

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Rapture: What is your rapture position? Pre-, mid-, or post?

TNN Online promotes the idea of a post-tribulation, pre-wrath return of Yeshua for the saints, which we believe will occur near or at the end of the Tribulation period. The Messiah Himself says that He returns “after the tribulation of those days” (Matthew 24:29-31), the Apostle Paul says that the resurrection and transformation of living Believers occurs “at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52), and the Apostle John writes that at the seventh, or last trumpet, of Revelation, “The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Messiah; and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15), meaning that the Lord returns to establish His throne on Planet Earth.

We do not believe that harassment or criticism of those who believe the other standard pre-millennial views, notably the pre-tribulation rapture, is godly or spiritually edifying. While we are post-tribulationists, we do not consider the rapture debate to be an issue of salvation, but do encourage reasoned dialogue about it.

The issue of the rapture is discussed in several articles on our **Tribulation News** site. We also recommend you read the editor's books *When Will the Messiah Return?* and *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism*.

updated 10 October, 2006

Reformation: What is your opinion on the Protestant Reformation?

We believe that the Protestant Reformation was absolutely imperative in order for our faith to be where it is today. Prior to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church held the only copies of the Scriptures, and the Bible was inaccessible to the common man. When God started moving on men and women to return to the Scriptures, Roman Catholic tradition began being questioned and eliminated from the faith. Many of these people were hunted down and martyred for their beliefs, because they dared to challenge the papal authorities, who not only held great sway over European religion, but also politics.

It is easy for some Messianics to look back on the past and say that if they had been there during the Reformation that they would have seen to it that practices like Sunday church, and replacement holidays like Christmas and Easter, would have been totally eliminated from the Protestant scene. Unfortunately, we cannot go back into the past and change it. We have to be thankful for what occurred in the past, because our faith is in a *continual state* of reform. The Reformers of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries were used by the Lord to perform a mighty work, and we have the responsibility to our ancestors in the faith to continue what they began, and the responsibility to posterity that we will endeavor to return to the First Century faith of Yeshua and His Disciples. We have to remember that we have much, much more information than the Reformers did about the Jewish background of the Apostolic Scriptures, and they were doing the best they could do with what they had.

updated 13 July, 2006

Renewed Covenant: Why do so many Messianics use the term “Renewed Covenant”? I have not been able to find support for this from the Hebrew or Greek.

In significant sectors of the Messianic community today, it is not uncommon to hear the term “Renewed Covenant” being used instead of the more common “New Covenant.” This is often done so because it is believed, albeit in error, that the New Covenant or “New Testament” is an additional set of Scripture to the “Old Covenant” or “Old Testament.” But this is not what Paul tells us the Old Covenant is. He writes that because of the work of Yeshua we have been “made...adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6). The New Covenant is one that brings life,

whereas the Old Covenant can only condemn. The Old Covenant was the system in which the Torah operates prior to a person coming to faith in Yeshua, whereas the New Covenant is the system in which the Torah operates after a person comes to faith in Yeshua.

Prior to coming to Yeshua, all that the Torah can do is condemn us as sinners. Paul describes it as “the ministry of death.” Certainly, this ministry of death “came with glory” (2 Corinthians 3:7), because it was revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. But Paul is forced to ask, “how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?” (2 Corinthians 3:8). The ministry of the Spirit comes by us receiving Messiah Yeshua into our lives. He compares the ministry of death to a veil that Moses had over his face, so that the Israelites were unable to see the reflection of God’s presence that was upon it (2 Corinthians 3:13). Paul further writes, “for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah” (2 Corinthians 3:14). Those who hear the Torah read as unbelievers without atonement for their sin can only be condemned by it, because the Old Covenant is at work and can only condemn them. The condemnation can only be removed by the work of Yeshua so we can fully behold the glory of the Father.

In Pauline literature the terms old and new are primarily employed to speak of one’s spiritual condition. Colossians 3:9, for example, admonishes us “Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the **old self** with its *evil* practices.” Ephesians 4:22 further says, “in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the **old self**, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit.” When a new self or new man is introduced via one’s salvation experience, it replaces the **old self** or **old man**. *It is by no means a “renewed man.”* The Torah or God’s Law remains the same, but how it functions is certainly changed. Leon Morris is absolutely correct when he says that the New Covenant “will not simply be the old one patched up and renewed” (EXP, 12:78). But Morris, and many other Christians *and* Messianics often conclude that Scripture is being talked about, rather than a condition of how God’s Word functions in the life of a person. The person himself or herself is not necessarily replaced, but the personality is changed from one that is unregenerate to regenerate. The terms old/new in Pauline theology are used to represent lost/saved.

Unfortunately, many in the Messianic community have not broken out of thinking that the “Old Covenant” and “New Covenant” are different parts of the Bible, but are instead conditions in which the Torah operates in prior to, and after, someone comes to faith in the Lord. Those who use the term “Renewed Covenant” do so from the belief that the “Renewed Covenant,” i.e., the Apostolic Scriptures, does not negate or replace the Tanach or so-called “Old Covenant.” However, the Hebrew and Greek vocabulary behind the terms *b’rit chadashah* (בְּרִית הַחֲדָשָׁה) and *diathēkēn kainēn* (διαθήκη καινήν) do not support the description of “Renewed Covenant.”

The most common Hebrew term used in the Tanach for “new” is the verb *chadash* (חָדַשׁ). In the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice) it can mean “to **make anew, restore**” (HALOT, 1:294). It is employed in 2 Chronicles 15:8 as such when King Asa “renewed [*chadash*] the Altar of HASHEM that was before the Hall of HASHEM” (ATS). However, the adjective *chadash* (חָדָשׁ) does not have the same variance that its verb equivalent has. It is used to indicate things that are “**new, fresh...not yet existing**,” “**new things**” (HALOT, Ibid.). In this way the *b’rit chadashah* of Jeremiah 31:31-33 is to truly be a New Covenant that is unparalleled by what has come before it. Of course, the New Covenant is absolutely consistent with the character of God that we see beginning in the Book of Genesis, but the Lord did not renew what Paul calls “the ministry of death.” The New Covenant, in contrast, is “the ministry of righteousness” brought in by “the Spirit [which] gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:9, 6).

In the Greek Septuagint, the most common equivalent for *chadash* is *kainos* (καινός), which “pert. to being not previously present, **unknown, strange, remarkable**, also w. the connotation of the marvelous or unheard-of” (BDAG, 497). This usage is continued in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures. As it regards the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, it was certainly known by centuries of Jews who read the Prophets and anticipated it being inaugurated via the

end-time restoration of Israel. What is unexpected or remarkable about the New Covenant is that the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 8 connects its inauguration to the priestly work of Yeshua in Heaven. This is what makes it such a New or remarkable Covenant. Yeshua Himself attested to this at His Last Sedar meal:

“And He said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.’ And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘**This cup which is poured out for you is the new [kainos] covenant in My blood**’” (Luke 22:15-20).

With Yeshua’s death for us on the cross and Him spilling His blood forth, the ministry of death or the Old Covenant can be rendered obsolete in our lives. The New Covenant or *b’rit chadashah* of Jeremiah 33 and Hebrews 8 is not the ministry of death revisited or “renewed” by any means, but is the Torah operating in its fullness by God writing His Instruction onto our hearts and minds. This is something that is totally new in the life of a person who is no longer subject to the Old Covenant of the Torah condemning him, but now has the commandments of God written on his heart by His Spirit.

Most in the emerging Messianic movement use the term “Renewed Covenant” innocently, and are often repeating what they have heard from those who have not examined the issue fully. They have not broken out of the belief that “covenant” does not constitute Scripture, but rather how Scripture is applied in the life of a person. We use terms like Tanach or Apostolic Scriptures/Writings, to affirm that these texts all compile authoritative instruction from God, but they do not make up a “covenant.” The covenants of God, rather, are detailed inside these texts. When necessary, we do find ourselves using terms like “Old Testament” or “New Testament” for the familiarity of others who are new to Messianic things, but that should be infrequent. What we need to understand more than anything else is that the New Covenant is not something divorced from the Tanach, but it is something that is likewise only accessible through Yeshua. It is not the ministry of condemnation revisited and reworked, but is something entirely new that is inaugurated only by the Spirit of God.

For a more detailed explanation of this subject, we recommend the DVD teaching “What’s So New About the New Covenant?” by Tim Hegg, available from First Fruits of Zion.

(This entry includes adapted excerpts from “Excursus on the ‘New Covenant’ or ‘Renewed Covenant?’” appearing in the editor’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.)

posted 02 July, 2006

Resurrection, Commemorating: How do you think that today’s Messianics should commemorate the resurrection of Yeshua?

Honoring the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah is something entirely appropriate for men and women of faith. The Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:13-14 testify, “if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Messiah has been raised; and if Messiah has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.” **Yeshua’s resurrection is the most important event to our Biblical faith.** As the Messianic movement has grown, and many non-Jewish Believers have stopped celebrating Easter and instead started remembering Passover, there is still undeniably a desire to want to remember Yeshua’s resurrection sometime during the week of Passover and Unleavened Bread. *There is nothing wrong or reprehensible about this.* How we learn to do this as a developing faith community, may be a bit of a challenge, though.

Those who follow the Saddusaical reckoning for the counting of the *omer* believe the answer is very straightforward. Interpreting “the day after the sabbath” (Leviticus 23:15) as being the weekly Sabbath on which the sheaf of firstfruits was to be waved before the Lord, it would

seem pretty easy to connect this with Yeshua's Sunday morning resurrection, Yeshua being the firstfruits raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20). The early Church must have mixed up this "firstfruits" commemoration with some errant practices that later became "Easter." Connecting a Sunday sheaf waving to Yeshua's resurrection is fairly easy for Christians, who currently celebrate Easter Sunday, to understand.^a

Not all Messianics are convinced, however, that the Biblical and historical data supports the Saddusaical reckoning of the counting of the *omer*, and believe that it would be more appropriate to honor Yeshua's resurrection not on a specific day of the week like Sunday—but instead closer to the actual date it would have taken place. Remembering Yeshua's resurrection on any day of the week adjacent to Passover may not be very palatable for some of today's Christians, but it has a significant precedent in the annals of early Church history. The Quartodecimans were a major sector of the Second-Fourth Century Church, present in Asia Minor, who commemorated the resurrection of Yeshua three days after the Jewish Passover, claiming to follow a tradition handed down to them by the Apostle John. Once the Synagogue came out with the official date for the Passover, the Quartodecimans followed suit. **It was not irregular for them to commemorate Yeshua's resurrection on *any* day of the week**, versus the Roman Church that insisted on the first Sunday after the Spring equinox.^b

Today's emerging Messianic movement, in the short term, is likely to see some variance in regard to how Yeshua's resurrection should be commemorated. Those following the Saddusaical reckoning of counting the *omer* are likely to hold some kind of firstfruits/Resurrection Sunday service. Those adhering to a Quartodeciman style approach could hold some kind of prayer service or other commemoration three days following 14 Nisan. A fair approach to whatever position one holds is to focus on the broad themes of Yeshua's Last Supper, His betrayal and arrest, His beating and humiliation, His crucifixion, and His resurrection in teaching and preaching during this season. We should maintain our attention on *these events* (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:2), and not try to pick apart on which days these events "must" have taken place, as though prophetic fulfillment is contingent on some kind of a Twenty-First Century binary thinking of 0s and 1s.

What the Messianic movement does in the long term is likely to be contingent on further studies that are conducted in the Gospels, and a renewed appreciation for a traditionally Jewish approach to the appointed times.

updated 25 February, 2010

Resurrection, Sunday: Is it really true that Yeshua was resurrected on Sunday?

Aside from all of the debates surrounding the chronology of Yeshua's frequently-called "Passion Week," which are present in both evangelical Christianity and the Messianic movement, it can be legitimately challenged from the Greek text of Matthew 28:1 whether or not the Messiah was resurrected on a Sunday morning. In most versions, the text reads as, "Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave" (NASU). Notably different from this is the 1901 American Standard Version, which has, "Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher."

The difference between "after" or "late on" depends how one renders the Greek preposition *opse* (ὀψέ), which can mean "after a long time, late," or applied as "late in the day, at even."^c Did the Marys leave to go to Yeshua's tomb on Sunday morning, or late on the Sabbath day on what we would consider Saturday evening? This is a subject that will require further discussion and analysis.

^a This point of view is explained more thoroughly by Zola Levitt, *The Seven Feasts of Israel* (Dallas: Zola Levitt Ministries, 1979), pp 6-8.

^b Consult "Quartodecimans," in David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 547; "Paschal Controversy," in *Ibid.*, pp 500-501.

^c *LS*, 582.

Certainly, by the first day of the week, the Marys and many of the Disciples had discovered that Yeshua the Messiah had resurrected from the dead. Most in Christianity believe that because of Yeshua's so-called "Sunday morning resurrection" that it validates the transference of the Sabbath to Sunday, or the institution of "the Lord's Day" in place of the Sabbath. Yet, the Apostolic testimony that we see in the Book of Acts continues to indicate that they continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. The "first day" Biblically understood begins in the evening on Saturday, and would have been an appropriate time for the First Century Believers to handle the business and financial affairs of their assemblies, which they would have not done on the Sabbath.

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Revelation, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Revelation?

Approximate date: 54-68 C.E. (liberal), 90 C.E. (conservative)

Author: the Apostle John

Location of author: the island of Patmos

Target audience and their location: the congregations of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (Asia Minor)

The Book of Revelation, perhaps more than any other text in the Apostolic Scriptures, is one of the most confusing, as well as controversial, for Believers to digest. There are a wide variety of opinions concerning how Revelation should be interpreted, and what its message is for Believers today.

The author of Revelation identifies himself in the text as being John (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). All of the early Church Fathers from the Second Century believed that the author was John the Apostle (Guthrie, pp 930-931). Liberal theologians today lean toward believing that the author of Revelation was John the Elder, or a pseudonymous person (*ABD*, 5:702). While the bulk of conservatives today believe in genuine Johannine authorship, some doubt it because of the extensive usage of Jewish literary forms unique to apocalyptic literature of the period (*EXP*, 12:405). A lack of strong tradition regarding who John the Elder was, in Guthrie's estimation, points to John the Apostle as the author (Guthrie, 933).

It is very easy to realize the fact that Revelation is the only text in the Apostolic Scriptures that is "exclusively prophetic in character" (*NIDB*, 859). The Book of Revelation was received as authentic Scripture in the early Second Century (*Ibid.*; Gundry, 458; *IDB*, 2:60; *ABD*, 5:695). Revelation was debated in the early centuries of the emerging Christian Church, however, and some of the Reformers even questioned its authenticity. "Erasmus, Luther, and Zwingli questioned the Johannine authorship because it teaches a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ" (*NBCR*, 925).

There are two views for the dating of Revelation's composition. Some date Revelation being written from 54-68 C.E., during the reign of Nero Caesar. Others date Revelation being written in the reign of Dometian Caesar, from 81-96 C.E. The dating of Revelation is influenced by one's eschatological position of either preterism or futurism, meaning whether the events of Revelation occurred in the late First and early Second Centuries, or still largely remain to be fulfilled in the distant future. Liberal theologians, who largely adhere to preterism, often lean toward the early date (*ISBE*, 4:172; *NBCR*, 1279). Preterists largely ask the question, "Was Nero the antichrist of Revelation?" Futurists are keen to point out that if Revelation was indeed written in the 50s-60s C.E., that would mean that would it pre-date many of the Pauline Epistles (*EXP*, 12:405). The Church Fathers of the Second Century largely believed in a late First Century composition of Revelation (*NIDB*, 860), and such a sentiment is likewise believed among conservatives today, who favor a general date of 90 C.E. Traditions from Victorinus of Pettau and Jerome assign genuine Johannine authorship to Revelation, including John being exiled to the island of Patmos by Dometian (*ABD*, 5:700).

The actual language and grammar of Revelation is very intriguing to scholars. It is widely recognized by theologians that there are many untranslatable Hebraisms in the text (*NIDB*, 860). Black points out, “the grammar of Revelation...reflects the work of a Semitic-speaking person who is just learning Greek” (*It’s Still Greek to Me*, 150). Why this is the case has been a matter of great academic discussion. Ladd, for example, indicates, “Undoubtedly the book reflects Semitic influences, but some of its solecisms appear to be deliberate, and possibly the writer’s emotional state accounts for others” (*ISBE*, 2:172). Perhaps the best explanation is offered by Gundry, who believes in genuine Johannine authorship for Revelation, and is a futurist:

“It is true that from a grammatical and literary standpoint the Greek style of Revelation is inferior to that of the gospel and epistles. But in part the ‘bad grammar’ may be deliberate, for purposes of emphasis and allusion to Old Testament passages in Hebraic style, rather than due to ignorance or blundering. In part the ‘bad grammar’ may also stem from an ecstatic state of mind, due to John’s having received prophecies in the form of visions. Or writing as a prisoner on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, he did not have the advantage of an amanuensis to smooth out his rough style, as he probably did have for his gospel and epistles” (p 458).

The author of Revelation identifies his location as being the island of Patmos: “John... was on the island called Patmos” (1:9). Patmos was an island approximately 15 miles west of Ephesus (*ISBE*, 4:171). Some traditions espouse that John was forced to work in a mine on Patmos during his exile. His initial audience is clearly identified in the first three chapters of Revelation. The Revelation is composed for seven congregations in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These were all Greek-speaking congregations.

While some Messianics would like to believe that Revelation was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, no extant, authenticated text has surfaced to substantiate such wishes. Theologian C.C. Torrey advocated in the early Twentieth Century that Revelation was originally written in Aramaic (*NBCR*, 1279), but many of his claims have been dismissed by both liberals and conservatives per no available text to substantiate his theory. (Torrey himself also repudiated much of the veracity and the reliability of the Tanach.) In fact, “The book of Revelation was definitively rejected by the Eastern Syrian Church. It was not included in the early Syriac translation of the NT, the Peshitta” (*ABD*, 5:695; cf. Guthrie, 932). The conservative position concerning Revelation’s language seems to be the best. The Book of Revelation was a Greek composition with a high Hebraic style to clue in the reader to texts and concepts seen in the Hebrew Tanach. The “bad grammar” could have been overlooked by the Johannine communities, and not corrected by them, because of the strong apocalyptic nature of the work.

Chs. 1-3 of Revelation include letters from the Messiah Yeshua to specific assemblies that existed in ancient times. This part of Revelation is primarily directed to a late First Century-early Second Century audience. This thrust of the book is an unveiling by Yeshua to encourage these Believers through their persecution, and that they will be vindicated by His return. The overarching theme of Revelation, no matter what interpretation one takes, is “the mind and purpose of God as seen in redemptive history” (*IDB*, 4:58). The Book of Revelation is to ultimately have a message of hope for those in distress, as the Lord will right the wrongs of this fallen Earth.

The language of Revelation is apocalyptic, and much of its terminology is symbolic. Regardless of what school of thought you hold to regarding its interpretation, most do recognize this. Generally speaking, there are four distinct groups of interpretation relating to the Book of Revelation:

1. **Preterists** hold to the belief that Revelation was written in the mid-First Century, during the reign of Nero Caesar, and that most of the events prophesied in Revelation, as well as in Scriptures like Matthew 24, were prophetically fulfilled by the early Second Century. Preterists generally believe that Nero was the antichrist of the Book of Revelation, and largely make up a liberal segment of Christian eschatology.
2. **Historicists** hold to the belief that Revelation speaks to the many centuries of Christianity, and should be interpreted in light of the history of the Church.

Historical events in Christian history are represented by the imagery of Revelation. Many of the early Reformers were historicists, as are some Roman Catholic theologians today.

3. **Futurists** hold to the belief that Revelation was written in the late First Century, and although it had a message for the early Believers (chs. 1-3), is primarily speaking of events to occur in the distant future (chs. 4-18), and believe in a literal thousand-year reign of Yeshua on Planet Earth. The majority of the early Church Fathers were futurists, as are many evangelical Christians today, and most people in the Messianic movement. Futurists may **all** be described as being **pre-millennialists**, believing that Yeshua returns before His thousand-year reign. There are distinct viewpoints within the pre-millennial camp, however, notably the “rapture debate” between pre- and post-tribulationists.
4. **Idealists** are those who widely do not take sides in the actual debate over what Revelation means, but simply believe that it speaks of the Messiah’s final battle over Satan, sin, and evil in the world. Some Roman Catholic theologians are idealists.

It is notable that there are futurists who adhere to some of the elements of the other three groups, as some concede that a wider portion of Revelation may have been more applicable for the late First-early Second Century Believers than others (*EXP*, 12:412). There are some problems with futurists who only focus on the first three chapters of Revelation in teaching, but largely ignore the rest. Johnson notes, “The chief problem with it is that it seems to make all but the first three chapters of Revelation irrelevant to the contemporary church. This objection is pressed more strongly when adherents to the futurist view affirm, as many do today, that the church will be removed from the earth before the events described in 6:1ff. occur” (*Ibid.*, 12:409). In stark contrast to this, “Liberal scholars largely endorse the ‘preterist’ view and repudiate the predictive elements of the book” (*NBCR*, 1279).

Most in the emerging Messianic movement today are futurists, even though specific interpretations of the Book of Revelation widely vary. Many Messianic interpretations of Revelation are carbon-copies of dispensational, pre-tribulational dogma concerning “the rapture of the Church.” Many other interpretations of Revelation are post-tribulational in nature.

As we examine the Book of Revelation, it is absolutely imperative for us to know other prophetic Scriptures that give us clues as to its background. In particular, it is important that we have a grasp on prophetic texts like Daniel and Ezekiel (*EXP*, 13:399), as well as Zechariah (Guthrie, 965). These will give some of us the background data we need to be able to have a better handle on why the author of Revelation uses the verbiage and terms that he does.

Contemporary Messianic discussions regarding Revelation include debates over what the “churches” represent; whether or not “Babylon” exclusively represents Rome and Roman Catholicism, and the proper attitude we should have regarding it; and debate over what “666” really means. More than anything else, because Revelation is such a confusing book for many, it is sadly overlooked by many in the Messianic community. Many hold to the sentiment that being Torah observant and believing in Yeshua is controversial enough, and that they will deal with the Book of Revelation when the end-times are upon us. Sadly, a root for these attitudes may be present in the fact that our Torah studies are not always complemented by studies of the Prophets. Likewise, it may also be rooted in a negative view of prophecy that focuses more on the beast and destruction to befall Earth, as opposed to the end result of it: the restoration of God’s Kingdom.

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Revelation 22:14: Which is the correct reading of Revelation 22:14, "Blessed are they who keep His commandments," or "Blessed are they who wash their robes"?

Revelation 22:14 reads differently in the Greek Textus Receptus of the Apostolic Scriptures, than it does in the critical Greek texts used today for most English Bible versions. In the KJV, Revelation 22:14 reads as follows:

"Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

In modern English Bibles, using critical Greek texts, the verse reads slightly differently:

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city" (NASU).

The difference is obviously that the Textus Receptus includes the phrase, "Blessed *are* they that do his commandments," versus "Blessed are those who wash their robes." Some may claim foul play with the Scriptures, and that texts have been deliberately altered to support a particular doctrinal bias. However, the reading "Blessed are those who wash their robes" is **older**. Bruce Metzger notes in his work *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* that the change happened rather innocently, because in ancient times the Greek Scriptures were copied with one person reading the text out loud, and multiple scribes copying it. This inevitably led to some textual deviations occurring. He comments,

"Instead of πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν, supported by **ⲛ** A about 15 minuscules (including 1006 2020 2053) it^{ar} vg cop^{sa} al, the Textus Receptus, following 046 most minuscules it^{sig} syr^{ph, h} cop^{bo} al, reads the somewhat similar sounding words ποιῶντες τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ. The latter reading appears to be a scribal emendation, for elsewhere the author uses the expression τηρεῖν τὰς ἐντολὰς (12.17; 14.12)" (p 765).

Hearing the audible phrase *plunontes tas stolas autōn*, some Greek copyists wrote *poiountes tas entolas autou*. This latter phrase means "Happy are those doing His commands" (YLT). There is no foul play here, but innocent human error. Metzger is keen to note that both Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 previously emphasize God's people keeping His commandments, and how a copyist would have had this idea in mind when hearing what text to write down. However, the correct reading is *plunontes tas stolas autōn*, "Blessed are those who wash their robes."

In a Messianic movement that strongly encourages Believers to keep and follow the Torah or Law of Moses, determining the correct reading of this verse can be a problem. When we determine what the correct reading of this verse should be, we have to ask the question of what is more important: Is keeping God's commandments more important than having our robes washed in the Messiah's blood? Or, is being covered by His blood and having salvation more important than keeping God's commandments?

Many in today's Messianic community, unfortunately, will say that observing the Torah is superior to knowing Messiah Yeshua as our Lord and Savior. As keeping God's commandments is a theme of Revelation, we have to understand that you cannot hope to enter into His Kingdom without being washed by the Messiah's blood. Our Torah observance is to come as a result of us being transformed by God's power, and us being continually sanctified and renewed as we grow in our faith. But, our Torah observance is *not to precede our salvation experience—and is not more important than knowing Yeshua*. There may be many people who are disappointed—and who were "Torah observant"—when they are not allowed into the Messiah's Kingdom.

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Romans, Epistle to the: What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle to the Romans?**Approximate date:** 56-57 C.E.**Author:** the Apostle Paul, written down by Tertius**Location of author:** Corinth (adjacent to Achaia) or Cenchrea**Target audience and their location:** Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Rome

All ancient authorities are agreed that the Apostle Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans. There are no disputes in early Christian history made about the authorship of this letter. Second and Third Century Christianity used Romans, along with 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, to establish much of its early theology. Romans stands as the longest of all the individual Pauline letters, and is often viewed as being the most significant. Without a doubt, Romans lays out how Paul preached the gospel to a broad audience of Jews and non-Jews. Romans 1:16 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Paul makes the salvation message one that is readily available to all members of the human race, regardless of ethnicity.

Romans demonstrates all the classic characteristics of being a letter, or an epistle. Paul's friends were with him when he wrote this letter (16:21-23). The letter was specifically written down by Tertius, a scribe who issued his own greeting in 16:22. Romans is more formal than any of Paul's other letters, because he was only familiar with a few of the Believers in Rome (Gundry, 379). Most conservative theologians place the dating of Paul's letter being somewhere in 56-57 C.E., during Paul's Third Missionary Journey. Romans was written by Paul prior to his going back to Jerusalem with offerings (15:25-28), and it follows his composition of 1 & 2 Corinthians. A most likely place for its composition is either in Corinth (adjacent to Achaia) or Cenchrea (16:1).

While there is not total agreement, Paul's audience was likely a mixed group of both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Yeshua, probably focused around some kind of synagogue. The assembly in Rome was not founded by Paul (1:10-15; 15:20-22), but likely by Jews from Rome who had seen the Holy Spirit poured out at *Shavuot*/Pentecost (NBCR, 1012). Paul's letter to the Roman Believers was written prior to Peter's visit to Rome, as it is not mentioned. Paul would have known about the Roman community of faith from Jewish Believers such as Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2), who had been among the Jews expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius. One of the distinct reasons for Paul writing his letter was likely because there were leadership issues at the congregation in Rome after Claudius' death. Jewish Believers were returning to Rome and the non-Jewish leaders in the congregation, who did not have to leave Rome, had difficulty sharing the leadership with them. Paul warns these non-Jewish Believers not to have an attitude of superiority to their fellow Jewish brethren (11:17-32).

While there have been those in the Messianic community who would like to think that Paul's letter to the Romans was written in Hebrew or Aramaic, the history surrounding the letter's composition reveals otherwise when we consider his audience. *IDB* notes, “When Paul wrote his letter, this church was well established and already known and esteemed throughout the Christian world (1:8; 15:23-29). It was composed mainly of Gentiles, with a certain number of Jewish members, and was certainly a Greek-speaking community, which means that its membership was drawn chiefly from the Levantine population of the city. This Greek character continued until the later years of the second century, for it is not until then that we find the earliest Latin documents of the Roman church” (4:114).

Simply because Paul's audience was largely Greek speaking does not by any means diminish the fact that Paul's letter is very Hebraic in character. There are sixty direct quotations from the Tanach in Romans. “Paul feels perfectly free to quote the law and other portions of the Hebrew Scriptures even when writing to Gentile churches... Many Gentile converts to the gospel had previously attended the synagogue as God-fearers and there had heard the OT read and expounded” (*EXP*, 10:9).

The purpose for Paul's writing this letter was to prepare the Roman Believers for a personal visit from him. Paul's work in the East had largely been accomplished, and now he was planning to expand it to the West. Many believe that just as Antioch had been a staging area for Paul and his associates to use for evangelizing the East, Paul was planning to use Rome as a hub for evangelizing the West, as he indicates a desire to travel to Spain (1:10-15).

Paul's letter to the Romans begins by him expressing comments on the general plight of mankind, man's rejection of the One True God, and the sin that He has let them practice out of their own fallen nature. Paul writes about the need for all human beings to receive God's salvation, and how this is an important act of faith. Later on, Paul goes into extreme detail describing the relationship of Jews and non-Jews as a part of the community of faith and the olive tree of Israel (chs. 9-11). Disputes had arisen in the Roman assembly regarding Torah-related and extra-Biblical practices (ch. 14). Paul assures the Roman Believers that salvation is the same for all of God's people, and goes to lengths describing the example of Abraham, and mentions the fact while "all Israel" will be saved, it is but only a remnant (11:26). A major theme of Romans is justification by faith in Yeshua the Messiah.

Romans has been used by many of the influential Christian theologians of our time, and has most certainly been a debated text: "Augustine acquired his idea of original sin from Romans 5, Luther gained his understanding of justification by faith alone from Romans 3-4, John Calvin obtained his doctrine of double predestination from Romans 9-11, John Wesley got his distinctive teaching on sanctification from Romans 6 and 8, and Karl Barth learned of the importance of the righteousness of God from Romans 1 and 2" (*ABD*, 5:817).

Paul's epistle to the Romans is also frequently discussed among many Messianic Believers today, who believe that the traditional Christian view of Paul saying that the Torah is no longer to be followed is invalid. Those who believe that the Law of Moses is valid instruction often wrestle with Paul's words to the Romans, which, like all of his teachings about the Torah, relate to its proper place in the assembly, and largely how it is to be handled by the new, still-maturing non-Jewish Believers. Sadly, many Christian theologians who have taught Romans present it via a "law versus grace" model, as opposed to a "law and grace" model. The doctrine of justification by faith is not something new that was invented by Paul, as it is clearly spoken of by Yeshua in His parables of the prodigal son, the laborers in the vineyard, and the great supper. It is something deeply rooted in the words of the Prophet Habakkuk: "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Paul simply developed the doctrine of justification by faith and adapted it for a distinctively Jewish *and* non-Jewish audience (Gundry, 376).

When reading Romans, it is important to note that there are sections of the text specifically directed to the Jewish Believers in Rome, and the non-Jewish Believers in Rome. In Romans 11:13, for example, he says "I am speaking to you who are Gentiles," and the text following specifically applies to the non-Jewish Believers in Rome. In writing his epistle, Paul recognized the reality that more non-Jews would be coming to faith in the Messiah of Israel.

According to most Christian theologians, there are three major reasons why Romans was written: "the relation of (1) the OT Scriptures, (2) contemporaneous pharisaic Judaism, and (3) the gospel implemented by the earthly work of Christ" (*NIDB*, 870). Most Messianics are agreed with them on points #1 and #3. Paul's letter to the Romans employs a vast amount of knowledge, wisdom, and insight from the Hebrew Tanach, and Paul by no means diminishes the "Old Testament." Paul's epistle also uplifts the atoning work of Messiah Yeshua, and how He is the only way to salvation. As far as Pharisaic Judaism is concerned, recent studies in First Century Judaism, coupled with Jewish-Christian dialogue, have led many Christian theologians to reconsider Paul's view of the Law, to at least a more moderate position of him not demeaning it to the point of saying that it has been "abolished."

Those Christian theologians taking a "new perspective" to Paul, have advocated that Paul believes that the Torah is still to be followed by all Jews, and that non-Jewish Believers are to respect it and follow it in all matters except those which relate to specific Jewish identity (i.e.,

circumcision, the Sabbath, the kosher laws). This is certainly a step forward for many Christian theologians, and their extant research has certainly helped a Messianic community which believes that Paul advocated Torah observance for all of God's people, but one that comes as part of an individual's growth in the faith. Of all the texts of the Apostolic Scriptures, this has been one which has created many Messianic Bible studies, and several distinct commentaries.

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Romans 1:26-17: I have heard liberal Bible scholars teach that Romans 1:26-27 allows for homosexuality. Is this at all true?

Paul's epistle to the Romans is often considered to be his theological *magnum opus*, and for good reasons. It is a well drawn out presentation on the gospel as he proclaims it among the nations, as Paul is preparing to move to the Western Mediterranean, and wants the Roman Believers to know what the mission is that the Lord has entrusted to him. Most expositors agree that Romans was written against a backdrop of either Corinth or Achaia, and such places were harbingers of gross sexual sin, likely affecting Paul's choice of words. It should thus be no surprise that Paul considers idolatry *and* inappropriate sexual behavior as direct consequences of the fall of humanity. As he describes,

"For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error" (Romans 1:25-27).

The traditional interpretation of this text throughout centuries of Christian theology has **undoubtedly and undeniably viewed it as relating to homosexuality**. Only in recent days as homosexuality has become legal in the West and acceptable as an "alternative lifestyle" have some liberal Christian theologians viewed Romans 1:26-27 as relating to behavior *other than* homosexual intercourse. Skewed definitions of Biblical concepts are appearing in some theological resources, as *EDB* summarizes, "The Bible does not appear to say anything directly about homosexuality in this modern sense of the term, but a few passages do refer to same gender genital acts" (L. Wm. Countryman, "Homosexuality," in *EDB*, 602). It goes on to say, in regard to verses such as Genesis 18:16-33 and Leviticus 18:22; 20:1, "None of [these passages] appears to address modern questions directly" (*Ibid.*, 603).

The debate in favor of homosexuality from liberal theologians often focuses on the so-called "relational" side, arguing that since the Bible does not directly address the modern questions of commitment between a man and a man, or a woman and a woman, it could thus be acceptable as "love" is the principal thrust of the gospel. Even evangelicals who would strongly oppose today's Messianic movement and its emphasis on a Torah foundation, still will agree that in Romans 1:26-27 Paul is speaking about homosexuality and considers it a gross sin. Ben Witherington III candidly states, "Vv. 26-27 are about as clear a condemnation of homosexual and lesbian behavior as exists in the NT" (*Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Historical Commentary*, 69), even though he provides no Tanach references in favor or support of Paul's position.

Evangelical Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser—who holds to a much higher view of the Torah in his theology—represents a standard conservative view, summarizing,

“To prohibit homosexuality today, some would argue, would be like forbidding unclean meats. It is admitted, of course, that there is a category of temporary ceremonial laws, but I do not agree that homosexuality is among them. Nothing in its proscription points to or anticipates Christ, and the death penalty demanded for its violation places it in the moral realm and not in temporary ceremonial legislation” (*Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 118).

Those in the Jewish Synagogue today who believe that homosexuality is a valid behavior are consequently often very liberal, believing only that a cultural Judaism is what God asks of His people. And that cultural Judaism is very much pick-and-choose, “changing” with the times!

It is, of course, very important to understand the worldview of the Apostle Paul when writing vs. 26-27. This is not an issue that is going away, and we need to be prepared to directly encounter it should homosexual issues arise in our Messianic communities, or more likely we find people asking honest questions about it in the context of sexual ethics from Scripture.

Paul remarks that as a direct result of the Fall, human beings have rejected the primacy of God in their lives: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (NIV). He then goes on to say, “their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another” (vs. 26b-27a, ESV).

Because of discussions circulating today not only in society, but also in theology, it is absolutely critical that Believers understand the distinct worldview of Paul—so as to accurately understand what he is telling the Romans. It is not uncommon for some to conclude that only homosexual activity involved with idolatry, rather than homosexual intercourse independent of such religious practice, is only what is being talked about.

We should begin by asking ourselves how the good Rabbi from Tarsus, a Pharisee trained by Gamaliel, would have thought about homosexuality from the Torah and Tanach.

Paul very clearly says that due to the curse on the world, men and women have both exchanged natural functions for unnatural functions. When God created man and woman, He made them in His own image (Genesis 1:27), and decreed “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). In Genesis 2:18-24, in the second account of Creation, we see how God made woman to be the man’s partner in his endeavors:

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’ Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

Yeshua the Messiah and the Apostle Paul directly appeal to Genesis 2:24 regarding the Divine estate of marriage (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). God originally made the woman to be the partner of the man—not another man for the man—so that the two might reproduce and tend the wonderful Creation that He made for them. Acceptance of anything other than relations between a man and a woman mars not only God’s original intention for them as “one flesh,” but also the fact that human beings have been created in His image and for His Divine purposes. Furthermore, as Douglas J. Moo points out, “it is clear that Paul depicts homosexual activity as a violation of God’s creation order, another indication of the departure from true knowledge and worship of God” (*New International Commentary on the New Testament*:

The Epistle to the Romans, 115). Thus, it can be easily seen that homosexual acts are not only sinful, but they are **idolatrous in and of themselves** as men and women “worship themselves” in a reality that is seen outside of the realm decreed by the Lord.

The fact that prohibitions against homosexual activities are seen in the Torah should be self-obvious to this discussion:

“You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22).

“If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them” (Leviticus 20:13).

The commands *v'et zakar lo tishkav mishkevei ishah* (וְאִתְּזָכָר לֹא תִשְׁכַּב מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה) in Leviticus 18:22a, and *v'ish asher yishkav et zakar mishkevei ishah* (אִשֶּׁר יִשְׁכַּב אִתְּזָכָר מִשְׁכְּבֵי אִשָּׁה) (וְאִשֶּׁר), both concern a man “lying” with another man—as he would with a woman. Clearly, some kind of sexual intercourse is what is in mind. The verb *shakav* (שָׁכַב) or “to lie down” can very much have connotations “to lie down and have sexual intercourse” (*HALOT*, 2:1487). The Lord is very clear in that He considers this behavior to be *toevah* (תּוֹעֵבָה) or an “abomination.” The severity of this act merits capital punishment.

The first major instance we see regarding homosexuality in the Torah concerns the men of Sodom wanting to burst into the home of Lot, and gang rape his angelic visitors:

“Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.’ But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, and said, ‘Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly’” (Genesis 19:4-7).

Here, the outcry of the men of Sodom is “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them” (NIV). The verb *yada* (יָדַע) or “to know” is used to describe this demand, and in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice) it can certainly mean “to know sexually, have intercourse with, **copulate**” (*HALOT*, 1:391). A similar instance is seen in Judges 19:22, clearly attesting that the Ancient Israelites encountered homosexual activities among the Canaanites:

“While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, ‘Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations [*yada*; ‘have sex,’ NIV] with him.’”

The Apostle Paul’s training in the morality of the Hebrew Tanach would certainly never allow him to accept homosexual intercourse or relationships as a valid practice for the faith community. Not only did it go against God’s intention at Creation for the man and woman to reproduce, but the examples seen in the Tanach of homosexual behavior often associate it with violence. From a First Century Jewish perspective, acceptance of any kind of homosexuality **was never an option**. Homosexuality was a perversion to be associated with the pagan Gentiles, and to say otherwise is to create an artificial world of the First Century Synagogue that never existed. James D.G. Dunn indicates,

“In the Greco-Roman world homosexuality was quite common and even highly regarded...It was a feature of social life, indulged in not least by the gods...and emperors...But Jewish reaction to it as a perversion, a pagan abomination, is consistent throughout the OT” (*Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 1-8*, Vol 38a, 65).

What is interesting about Paul, is that even though his declarations against homosexuality are firmly rooted within the Torah and Tanach—is that in writing to the Romans he makes use of some important classical terms that also describe the practice. He uses *tēn phusikēn* (τῆν φυσικῆν) to describe the “natural function” (NASU) or “natural relations” (RSV) between men and women. C.E.B. Cranfield concurs that by using this, “Paul clearly means ‘in accordance with the intention of the Creator’...For this appeal to ‘nature’ in the sense of the order manifest in the created world

compare 1 Cor 11:14, where ἡ φύσις αὐτῆ [hē phusis autē] might almost be translated ‘the very way God has made us’ (*International Critical Commentary: Romans 1-8*, pp 123-124). Dunn states that *phusis* (φύσις) “is not a Hebrew concept...The concept is primarily Greek, and typically Stoic—to live in harmony with the natural order and its divine rationality” (*WBC*, 38a:64). In writing to a predominantly non-Jewish audience in Rome, Paul feels at liberty to use terminology that they are familiar with to communicate the moral truths of God’s Torah.

Today among some liberal commentators *para phusin* (παρὰ φύσιν) or what is “against nature” is sometimes argued to not necessarily concern condemnation upon homosexuality. Instead, some suggest that Paul is speaking against heterosexuals engaged in unwarranted homosexuality, which would be contrary to one’s predetermined disposition. This view is intended to provide theological support for the concept that some are homosexual, and others are heterosexual, from the time of birth. With this in mind, rather than male or female homosexuality stemming as a result of man and woman’s fall and rejection of God, all that Paul is condemning is homosexual behavior on the part of heterosexuals, likely in the context of Roman temple prostitution or religious rites.

Furthermore, lexical support for the homosexual agenda may be provided as the preposition *para*, when joined with an accusative noun (indicating direct object) can mean “more than” or “rather than” (*CGEDNT*, 131). To soften the blow it is said, Paul is really just speaking about things “more than nature” or “rather than nature.” So from this angle, Paul certainly cannot be condemning two men or two women in a committed relationship—that just or simply “goes beyond” Creation’s purpose of a union resulting in childbearing. Yet this line of reasoning makes a severe and fatal flaw: it assumes that the term *para phusin* is used only by Paul, and has no parallels in ancient literature.

The Jewish historian Josephus employs *para phusin* to describe homosexual activities:

“[W]hat reason can there be why we should desire to imitate the laws of other nations, while we see they are not observed by their own legislators? And why do not the Lacedemonians [Spartans] think of abolishing that form of their government which suffers them not to associate with any others, as well as their contempt of matrimony? And why do not the Eleans and Thebans abolish that **unnatural** [*para phusin*] and impudent lust, **which makes them lie with males?**” (*Against Apion* 2.273).

“[T]he Greeks...ascribed...sodomitical practices to the gods themselves, as a part of their good character; and, indeed, it was according to the same manner that the gods married their own sisters. This the Greeks contrived as an apology for their own absurd and **unnatural** [*para phusin*] pleasures” (*Against Apion* 2.275).

In these two quotations from Josephus, he criticizes the homosexuality of the Spartans, and later how the Greek religion allowed for homosexual activities among their gods (as well as incest). *Para phusin* is used to describe these sinful acts.

The Jewish philosopher Philo also had a great disdain for homosexual activities, in describing the men of Sodom (*On Abraham* 133-141). His scathing words against them testify,

“As men, being unable to bear discreetly a satiety of these things, get restive like cattle, and become stiff-necked, and discard the laws of nature, pursuing a great and intemperate indulgence of gluttony, and drinking, and unlawful connections; for not only did they go mad after women, and defile the marriage bed of others, **but also those who were men lusted after one another**, doing unseemly things, and not regarding or respecting their common nature” (*On Abraham* 135).

Here, Philo expands the sins of the men of Sodom as first involving the rape of women, but later devolving into homosexual activities. He says that they had no regard for *ton tēs phuseōs nomon* (τὸν τῆς φύσεως νόμον) or “the laws of nature,” clearly being guided by a Torah ethic.

These examples from Josephus and Philo, of course, appear in the milieu of Hellenistic Jewish literature. They attest that *para phusin* or “against nature” clearly does relate to homosexual activities that were considered abominable in the sight of God. Many of the Jews in Rome would have known how the Diaspora Synagogue could have adopted “*para phusin*” to refer to such an

abominable Gentile sexual act. Yet, what really nails the coffin for those arguing that *para phusin* does not refer to homosexuality—is that *para phusin* was used in a classical context to refer to homosexuality, independent of its Jewish usage. Richard B. Hays remarks,

“There are abundant instances, both in the Greco-Roman moral philosophers and in literary texts, of the opposition between ‘natural’ (*kata physin*) and ‘unnatural’ (*para physin*) behavior...In particular, the opposition between ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ is very frequently used...as a way of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual behavior” (“Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1.” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 1 [1986]: 192).

Hays gives a variety of examples from classical literature, where *para phusin* is clearly used to refer to homosexuality:

“Plutarch has Daphnaeus, one of the speakers in his *Dialogue on Love*, disparage ‘union contrary to nature with males’ (*hē para physin homilia pros arrēnas*), as contrasted to ‘the love between men and women,’ which is characterized as ‘natural’ (*tē physei*). A few sentences later, Daphnaeus complains that those who ‘consort with males’ willingly are guilty of ‘weakness and effeminacy,’ because ‘contrary to nature (*para physin*);’ they ‘allow themselves in Plato’s words “to be covered and mounted like cattle”’ (*Dialogue on Love* 751C, E). Plutarch’s reference to Plato demonstrates the point that Paul did not originate the application of the *kata physin/para physin* dichotomy to heterosexual and homosexual behavior. Its common appearance in the writings of the Hellenistic moral philosophers is testimony to a convention which can be traced back at least as far as Plato (*Laws* I.636C), almost variably in contexts where a negative judgment is pronounced on the morality or propriety of the ‘unnatural’ homosexual relations” (Ibid., 193).

In Plato’s *Laws*, a defense of the Athenian style of life is seen when compared against that of the Spartans and Cretans. An Athenian is attested as saying,

“For instance, these gymnastic exercises and common meals, useful though they are to a state in many ways, are a danger of their encouragement in revolution...More especially, the very antiquity of these practices seems to have corrupted the natural pleasures of sex, which are common to man and beast. For these perversions, your two states may well be the first to be blamed, as well as others that make a particular point of gymnastic exercises. Circumstances may make you treat the subject either light-heartedly or seriously; in either case you ought to bear in mind that when male and female come together in order to have a child, the pleasure they experience seems to arise entirely naturally. But homosexual intercourse and lesbianism seem to be unnatural crimes of the first rank, and are committed because men and women cannot control their desire for pleasure” (*The Laws*, 1.636c; trans. Trevor J. Saunders [London: Penguin Books, 1970], pp 18-19).

Here, we have some direct attestations about how *para phusin* was used among classical philosophers to refer to homosexuality, and even how perverse these pagan philosophers considered the practice. These Hellenistic witnesses agree that male and female homosexuality were viewed as being forbidden and taboo.

The Apostle Paul’s Jewish training and high regard for the Torah of Moses would never have permitted him to concede that homosexuality was anything less than an abomination. Furthermore, the attestation that *para phusin* or “against nature” is used in classical literature to refer to homosexuality—and that the Jewish Paul and Greek philosophers **actually agree on its perverseness**—strengthens the case against it, and surely does not weaken it. The propagation of homosexual activity is a rejection of God’s will for man and woman to procreate, and one of the human principal acts of rebellion against His authority to be equated as idolatry against Him as an act of self-worship.

Those who would argue that *para phusin* can mean something other than “against nature”—and not be a direct reference to homosexuality—have committed extreme eisegetical error. They have read a modern social situation into an ancient text, and have ignored sound hermeneutical skills. Not only have advocates of the homosexual agenda severely misapplied Romans 1:26-27, but they have created an artificial construct by which to at best allow (as seen in

the errant translations “more than nature” or “rather than nature”), and at worst actually condone, homosexual intercourse and relationships (the majority of which are not “monogamous”).

The larger issue that is asked of us as Believers in Yeshua, particularly as it concerns gays and lesbians today, is that although their actions are clearly opposed by Scripture—how do we treat them as fellow human beings? In Romans 1:26-27 Paul neither asks nor answers the question how a Believer is to specifically regard a homosexual man or woman. Kaiser’s thoughts are well taken:

“Homosexuality must be listed as a sexual perversion, a defilement of a country in which it is practiced, and an abomination in God’s eyes. Anything less than this is a form of specious reasoning. It is a sin that must be dealt with as any other sin even though the gospel also offers freedom, forgiveness, and healing from this sin as from any other—or it is no gospel at all” (*Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 197).

Indeed, Yeshua’s declaration to those in His home synagogue at Nazareth speak volumes to this problem:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18, ESV; cf. Isaiah 61:1).

Witherington is one who thinks that in Romans 1:26-27, “Paul speaks of actions, not inclinations, attitudes or genetics” (*Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Historical Commentary*, 69). Yet, the person who thinks about homosexual acts is just as guilty as the one “who looks at a woman with lust for her [and who] has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). Many people engulfed in the sin of homosexuality, no different than those engulfed in heterosexual adultery, are looking for acceptance and love. Homosexuals are those who have been unable to find any kind of acceptance or love among the opposite gender, and so they look to their own gender to find it. Certainly while Paul considers the actions of homosexuality to be unacceptable; the thoughts of homosexuality are equally as unacceptable. Paul states that such people will receive “the appropriate penalty for their perversion” (HCSB).

The transforming power of the Messiah Yeshua to not only proclaim the good news of His Kingdom, but also the proclamation of liberty to captives and the oppressed, can release people from the power of homosexuality. Only when a homosexual person recognizes the sinfulness of his or her act, confesses of such sin, and then asks for God’s transforming power to change him or her—can *His overwhelming love* engulf that person in the acceptance that was sought via homosexuality. But this acceptance is unconditional, it is restorative, and it goes above and beyond what any kind of sexual act can bring. It is the love of our Heavenly Father toward a child that has returned to Him and His desiring to live by His original intention at Creation. We must be there as His representatives and ambassadors—the Body of Messiah (Him working through us)—to offer the freedom from bondage that only Yeshua provides.

The issue of homosexuality is not going away anytime soon, especially with the homosexual agenda and political bloc for gay rights that have emerged on the world scene. Today, many Christian denominations are dividing over this issue. Many evangelicals are greatly concerned that a firm Biblical ethic is being tossed out the window in favor of extreme compromise with sin. As many evangelicals leave their denominations, this is where only the emerging Messianic movement in the future can offer a valid **and more consistent** theological perspective given our high view of the Torah. In the future, we could actually see ourselves significantly swell in numbers. Yet in order to do this, we must become a more stable and mature spiritual movement, and engage more with the world as God’s Word does indeed have answers for those in bondage!

(Other Pauline passages that reference homosexuality, that are worthy of further consideration on your behalf, include: 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.)

posted 10 January, 2008

Romans 10:4: I am confused. How can you say that the Law of Moses is still to be followed today when Paul himself says that “Christ is the end of the Law”?

“For Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4, NASU).

Many believe that Romans 10:4 is definitive evidence that the Torah is no longer to be followed. The claim that “Christ is the end of the Law” is quite frequent in discussions between Christians and Messianics relating to the position that the Law of Moses plays, or does not play, in the lives of Believers today. In fact, the Contemporary English Version translates Romans 10:4 with, “But Christ makes the Law no longer necessary.” Is this what Paul is really saying in Romans 10:4? Is the Apostle who in Romans 3:31 says that we are to “establish” or “uphold the law” (RSV, NIV), and who in Romans 7:12 says that “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good,” and who in Romans 7:14 says “the Law is spiritual,” and who even says in Romans 7:22 “I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,” suddenly saying that the Law of Moses is of no value? And, would this not again contradict the Messiah’s words in Matthew 5:17-19 about the Torah not passing away?

If one were to only examine the English text of this verse, it would seem that some have a legitimate claim against us who believe that the Torah should still be followed today. Many Christians would eagerly point out the word “end” and say, “Jesus Christ terminated the Law of Moses.” But even this is a stretch for the English language. *Webster’s Intermediate Dictionary*, designed, as clearly printed on its cover, “for young teenagers,” provides one critical definition for “end,” that can go overlooked even by the most well-trained seminary professor. This definition of the English word “end” is “the goal toward which an agent acts or should act” (p 245). In the English language alone is an available definition of “end” that does not mean “termination” or “abolishment.”

We should not be surprised that the Greek word *telos* (τέλος) too has a wider connotation of definitions not limited to “end.” A critical definition of *telos* provided by *BDAG* includes, “**the goal toward which a movement is being directed, end, goal, outcome**” (p 998). *Thayer* offers us the definition, “*The end to which all things relate, the aim, purpose*” (p 620). *Vine* says that it can mean “‘the aim or purpose’ of a thing” (p 199), and *CGEDNT* provides the definition “*outcome, result, goal, aim, fulfillment*” (p 180). Perhaps most importantly, *AMG* remarks that *telos* “does not, as is often supposed, mean the extinction, end or termination...It simply means the goal reached” (p 1376). The English word “teleology” derives from *telos*, which the *World Book Dictionary* defines as “the fact or quality of being purposeful.”

It would not be wrong by any means to translate Romans 10:4 as “Christ is the goal of the Law” or “Christ is the aim of the Law” or “Christ is the purpose of the Law.” It all depends on one’s theological presuppositional bias. If one’s theological bias is that the Messiah abolished the Torah, then Scripture will be translated accordingly. If one’s theological bias is that the Messiah fulfilled the Torah and showed us how to live it correctly so that we might properly obey God, likewise Scripture will be translated accordingly. Romans 10:4 is a very clear-cut example of this. It should be no surprise to us then that a footnote exists in the Contemporary English Version for Romans 10:4 that says, “Or ‘But Christ gives the full meaning to the Law.’”

What is Paul trying to really say in Romans 10:4? The Complete Jewish Bible renders this verse as, “For the goal at which the *Torah* aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts.” In Romans ch. 10, Paul is discussing the salvation message and how it is related to God’s commandments. He is telling us that coming to faith in the Messiah is indeed the resultant end or *telos*, the consummation at which the Torah reaches. He is not telling us that Yeshua terminated the Law, as Romans 10:4 is so commonly misinterpreted. The purpose of the Torah, and indeed all of Scripture, is that it must point to our need for a Savior. As we see that as human beings we are incapable of keeping God’s commandments perfectly, and we see that we fall short of His high standard, we must be convicted of our sin, cry out in repentance before God,

and receive the forgiveness that He offers. The Torah is to always show us the need for a Redeemer, and the fact that we need salvation.

The NIV translates Romans 10:4 with the all too common “Christ is the end of the law.” But a very interesting footnote exists in the *NIV Study Bible* which says, “Although the Greek for ‘end’ (*telos*) can mean either (1) ‘termination,’ ‘cessation,’ or (2) ‘goal,’ ‘culmination,’ ‘fulfillment,’ it seems best here to understand it in the latter sense” (p 971). This commentary from a widely used Christian study Bible seems to recognize the validity of the Torah. But the commentary goes even further, surprisingly stating, “Christ is the fulfillment of the law...in the sense that he brought it to its completion by obeying perfectly its demands and by fulfilling its types and prophecies. Christians are no longer ‘under law’...since Christ has freed them from its condemnation, but the law still plays a role in their lives” (Ibid.). This commentary, from a source that you would consider to be anything but “pro-Torah,” essentially confirms what we are saying. The Messiah is the goal, aim, or purpose of the Torah, and born again Believers are not “under the Law” because we are freed from its penalties.

(This entry includes adapted excerpts from the editor’s book *The New Testament Validates Torah*. Also consult his article “Is Messiah the Termination of the Torah?”)

posted 07 June 2006

Rosh HaShanah: Why does the Jewish community call *Yom Teruah* “Rosh HaShanah”? I thought the Biblical New Year began in the Spring.

For many people in the independent Messianic movement, Exodus 12:2 settles the matter: “This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you,” speaking of the month of Aviv (Exodus 13:4). Thus it is said that the worldwide Jewish Synagogue has been in error for millennia about designating the festival commanded in Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6 as “*Rosh HaShanah*,” and remembering the first of Tishri as the Civil New Year:

“Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD”’” (Leviticus 23:23-25).

“Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for blowing trumpets. You shall offer a burnt offering as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, and seven male lambs one year old without defect; also their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. Offer one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you, besides the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD” (Numbers 29:1-6).

Those dismissing the Jewish custom of celebrating *Rosh HaShanah* at this time note that there is no reference to any kind of new year in either passage. All it speaks of is a *zikron teruah* (זִכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה) or “a memorial (of) blowing” occurring in the seventh month. They feel justified at referring to this appointed time exclusively as *Yom Teruah* (יוֹם תְּרוּעָה), and then criticizing anyone who follows the *halachic* lead of the Synagogue.

The issue regarding *Rosh HaShanah* (רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה) would not be an issue at all (along with many others) if it were not for the large numbers of non-Jewish Messianic Believers that have swelled the Messianic movement over the past 10-12 years. These are people who often misunderstand Jewish tradition. Respectfully, rather than investigate a Jewish tradition in a sensitive manner with an attempt to understand it, many just dismiss it without any adequate understanding of how it came to be. This often follows with harsh attitudes and disdain for things that are just classified as “vain traditions of men,” sometimes without any strong factual basis. Such

is clearly the case with *Rosh HaShanah*—as little if any attempt has been made to carefully weigh all of the opinions. (For a further examination as to how this has specifically manifested itself, consult the editor's article "**Anti-Semitism in the Two-House Movement.**") It is, unfortunately, difficult for many non-Jewish Messianics in the independent Messianic movement to realize that the Jewish people have been given the scepter of leadership (Genesis 49:10), that they possess the oracles of God or the explanations on how the Torah is to be followed (Romans 3:2; 9:4), and that Yeshua Himself directed us to follow the lead of the Pharisees in matters of Torah application (Matthew 23:2-3). And the Pharisaism of the Apostle Paul is often not even realized (Acts 23:6). These factors, however, when properly considered should make us wonder why the independent Messianic movement does not follow a style of Torah observance more like its Messianic Jewish counterpart and the mainline Conservative and/or Reform Synagogue.

The argument against *Rosh HaShanah* that is commonly made, to paraphrase what is often said, is that "The Rabbis were deceived by a blast from Babylon. The Civil New Year is based on Babylonian practices, and is now a misunderstanding present among Judah. We must leave such Babylonianism at the door."

Most would be unaware of the fact that saying *Rosh HaShanah* was picked up by the Jewish exiles in Babylon is actually quite dangerous, not knowing the school of Biblical scholarship that supports it. The Messianic Torah teachers of today are largely not equipped with knowing anything about German Higher Criticism and the considerable damage it has caused to Jewish and Christian Biblical Studies over the past two centuries. *If they actually did know about it*, then the rhetoric we are witnessing against *Rosh HaShanah* would not be able to pass. The critical tradition advocates that the Torah was not at all written by Moses or scribes under his direction, but instead was written entirely *after* the Babylonian exile. The Torah is believed to be a compiled document of a series of disparate witnesses that they attribute to the J writer or Yahwist, E writer or Elohist, the Priestly writer, and the Deuteronomist (see the FAQ entries on the composition of the Pentateuchal books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy for more details, and Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* [Jerusalem and New York: Shalem Press, 2006] for a Jewish refutation of it).

The sources that make up the Pentateuch in this schema can be determined by the usage of certain Divine names such as YHWH or Elohim, cultic material that would relate to the priests of Israel, and then the Book of Deuteronomy as a "pious fraud" written during the time of the Josianic reforms (cf. 2 Kings 22-23). In this case, information from Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6 would be viewed as originating from the Priestly writer, set against information from Exodus coming from J and/or E, and then the earliest data in D which would have said nothing of a *Yom Teruah* or *Rosh HaShanah* (cf. Deuteronomy 16:1-17). Yet if Moses is the principal writer of the Torah, as affirmed by both Yeshua and His Disciples (Mark 12:26; Luke 24:27; John 1:45; 5:46; Romans 10:5; 2 Corinthians 3:15), then some theological synthesis needs to take place between these so-called disparate witnesses within the Torah.

How does this all relate to hastily judging the Synagogue's observance of *Rosh HaShanah* as the Civil New Year? Messianic teachers who dismiss *Rosh HaShanah* as a legitimate observance are often forced to turn to literature that is affected by the JEDP documentary hypothesis—while in gross ignorance not even realizing it! Many would, for example, turn to a short quote in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* on "Rosh Ha-Shanah," which says in "the post-Exilic period...the Babylonian influences had become particularly pronounced." There you have it, *Rosh HaShanah* was picked up in Babylon, right? Unfortunately, many such teachers would exclude the surrounding sentences from their quotation, perhaps disregarding some of the information provided as just theological gobbledygook:

"In the critical view, the Pentateuchal legislation in which the festival appears belongs to the Priestly Code (P) and, therefore, to **the post-Exilic period, when the Babylonian influences had become particularly pronounced.** The older critical views consider the whole institution to be post-Exilic, pointing out, for instance, that there is no reference to it in the lists of the feasts of Deuteronomy (16:1-17)" (Louis Jacobs, "Rosh Ha-Shanah," in *EJ*).

Here, the view is that the festival codified in Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6—*regardless of what one calls it*—is a part of P, a source for the Torah that was compiled after the Babylonian exile. The belief that *Rosh HaShanah* was, in fact, something that the Jewish exiles picked up in Babylon is actually rooted in a theological tradition that denies any Mosaic involvement with the composition of the Torah—and more than anything else also severely denies the Torah’s historicity and reliability, **treating the Torah as little more than Ancient Israel’s mythology.**

While various non-Jewish Messianics might (foolishly) be willing to quote such critical scholars to refute what they perceive to be the errant Jewish practice of *Rosh HaShanah*, what else do those same scholars tell us the Jewish exiles “picked up” in Babylon? Well, they tell us that things such as the Flood of Genesis 6-8 and the Creation accounts of Genesis 1-3 are Ancient Israel’s redactions of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Enuma Elish, and Atrahasis—adaptations of pagan mythology into its own Scriptures! A poignant example would be the *Jewish Study Bible’s* liberal comments on Genesis 6: “The flood narrative that ensues, [is] a characteristically Israelite adaptation of a well-known and widespread Mesopotamian story” (Jon D. Levenson, “Genesis,” p 21).

Rather than considering the thoughts of those who believe that the early parts of the Bible—and consequently *all* of the instruction seen in Leviticus 23—are Ancient Israel’s mythology, we need to consider the Jewish theological justification for what *Rosh HaShanah* actually is.

The Rabbinical argument in favor of *Rosh HaShanah* being the Civil New Year is how *Rosh HaShanah* is connected to the later holiday of *Yom Kippur*, occurring ten days later. *Yom Kippur* is the Day of Atonement, and consequently also the eschatological time of humanity’s final judgment. The Civil New Year is celebrated on *Rosh HaShanah*, ten days previously, because it is believed that the judgment of humanity will likely take place during the same time of year as the creation of humanity. After the instruction of *Aviv* being the first of the year (Exodus 13:4), some conflicting information does—at least on the surface—appear in Exodus:

“Also *you shall observe* the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in *the fruit of your labors from the field*” (Exodus 23:16).

“You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, *that is*, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year” (Exodus 34:22).

Both of these verses speak of the commemoration of *Sukkot* “at the end of the year” or *b'tzet ha'shanah* (בְּצֵאת הַשָּׁנָה), and “at the turn of the year” or *tiqufat ha'shanah* (תִּקְוַת הַשָּׁנָה). This represents some kind of changing of the year in the Fall, and not in the Spring. Do the contradictions between Exodus 13:4, and later Exodus 23:16 and 34:22, appear because one set of commandments comes from P, and another comes from J and/or E, with D saying nothing on the matter? Or if all of these commandments came from Moses, have those criticizing *Rosh HaShanah* missed something and drawn some inappropriate conclusions?

Also to be considered is Ezekiel 40:1, when the Prophet is shown his visions from God: “In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there.” All interpreters are agreed that this vision was shown ten days after “the beginning of the year” or what the text clearly indicates as *b'Rosh HaShanah* (בְּרִאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה). **Either this was on the 10th of Aviv, a date with no particular significance, or this was on the 10th of Tishri, Yom Kippur (Leviticus 23:27).** The latter is the traditional view (b.*Arachin* 12a), and Ezekiel being shown his vision on *Yom Kippur* fits much more in line with the promise of restoration from exile.

It is very true that the first of Aviv/Nisan designates some kind of new year in the Spring, but it is equally true that there are different witnesses in the Tanach that point to a new year at a later time such as in the Fall. To act as though the Sages, Rabbis, and Jewish people have somehow been blind to this for millennia—and now it is time for us to correct them—is at the

very least not a very constructive attitude. It is one that is not open to learning why the Synagogue has designated the first of Tishri as *Rosh HaShanah*. In fact, the Mishnah indicates the view that there are four new years to be reckoned with as seen in the cycles of Scripture, as the tractate *Rosh HaShanah* begins by saying,

“There are four new years: (1) the first day of Nisan is the new year for kings and festivals; (2) the first day of Elul is the new year for tithing cattle. R. Eleazar and R. Simeon say, ‘It is on the first day of Tishre.’ (3) The first day of Tishre is the new year for the reckoning of years, for Sabbatical years, and for Jubilees, for planting [trees] and for vegetables; (4) for the first day of Shebat is the new year for trees, in accord with the opinion of the House of Shammai. The House of Hillel say, ‘On the fifteenth of that month [is the new year for trees]’ (m.*Rosh HaShanah* 1:1).

It is quite surprising for Messianics to see that there are no recorded statements in the Apostolic Scriptures about either Yeshua or His Apostles observing *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah*. This lack of data does not mean that they did not know about it, or that they did not keep it. But what it does mean is that we have to read between the lines regarding how they would observe this day were they living among us today. The closest that we can actually get is Paul’s defense before Festus in Acts 25:8 where he says “I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.” Considering the broad categories listed here by Luke, *ton nomon tōn Ioudaiōn* (τὸν νόμον τῶν Ἰουδαίων) or “the Law of the Jews” would be best considered as involving *both* the Written Torah and whatever significant customs went along with it normative to Paul’s Pharisaism (cf. Acts 22:3).

What this all points us to is that we must see how this sacred day was followed in the Second Temple period. In fact, what we see is that it was observed as *Rosh HaShanah* (cf. “Rosh Hashanah,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 536), something which has been carried on faithfully in today’s Synagogue. To find out what some of those significant customs were, that the Apostle Paul would not have committed an offense against as part of “the Law of the Jews,” the Messianic community can start reading at Mishnah *Rosh HaShanah* 1:2: “at the New Year all who enter the world pass before Him like troops, since it is said, *He who fashions the hearts of them all, who considers all their works* (Ps. 33:15).” **It is not at all inappropriate for the Messianic movement to celebrate *Rosh HaShanah* along with the worldwide Jewish community.**

In the Synagogue today, *Rosh HaShanah* is considered to be a very serious occasion calling people to *Yom Kippur*, occurring ten days later. J.H. Hertz indicates, “unlike the New Year celebrations of many ancient and modern nations, the Jewish New Year is not a time of revelry, but an occasion of the deepest religious import” (*Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, 522). He further goes on to say how the *shofar* (שׁוֹפָר) is blown, and what it is intended to call the people for:

“The sound of the Shofar, consisting, as handed down by Tradition, of three distinctive Shofar-notes—tekiah, shevarim, teruah—has been looked upon from time immemorial as a call to contrition and penitence, as a reminder of the Shofar-sound of Sinai; and the Day of Memorial, the beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance (עֲשֵׂרֵת יָמֵי תְשׁוּבָה), which culminate in the Day of Atonement, as a time of self-examination and humble petition for forgiveness” (Ibid.).

Rosh HaShanah being a call to self-examination, prayer, and repentance is to be contrasted against the new year celebrations of the Ancient Near East, involving great pomp and circumstance:

“New Year’s festivals in the ancient Near East included a number of similar elements—processions of the king and the deities, intricate sacrifices, prayers, rites of purification and cleansing of the temple, and celebrations to commemorate the overcoming of chaos and restoration of order. In the Ugaritic literature, the myth of the death and resurrection of Baal, as a fertility god, celebrating his triumph over Mot and the building of his palace, has been connected to the autumn New Year festivities in Canaan. In Egyptian New Year rituals at the temple of Edfu, the statue of the god Horus was removed from his temple and exposed to the rays of the sun to reunite his body with his soul. The Babylonian *akītu* festival, which became the most important religious and political celebration in Mesopotamian history, also involved complex and elaborate rituals...” (Julye Bidmead, “New Year,” in *EDB*, 963).

The Synagogue's commemoration of *Rosh HaShanah* in the Fall *by no means* parallels the kinds of contemporary celebrations that would have taken place in the ANE. *Rosh HaShanah* is to be a very contemplative time of reflection as one prepares for *Yom Kippur*. When sacrifices were offered in the Temple, they were done in accordance with specific instructions delivered by God through Moses, and not P. It is not a time when one pops open a bottle of champagne and celebrates the coming of another year. Yet when we consider some of the ANE new year's practices and compare them to many of the *Yom Teruah* commemorations that occur in some of today's Messianic congregations—is there more commonality between the revelry and partying of Canaan, Egypt, and Mesopotamia and such assemblies, or the prayer and piety of the Synagogue? Which style of commemoration would be more likely to encourage greater holiness among God's people? Which is a *miqra qodesh* (מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ) or “holy convocation” (Numbers 29:1)?

Based on some of the customs that have arisen in the past decade or so regarding the various “*Yom Teruah*” commemorations seen in the independent Messianic movement—a return to the Jewish practice of *Rosh HaShanah* should be in order. *Rosh HaShanah* was not just “picked up” in Babylon by the Jewish exiles, unless of course we are prepared to believe that most of the Torah, save the “pious fraud” of Deuteronomy, also came from Babylon. But what has happened more than anything else, is that the reverent day that *Rosh HaShanah* is in the Synagogue has been almost entirely forgotten by many Messianics. And as it has been observed in both the Synagogue and Church of today, getting a rabbi or pastor to encourage reverence for God in his people is probably the most difficult thing he has to do.

Some of the things that the editor will be encouraging and working for in the years ahead, so that *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah* can return to being the holy time that it is in the Synagogue, include:

- Only blowing the *shofar* at the designated times on *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, as opposed to indiscriminately blowing it not just any time on only these two dates, but any time throughout the year. The sound of the *shofar* is to be a sacred sound that has lost much of its significance over the past 10-12 years as it is blown far too frequently in the Messianic movement, becoming a quite common sound akin to “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1).
- Restoring the silver trumpets to being the Tabernacle/Temple vessels that they are, to be used only for the purpose of service in the Levitical priesthood no different than the Ark of the Covenant. These are vessels that are not used in the traditional Synagogue, but are used in various independent Messianic assemblies, contrary to standing *halachah*.
- Letting *Rosh HaShanah* be a very sacred and sober time of being called to the Ten Days of Awe toward *Yom Kippur*, where Believers are called to personal and corporate repentance, and intercessory prayer for our Messianic faith community, Israel and the Jewish people, and the salvation of the world.

The fruits of dismissing the Jewish traditions associated with *Rosh HaShanah*, as brought on by many of today's “*Yom Teruah*” commemorations in the independent Messianic movement, do speak for themselves. No stability of any kind has been brought to our faith community by summarily disregarding our Jewish spiritual heritage in this area, and non-Jewish Believers going along have not performed their job well of provoking our Jewish brethren to jealousy for faith in the Messiah (Romans 11:11). If anything, new and unnecessary barriers have been placed between the Messianic movement and the Jewish Synagogue that need not be there. And worse enough, Christians who know a few things about *Rosh HaShanah* and the important themes associated with it have not exactly been interested in the Messianic movement, either, as a result of what has been allowed to transpire.

As many begin to see that they have been hoodwinked into thinking that *Rosh HaShanah* was something that “Judah picked up in Babylon,” we will no doubt begin to see a return to a Messianic style of orthopraxy not that unlike the Conservative or Reform Synagogue in the next

10-12 years. The independent Messianic movement will basically parallel the practices of its Messianic Jewish counterpart. *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah* can again be a time of serious spiritual reflection, as we are called into a specific season where we can “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12)—turning to Yeshua for our salvation and any deliverance or unfinished spiritual business that is required.

(For a further summary of the traditions commonly associated with *Rosh HaShanah*, consult Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, pp 184-204.)

posted 22 September, 2008

Ruth, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Ruth?

Approximate date: between 950-700 B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate); 586-500 or 400s-250s B.C.E. (Left)

Author: Samuel (Right); Israel's court historians (conservative-moderate); an unknown person from the Southern Kingdom (Left)

Location of author: Land of Israel before or during the monarchy (Right, conservative-moderate); Land of Israel after the exile (Left)

Target audience and their location: people of Israel before, during, or immediately after the reign of David (Right, conservative-moderate); Jewish people having returned from Babylon (Left)

Readers of the Book of Ruth almost immediately can recognize it for what it is as a great account of human kindness (*IDB*, 4:131), as God uses people faithful to Him to accomplish restoration. Christian tradition, following the book order of the Greek Septuagint, places Ruth immediately after Judges. This was apparently something also followed by the First Century historian Josephus (Harrison, 1063), making Ruth an extended narrative as a part of the histories. In Jewish tradition Ruth is placed among the Writings, specifically among the five *Megillot* (*IDB*, 4:134; *NBCR*, 278; *ISBE*, 4:423; *ABD*, 5:846). The Book of Ruth is not placed in this later part of the Scriptures to demean women, but because it is used for special holiday readings. Ruth is frequently read at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, partly because of the belief that King David was born and died at this time (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1579).

The name of this text is for Ruth (Heb. *Rut*, רות), a young Moabite woman, who would become the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Yeshua the Messiah (4:21-22; Matthew 1:1, 5; cf. *IDB*, 1:131). Even though this book is named for Ruth, the principal character is actually the Israelite widow Naomi, who is forced to move to Moab during a time of famine in the Land of Israel. The events that Ruth portrays occur during the time of the Judges (1:1), and actually take place during a time of relative peace between Israel and the Moabites. The story of Ruth gives us a glimpse into an Israelite family during this period, and how various women must fare on their own (*ABD*, 5:845).

Jewish tradition in the Talmud points to Samuel being the author of Ruth (b.*Bava Batra* 14b), even though there is significant justification to doubt this because of the mentioning of King David at the end of the text (4:17, 22). Most conservatives today consider Ruth to be an anonymous book (*NIDB*, 875; *ISBE*, 4:423), which means that its composition should likely be placed at the feet of Israel's court historians. “There is nothing in the Book of Ruth itself that helps us to identify the author. All we can say is that he was a literary artist and skillful teacher” (*EXP*, 3:510).

Conservatives affirm that the style of Hebrew used in Ruth points to a composition time sometime during the monarchy. Many conservatives prefer to place it immediately prior to, or during the reign of King David (Harrison, 1060; *NBCR*, 277; *NIDB*, 875; *ISBE*, 4:244; *EXP*, 3:511), perhaps a century after Ruth actually lived (*NBCR*, 278). Some, however, argue for a later date during the monarchy after the death of David (*ISBE*, 4:244; Dillard and Longman, 131). The presumed audience of Ruth needed to know about the various times in Israel's history and the faithfulness of a few during a period of extreme unrest and moral depravity.

Liberals often consider the Book of Ruth to have been compiled after the Babylonian exile. While liberal views are not uniform, a few consider it to be a cult-myth from the Ancient Near East adopted by the Ancient Israelites (*ABD*, 5:843). Others consider Ruth to be an ahistorical novel, believing that many potentially unpleasant elements have been removed from the story, making it exactly that—a story (*NBCR*, 277). Most liberals consider Ruth to have been written during the Fifth-Fourth Centuries B.C.E., or even as late as the Third Century B.C.E. (*IDB*, 4:132, 133), as a protest to the Israelite intermarriage going on during the period of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Liberals will frequently argue that an archaic style of Hebrew has been deliberately imported into the text by Ruth's author (*IDB*, 4:132), but this has been refuted on historical grounds by many conservatives (Harrison, 1060-1061; *EXP*, 3:511; Dillard and Longman, 130). Some liberals, surprisingly, in response to this evidence have been reverting to an earlier date for Ruth: "all of the old 'evidence' has shown itself to be quite indecisive...a story of a Moabite background for David must antedate the 'transfigured' picture of David in the days of the Chronicler and even the era of the royal psalms. Accordingly, perhaps all that can be said is that such evidence as does exist points to a date in the monarchic period, and more likely the earlier part of it" (*IDBSup*, 759).

Of course, the biggest problem with the liberal view of Ruth is the belief that it does not portray any valid historical events, or the lives of people who actually existed. Is the story of Ruth too idealistic? Do we have substantial reasons to doubt the historicity of what it portrays—or must we consider the author's purpose for composing it (*EXP*, 3:510)? Interestingly enough, there are some liberals who want to affirm some historicity of Ruth because of the centrality of women in the story (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1578), including the possibility of a female author (*ABD*, 5:843).

Our present textual witnesses of Ruth in their Hebrew form are relatively strong. The MT and LXX generally conform to one another, with a few variants present among the DSS (Harrison; 1063-1064; *EXP*, 3:514; *ABD*, 5:843).

In the story of Ruth, we see the principal female protagonist, Naomi, having to move to Moab because of a famine in Israel. While in Moab, her two sons take Moabite wives. Ruth is one of those wives. Naomi and Ruth become widowed, and Ruth as a Moabite joins herself to the God of Israel and selflessly devotes herself to Naomi (1:16-17; 2:11-12; 3:10; 4:15). In the course of the story, they return to the Land of Israel and encounter a well-to-do Israelite named Boaz. Boaz demonstrates great kindness to both of these women (chs. 2-4), and is able to bring restoration to what they have lost, ultimately marrying Ruth.

The principal characters in Ruth all fulfill the Torah's command to love (Leviticus 19:18; cf. Romans 13:10), and are blessed by God in the process. Ruth is wholeheartedly accepted into an Israelite family. Some theologians have compared the kindness of Ruth toward Naomi to the kindness shown by the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 (*New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 383).

Ruth is a very short story, and as such it is told quickly. It often has a very wide appeal to Bible readers because many are able to easily identify with the human interests that it portrays (Harrison, 1059; *NBCR*, 277). Many form critics have compared Ruth to being an ancient *novella* (*IDBSup*, 758; *EXP*, 3:512; *ABD*, 5:843), noting its high literary composition.

The principal theme of the Book of Ruth is undeniably redemption and God's faithfulness through trial. This is something that we see all throughout the history of Ancient Israel. In spite of the terrible wickedness around them, the family unit portrayed in Ruth is faithful to God. "No one can be called evil in the book of Ruth" (Dillard and Longman, 129). The redemption that we see in Ruth largely relates to the restoration of those things that people have lost such as family members, property, and/or prestige (*New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 383). Ruth is absolutely portrayed as an appropriate ancestor for both King David and Yeshua the Messiah.

In Ruth's story of redemption, we see how God often works behind the scenes via the generosity of others (*IDBSup*, 785; *ABD*, 5:845; *Jewish Study Bible*, 1579). "It is through this subtlety that the book instructs its readers concerning God's ongoing work in the life of ordinary people" (Dillard and Longman, 133). We see how God can use those who are faithful to Him to bring

salvation to others—even those outside of the presumed community of faith (*NIDB*, 875; *ISBE*, 4:245). Some have even referred to the text as a “messianic history” (Dillard and Longman, 134).

On its own terms, Ruth is a very moving story, but knowing that Ruth was a progenitor of David and ultimately Yeshua Himself makes it an even more important stage to consider in the progressive plan of God (*Ibid.*) Ruth portrays for us the significant theological concept of the kinsman-redeemer or *go'el* (גוֹאֵל), something that we often lose in English translation (*NBCR*, 278).

Many in today’s Messianic community examine the Book of Ruth at some time during the year, often during the festival of *Shavuot*. Ruth has a message that remains true for anyone who reads it at any time: God’s faithfulness during times of trial. It encourages us today to be welcoming of anyone who comes into the fold, Jewish or not, and consider them as full-fledged members of the community of Israel. Ruth portrays an example of how we should have godly homes and families that are faithful to the Lord and His ways—and most importantly how we should love. It should also cause us to consider the valued role of women in the community of faith.

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