to Israel in the end-times, when they can be conveniently interpreted as something other than what they mean. Likewise,

^d *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

Christians who believe in dispensationalism and that God has two groups of elect think that Israel is just the Jewish people, and that as part of “the Church” Scriptures that apply to Israel do not apply (or perhaps even relate) to them.

Perhaps the biggest stumbling block as it relates to the Two-House teaching and Christians examining it has nothing to do with the prophecies of Israel’s restoration as much as it has to do with the Messianic, Torah observant lifestyle. This is where the bulk of criticism against the teaching rests from evangelical Christians that we have interacted with as a ministry. Ultimately, the Two-House teaching advocates that all Believers in Yeshua, be they Jewish, or scattered Israel/Ephraim, or the nations, are a part of Israel and are obligated to live as Israel in obedience to the Torah. The “Two-House” part relates to how God will restore Israel in the end-times to be culminated at Yeshua’s return, with many of the *specific* details to be left in His hands.

In time, it would be our prayer that more and more evangelical Christians will awaken to their Hebraic Roots and be convicted about the same things that we have been. This will only occur, though, as we mature and are able to testify to others how the Lord has brought us into a more vibrant and active relationship with Him by adopting a Messianic style of faith. Our positive testimony of becoming more like Him—more than anything else—will cause our Christian brethren to ask us questions of how they too can acquire these blessings.

For a further discussion of these issues, consult the editor’s article “**Christian Problems With the Two Houses of Israel.**”

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Christian, Title: Is it true that the early Believers did not call themselves “Christians”?

In Acts 26:28, the Apostle Paul is called before King Agrippa who asks him, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” (NIV). This statement is made after Paul defends himself for believing in the resurrection of the dead and for the decisions that he made as a Jewish Believer who preached in the name of Yeshua. But was Paul going out and making “Christians” of those to whom he preached? Many people believe so, and would say that if you are not a “Christian” then you cannot be a Believer in the Anointed One or *Christos* (Χριστός).

Another place where the term “Christian” is seen in the Bible is in 1 Peter 4:15-16: “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

This is a very perplexing statement made by this disciple of Yeshua’s, who many consider the preeminent of the original twelve. Peter says “let him glorify God in this respect” (YLT), in reference to Believers being called “Christians.”

The third location that this title appears is in Acts 11:25-26: “And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the [assembly] and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

There is considerable debate among theologians regarding what context “called” means in this passage from Acts. *LS* defines the verb *crēmatizō* (χρηματίζω), as “to take and bear a title or name, to be called or styled so and so” (p 894). Many today readily assume that “Christian” is a title that was given by God to identify those who have placed their trust in His Son. However, this title, *Christianos* (Χριστιανός), only appears three times in the Bible. *AMG* indicates, “It does not occur in the NT as a name commonly used by Christians [i.e., Believers] themselves...The believers first became known as Christians as an appellation of ridicule” (p 1483). *Vine* adds that “the Christians do not seem to have adopted it for themselves in the times of the Apostles...As applied by Gentiles there was no doubt an implication of scorn...” (p 643). The Greek seems to indicate that the term “Christian” was used by outsiders as a term of insult to the early Believers.

By the beginning of the Second Century, however, the assembly of Believers, predominantly made up of non-Jewish people, had taken this title as one of honor and it

subsequently remains to this day. It is possible that the term “Christian” began to be used in great numbers at the time following the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and when anti-Semitism in the Roman Empire rose in great numbers because of the Jewish revolt. It was also at this time when many Believers in Yeshua began being barred from the Jewish Synagogue, and Jewish animosity toward them was enflamed. Many non-Jewish Greek and Roman Believers probably wanted to separate themselves from the Jewish Believers. But it is notable that the term “Christian” was never applied or used by the Apostles. You never see them calling themselves “Christians.”

The inherent problem here with the term “Christian” is that it was not given by God to His people. It was given as an insult by outsiders to the early Believers in Yeshua and consequently it stuck in certain communities. Christian is not a title that God gave to His people, but it is ultimately a man-made title.

What the Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:15-16 concerning the title “Christian” was that if you suffer for the Messiah being called this, do not be ashamed. But “Christian,” which was originally implied as a term of insult, is compared to “a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler.” Peter does not say that we are to readily call ourselves “Christians.” When we as Messianic Believers are asked whether or not we are a “Christian,” we should change the focus of the discussion to the Messiah and the work that He has done in our lives—not whether we are “this” or “that.” This is because a born again Believer is one who has been spiritually regenerated by the power of God via His Son Yeshua, and continually trusts and believes in Him. **This is what each of us must be known by.** What a person is called is entirely irrelevant if there is no faithful life of obedience to the Lord, and the love of God emanating from one’s heart toward others.

posted 17 July, 2006

Christian, Website: Is TNN Online a Christian website?

Many Christians we have encountered would not consider TNN a “Christian” website by the simple fact that we prefer to use “Yeshua” rather than “Jesus,” and promote an understanding of our faith’s Hebraic origins. However, we do believe in the foundational orthodox principles such as the final authority of Holy Scripture, the Divinity of the Messiah, and salvation by grace through faith, consistent with what most evangelical Christians believe.

We do disagree with common mainstream Christian beliefs as they relate to things such as the Torah, the seventh-day Sabbath, the appointed times, and the dietary commandments of Scripture, believing that these and other things still apply today. But, we *first* try to focus on what we have in common with our Christian brethren and what unites us, recognizing that we do have a shared theological heritage with the Christian Church, every bit as much as we do with the Jewish Synagogue. Yet, we are fully a Messianic website and are best considered as such.

We do our best to be fair and respectful where we disagree with some of the practices and teachings of today’s Church. We do not unfairly criticize or condemn Christians mercilessly as is the pattern of some Messianics, and readily speak against it. We encourage fair and tactful dialogue with Christians, constructively working through those issues where we may not currently see eye to eye. We engage with evangelical scholarship, rather than tossing it aside as though it has no value.

updated 14 September, 2006

Christianity, Pagan?: Do you believe everything in Christianity is pagan?

We believe that evangelical Christianity, as it stands today, has some non-Biblical practices which stem from Roman Catholicism that need to be eliminated. But we are not prepared to say that every aspect of Christianity is “pagan,” although certain practices that are not found in Scripture are no doubt of questionable origins (i.e., Christmas trees, Easter eggs, etc.). If everything in Christianity is “pagan,” does that suddenly make all things in Judaism “kosher”? No.

Those who try to make pagan connections with virtually “all” aspects of Christian doctrine and practice are fooling themselves. Satan is the Father of Lies and is going to mimic God on all plains. We must recognize that while there are non-Biblical elements of Christianity, Satan is also a masterful counterfeiter.

We have serious concerns for those who try to equate “everything” that Christianity has stood for as being “pagan” because in the future such individuals may deny that Yeshua is God, or perhaps even deny His Messiahship because these beliefs are from “the Church.” There is a plethora of pagan myths that speak of gods (“mighty ones”) coming down from the sky to help humans, and who is to say that the early Believers in Messiah did not just “copy off the pagans”? **We cannot accept this and neither should you.** (See the editor’s article “Is the Story of Yeshua Pagan?”) Furthermore, what parallels exist between the Hebrew Tanach and Ancient Near Eastern mythology? Such people need to hold *all* of the Scriptures to the same standard if they are searching for connections to paganism.

We recognize that there are areas of Christian doctrine that need serious reevaluation in the light of the understandings that the Holy Spirit is leading many of us into as Messianic Believers. But to say that “everything” that Christianity has stood for is “pagan” is inaccurate and absurd, and is certainly not something we advocate.

updated 28 July, 2006

Christian Scholars: Why does today’s Messianic movement generally frown on the works of Christian Biblical scholarship?

Today’s Messianic movement does have a significant challenge when it comes to considering the theological contributions made by Christian Biblical scholarship. The reasons for this are varied and complex, but they largely have to relate to perceived Christian animosity toward the Torah. It is very true that many Christian theologians have a negative and pessimistic attitude when it comes to the Torah or Law of Moses and how it is talked about in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament). But this is certainly not all Christian theologians, and theological works and commentaries from the past thirty to fifty years have become increasingly more Jewish-sensitive and cognizant of Jewish theological views of Scripture. The problem with this is not that there are theologians who are writing commentaries with more Jewish opinions in mind; it is that your average pastor and/or layperson is unaware or uninformed of these resources.

Ignorance of knowing about important trends such as the New Perspective in Pauline studies—a renaissance of understanding Paul as a First Century rabbi—even carries over into the Messianic movement. While it is true that New Perspective advocates are not going to teach that today’s Christians should follow the Torah as Messianics do, they will teach that Paul had a much more moderate view on the Torah than is perceived by much of today’s Christianity. This is certainly a step in the right direction! The rise of so-called “Karaites” interpretations of the Torah in the independent Messianic movement comes as a direct result of not recognizing and interpreting Paul as a First Century Pharisee—something that many Christian theologians are beginning to recognize.

One of the things that Messianics today are often not aware of is the fact that Jewish Biblical scholarship—which often is consulted by Messianic teachers—is **largely polarized between the extreme-Right and extreme-Left**. If one reads the Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Chumash*, and then compares it to the *Jewish Study Bible*, he or she will see two largely different points of view on an issue. One will advocate that Moses wrote every single letter of the Torah, and then the other will tell you that Moses may not have existed. One will advocate that the Israelites’ conquest of Canaan included more than is mentioned in the Biblical text, and the other will say that it never took place. Consequently, many Messianics today will only examine Orthodox and/or Chassidic Jewish opinions on certain subjects that often disregard ancient history and criticism from skeptics.

Conservative, evangelical Christian scholars often compose the middle position between the Right and the Left on these issues. While affirming the historicity of a key event like the Exodus, evangelicals are willing to place the Exodus in the context of Ancient Egypt. Evangelicals are willing to engage with liberal criticism, and place a much higher value on historical and linguistic studies of the Scriptures than most in the Orthodox Jewish community. Interestingly enough, there are more Christian commentaries on the books of the Torah than there are Jewish commentaries. Casting these aside as though they have no value is ill-advised in a movement that will have to increasingly deal with more criticism against the Scriptures—particularly the Torah or Pentateuch because of the “modern age” in which we live. Furthermore, these same commentaries will point out Messianic symbolism that is fulfilled in the life of Yeshua, whereas most Jewish commentaries—if not ignoring them—will discredit the life of Yeshua.

Our ongoing challenge as the Messianic community and our own Biblical scholarship relates to how we can incorporate the best of Jewish and Christian scholarship and make it our own. We have a shared theological heritage with both the Synagogue *and* the Church. We cannot disregard either one, but have to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of both. Doing this properly will admittedly take time.

posted 08 January, 2007

Christmas: Do you celebrate it?

Christmas is, without question, a very sensitive subject for many Believers—and we would emphasize understanding between those who do not celebrate it, and those who celebrate it in ignorance. We cannot find in Scripture where God mandates that we observe a holiday with decorated trees, mistletoe, holly, Santa Claus, and presents. On the contrary, the Prophet Jeremiah tells us that we are to not be as the heathen who adorn trees:

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens although the nations are terrified by them; for the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. They decorate *it* with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter” (Jeremiah 10:2-4).

This same concept is reemphasized for us in Deuteronomy 16:21: “You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the LORD your God, which you shall make for yourself.”

We do not celebrate Christmas, nor do we endorse a “substitute” for it, either. We do not believe that the celebration of Christmas was God’s original intention. Christmas today is highly commercialized and is often more about self-indulgence than anything else. Of course, we are not against “giving gifts,” but the purpose of Christmas today for many people, including Believers, is about *self* rather than about seeing the Messiah lifted up.

We do not celebrate Christmas. But, we are not against people remembering the birth of Yeshua, either, although it probably did not occur during the Winter. The birth of Messiah Yeshua is a part of the Bible that is to be remembered and taught upon, something appropriate for *any* time of year. So with this in mind, it is important to remember that at “Christmas time,” people are relatively free to talk about Yeshua and the gospel, and many are presented to Him who would normally not be during the rest of the year. Obviously, in spite of the questionable origins of December 25, God is going to work through those who sincerely believe that they are honoring Him.

Without question, this issue will continue to baffle many Messianic Believers in years to come, as we learn to properly deal with those who celebrate Christmas in ignorance, not knowing where it comes from. As a faith community we will need to change all the “Christmas is pagan!” rhetoric to something less sensationalistic, yet still be able to properly communicate that we do not celebrate it. We also must emphasize understanding and fairness for others in this area. Christmas as it is known today is not a Biblically mandated holiday, and on this basis we do not

celebrate it. But there is also the Biblical reality of the Child born at Bethlehem who is our Savior, so with this issue, let us truly not “throw out the Baby.”

Consult the article “**The Christmas Challenge**,” for a further discussion of this issue.

updated 09 December, 2009

Christmas, Dinner: Should I attend Christmas dinner with my extended family?

Many of today’s Messianic Believers, who once celebrated Christmas, still have to interact with their Christian family during the Winter holiday season. The Spring holiday season is admittedly much easier, because Easter does not have the same kind of commercialism associated with it as Christmas, and many churches today hold some kind of Passover *sedar* meal. It is much easier to tell Christian family, who are familiar with the Passover *sedar* to some degree, that you remember Yeshua’s resurrection in conjunction with your Messianic congregation’s Passover remembrance.

How you answer your family’s request as to what Messianics do to remember Yeshua’s birth is not as easy, not only because there is no agreement in today’s Messianic community as to what is to be done, but even more so because of the significant commercialism during this time of year. Christmas parties are held throughout the month of December, and traditionally extended family does get together for some kind of Christmas dinner. It is easy for Messianics who do not live close to extended Christian family to say that it will be difficult to attend Christmas dinner, but this is not everyone.

Too frequently, our ministry has heard stories of Messianics who will write mean-spirited letters to Christian family, telling them not to send them any Christmas presents or invite them to Christmas dinner as they “are not pagans anymore.” This implies to extended family, who are God-fearing Christians who love Jesus, that they really do not know the Lord. The damage that this has done, and the bad reputation this has given our faith community, is **immense**. A person can always choose his or her friends, but a person can never choose his or her family. When you face the most difficult seasons in your life such as when a member of your immediate family dies, or when you are facing severe financial problems, your extended family will often be there to help, whereas your friends may not. You have the responsibility to always have good relations with your extended family, beyond the Fifth Commandment’s requirement to honor father and mother (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

So when the month of December comes, should you turn down an invitation to Christmas dinner? *Only you can decide this for yourself*. Some will answer “No!” But some will attend. They will recognize that this might be the only time of year to see all of their extended family, especially those who are aging and who may not live long. Many of us just recognize Christmas dinner as yet another meal, and will keep our comments regarding “Christmas” to “Did you have a good holiday?” **Some of us desire good relations with our extended family**. And, in demonstrating a degree of good will to them, we actually find it appropriate to invite them into our homes during one of the nights of *Chanukah*—even if it might be under the “guise” that we will be eating some rather tasty fried foods!

added 09 December, 2009

Chronicles, Books of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Books of Chronicles?

Approximate date: late 400s B.C.E. (Right; conservative-moderate; some Left); 300s B.C.E. (some Left); 200s B.C.E (some Left)

Author: Ezra (Right); an anonymous Chronicler (conservative-moderate; some Left); unidentified redactors (some Left)

Location of author: Land of Israel, possibly Jerusalem (Right; conservative-moderate; Left)

Target audience and their location: Jewish exiles having returned from Babylonian captivity (Right; conservative-moderate; Left)

The Hebrew title of the Books of Chronicles is *Divrei HaYamim* (דברי הימים), meaning “the Events/Annals of the Days/Years.” Similar terminology appears in Kings (1 Kings 14:19, 29; 15:7, 23, 31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27; 22:45). The Greek Septuagint actually titled this text *Paraleipomenōn* (ΠΑΡΑΛΕΙΠΟΜΕΝΩΝ) meaning “things omitted,” which some consider “not a very suitable name” (NBCR, 369). Its translators likely considered the text to be a supplement to Samuel-Kings, and they were the first to divide the text into two books. Jerome suggested that the Latin title *Chronicon totius divinae historiae*, “a chronicle of the whole of sacred history” (Harrison, 1152; EXP, 4:304), be used. It has since been adapted as “Chronicles.”

Chronicles is a very unique text when compared to its predecessor, Samuel-Kings. It does not focus on the Northern Kingdom of Israel, except in passing (EDB, 243; ECB, 282). This work attempts to summarize events beginning with Adam all the way to Cyrus the Great of Persia. Chronicles jumps over and overlooks many people and events seen in Samuel-Kings, which is undeniably the author’s main source of information. Because of its irregular style of composition “The Chronicles have long been among the most neglected books in the Hebrew Bible” (Dillard and Longman, 169)

Protestant Christian tradition, following the order of the Septuagint and Vulgate, places 1&2 Chronicles among the Historical Books between 2 Kings and Ezra-Nehemiah. 1&2 Chronicles is actually the last book of the Tanach in the Jewish order, placed among the Writings.

The questions that Chronicles asks largely pertain to the Jewish people having returned from Babylonian exile (Dillard and Longman, 173). Is God still interested in His people? Is He still faithful to His covenants? What do the Jewish people do under foreign (Persian) rule? Was God going to fulfill His promises? As a result of these, and other questions, the history presented in Chronicles presents itself with a more definite “slant” than Samuel-Kings, as it is designed to be uplifting and a message of hope to those who read it. Chronicles attempts to answer the question of who the returned Jewish exiles are as the people of God. The occasion for writing Chronicles is probably to call the people back to the Instruction of God (cf. Ezra 7:10) so that they may fulfill His Divine purpose.

Jewish tradition in the Talmud regards the priest Ezra as the author of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah (b.*Bava Batra* 15a). This cannot be established with certainty as the text does not state an author directly (NIDB, 210; ECB, 282; Dillard and Longman, 170). It may be that Ezra was the principal composer of an early draft of the text. Harrison indicates, “Ezra [presumably] carried the narratives down to his own time” (Harrison, 1153). If Ezra were the principal composer, then it is no surprise that the various priestly genealogies seen in 1 Chronicles 1-9 carry their way to him. Ezra-Nehemiah does pick up where Chronicles leaves off, and many conservatives believe that these two texts once made up a single work (NBCR, 369; ISBE, 1:667; EXP, 4:305-307; Dillard and Longman, 171).

There is a trend among conservative scholars today to not consider Chronicles a unified work with Ezra-Nehemiah (Dillard and Longman, 172), as there have likely been redactions made to the text. In the original composition, the Chronicler indicates that he considered many sources, notably Samuel-Kings. Additional sources used by the Chronicler probably included the Torah, Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Zechariah (although probably not in their final, current form). References are made throughout Chronicles to other sources, including: the Book of the Kings of Israel (1 Chronicles 9:1; 2 Chronicles 20:34), the Book of the Annals of King David (1 Chronicles 27:24), the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel/Israel and Judah (2 Chronicles 16:11; 25:26; 27:7; 28:26; 32:32; 35:27; 36:8), and the Annotations on the Book of the Kings (2 Chronicles 24:27). These sources are all admittedly vague and no longer extant (IDB, 1:578-579; Harrison, 1159-1161; NIDB, 210; ISBE, 1:668; EXP, 4:309-311; ABD, 1:996-997; EDB, 242). A number of non-extant prophetic writings are also mentioned throughout Chronicles.

Conservative theologians often date the composition of Chronicles in the late Fifth Century B.C.E., although a date in the late Fourth Century B.C.E. is probable if one accepts a unified composition with Ezra-Nehemiah (NBCR, 369; ISBE, 1:670). It is asserted that the text

had to have been written during the Persian period as there are no references to either Hellenism or the rise of Alexander the Great (*ECB*, 282).

Liberal theologians largely deny any kind of unified composition for Chronicles. Earlier liberals considered Chronicles to be a kind of sequel to P or the so-called Priestly Code (*IDB*, 1:573-574) seen in their documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch (see **Genesis FAQ** entry for a summarization of the JEDP documentary hypothesis). It has been advocated that Chronicles reflects a distinctly religious history from a Levite (*IDB*, 1:575; Harrison, 1161-1162; *IDBSup*, 157; *ECB*, 283), placing the Levites in a very positive light and “glorifying Judaism and the Jews through the centuries beyond all possibilities...[rewriting] the history from David to Cyrus: he freely omitted from his sources, added to them, modified them, being blissfully unaware of anachronisms and impossibilities” (*IDB*, 2:577).

Liberals have commonly argued that Chronicles was composed over a broad period of time from the Fourth-Third Centuries B.C.E., and was intended to be the “first apology for Judaism” (*IDB*, 1:577; cf. *ABD*, 1:994-995). Some liberals even place the composition of Chronicles as late as the Second Century B.C.E. (*ISBE*, 1:670). Generally, liberals agree that Chronicles itself is pieced together from sources, such as the sections dealing with David and Solomon, as well as other individual kings, and over time were strung together and unified.

Liberal criticism against Chronicles has been immense. Most consider it to have some severe theological inconsistencies (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1712). Criticism against Chronicles is nothing new, going back to the time of the writing of the Talmud, with many considering Chronicles to be “didactic or homiletical in nature” (Harrison, 1163). Most liberal problems with Chronicles concern its historicity and reliability (Harrison, 1157-1158; *Jewish Study Bible*, 1712).

Conservative theologians have largely responded to liberal criticism with our need to consider Chronicles as first theological, then historical. Harrison indicates, “it should be noted at once that the writings of the Chronicler did not lay claim to be considered as history in the contemporary occidental sense of that term” (Harrison, 1158). Our interpretation of Chronicles is directly connected to Samuel-Kings, and one must consider their unique vantage points: one before or during the Babylonian exile, and one after it.

The way the Chronicler records Israel’s history is not inconsistent from what we see among the documents at Qumran (*ISBE*, 1:667; *ECB*, 284). A modern reader cannot subject Chronicles to his or her expectations of historical accuracy, recognizing that among its contemporary ancient histories Chronicles demonstrates a strong level of affinity. “What the reader of the Chronicler needs is sensitivity to the method of writing history in biblical times together with some knowledge of the milieu in which the work came into existence, the need which it was intended to fill, and the audience to which it was addressed” (*ISBE*, 1:669). Current trends in liberal studies of Chronicles indicate an “emphasis...more on the Chronicler’s use of additional material, rather than upon that material’s historical value” (*ABD*, 1:997).

Both Aramaic and Hebrew are present in the Books of Chronicles. Its Septuagint Greek translation is important, but is often considered to be “paraphrastic...[and] bears witness to an older and often shorter form of the text” (*ABD*, 1:995). Others consider its LXX version to be extremely literal (*EXP*, 4:311). The Hebrew MT witness of Chronicles is in a “fair state of preservation” (*Ibid.*), but due to its young date among Tanach books infrequent copying may have actually caused more textual errors (*Ibid.*) that could have been redacted—particularly with its numbering system. “[S]maller numbers [are] supplied by the LXX [and] seem to indicate that the larger ones of the Hebrew have not been transmitted in their original form, or that the compiler was scaling them down in the interests of factual reality” (Harrison, 1170).

The author of Chronicles affirms a continuity to the past, with the Temple in Jerusalem being rebuilt by the approval of the Persian king (2 Chronicles 36:22-23), mirrored by his earlier references regarding Kings David and Solomon. The author focuses on the successes and failures of Israel’s earlier kings, and emphasizes how being faithful to the Torah and Prophets is more important than whether the Jews of his generation have a king. The author also probably considers his Jewish people to represent “all Israel,” as the Southern Kingdom had absorbed a

sufficient number of Northern Kingdom Israelites (2 Chronicles 34:9; 35:17-18). This can present some problems to those who overemphasize the Two-House teaching and fail to recognize the Jews as being “Israel,” not placing the prophesied restoration of all Israel into a Jewish eschatological framework.

The author of Chronicles wants to sustain a hope for a Deliverer to come, i.e., a Messianic son of David (2 Samuel 7). He indicates that God has been faithful to His people going back through the recorded generations (1 Chronicles 1:1). God has chosen Israel for special purposes, but Israel's relationship to God is contingent upon their obedience. As a result, the Chronicler is also concerned with God's retribution upon His people (*ISBE*, 1:671-672).

The dominant parts of Chronicles are dedicated to David (1 Chronicles 11-29) and Solomon (2 Chronicles 1-9), with negative information regarding these two kings largely omitted (*ABD*, 1:999-1000; Dillard and Longman, 174-175). This has led to intense speculation that this is intentional, with the Chronicler portraying the “Messianic” qualities of these two leaders (*ISBE*, 1:672; *Jewish Study Bible*, pp 1715-1716). It may be that the author intends to use the lives of David and Solomon to address some serious post-exilic questions (*ISBE*, 1:669-670; *EDB*, 243).

Issues in interpretation largely regard the relationship of Samuel-Kings to Chronicles, and how to synthesize Samuel-Kings' accounts of Ancient Israel's history with how they are often “explained” in Chronicles (*EXP*, 4:315). “It is clear that Chronicles read by itself would give an unbalanced view of Israelite history” (*NBCR*, 370) as the author has a definite theological agenda (*NIDB*, 211). Genealogies in Chronicles (1 Chronicles 1:1-9:44) are segmented in places compared to their listings in other Tanach Scriptures (Dillard and Longman, 173-174), with the process of telescoping purposefully omitting names to make an important theological or ideological point (cf. Matthew 1; Luke 3).

Furthermore, there are serious issues in Chronicles regarding numbers and census accounts that may be a result of textual corruption. A notable one appears in 2 Chronicles 14:9 which refers to a million man army accompanied by only 300 chariots (*IDB*, 1:574; Harrison, 1165; *ISBE*, 1:669; *NIDB*, 211; *EXP*, 4:562). The Greek Septuagint is sometimes helpful in providing a more realistic number, but not always. Difficulties such as the spelling of proper names is a challenge to modern readers, but not to the Ancient Near Eastern worldview.

The Apostolic Scriptures do occasionally quote from Chronicles (*EXP*, 4:312), and undoubtedly formed an important part of the worldview of Yeshua and His Disciples.

Messianic handling of Chronicles is difficult to determine at the present time, concurrent also with its handling of Samuel-Kings, largely due to the overemphasis on the Torah in our Biblical studies. Too frequently, when interpreters do examine Chronicles, the witness of Samuel-Kings is not considered, or vice versa. Even more issues may have to be considered with the possible unity between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah that is often proposed. Parallels are most certainly seen between characters in the Torah (i.e., Moses and Joshua) and how they are compared to some figures in Monarchist Israel (i.e., David and Solomon). The Chronicler is undeniably influenced by his position as a Southern Kingdom Jew, and is one who is ultimately interested in giving the returned exiles hope for the future in the covenant faithfulness of their God.

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posted 22 March, 2007

Church, missing after Revelation 4:1: As post-tribulationists, how do you respond to the fact that the word "church" does not appear after Revelation 4:1? This means that the Church is missing and has been raptured to Heaven.

In the opening chapters of Revelation (chs. 1-3), the Apostle John is given specific instruction by Yeshua the Messiah that he is to deliver to the seven assemblies of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea). After John relays Yeshua's messages to these congregations, John is told by the Lord, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things" (Revelation 4:1b). Notice what John says as this command is given to him: "After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me" (Revelation 4:1a). This is a directive that is given only to the Apostle John, as he is called to step into the Heavenly realm, and be shown a vision of the future that, as far as Yeshua and those assembled are concerned, has already taken place. John is asked to step forward in time and be shown things that he does not know about.

This is not a command that is given to "the Church." As Messianics are keen to emphasize, the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) should be properly translated as either "assembly" or "congregation" in our English Bibles, as opposed to the anachronistic term "church." Likewise, *ekklēsia* was used in the Greek Septuagint to render the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל), referring to the congregation or assembly of Israel, and the Apostolic writers most often use *ekklēsia* with this understanding in mind.

In Johannine literature (John, 1-3 John, Revelation) *ekklēsia* is never used to refer to the Body of Messiah at large, but instead the localized assembly. Douglas J. Moo poignantly remarks in *Three Views on the Rapture*, "John, himself, never uses ἐκκλησία other than as a designation of a local body of believers. Moreover, it is important to note that John never in chapters 4-19 calls any group in *heaven* the church" (p 201). The reason that *ekklēsia* does not appear after Revelation 4:1 is because the letters Yeshua has John write to the seven, localized assemblies of Asia Minor are complete. It is not because "the Church" has been raptured to Heaven. In fact, at the end of Revelation, we are told that the apocalyptic revealing of Yeshua to John is for the *ekklēsia*, indeed implying that the Body of Messiah will be on Earth when these events take place:

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16, ESV).

It is notable that there is an urban myth that frequently circulates among Messianic post-tribulationists relating to Revelation 4:1. It often goes along the lines of, "The Church is mentioned after Revelation 4:1—and it is the whore of Babylon!" Unfortunately for those who adhere to this line of reasoning, it is not based in a sound exegesis of the text, neither in a sound examination of what end-time Babylon actually is. While there are religious elements of the end-time Babylonian system, there are also political and economic elements. To simply say that that end-time Babylon is "the Church," is to misidentify end-time Babylon, which is the multifaceted, anti-God world system.

added 12 January, 2006

Church, word of pagan origin: I have heard that the English word "church" is of pagan origins. Is there any substantiation to support this?

There is debate over the origins of the English word church, but before we can address this, we need to have a proper understanding of the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), which in our Bibles is commonly rendered as "church." Is "church" an appropriate translation of this word?

LS defines *ekklēsia* as “an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned, the legislative assembly” and “in N.T. the Church, either the body, or the place” (p 239). In the Apostolic Scriptures, *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and thus by extension, is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. *TDNT* remarks that “Since the NT uses a single term, translations should also try to do so, but this raises the question whether ‘church’ or ‘congregation’ is always suitable, especially in view of the OT use for Israel and the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic...‘Assembly,’ then, is perhaps the best single term, particularly as it has both a congregate and an abstract sense, i.e., for the assembling as well as the assembly” (K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” p 397). This Christian commentary says that “assembly” would be the best, consistent translation for the word *ekklēsia*.

The ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanach, the Septuagint (LXX), produced approximately 300 years before Yeshua the Messiah, frequently translates the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל), or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *TWOT* tells us that “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX” (Jack P. Lewis, “*qāhāl*,” 2:790). When the Apostolic writers used the Greek word *ekklēsia*, often rendered as “church” in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate assembly or group of people away from Israel. Rather, they considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel. It is not surprising by any means that one of the definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include “Israel.” *Thayer* states that “in the Sept. often equiv. to קָהָל, the assembly of the Israelites” (p 196). It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as “church,” whereas it would be best rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation.” Two Christian translations that render *ekklēsia* as “assembly” include Young’s Literal Translation and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green. The Power New Testament by William J. Morford renders *ekklēsia* as “congregation,” and the Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern mostly uses the phraseology “Messianic community.”

As it relates to whether or not the English word “church” is of pagan origins, there are a number of differing opinions. *ISBE* indicates that it comes from “Gk. *kuriakós*—‘belonging to the Lord’; NT *ekklēsia*—‘gathering’; Lat. *ecclesia*” (G.W. Bromiley, “Church,” 1:693). *NIDB* confirms this opinion, stating, “The English word derives from the Greek *kuriakos* (belonging to the Lord), but it stands for another Greek word *ekklēsia* (whence ‘ecclesiastical’), denoting an assembly” (Bromiley, “Church,” p 218). *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* has a slightly different view of the origins of the English word “church,” remarking, “The derivation of the word is generally said to be from the Greek *kuriakon*, ‘belonging to the Lord’. But the derivation has been too hastily assumed. It is probably connected with *kirk*, the Latin *circus*, *circulus*, the Greek *kuklos*, (κυκλος), because the congregations were gathered in circles.”

Regardless of if you believe that the English word “church” comes from the Greek *kuriakos*, meaning something that belongs to the Lord, or the Latin *circus* via *circulus*, because the early congregations gathered in circles, there is no substantial proof that it is from a word of pagan religious origins.

There are Messianics, in their criticism of our Christian brothers and sisters who are not Torah observant, who say that they are part of “the kirk” or “the kirch” and that the English word “church” is of pagan origins. (*Die Kirche*, pronounced *keer-kay*, is simply the German word for “the church.”) Their problem, aside from this being a non-substantiated belief, is that they are trying to insult others and incite them, rather than reason with them from the Word of God about who the true assembly is. The true assembly or *qahal/ekklēsia* is the Commonwealth of Israel. While we believe that *ekklēsia* is properly rendered as either “congregation” or “assembly” in English, saying that the word “church” is of pagan origins is a poor excuse in light of a bigger problem. The bigger problem is getting people to theologically see that there is no separate assembly of elect called “the Church,” and that there is only one *ekklēsia*, the assembly of Israel. This has to be proven from more than just vocabulary, but specifically from the calling and mission the Lord has placed upon His people—a separate “Church” *or* not.

updated 06 July, 2006

Church Fathers: What is your opinion of the writings of the “Church Fathers”?

The writings of early Christianity from the late First to Fourth Centuries C.E., commonly termed the writings of the “Church Fathers,” is a body of religious literature not unlike the Jewish writings of the same period. These writings demonstrate the various theological opinions and controversies that existed in early Christianity, the persecution that the Believers experienced at the hands of the Roman Empire, and the overall challenges that they faced.

There are some in the Messianic community who readily criticize the writings of the “Church Fathers,” as it was during this period that the *ekklēsia* largely divorced itself from its Hebraic Roots. But in total fairness, it is necessary to consult these writings to understand the development of the early Church, and to understand that not all of the Church Fathers were “bad.” Many of the “Church Fathers” had good, Spirit-inspired things to say and were sincere Believers. Many of them have spiritual insight on Biblical matters just as do many of the Rabbis of Judaism. With all things, we are called to use wisdom and discernment and remember the circumstances in which these people lived. We cannot afford to over-simplify things.

updated 10 July, 2006

“Churchy,” Why is your website: Why is your Messianic website “churchy”?

(This is a common question asked by critics of our approach to Messianic ministry, particularly from those who would prefer us to “beat” on Christians and the Christian Church, rather than show them grace and mercy.)

When objectively reading the information and articles on the TNN Online website, how could you come to the conclusion that TNN Online is a “churchy” website? We are actually quite Messianic, meaning that we are very pro-Torah and pro-Jewish. We encourage all Believers to live a Torah obedient lifestyle like Yeshua and His Apostles, we encourage regular study of the Torah, and we advocate that all Believers in Yeshua are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. These, and other beliefs we hold to, run contrary to a great deal of today’s evangelical Christian theology.

It is true that some believe that TNN Online is a “churchy” website because we try to be fair to those in mainstream Christianity, as opposed to many other “independent” Messianic websites. We do not unfairly criticize Christians, insulting and harassing them, as is the pattern of others. We focus on areas of common agreement with our Christian brethren. We do our best to treat Christians with love and respect, encouraging reasoned dialogue and discussion from the Scriptures so that we can all learn something and bring glory to the Lord. We treat Christians as fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, unless *they say otherwise*.

Our website is not “churchy,” but we are fair to the Church, which is something that sadly is not evident among enough Messianics today. We do recognize that the Messianic community does have a Christian spiritual and theological heritage, just as it has a Jewish spiritual and theological heritage.

updated 14 September, 2006

Circumcision: Do you believe that males should be circumcised?

We are aware that the issue of circumcision is extremely controversial in the Messianic world, whereas most Christianity has decided to largely ignore circumcision as an “Old Testament rite” entirely unimportant for Believers today.

Circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:11). The Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all circumcised. Yeshua the Messiah was circumcised (Luke 2:21). The Apostle Paul was circumcised (Philippians 3:5). If we intend to follow the example of these men, then men should not look down on the practice of circumcision, and they should be encouraged to have this sign as a matter of simple obedience. Yet, being circumcised as a male adult must always be tempered with knowing that Abraham was considered righteous while

uncircumcised (Romans 4:9-10; cf. Genesis 15:6), later being circumcised (at the age of ninety-nine) as he advanced in faith (Romans 4:11; cf. Genesis 17:1, 10-11).

We do not consider circumcision to be a salvation issue at all, as the power of the gospel is blind in saving males who are either circumcised or uncircumcised (Colossians 3:11). We do, however, encourage circumcision for the *appropriate* reasons (concurrent with the example of Abraham). The reason circumcision was such a controversial issue in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) is that the non-Jewish males coming to faith were not circumcised as infants as the Scriptures prescribe. Had they been circumcised as infants, then the controversy may not have really arisen. The foolish Galatians believed that circumcision of the flesh would assure them a place among the righteous, to which the Apostle Paul said, “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Messiah will be of no benefit to you” (Galatians 5:2; cf. Acts 15:1). To these people he said that if you think circumcision will save you, do not even bother receiving it. (Note that circumcision was required of proselytes to Judaism, and there is good cause for us to believe that the phrase “receive circumcision” in Galatians is more concerned with being “converted to Judaism.”)

Circumcision has become a common medical practice for non-Jews in North America and in other parts of the world since the late 1800s. We do not believe this is by coincidence. As the Father is in the process of restoring all of Israel, it is probably not by happenstance that many non-Jewish males in the United States and elsewhere have been circumcised as a simple medical practice not looked at as strange or taboo. (Please note that this is not to exclude those elsewhere who are not circumcised; we are only making an observation). Yet, in recent days in Western Europe, legislation has been proposed that would make infant circumcision illegal under the guise of it being “genital mutilation.” Sadly, many Christians are in support of making infant circumcision illegal.

We believe that Messianic families—either Jewish or non-Jewish—should be encouraged to circumcise their infant males. Although the practice of circumcision is not a salvation issue, it does have medical and health benefits, and it can be employed as a simple memorial of the Abrahamic Covenant. Circumcision for *all* Believers—male *and* female—should be of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:6; 30:6; Romans 2:29) more than anything else, but this is in no way nullifies the benefits of a male being circumcised in the flesh. Being circumcised as an adult male should be an issue of maturity, as Believers are called to “continue” (Grk. *menō*, μένω) in the faith (1 Corinthians 7:20). It may not be necessary to be physically circumcised in order to be saved, but going through the procedure as a simple act of obedience (not as some kind of proselyte procedure) should not be discouraged. This kind of obedience would be no different than a urologist advising a man that circumcision would be useful for his penile health.

The issue of circumcision is especially touchy during the Passover season, as the Torah clearly specifies that “no uncircumcised person may eat of it” (Exodus 12:48). Within the Messianic community, there are some groups that do not let uncircumcised males attend their Passover *sedars*. Is this right or is it wrong? We do need to keep in mind the fact that a Messianic Passover *sedar* conducted today is often just a memorial of the Passover, and there are many elements that are not observed because there is no Temple to go to where the sacrificial lamb can be offered. Because we are in the Diaspora, there are things that the Torah originally specified that cannot be followed. And in our Passover memorials, we have to not only weigh in the difference of venue, but also the reality of the post-resurrection era in which we live.

We do not believe that it is necessary for males to be circumcised to attend a Messianic Passover memorial. However, it should be encouraged that participation of individuals within the order of service or events at a Messianic *sedar* could be limited to only those males who are physically circumcised. (And, by extension, it would be appropriate to require any males within the leadership structure of a Messianic congregation to be physically circumcised.)^e

updated 23 February, 2010

^e For a further discussion of this issue, consult the article “Is Circumcision for Everyone?” by J.K. McKee.

Colossians, Epistle of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle of Colossians?**Approximate date:** 60-62 C.E.**Author:** the Apostle Paul**Location of author:** Rome**Target audience and their location:** Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Colossae

The Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Colossians has not been significantly disputed by many evangelicals, even though it is doubted by most liberals. The letter to the Colossians is unique, because the Biblical record does not attest the Apostle Paul as ever having any personal encounter with the Colossians, and there is a great amount of personal involvement in his letter. Paul is not personally acquainted with the Colossians, and he never visited them (Guthrie, 564). Paul does, however, learn a great deal about the Colossian assembly through Epaphrus, attested as being a dedicated servant who took the time to visit Paul during his imprisonment to inform him of the situation that the Colossians were facing (Ibid., 165).

The city of Colossae was located in Asia Minor on the trading road between Ephesus and the Euphrates River. Apparently, the gospel message had been carried to Colossae by Epaphrus, who was a native of the city (4:12), during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus (1:7-8; cf. Acts 19:10). Colossae was originally a Phrygian city, but later Hellenized. It was a major trading center for many centuries prior to Roman expansion, but in the First Century had become secondary to cities like Laodicea (ABD, 1:1089).

Most conservative theologians consider Colossians to have been written in the same general time frame of Ephesians and Philippians, likely between 60-62 C.E. from Paul's imprisonment in Rome. The actual composition of Colossians is uniquely tied to that of Philemon: "both letters mention Timothy, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphrus, Luke, Demas, Archippus, and Onesimus (Col. 1:1 and Philem. 1; Col. 4:10-14 and Philem. 23-24; Col. 4:17 and Philem. 2; Col. 4:9 and Philem. 10ff.) The duplication of so many names must indicate that Paul writes and sends both letters at the same time and from the same place" (Gundry, pp 392-393).

Paul's audience in the Colossian assembly was predominately non-Jewish. The people in Colossae were mostly of Phrygian origin. The Phrygians were a subjugated people mentioned all the way back in works such as Homer's *Iliad* (ABD, 3:806). In the Fifth Century B.C.E. when Colossae was at its peak, the people would have largely spoken Phrygian (IDB, 1:658), but Hellenization brought Greek as the dominant language of business: "During the Hellenistic and Roman periods the use of the Greek language naturally spread in this region" (Ibid., 3:806). There were apparently a large number of Jews in Phrygia, possibly as many as 50,000, including 7,500 freemen (ABD, 1:1089). "The Jews of this region were known for their laxity in observing their law" (IDB, 3:807). The claim by some Messianics that Paul would have written to the Colossians in Hebrew or Aramaic is without historical merit, especially when the Jews of Colossae, largely lax in their observance of the Torah, would not have been using it. A written Greek origin for Colossians is well-assured.

The Colossian congregation became a hub of doctrinal problems, all of which necessitated a personal visit from Epaphrus to Rome to meet with Paul. The religious background of the Colossians would have been consistent with the standard Greco-Roman pantheon of deities, but there is some evidence of worship to Egyptian deities as well (ABD, 1:1089). This likely came from Colossae having been a center of trade. A dominant issue that theologians have debated about is what the major crisis that the Colossians faced was. Conservative theologians are in general agreement that the issue is Gnosticism, but probably not the more developed Gnosticism that we see the Second and Third Century Church Fathers combat in their writings. "This was probably an incipient form of what later became known as Gnosticism, a very complex system that reached its zenith in the second century. This incipient Gnosticism—some use the expression proto-Gnosticism—was essentially a religio-philosophical attitude, not a well defined system" (EXP, 11:166).

We see a variety of issues at hand that Paul must address in his letter, all of them critical to place in their historical context: (1) asceticism (2:18); (2) angel worship (2:18); (3) depreciation of Yeshua's Divinity (1:15-20; 2:2-3, 9); (4) secret knowledge (2:18); (5) a reliance on worldly wisdom (2:4, 8). Paul urges the Colossians to be compliant with God's Word, telling the Colossians not to let outsiders judge them for keeping the Sabbath, appointed times, or dietary laws (2:16-17), and be led astray by their worldly philosophies. There might be some doctrinal parallels between Galatians and Colossians, if indeed the Judaizers influencing the Galatians were Jewish mystics, and those influencing the Colossians had an even greater mix of Jewish mysticism, Gnosticism, and pagan philosophy. The evil influences we can see present in Colossians are "syncretistic influences including ideas from neo-pythagoreanism, Iranian and Egyptian influences, and also...Jewish mysticism" (Guthrie, 571).

Many of the heresies and false practices that we see addressed by Paul in Colossians are addressed in greater detail in 1 John, penned near the end of the First Century and addressing a more developed Gnosticism. One element that Paul refutes, that of angel worship, apparently continued well into the Fourth Century in the surrounding area, with worship of the Archangel Michael. Paul refutes the Colossian heresy by emphasizing the supremacy of Yeshua as the image of God (1:15), the Creator (1:16), the preexistent One (1:17), the head of the assembly (1:18), and a fully Divine member of the Godhead (1:19; 2:9). This is in contrast to the meaningless humanistic philosophy of the Colossians, which was leading them astray and away from believing that Yeshua was Divine (2:8). The most direct statement regarding Yeshua's Divinity appears in Colossians 2:9: "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."

Some Christian theologians have claimed that "Basically the heresy was Jewish" (*ISBE*, 1:733). However, with the growing research in the field of First Century Judaism, and other ancient religions, theologians are beginning to see that the problems the Colossians faced were largely pagan or humanistic in nature, not Jewish or Hebraic. These ungodly influences would have affected the local Synagogue, though. From a distinct Messianic viewpoint, the Colossians were being led astray by pagan beliefs and philosophies, clouded in Gnostic and mystical thought, away from the Torah foundation in which the Jerusalem Council wanted the non-Jewish Believers to be instructed. This is Paul's whole perspective in Colossians 2, often a problem chapter for Messianic Believers lacking an historical framework for the text.

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updated 06 February, 2006

Communion: Do you think that Messianic congregations should practice communion with bread and wine on a regular basis? I have noticed that some do, and some do not.

When Paul writes the Corinthians, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26), he delivers this instruction in the context of speaking to them about the yearly Passover meal (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:8-9). Many over the centuries, though, having been separated from the Hebraic Roots of our faith, have interpreted this as relating to the sacrament of communion. Certainly, while Christian communion has been a spiritually beneficial practice for many to remember the Last Supper, it is often removed from its First Century Jewish context, or its origins in the Passover. What we are to

remember is the point in the *sedar* meal where Yeshua lifted up the *afikoman* and said: “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19; cf. Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22).

It is our opinion that the Lord's Supper, our remembering of when He said “This is My body,” should be observed once a year during Passover at a **very solemn point** in the *sedar* meal. However, with this said we should understand why many Christians observe it more frequently. Remembering Yeshua's Last Supper is by no means something that is wrong or “evil.” But, most Christians' understanding of this is separated from the Last Supper being a Passover meal, and that is why communion is often observed with leavened bread in many churches (even though various Christian traditions do use some kind of leavenless bread).

Some Messianic congregations observe a form of “communion” with *matzah* or unleavened bread. This would be more accurate than what many churches do, but it is still a definite holdover from Christian observance. It is not “wrong” to partake of a communion when it is offered, especially if you are visiting a church with a friend or relative. Yet, proper *halachah* for the Messianic community should more closely try to keep it in line with the season of *Pesach*. If Messianic congregations serve a communion with leavened bread, typically *challah*, and wine, it can only be taken as *kiddush* and not a true remembrance of Yeshua's Last Sedar where *matzah* was used. If you are in an environment that observes this kind of an observance weekly, then partake of it, but if not and you are leading a home fellowship or study group, then we recommend you keep it consigned to Passover.

posted 10 July, 2006

Concubines: Can you explain to me what a “concubine” is in the Bible?

When your average person encounters the subject of concubines in the Tanach or Old Testament, it can be difficult if the reader is not informed as to what a concubine was in ancient times. The term *pilegish* (פִּילֵגֶשׁ) “seems clearly to be a word of non-Semitic origin...The fact that there are clear cognates in Greek (*pallakis/pallekē*) and Latin (*paelex*) suggests that the word is Indo-European in origin, borrowed into all three languages” (Peggy L. Day, “Concubine,” in *EDB*, 273).

Concubinage in the Tanach is often associated with some kind of slavery, as Bilhah was called both a slave (Genesis 29:29; 30:3) and a concubine (Genesis 35:22). Likewise, Gideon's unnamed concubine (Judges 8:31) is also called his slave (Judges 19:19), with him actually being considered her “husband.” *TWOT* explains, “A concubine was a true wife, though of secondary rank...the concubine was not a kept mistress, and did not cohabit with a man unless married to him. The institution itself is an offshoot of polygamy” (Victor P. Hamilton, “pilegish,” in *TWOT*, 2:724). Among those who practiced concubinage, the concubine was “A female slave regarded as part of the Israelite family, generally designated as bearing children...In addition to providing offspring and sexual activity (Eccl. 2:8), concubines were responsible for care of the those (2 S. 15:16; 16:21; 20:3...)” (Allen C. Myers, “concubine,” in *ISBE*, 1:758).

As concubinage is connected to polygamy, it was often only the rich and/or powerful who were able to afford concubines, as most of those who had concubines were kings (i.e., Esther 2:17; Song of Songs 6:8; Daniel 5:3, 23). Keturah, taken as Abraham's wife after Sarah's death, was considered both his wife (Genesis 25:1) and concubine (1 Chronicles 1:32), perhaps as a way to honor Sarah as Israel's matriarch with Keturah being considered of lesser status. Unlike those women who would have been considered wives, “concubines were of a lower status than primary wives because no brideprice (*mōhar*) was paid for them, or they brought no dowry (*šillūhīm*), or both” (Day, in *EDB*, 273). As a result, any children born of concubines only inherited land at their father's discretion (i.e., Genesis 25:6), rather than those children born of actual “wives.”

The Torah's legislation is mute on regulating the practice of concubinage, as “Concubines are mentioned almost exclusively in the patriarchal period and early monarchy” (Allen, in *ISBE*, 1:758). “The fact that the word *pilegeš* is nowhere mentioned in the legal collections of Exodus and

Deuteronomy, nor in the lists of proscribed sexual relationships in Lev. 18, 20, should further caution against too quickly positing that this form of connubial arrangement was widely practiced” (Day, in *EDB*, 273). Indeed, the fact that the families of Israel’s kings suffered from polygamy—with concubinage as an extended form of this practice with added “lesser-wives”—demonstrates that it was indeed a practice never blessed or sanctioned by God.

With the unfortunate rise of a sector of Messianic polygamist men among us today, it should not be surprising that some are now discussing whether or not concubinage is also acceptable. If polygamy is unacceptable given the Genesis ideal of marriage being between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24), a principle upheld by Yeshua and His Apostles (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31)—then just as polygamy would be absolutely unacceptable in view of the equality of the genders He has restored (Galatians 3:28), **so would concubinage be even more unacceptable!** Messianic men today wanting to take concubines to themselves or “lesser-wives” into their homes are doing so only for the purpose of having a sexual outlet. They forget the fact that the Hebrew Tanach depicts both the ups *and the downs* of its chosen people, and simply practicing polygamy or concubinage because the Patriarchs or kings of Israel did it fails to consider the severe negative consequences that both brought upon their households and the Kingdom as a whole.

(For a further discussion, consult the editor’s articles “Is Polygamy for Today?” and “Addressing the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianics Encounter in the Torah.”)

posted 23 November, 2008

Conspiracy Theories: I have seen some prophetic end-time websites, some of which are Messianic, which advocate various conspiracy theories regarding groups like the Illuminati or Freemasons. What do you think of these theories? Is there any merit to them?

We do not engage in these types of theories. For quite some time there have been people associated with Messianic beliefs who believe that the Illuminati and Freemasons are trying to take over the world, and in actuality control all of the world’s politics behind the scenes. We do not doubt the fact that these groups may exert some influence behind the scenes, as the Scriptures are clear that there is a conspiracy against the Lord (Psalm 2:1-3). However, most of those people who address these groups, and try to connect them to end-time prophecy, have been discredited due to either failed end-time projections or outright distortion of facts or lack of primary evidence. Because of this and the strong connection to fear that is often associated with these theories, we choose not to address them and are often skeptical of those who do. We believe that there is little merit to them, especially if fear is the primary motivation. God’s people need to spend more time on the work of His Kingdom, recognizing that the Kingdom of Darkness *responds* to us.

updated 18 December, 2006

Corinthians, Epistle of First: What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle of 1 Corinthians?

Approximate date: 56 or 57 C.E.

Author: the Apostle Paul

Location of author: Ephesus

Target audience and their location: Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Corinth

There is no controversy among conservative theologians that the Apostle Paul is the author of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. Paul is plainly identified as being the author in the text (1:1-2; 16:21). There was no controversy in ancient times surrounding Pauline authorship, attested to by Clement of Rome in 96 C.E. Writing the Corinthians, Clement attests, “Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached?” (*1 Clement* 47:1). 1 Corinthians, in fact, is Paul’s second letter to the

Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 5:9 indicates, “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people,” indeed attesting to the fact that there was a first letter written by Paul that is no longer extant. 1 Corinthians is his second out of (at least) three letters, indicating that the Corinthian congregation had many problems.

The composition of 1 Corinthians is often dated in either 56 or 57 C.E., toward the end of Paul’s three-year residency in Ephesus (16:5-9; cf. Acts 20:31). This was during Paul’s Third Missionary Journey. Having received several envoys from the assembly of Believers in Corinth, Paul finds it necessary to address their questions and issues—and he does this very directly. 1 Corinthians has been called “the most business-like of all Paul’s epistles” (Guthrie, 440).

It would be impossible to understand the scope of 1 Corinthians without understanding a bit about Ancient Corinth. In the mid-First Century Corinth was the chief city in Greece, the capital of Achaia. It had become a major metropolis on the isthmus connecting the Greek mainland with the Peloponnesus. Corinth was a newer city when compared to Athens or Sparta, having a mixed population of both Romans and Greeks (*IDB*, 1:685). Corinth was a major center of Greek philosophy, but probably not as significant as Athens. Of the twelve temples in Corinth, the major one was dedicated to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love.

When Paul was writing his epistle, Corinth had a very broad ethnic community. “Egyptians, Syrians, Jews, and Orientals of other races had settled among the earlier Italian and Greek colonists and had brought with them their diverse cultural heritage, their distinctive religious customs, and their differing religious beliefs and practices” (*Ibid*). Some archaeological finds in Corinth have revealed the ruins of temples to Egyptian, Phrygian, and Syrian deities (*Ibid*). Corinth had a sizeable enough Jewish community to have at least one synagogue, where the community of Messianic Believers first met.

More than anything else, Corinth was known as a place for gross sexual immorality. The verb *Korinthiazomai* (Κόρινθαζομαι) or “to live as a Corinthian” in Greek had become synonymous with “to practice sexual immorality.” Not surprisingly, admonitions against fornication are a common theme throughout Paul’s epistle. “Even at a time when public morality everywhere in the Empire was at a low ebb, Corinth in Paul’s day was notorious for lax morals” (*Ibid*).

Considering Paul’s Greek-speaking Corinthian audience, no scholastic claim has ever been made trying to suggest a Hebrew or Aramaic origin for his epistle. There are very few quotations made from the Tanach in this letter, so even the amount of possible Septuagintisms is low. That does not mean that there are not Hebraic undertones to his writing, but other than a few Messianics wishing the letter were written in Hebrew, there is no scholastic or historical proof able to substantiate it. Paul’s audience included “Jews with their love of the OT, and pagans who were so dissatisfied with their paganism that they had gone as far as to attend the Jewish house of worship” (*ISBE*, 1:776). On the contrary, the fact that Paul wrote this letter in Greek is understood overwhelmingly by the fact that all of the people in the Corinthian assembly, especially the Jewish members of his audience, all had proper names of Greek and Latin origin: i.e., Gaius, Fortunatus, Crispus, Justus, Achaius, Sosthenes, Aquila, Priscilla (*EXP*, 10:177).

Paul himself had actually helped found the assembly in Corinth, via the association that he had with Priscilla and Aquila, two Roman Jews who were forced to leave Rome at the decree of Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2). Acts 18:11 indicates that Paul probably stayed in Corinth for a year-and-a-half. Originally, this group of Believers met in the local synagogue. When the group was forced out of the synagogue, they met in a home next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:8). Many of the early converts also included non-Jewish pagans, whose adoption of faith in Yeshua would prove to have many challenges. The Alexandrian Jew Apollos made his way to Corinth, where he was tutored by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24).

The text of 1 Corinthians indicates that the Corinthian assembly was spiritually very immature (3:1-4). Paul wrote his letter to correct them on their sinful behaviors, addressing specific questions that had been brought to him via courier. Paul is forced to rebuke the Corinthians about the factions that have arisen among them (1:11). 1 Corinthians 5 is spent by Paul

warning the Corinthians about the dangers of incest, indeed indicating that they were ignoring the foundational principles of the Torah. Paul is shocked that the Corinthians are taking their fellow Believers to the pagan Corinthian courts to determine their disputes (ch. 6). He is also forced to comment about the proper place of marriage between a man and a woman, and urges some of the unmarried to stay unmarried in light of their circumstances. A person who is married to an unbeliever is urged to stay married and lead that person to faith through good conduct (ch. 7). 1 Corinthians 10 is a treatise on meat sacrificed to idols, and how Believers must be consciously aware that what they are doing is observed by others.

Paul also must address the issue of women's clothing in the assembly (11:2-16), likely in direct response to the reversed gender roles between men and women that were common in parts of Ancient Greece. He also issues instruction regarding the Lord's Supper (11:17-34). Chs. 12-14 are spent analyzing the proper usage of the spiritual gifts, with love being the greatest of them all (ch. 13). Writing to a predominantly Hellenistic audience, Paul spends ch. 15 laying out the Biblical doctrine of resurrection. Throughout Paul's letter, he must spend a significant amount of time defending his spiritual authority (*ISBE*, 1:776-777).

Unlike some of Paul's other letters, 1 Corinthians offers no major exegetical challenges regarding Torah observance. Paul spends so much time addressing the sinful behavior of the Corinthians, that one is forced to turn to the Torah to know why Paul does not explain "why" their actions are sinful. The Apostle assumes that his readers know enough of the Law of Moses so that he does not have to go into great detail about their sin. Paul simply addresses their sin, the problems that they have caused, and tells them to stop.

1 Corinthians is an excellent piece of Scripture to examine and heed when it comes to how sin can destroy both a person and the community of faith. For Messianic Believers, 1 Corinthians is a superb case study for understanding a broad-sweeping letter in historical context and why the early Believers in Yeshua were indeed admonished to follow the Torah.

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updated 06 February, 2006

Corinthians, Epistle of Second: What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle of 2 Corinthians?

Approximate date: Winter 56 or 57 C.E.

Author: the Apostle Paul

Location of author: Macedonia or Ephesus

Target audience and their location: Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Corinth

The text that is often called 2 Corinthians is unanimously agreed to have been written by the Apostle Paul (1:1; 10:1). Unlike any of his other letters, 2 Corinthians contains more autobiographical material, and we learn much about Paul the person in this epistle (*NIDB*, 236). Pauline authorship of 2 Corinthians has not been challenged, but it was not as well known to the Second and Third Century Church as some of Paul's other letters. Only those who challenge Pauline authorship of all of his letters do not believe that Paul wrote this text (*ISBE*, 1:779).

There is some debate among theologians regarding whether 2 Corinthians is a single letter, or actually a composition of several letters. Conservatives generally argue for the unity of this epistle, whereas liberals tend to believe that it is a compilation of several letters (*ABD*, 1:1148).

According to some scenarios, 2 Corinthians may be the fourth letter that Paul wrote the assembly in Corinth. Harris validly points out, “There is probably no part of Paul’s life more difficult to reconstruct accurately than the period of thirty or so months he spent in and around Ephesus (perhaps from the fall of A.D. 53 to the spring of A.D. 56)” (*EXP*, 10:302). For certain, the bulk of Paul’s writing the Corinthians was to rebuke them for problems that they were facing. 2 Corinthians 2:4 states, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.” This does indicate that a previous piece of writing preceded his writing in 2 Corinthians, but what that piece of writing is has been debated.

Some believe that the piece of writing referred to is 1 Corinthians. Others believe it is a lost letter of stern rebuke. Gundry notes, “After writing 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, Paul found it necessary to make a ‘painful visit’ to Corinth and back—painful because of the strained relation between him and the Corinthians at the time. Luke does not record this visit in Acts. It is to be inferred, however, from 2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1-2, where Paul describes his coming visit as the ‘third’” (Gundry, 369). The existence of 2 Corinthians as a “fourth letter” creates some problems for exegetes trying to recreate the circumstances under which 2 Corinthians was composed (Guthrie, pp 451-452). Of course, more than anything else, if 2 Corinthians were indeed the fourth letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, it indicates once again how spiritually immature they were and that they had some major problems.

Another proposal that some have suggested is that 2 Corinthians chs. 10-13 are the sorrowful letter that Paul refers to earlier in the text. While most conservatives are agreed that chs. 10-13 are part of the original text, or yet another piece of text written later, this is a distinct possibility and deserves some consideration when examining the whole of 2 Corinthians. In the most extreme case, this would mean that Paul wrote a total of five letters to the Corinthians (the non-extant first letter, 1 Corinthians, a non-extant third letter, 2 Corinthians chs. 1-9, 2 Corinthians chs. 10-13).

If we can assume that 1 Corinthians 16:5-8 points to a Spring 56 or 57 C.E. dating, then it is likely that 2 Corinthians was written sometime in the following Winter. A likely place of composition is Macedonia (2:13; 7:5), although some also favor Ephesus.

Like 1 Corinthians, no original composition in Hebrew or Aramaic has ever been proposed by anyone in the scholastic community. It is only limited to those in the Messianic community who want it to be so. It is a complete historical impossibility.

When coupled with 1 Corinthians, and compared with Acts 18 and the late First Century composition of *1 Clement*, 2 Corinthians gives us a very good idea about the internal dealings in the First Century community of faith. It specifically gives us the framework for many of the interpersonal and societal issues that faced the *ekklēsia* at large.

Why Paul composed this letter to the Corinthians is a slight challenge, but not that difficult to determine. It is often proposed that the purpose for Paul writing 2 Corinthians was that his admonitions laid out in 1 Corinthians, and likely other previous communication, were not met. Paul is believed to have made a brief visit to Corinth to try to remedy the situation, which did not help, because false teachers and false apostles had entered into the assembly and were challenging his authority (11:4; 12:11). After Paul’s visit, which is viewed as a disaster, he writes them a severe letter (2:4). This letter may be non-extant, or as some have proposed, may be composed in chs. 10-13. Later, we see that Paul meets Titus in Macedonia, who brings a good report from Corinth, and this improved situation necessitates the writing of 2 Corinthians.

Chs. 10-13 present the biggest challenge for the exegete because it is a severe rebuke that seems to be disjointed from the larger, more positive context of the letter. Those who see 2 Corinthians as a whole work, rather than two letters put together, believe that Titus did bring some negative news with him to Paul, and chs. 10-13 address this. Some evangelical scholars, though, believe this is another letter written to the Corinthians, at a later date by Paul, and then was added to the document that became known as 2 Corinthians (*EXP*, 10:305).

The nature of 2 Corinthians does not present a great amount of debate for Torah observant Messianic Believers, as it is a large continuation of the “sin” motif of 1 Corinthians. It continues to address the disarray that can take place when a community of Believers is out of order. It is notable that some theologians believe that the “teachers” influencing the Corinthians in this epistle were Judaizers (2 Corinthians 11:22-23), forcing circumcision and Torah observance on the Corinthians, for salvation, similar to the events surrounding Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Of course, this requires the able student to place the events in their historical, First Century Jewish context, and what happens when the young, naïve, or immature adopt things that they are spiritually not ready for. As with all of his epistles, the bulk of the Torah-related issues are addressed in the context of the spiritually still-maturing, and what is most applicable for new Believers in Messiah Yeshua.

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updated 06 February, 2006

1 Corinthians 6:12: The Apostle Paul says that “all things are lawful.” How can you say that the Law of Moses is still to be followed today?

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12, NASU).

The statement made by some, “all things are now lawful,” on the basis of 1 Corinthians 6:12, can be a very slippery slope. If we are to interpret this statement properly, then what is being asserted is that when we become Believers we are now allowed to do whatever we want, regardless of Divine consequences. What it would mean is that those things that are considered sin in the Torah or Law of Moses, which we are prohibited from doing and in many cases are punishable by death, no longer apply. This would mean that pre-marital sex and homosexuality are not sin. This would mean that murder is not sin. This would mean that idolatry is not sin, and that even though we may claim to serve the Holy One of Israel, if we also participate in heathen idolatry, then we will not be held accountable for it.

If this is what the Apostle Paul is saying here, then we should indeed have a problem with Paul. This statement alone would contradict the Apostle John’s writing at the end of Revelation, “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (21:8). But this would certainly not be the case, because Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 6:12 are prefaced in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 with a statement that is nearly identical to John’s: “Or 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 effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.” There has to be a better explanation of 1 Corinthians 6:12.

Any of you who have examined Paul’s epistles will notice that he writes two lengthy letters to the Corinthians. There is internal evidence from 1 Corinthians 5:9, where he says, “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people,” that he wrote a previous letter to them before what we now call 1 Corinthians, that we no longer have. The assembly at Corinth was riddled with problems, as many of the Corinthian Believers were not being properly trained up in the foundational guidelines of God’s Word and what He considered acceptable and

unacceptable. One of the most serious problems that the Corinthian assembly faced was that of sexual immorality. This apparently did not only include sexual promiscuity between males and females, but extended to homosexuality and even incest. In 1 Corinthians 5:1 Paul attests to the fact that “It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.” He says quite candidly “there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans” (RSV). This is how bad things were in Corinth, and with this backdrop, how on Earth would Paul be telling them that “all things were lawful,” to be construed as meaning that this kind of behavior was acceptable?

It should be noted that there is translation error with rendering 1 Corinthians 6:12 with “all things are lawful.” The Greek word that would be rendered as “lawful” or “lawfully” in the Apostolic Scriptures is *nomimōs* (νομίμως), which *Vine* says “is used of contending in the games and adhering to the rules” (p 357). This word appears in 2 Timothy 2:5, where Paul writes, “we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully [*nomimōs*]” (NASU). But *nomimōs* is not what appears in 1 Corinthians 6:12.

The Greek verb that is often rendered as “lawful” in 1 Corinthians 6:12 is *exesti* (ἔξεστι), which *LS* defines as “it is allowed, it is in one's power, is possible” (p 273). *CGEDNT* says that it means “it is proper, permitted” (p 64). *Exesti* is an entirely different Greek word than *nomimōs*. “Lawful” is an improper translation of *exesti* because it does not include the root *nomos* in it which means “law.” Surprisingly, the only major Christian Bible that translates this properly is the NIV, which renders 1 Corinthians 6:12 as “Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’—but I will not be mastered by anything.”

While the NASU does not use quotation marks around the statement “all things are lawful for me,” the RSV does: “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be enslaved by anything.” It is absolutely true that there was no punctuation, quotation marks, or commas in the original Greek text that Paul wrote. But in light of how he precedes in his comments, chastising the Corinthians for their sin and how he says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that such individuals have no place in the Kingdom of God, for him then to say that “all things are lawful” and we can do whatever we want would be a self-contradiction on his part. Rather, we believe that Paul is making a point by injecting the phrase *panta moi exestin* (Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν), “all things are permitted,” to make a serious point to the Corinthians. It is the Corinthians who are saying, “all things are permitted,” because they are participating in gross sins which are high crimes according to the Torah. Paul is trying to demonstrate to the Corinthians the absurdity of their belief that they can go on practicing these sins without suffering any Divine consequences. It is because of this that modern translations such as the RSV and NIV have placed these statements in quotation marks, and because this is what was being said by *the Corinthians*, not by Paul.

Is Paul really saying in 1 Corinthians 6:11 that “all things are lawful” and that we can do whatever we want? Absolutely not. When we carefully review the surrounding Scriptures, and the sins that Paul was chastising the Corinthians for, we cannot possibly come to this conclusion. It was the Corinthians who thought they could get away with sinning, and who were saying, “All things are permitted for me.”

Sadly, we have the same situation today. There are people who believe that once they “get saved,” that they have been forgiven of their sins and since they have the covering of grace they do not have to live in accordance with God's standards and are, at the very least, not subject to His correction. We can legitimately wonder if such individuals are indeed spiritually regenerated, but ultimately God knows if they are truly born again or not. What we do know is that as Believers we have the responsibility to obey the Lord and not fall prey to the kinds of gross immoralities that the Corinthians participated in. The Lord's standard is laid forth for us in the commandments of the Torah. The Torah clearly defines what sin is and what He considers acceptable and unacceptable. All things are not lawful for us, especially if we have the Torah written on our hearts as Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8 tell us.

(This entry includes adapted excerpts from the editor's book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.)

posted 07 June, 2006

Creationism: What is the Messianic position on Creationism?

Surveying today's Messianic movement, it is fair to say that the vast majority of Messianic Believers adhere to some kind of Young Earth Creationism. They believe that Planet Earth (and perhaps the whole universe) is approximately 6,000-7,000 years old, and was created in six literal 24-hour days. They believe that science supports these beliefs, and that the genealogies in Genesis chs. 5 and 11 can be used to calculate the age of the Earth. Frequently when the readings *Bereisheet* and *Noach* are examined at the beginning of the Torah cycle, theological critiques of Young Earth Creationism are often not considered.

In evangelical Christianity, however, not all adhere to Young Earth Creationism. Many evangelicals hold to the alternative view of Old Earth Creationism, and believe that Young Earth Creationism often follows what can be called "pseudoscience." While affirming that human beings are a fiat creation of God—and did not appear because of millions of years of evolution—these views do espouse a much older age for Planet Earth and the universe. Of important note to Old Earth advocates is Genesis 1:2: "The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep." Old Earth Creationism generally advocates that the universe was formed by God in six "days" or *yamim* (יָמִים) equaling periods of time (about 14-16 billion years), and that the "rock" known as Planet Earth remained unused by God for human habitation for about 4.5 billion years. In this schema human beings only started appearing on Earth perhaps a minimum of 14,000-20,000 years ago, to 40,000-50,000 years ago.

This is not to say that there are not some theological critiques of Old Earth Creationism or variation among its proponents. In its defense, this view often does take into consideration factors such as the speed of light, the rotation of the Solar System in the Milky Way Galaxy, and the rotation of the galaxy in the universe—things that Young Earth Creationists generally ignore or try to avoid. They also do not advocate a strict "black-and-white" reading of the Genesis 1 account, allowing for some poetic or literary creativity on behalf of its author, given its ancient genre. Old Earth Creationists do affirm the inerrancy of Scripture and the existence of Adam and Eve as historical people. One frequent critique is that most advocates hold that the Noahic Flood of Genesis 6-8 was just a regional catastrophe to the Ancient Near East and not a global catastrophe. Yet, the Flood would have affected all of humanity in existence at the time, and all of the animals associated with humanity, being "worldwide" from the vantage point of its participants.

As the Messianic movement grows and expands, more proponents of Old Earth Creationism or forms of Old Earth Creationism will be present. **This includes the editor.** This growing minority position will affirm the antiquity of the Earth and the universe, but also recognize that humans are a relatively new arrival on Earth. It will affirm that we are indeed made in the image of God for His purposes, but we preside over a Creation that God has been preparing for us for much longer than 6,000-7,000 years. Adopting a more moderate position on Creationism will also require that today's Messianic movement reevaluate some of its current views on Biblical chronology, which are often used to calculate the return of Yeshua in the so-called Biblical Year 6,000—something that our ministry believes that we are **not supposed to do**.

If you are unfamiliar with this issue, we would recommend that you consult the book *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, eds. J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), or purchase the DVD set [The Great Debate on Science and the Bible](#) by the Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, where proponents of both Young and Old Earth Creationism discuss their views. For an introduction to Old Earth Creationism, consult the book *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, second expanded edition by Hugh Ross (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001).

updated 26 August, 2008

Crucifixion: I have heard some Messianic teachers say that Yeshua was not crucified on a cross. Can you clarify this for me?

Many Messianics have been hesitant to use terms like “cross” or “crucifixion” for any number of reasons. The Complete Jewish Bible, for example, uses the term “execution stake” instead of cross, and it is not uncommon to also hear the term “tree” being used. While these are perfectly acceptable alternatives to the more common terms “cross” or “crucify,” it by no means negates them. Much of the Messianic movement, sadly, has an immature attitude when it comes to the symbol of the cross. Many Messianic Jews, for whatever reason, are offended by it. Perhaps some of this is due to historical Christian abuses of the Jewish community done in the “sign of the cross,” but the same can be said of just about any religious symbol. While we should be sensitive to those who may not always like the term “cross,” the Apostle Paul himself writes that “we preach Messiah crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). For Believers in Yeshua, the cross is a bittersweet symbol of the pain and suffering that the Lord endured for us.

History fully attests that criminals in the Roman Empire were crucified upon some kind of a cross. It was an extremely brutal, humiliating, and painful way to suffer and die. It was intended to serve as a public warning to others not to infuriate the Roman state:

“Under the Roman Empire, crucifixion normally included a flogging beforehand. At times the cross was only one vertical stake. Frequently, however, there was a cross-piece attached either at the top to give the shape of a ‘T’ (*crux comissa*) or just below the top, as in the form most familiar in Christian symbolism (*crux immissa*). The victims carried the cross or at least a transverse beam (*patibulum*) to the place of the execution, where they were stripped and bound or nailed to the beam, raised up, and seated on a *sedile* or small wooden peg in the upright beam. Ropes bound the shoulders or torso to the cross. The feet or heels of the victims were bound or nailed to the upright stake. As crucifixion damaged no vital organs, death could come slowly, sometimes after several days of atrocious pain” (*ABD*).^f

When we consider this scholastic description of crucifixion, it portrays exactly what Yeshua did for us. Yeshua’s crucifixion on a cross at Golgotha (Calvary) in the vicinity of Jerusalem was an historical fact. **You can stand rest-assured that the traditional view of Yeshua being executed on a Roman cross is generally accurate**, even though it was by no means something elaborate or glorified as some Christian portrayals may make it. Crucifixion was common in the First Century world. Any “alternative theories” that many Messianics may try to offer describing Yeshua’s execution often try to make it something less brutal and horrific than it was. In fact, the Messianic immaturity concerning Yeshua’s death can be so bad in some cases, that the book *Come Out of Her, My People* actually concludes that the cross could be the mark of the beast:

“What is the ‘mark of the beast’ of which we read in Rev[elation]...a mark on people’s foreheads and on their right hands?...Different interpretations have been given to the ‘mark of the beast,’ and also the cross has been suggested.”^g

If true, these are blasphemous statements designed to trivialize the sufferings that our Lord experienced for us. The fact that Yeshua was crucified on a cross does not necessarily make the cross a “holy symbol.” The cross is, first and foremost, an instrument of death. When Yeshua says “take up your cross and follow Me” (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23), He means that you must follow Him to the point of dying or being martyred—an unpopular subject in just about any religious venue.

^f Gerald G. O’Collins, “Crucifixion,” in *ABD*, 1:1208-1209.

^g C.J. Koster, *Come Out of Her, My People* (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 1998),

It is also important to note that if Yeshua had been executed as solely a Jewish criminal, then He would have been stoned. But Yeshua was not stoned; He was executed by the Romans. This is because the sin of the *entire world*—and not just the Jewish people—was responsible for His death. **We are the ones responsible for Yeshua's crucifixion, and we should not try to trivialize His death.** Crucifixion is one of the most painful and humiliating forms of execution that humans have ever devised, and those who would try to make Yeshua's death something that it was not are on extremely dangerous ground.

updated 24 February, 2010

Cult: I have been told that because I am now pursuing a Messianic walk that I have joined a cult. How do I counter these claims?

It is not uncommon for people who enter into the Messianic movement to be accused of joining a “cult.” This is often done by Christian family or friends who do not understand what the Messianic movement and/or Torah observance are about. Rather than investigate the Hebraic Roots of our faith, many decide to accuse those who have done so as being part of a “cult,” when in actuality such a claim is made with no substantial basis other than complete misunderstanding and lack of knowledge.

Technically speaking, any group that is dedicated to any cause is a “cult.” *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines the word cult as “devoted attachment to person, principle, etc.,” which would include religious or social devotion to anything. It could include those who are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, or are dedicated to entertainment phenomena such as Star Trek or Elvis Presley. Just about everyone on Planet Earth is part of some kind of “cult,” when this definition is applied.

Theologically speaking, however, a cult is a group which advocates aberrant theology which is clearly in violation of the Scriptures. The term cult is often used more frequently than it should, but when correctly applied it should be applied to groups that deny core essentials of the faith such as denial of the Divinity and/or Messiahship of Yeshua, the inspiration of Scripture, and salvation by grace through faith alone. If any one of these three areas is violated by a group, be they Messianic or Christian, than such a group may be rightfully considered a cult. A cult also may be defined as a group with a domineering leader who demands the complete loyalty of that group's members, and who says that his teachings may not be challenged.

Are there groups claiming to be “Messianic” that classify as being “cults”? Yes. But in complete fairness there are “Christian” groups which likewise fall into the same classification. If you are challenged as being part of a cult, please ask the person making the accusation on what specific theological reasons and what significant basis that the claim is being made.

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