

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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updated 26 February, 2010 www.tnnonline.net

### **Talmud:** What is your position concerning the Talmud?

The two Talmuds, the Babylonian Talmud and the smaller Jerusalem Talmud, both compose several centuries of Rabbinic gemara or commentary on the Mishnah. The Mishnah was composed by approximately 200 C.E. and makes up what is considered to be the Oral Torah. According to Jewish tradition, two Torahs were given to Moses on Mount Sinai: the Written Torah (the Pentateuch or Chumash), as well as the Oral Torah or explanations on how to perform the Written Torah's commandments. In Orthodox Judaism today, both the Written Torah and Oral Torah hold equal status. In non-Orthodox Judaisms, they comprise the basis of Jewish custom and tradition.

The overall Messianic position on the Talmud varies from congregation to congregation. Many agree that the Oral Torah should be given an equal footing with the Written Torah. Others want nothing to do with the Oral Torah and believe that only the Written Torah should be followed. Then again, there are many who fall somewhere in between, recognizing the primacy of the Written Torah, but not discounting the customs and traditions that the Oral Torah represents. This group would recognize that the Mishnah and Talmud contain the "oracles of God" (Romans 3:2), but would urge that we also look for what is spiritually edifying in them employing proper discernment, casting aside those things that clearly are not good (Philippians 4:8).

We would not elevate the Oral Torah or Oral Law over the Written Torah or Pentateuch (what is contained in Genesis-Deuteronomy), but believe that it is a mistake to totally cast it aside. The Mishnah and Talmud, in particular, are valuable sources of commentary, historical data, and spiritually edifying material. They are perfectly valid to use as secondary resources to supplement one's understanding of the Bible. At the same time, the Mishnah and Talmuds are also broad-sweeping collections of literature, so one should expect (particularly with the Talmud) there to be some internal inconsistencies and differences of opinion among Rabbis.

The easiest way to employ the Talmud in your Bible study is to note Talmudic references in a technical commentary as you examine the text verse-by-verse. Some ecumenical study Bibles like the *Jewish Study Bible* or *New Interpreter's Study Bible* have Talmudic references sprinkled in their commentary. The most popular English edition available is the Soncino Talmud. Judaic scholar Jacob Neusner has also edited his own modern English version.

updated 21 August, 2006

### **Tanakh/Tanach:** I have seen you use the term Tanakh/Tanach. What does this term mean?

Tanach (תנ"ך), also commonly spelled as Tanakh, is a composite Hebrew term for *Torah* (the Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). Messianic Believers prefer the term Tanach (Tanakh) rather than using the term "Old Testament," because the term "Old Testament" often brings with it thoughts of these Scriptures being old and outdated. If anything, when the term "Old Testament" is used in writing or speaking, it is only done so for the familiarity of others who are unfamiliar with the term Tanach.

updated 23 November, 2006

### **Technology, Effect on Torah Observance:** Do you believe that the evolution of technology should influence our application of the Torah?

There are actually three important factors that we need to consider today when we apply the Torah: (1) technology, (2) culture, and (3) economy. The Written Torah was originally given to Moses approximately 3,300 years ago at the base of Mount Sinai. Even in the Biblical world we see changing dynamics that indicate that the Torah as it was originally given to Israel cannot be kept. As Israel evolved into a Kingdom and into a foreign power, the Torah had to be applied differently. Things regarding the sacrificial system had to be modified when the Temple was

constructed in Jerusalem, as the commandments were originally given concerning a Tabernacle that was portable. Following the end of the Babylonian exile, the Jews who returned lived in a land along with the Samaritans, and by the time of the First Century almost two-thirds of the entire Jewish community was living in the Diaspora. Major centers of Diaspora Jewry were established in Alexandria, Antioch, Corinth, and even Rome. When we see the teachings of Yeshua the Messiah and the Apostles, their view of the Torah is most certainly affected by their *Sitz im Leben* or Situation in Life.

Consider the Apostle Paul, author of more than half of what we consider to be the “New Testament.” Paul was a Pharisee trained by Gamaliel, who even today is revered in the Jewish community. The Pharisaical movement arose approximately 120 years before Yeshua as a reform movement. Some of the original goals of the Pharisees were to emphasize personal holiness and piety, social justice for the Jewish people and the oppressed masses, and above all provide an *halachic* orthopraxy for the Jewish people in environments and settings for which the Torah was not originally given. One of the major goals of the Pharisees was to go out into the world and make converts, practicing what today we call “missionary evangelism,” and they were extremely successful in the Mediterranean basin. To many in the First Century, especially Sadducees, the Pharisees were actually considered to be liberal—even though today we largely consider them to be fundamentalists. The Pharisees actually wanted to bring “freedom” to the entire world by proclaiming who the God of Israel was, even though by Yeshua’s day, and subsequent generations of Pharisees having passed on, the leadership was frequently hypocritical.

Fast-forwarding to today, the Twenty-First Century, how many of us think that we can follow every commandment of the Torah, when in actuality we cannot? This is not to encourage ignorance of the Torah’s commandments, but is a reflection of the reality that we are not living in the world of ancient times. In the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament we see that technological, cultural, as well as economic factors change the application of the Torah in both the Jewish and early Messianic communities. The same is most definitely true of us today. Technology, culture, and economy are determining factors with how we apply the Torah. The question we have to always answer is whether we are trying to return to the *exact lifestyle* of the ancients—or the theology of the ancients.

How do these factors relate to our emerging Messianic theology? We need to determine with accuracy how the Apostles lived out the Torah in their lives *first*, so we can then properly ask what they would do if they were living today. But this requires more study, meditation, and above all reasoned discussion among ourselves than is presently occurring in the Messianic community. Are we going to hold to a strict and rigid view of the text, like some, who then cannot answer questions relating to what they do about the Torah’s instructions that appear to be outdated? Or, are we going to be part of a reforming movement focusing on personal holiness, piety, and justice toward our fellow humans—like the Pharisees originally were, and which Paul was? These will be some of the questions that dominate our discussions in the days ahead, and we would certainly ask you to consider them in your study of God’s Word and personal time with Him.

posted 24 February, 2006

**Tefillin:** Do you believe that Messianics should wrap *tefillin* (phylacteries)?

*Tefillin* (תְּפִלִּין) or phylacteries (Grk. sing. *phulaktērion*, φυλακτήριον) are small leather boxes with straps worn on the left arm and forehead. Their compartments contain small parchments with Scripture writing. They are customarily used during morning prayer by observant Jews. Their usage is primarily derived from Exodus 13:16 which says that the Word of God “shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”

*Tefillin*/phylacteries are only mentioned once in the Apostolic Scriptures, in Matthew 23:5, in Yeshua’s admonishment of the Pharisaical leaders. Many conclude based on His statements

that He spoke against the usage of *tefillin* and condemned it, but that is unlikely because He also condemned how these Pharisees wore their *tzit-tzityot* or fringes, and Yeshua Himself wore tassels/fringes (Matthew 9:20; 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44). Yeshua was likely criticizing these Pharisees for *how* they were practicing the commandment to bind the Word on one's forehead, as it is most probable that Yeshua wrapped *tefillin* Himself.

The commandment to bind the Word on one's hand and forehead is interpreted variably in the Messianic community. Most in the Messianic community do not wrap *tefillin*, and instead interpret the commandment allegorically, meaning that one is to have the Word of God on his mind and in his actions continually. There are some who do not condemn the practice of wrapping *tefillin*, but do not believe that it is for them. (This may be because a set of *tefillin* is often expensive.) There are those in the Messianic community who do wrap *tefillin* on a consistent basis, and consider it to be a deep spiritual experience.

We encourage usage of *tefillin* provided it is done in proper understanding. First and foremost, we must have the Word of God continually on our minds and in our actions. However, *tefillin* did exist in the First Century, and in all likelihood Yeshua the Messiah did use them. Choose an application of this command to bind God's Word that brings you closest to Him.

updated 23 November, 2006

**Terrorism:** What is your feeling on global terrorism? Does it have any prophetic significance?

Terrorism, in comparison with "established war," is a relatively new phenomenon, as it began being employed as a technique of the "poor man's war" in the mid- to late- 1960s, as various Left- and Right-wing militant movements gained publicity by taking hostages, blowing up commercial jetliners, and committing terrorist acts in public places. Terrorism, like all methods of violence, can have indirect prophetic significance, even though at present we do not see any specific mention of it in the Bible. We believe that it is important that as responsible citizens we be aware of the implications of terrorism, and how terrorism can be used to bring in controls that curtail civil liberties.

The most important thing to consider as it relates to global terrorism is the fact that terrorism is aimed at those who are watching the terrorist attacks take place. We have to be very conscious of how we react to any events that occur, so we do not fall into fear and into giving into terrorists' demands.

updated 23 November, 2006

**Textual Criticism:** I have heard you use the term "textual criticism" before. What is this?

Textual criticism, also known as "lower criticism," as stated by *ISBE*, "is the restoration of the wording of a document when alterations have been introduced (deliberately or inadvertently) in the course of copying and recopying. Before the invention of printing, when each copy of a document had to be written out separately by hand, scribal errors were especially apt to occur" (F.F. Bruce, "Criticism," 1:818). It is employed to determine what the original reading of a Biblical text was, taking into account the oldest available texts and textual fragments of Scriptures, ancient translations of Scriptures available, and quotations of Scripture in ancient literature. The same entry goes onto state,

"If the autograph or original document survives, scribal errors can be corrected by reference to it. But if it has long since disappeared (as has happened with all the original emplans of biblical books), and the surviving copies differ from one another here and there, the original wording can be determined only by comparative study of these copies. The scribal habits of individual copyists, and the remoteness of proximity to individual MSS to the original...must be investigated" (Ibid.).

We do believe that the Holy Scriptures are inspired of God and that they are not myths, borrowed or copied from pagan stories or the contemporary religions around Ancient Israel. However, textual errors have occurred in the copying and transmission of the Scriptures over the

centuries, be they in the Hebrew Tanach or Greek Apostolic Writings. Some of these errors were unintentional mistakes, and others may have been intentional for doctrinal reasons.

The two most commonly employed Biblical texts today that cannot be considered “critical texts,” because they **have not** been compared against textual discoveries, are the Masoretic Hebrew text (MT) for the Tanach and the Textus Receptus for the Greek Apostolic Writings. We use the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and the *Greek New Testament, 4th Revised Edition* (same as the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed.), both produced by United Bible Societies. These are the same critical texts that are used in modern translations such as the Jewish Press Society Tanakh, New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version. These critical texts have the variant manuscript readings in their footnotes.

updated 23 November, 2006

**Thanksgiving Day: Do you believe that Messianic Believers in the United States should celebrate Thanksgiving Day?**

The tradition of celebrating Thanksgiving Day goes back to the Pilgrims who settled the Plymouth Colony in 1621. Originally, these colonists were English Puritans who had protested against much of the popery or Catholic elements present in the Church of England. Being persecuted in England, they had settled in the Netherlands for a season, but discovered that they would not be totally satisfied until they found a home of their own where they could practice their religious convictions in total peace.

The Pilgrims’ intention was to actually settle in the colony of Virginia, but their voyage to the New World caused them to be led off course and settle in what is today Massachusetts. They were greeted by a harsh Winter that caused many of them to die from cold and hunger. In the Spring of 1621, the Pilgrims planted their first crops with the help of the local Indians. By that October, the Pilgrims celebrated their harvest to boost the morale of those who had endured terrible loss and hardships. They wanted to thank God and their Indian neighbors for the bounty that had been provided.

As Puritans, the Pilgrims’ spiritual convictions came from a strict reading of the Bible. They were very intent on eliminating any opulent elements of Catholicism from their worship. Much of their society was focused around the idea that they had fled England in a similar way to how the Ancient Israelites were led out of Egypt. As America was viewed as a new “Promised Land,” much of the symbolism of the Old Testament was adopted for the Pilgrims’ life. The emphasis on thanking God with a large communal meal in the Autumn is likely appropriated from the Tanach themes of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Thanksgiving Day is a holiday intended to commemorate the hardships of some of the early settlers of America, and how thankful they were to have God preserve them through times of difficult trial. These early pioneers and pilgrims were godly men and women who left Europe to flee religious persecution and establish a Bible-based community in the New World. Because we as Messianic Believers would not be here without Christians such as these, it is entirely appropriate for us as Americans to remember what they did.

updated 23 November, 2006

**Theological Categories: What theological category does your ministry best align with: fundamentalist, conservative, or liberal?**

The three broad theological categories, as ranging from Right to Left, are: fundamentalist, conservative, and liberal. On the Right end of the spectrum are often those holding a strict “black-and-white” view of issues, who are frequently unwilling to allow for any variance of Biblical interpretation or application regarding non-essentials. On the Left side of the spectrum are those holding to a very loose view of the Bible, perhaps even treating it as mythology, but one that can still guide humans in their interactions with “God.” Stuck in the middle are those who hold to the integrity and final authority of Scripture, but allow for variance and application regarding non-

essentials, and are willing to allow for some critical examination of Biblical texts, but not at the expense of denying the Bible's accuracy.

Our ministry falls well into the Center category of being **conservative**.

posted 26 September, 2006

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

**Approximate date:** 52 C.E.

**Author:** the Apostle Paul

**Location of author:** Corinth

**Target audience and their location:** Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Thessalonica

The authorship of 1 Thessalonians is most certainly Pauline, indicated by the personal characteristics we see interspersed throughout the letter, and comparison with other texts of Scripture (3:1-2, 8-11; cf. Acts 15:36; 2 Corinthians 11:28). The historical data that appears in 1 Thessalonians compares well with Acts 17:5-14. Pauline authorship of 1 Thessalonians is not severely challenged, even by some liberal theologians. 1 Thessalonians is believed to be one of Paul's earliest letters, if not the first letter, and quite possibly even the first piece of text composed by the early Messianic community (*ABD*, 6:517), depending on how one dates the composition of Galatians. The Thessalonian congregation was founded by Paul on his Second Missionary Journey.

It is generally agreed that Paul composed his letter from Corinth, based on internal evidence (1:1; 2:18), and external evidence regarding the proconsul Gallio's ascension to power, as Paul had to go before him to answer charges (Acts 18:12-17). The dating of 1 Thessalonians is often tied to the ascension to Gallio (Guthrie, pp 587-588). "An inscription discovered in Delphi in 1909 contains a letter from Claudius to Gallio, before whom Paul was arraigned in Corinth; it dates the proconsulship of Gallio to the twelfth year of Claudius's tribunicial power and before the latter's twenty-seventh acclamation in August, A.D. 52...Just when Paul appeared before him is not stated, but Acts 18:12-18 implies that Gallio's succession took place near the end of Paul's eighteen-month stay in Corinth" (*ISBE*, 4:833).

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia while under Roman administration. In the First Century, the city was probably only about a third smaller than today's Saloniki, which has a population of around 300,000 (*EXP*, 11:229). Thessalonica was a seaport city located at the head of the Thermaic Gulf (now the Gulf of Salonika), the chief seaport in Macedonia (*NIDB*, 1010). The city was an important trade center on the road leading north to the Danube, and many goods coming and going to Rome went through Thessalonica.

Paul began his early ministry in Thessalonica at the synagogue (Acts 17:1-9). This indicates that there was a Jewish presence in the city, but later the assemblage of Messianic Believers became predominantly non-Jewish (Acts 17:4), indicated by Paul's words, "For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Many of the Thessalonian Believers came out of Greco-Roman paganism, quite recently as indicated by Paul's salutation. A large sector of his audience also included a number of "devout Greeks" (*IDB*, 4:622), as the first major group to receive the new faith in Yeshua appear to have been Greek proselytes to Judaism (*ISBE*, 4:832).

Contrary to what some in the Messianic community today might want to believe, no Hebrew or Aramaic origin for 1 Thessalonians has ever been suggested by any reputable scholar. All are in agreement that Paul wrote this letter in Greek, especially given the orientation of even the Jewish audience.

Acts 17:5-10 tells us that Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica abruptly, due to hostility from the local Jewish community over his preaching the gospel. Paul wrote the Thessalonians, mostly new Believers coming out of paganism, about the persecution that they were facing (3:3-5).

Paul's letter deals with some practical instructions for proper living (4:1-12), and he wanted to clarify for them some misconceptions regarding the Messiah's return (4:13-18).

"Far and away the largest theological contribution of the Epistles [1&2 Thessalonians] lies in what they say about eschatology" (*EXP*, 11:223). Teachings regarding the Last Days appear in every chapter of this letter (1:9-10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23-24), and are dominate throughout ch. 4. 1&2 Thessalonians, along with Yeshua's Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) and the Book of Revelation, form the backbone of end-time teachings within the Apostolic Scriptures. Secondary issues in 1 Thessalonians regard proper sexuality and being aware of the times in which one is living.

The persecution that the Thessalonians were facing is often attributed to the hostility that the Jewish leadership at the synagogue had toward Paul (Acts 17:5-9). This hostility may have been because the Greek proselytes in their midst were eager upon hearing the good news of Yeshua. The synagogue leaders may have cherished this group of converts and was upset that they left their tutelage (Guthrie, 586). In spite of this, however, the persecution of the Thessalonian Believers appears to be of Thessalonian, and not Jewish origin (*IDB*, 6:623), but possibly came as a result of Jewish influence over local leaders. The initial charge against Paul that the Jews brought was that he was inciting rebellion against Caesar.

1 Thessalonians does not prove to have many Messianic-specific subject issues to wade through. "There is no reference to the Torah and, consequently, no language of justification... That does not mean [Paul's] thought is impoverished; it is simply different, fitted to the church he addresses" (*ABD*, 6:517). We would be remiss not to keep in mind the fact that when Paul first visited Thessalonica, he reasoned with the Jews there from the Torah and the Prophets (*NBCR*, 1154). However, eschatology dominates his writing to them, so any Torah-relates issues are secondary, if not tertiary, at best. It is safe to place 1 Thessalonians after the Jerusalem Council. 1 Thessalonians also addresses some critical theologies regarding the plurality of the Godhead, the Divinity of the Messiah, the First Century responsibility of the Apostles, and pastoral responsibility.

If there are any challenges that exist in 1 Thessalonians, they do not relate to the validity of the Torah and its commandments for us today, but relate to the infamous pre- versus post-tribulation rapture debate. While much of evangelical Christianity today leans heavily toward the pre-trib viewpoint, and there is often not an even balance between pre- and post-trib Christians, there is a more even balance between pre- and post-tribulationists in the Messianic community. Those of us who are post-tribulationist would do well to properly address 1 Thessalonians, and how it may relate to the over-enthusiasm of some who examine prophecy.

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updated 06 February, 2006

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

**Approximate date:** 52-53 C.E. (maximum of six months after 1 Thessalonians)

**Author:** the Apostle Paul

**Location of author:** Corinth

**Target audience and their location:** Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Thessalonica

Genuine Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians is questioned by many liberal theologians, even though the text of this letter was well-known to many of the Church Fathers (Guthrie, 593). Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians is often challenged on the basis of its structure, and the fact that it is more formal and rigid in its language than 1 Thessalonians. Some liberal theologians believe that 2 Thessalonians was an “application letter” written by a student of Paul to apply his instruction in 1 Thessalonians to a new situation. The majority of conservative scholars, in contrast, hold to genuine Pauline authorship, and the conviction that 2 Thessalonians clarifies many of the statements made in 1 Thessalonians. Tenney notes that none of the arguments against Pauline authorship are valid, “for the two letters deal with two different aspects of the same general subject, and bear so many resemblances to each other that they are clearly related” (*NIDB*, 1009).

2 Thessalonians was composed not long after the letter of 1 Thessalonians. It was likely written by Paul a maximum of six months later, although some speculate a composition of a few weeks after 1 Thessalonians (*ISBE*, 4:835). 2 Thessalonians was probably written from Corinth, and was written to clarify misunderstandings from the first letter. It adds additional dimensions to the eschatology of 1 Thessalonians, specifying that certain events must precede the return of Yeshua (2:1-3), and it introduces “the man of sin” (2:3-9). The letter was probably written to answer the claims of an unauthorized letter that said the return of Yeshua was at hand (2:2). The text takes on a distinctly more Jewish character than 1 Thessalonians, including references to “the day of the Lord” (2:2), which the largely non-Jewish readership would not have been as familiar with as the Jewish readership.

Like 1 Thessalonians, no one in the scholastic community has ever proposed a Hebrew or Aramaic origin for the text of 2 Thessalonians. A Greek composition of 2 Thessalonians is definite given its audience.

The theology of 2 Thessalonians is largely focused around eschatology. Paul specifies many of the general end-time claims of 1 Thessalonians. He encourages the Believers in Thessalonica (1:4-10), corrects misunderstandings relating to the Second Coming (2:1-12), and is forced to exhort many of the Thessalonians to work (2:13-3:15). There was a strong belief that the return of Yeshua and the end of the world were at hand, and men were not working, providing sustenance for their families. As Gundry remarks, “The fanaticism arose out of a belief in the immediacy of Jesus’ return...Paul therefore writes this second epistle to the Thessalonians to quiet the fanaticism by correcting the eschatology that gave rise to it” (Gundry, 356).

2 Thessalonians offers no huge theological challenges for the Messianic community today. It is interesting, though, that Paul does write, “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (2:7), indicating that in the mid-First Century the community of faith was already distancing itself from the Torah. However, the bulk of Paul’s writing relates to the return of Yeshua, and responds to the arguments of so-called end-time immanency. If anything, there is more in 2 Thessalonians that regards the infamous pre- versus post-tribulation rapture debate. It also addresses the need for us not to be too overanxious about the end-times.

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updated 06 February, 2006

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

**Approximate date:** 63-64 C.E. or 65-67 C.E.

**Author:** the Apostle Paul

**Location of author:** traveling to Macedonia

**Target audience and location:** Timothy in Ephesus

The author of 1 Timothy is identified in the text as being the Apostle Paul (1:1), and while many conservatives accept genuine Pauline authorship, liberals do not. Liberals often favor the belief that the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) were written by third generation Christians (*IDB*, 4:651), casting doubts on their historicity. It is doubted on the basis that Paul could not have written 2 Timothy from his imprisonment in Rome described in Acts 28 (even though this was more of a house arrest), and consequently 1 Timothy is attached to this premise. However, it is reasonable to infer that Paul was released from his imprisonment described at the end of Acts, and traveled to Spain (cf. *1 Clement* 5), only later to be arrested when he returned to Rome.

Paul writes his letter to Timothy, who was a native of Lystra in Asia Minor (Acts 20:4). Timothy's father was a Greek, but his mother was a Jewess. Timothy was taught from the Tanach as a young man by his Jewish grandmother Lois, and later his mother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15), but he was never circumcised, nor converted to Judaism. It is assumed that Timothy's mother was not originally religious, causing her to marry a Greek man, who would not allow his son to be circumcised (*ISBE*, 4:857). When Timothy came to faith in the Messiah Yeshua, Paul made sure that he underwent circumcision. "Paul regarded Timothy's circumcision not as a means of salvation but as a legal act to remove a serious obstacle to the gospel" (*Ibid.*). Timothy assisted Paul in his work in Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5), and was with him during most of his work in Ephesus (Acts 19:22). Timothy was Paul's traveling companion, going with him from Ephesus to Macedonia, to Corinth (Acts 20:3), through Asia Minor (Acts 20:1-6), and even to Jerusalem.

The Apostle Paul mentions Timothy as a "co-sender" of six of his letters (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon). When he found himself imprisoned in Rome again, Paul asked Timothy to join him (2 Timothy 4:9, 21). While we do not know if Timothy made it to Rome, we can safely assume that he made every effort to do so. Timothy is mentioned more times than any of Paul's other companions, indicating a fond affection for him (*NIDB*, 1018). In spite of his young age, natural reserve, and timidity (1 Corinthians 16:10; 2 Timothy 1:7), as well as his frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5:23), he was a faithful servant to the community of faith, following the tasks assigned to him by Paul and the other Apostles with absolute dedication.

1 Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy while he was in Ephesus (1:3). Paul leaves the Ephesian assemblies in Timothy's capable care, and writes the letter while traveling to Macedonia. The letter is often estimated as having been written in 63-64 C.E., although some prefer a slightly later date of 65-67 C.E. Paul indicates in this letter that he might not return for some time, so he writes to encourage him (1:3, 18). Paul instructs Timothy to refute false teachings (1:3-7; 4:1-8; 6:3-5, 20-21), and to adequately supervise the assembly (ch 2; 3:1-13; 5:17-25).

Contrary to the opinion of some in the Messianic community, no Hebrew or Aramaic origin for 1 Timothy has ever been proposed by anyone in the scholastic community. It is impossible considering that Timothy was raised as a Greek in Lystra, and would have spoken Greek as his native language. In fact his very Greek name *Timotheos* (Τιμόθεος) is preserved in modern Hebrew translations of the New Testament as *Timotius* (טימותריוס).

The problem that had infected the Ephesian congregations Timothy was overseeing likely involved Gnosticism, or at least a primitive form of it, combined with people thinking that they should be Torah teachers who should not be (1:3-7). Combined with this was a form of asceticism. While expositors have often assumed that many of the problems Timothy had to address were

Jewish in nature, “the nature of the heresy has nothing in common with legalistic Judaism. The second danger is the identification of the opposition with a well-known Gnostic movement of the second century” (*IDB*, 3:672). Timothy also had the job of making sure that proper order and organization were in place among the leaders of the Ephesian assemblies.

The Messianic community today faces some of the same issues described by Paul in 1 Timothy. We have Judaizers or “Influencers” who think themselves to be teachers of the Torah, and have no business being such, and are led by Gnostic-type ideas. As Paul says, “These promote controversies rather than God's work—which is by faith...They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1 Timothy 1:4b, 7, NIV). We would do well to heed Paul's words to Timothy, and understand them for what they meant to the Torah community in Ephesus, and what they mean for the emerging Messianic movement today.

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updated 06 February, 2006

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

**Approximate date:** 66-67 C.E.

**Author:** the Apostle Paul, possibly written down by a scribe

**Location of author:** Rome

**Target audience and their location:** Timothy in Ephesus

The issues surrounding genuine Pauline authorship for 2 Timothy are the same as those for 1 Timothy. Generally, Pauline authorship of 2 Timothy is accepted by many conservatives, but doubted by liberals because of an advanced grammatical structure that is unique to the other Pauline letters. Some conservatives do believe, however, that 2 Timothy and Titus may have been composed by members of Paul's entourage, under his authority, during his imprisonment (*ABD*, 6:568). This would certainly account for its advanced wording.

The letter of 2 Timothy is generally agreed to have been written during Paul's second imprisonment under Nero in 66-67 C.E., from Rome, prior to the winter (4:21), and probably after Paul's letter to Titus. While Paul's first imprisonment in Rome was in a rented house (Acts 28:30), his second imprisonment came from a dungeon (4:13), where Paul was chained like a criminal (1:16; 2:9). Paul writes his letter, reflecting on the fact that the work God had for him had been completed, and that his life was ending (4:6-8).

Paul wrote Timothy because of an extreme loneliness he was feeling, as only Luke, of Paul's inner circle, was still with him (4:11). Titus and Tychicus were away in Crete (4:10-12), and the rest deserted him (1:15; 4:10), possibly for fear of persecution or to pursue Earthly pleasures. Paul desired Timothy to visit him (1:4), and for him to come soon (4:9, 21). Paul writes Timothy because he was greatly concerned for the persecutions that were coming, presumably at the hands of Nero. Timothy is admonished by Paul to keep and persevere in the gospel (1:14; 3:14), and if necessary suffer for it (1:8; 2:3). Timothy was overseeing the Ephesian assemblies at the time, and by extension Paul is issuing some important instruction for them.

Just like 1 Timothy, no scholar or academic has ever proposed a Hebrew or Aramaic origin for the composition of 2 Timothy. It is impossible given Paul's circumstances as a chained criminal in a Roman dungeon, and the strong possibility that members of the Roman faith community composed it for him on his authority. It guarantees that the letter was composed in Greek, being sent to Timothy, a native Greek speaker, and by extension to the Ephesian assemblies.

2 Timothy is largely a personal letter from the Apostle Paul to Timothy. Paul urges Timothy not to give up in his faith, and not to be intimidated by any false teachings or apostasy around him—likely the same issues as in 1 Timothy. Paul stresses to Timothy that “all Scripture” is inspired by God (3:16), and at the time that would certainly have included the canon of the Tanach, but was likely beginning to include some of the Apostolic texts. Paul makes an interesting reference in his letter to Jannes and Jambres (3:8), who are not described in the Torah itself, but rather in Targum Jonathan on Exodus 7:11. When Paul instructs Timothy to bring him the parchments or scrolls, it likely included copies of the Tanach, records on Yeshua's life and teachings, other religious documents, and Paul's legal papers, including his certificate of Roman citizenship (Gundry, 417).

The clear emphasis in 2 Timothy is for him to maintain “sound doctrine” (4:3) in the assembly of faith. Timothy is admonished to maintain order among those whom he oversees. The emerging Messianic community today would do well to take Paul's words to Timothy seriously, because there are Messianic groups that lack the order that Paul desired Timothy to enforce.

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updated 06 February, 2006

#### **Tithing:** What can you tell me about tithing from a Messianic perspective? How am I to honor God with my money and resources today?

There are a wide variety of opinions given as to what “tithing” means, even though all of us should agree that we need to honor the Lord with our resources. One of the things that we should keep in mind is that the instructions regarding tithing in the Torah, specifically with land, produce, livestock, etc., were intended to be kept in the Land of Israel in conjunction with the priesthood and Tabernacle/Temple service. Since most of us live in the Diaspora, and there is no operative Tabernacle/Temple service today, we can only keep these commandments in principle and have to find another way to apply them.

The Book of Acts is probably the best place to start, where we see that the early Messianic community shared many of their possessions and gave money, supplies, and goods to one another as they needed them. This too, of course, would be a challenge since today's Messianic community is spread abroad, and most of us are not in need for someone else to provide us with daily wares. Furthermore, we do not live in an economy that would largely allow for common ownership to this extent. When we see the early Messianic community growing beyond the borders of Judea we see that as congregations were established, monies were regularly collected for the expenses of the local assembly and for the traveling Apostles. Paul's letter to the Philippians, for example, is largely written thanking them for a generous contribution that they made to his ministry work.

Today, these are all things we have to consider as we return to the Hebraic Roots of our faith and the Messianic movement continues to grow. Many people do not have local assemblies

and as such do not consider it important to give a tithe. These individuals are largely served and taught by independent Messianic ministries, but sometimes do not support them financially *in any way*. Is this right? Many people feel convicted to tithe, but do not know how to do it.

We see the issue of tithing and giving offerings applied in some unique situations in the Apostolic Scriptures. We would encourage you to support those who teach and minister to you just as the Apostles did. From the Apostles' work our faith was able to survive and last almost 2,000 years. In today's Messianic movement, which has quite a bit going against it, there is a great deal of difficult work ahead to establish a theology and discipline that will last for future generations. People who are on the front lines in Messianic ministry need the financial support of others so they can continue the work that God has given to them. Pray to the Lord and ask Him how He would have you serve Him with your finances.

posted 16 September, 2006

**Titus, Epistle of:** What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle of Titus?

**Approximate date:** 63-64 C.E.

**Author:** the Apostle Paul

**Location of author:** Nicopolis

**Target audience and their location:** Titus in Crete

The author of the letter to Titus is very clearly identified as being the Apostle Paul in the text (1:1). Genuine Pauline authorship is not doubted by conservatives, neither was it by the Second Century Church. Pauline authorship is doubted by liberals, who often believe that Titus was composed by second or third generation Christians.

This letter, in the series of Pastoral Epistles, is addressed to Titus, one of Paul's original converts (1:4). Titus was very important to Paul, as Paul took him to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-3). When Paul took Titus to Jerusalem, Titus was not circumcised (Galatians 2:3-5). In the growing world of Jewish New Testament studies, there is debate as to what this would mean, whether he was not physically circumcised, or if being "circumcised" is an expression meaning conversion to Judaism, if he had not become a proselyte. Regardless of which is correct, we may safely assume that when Titus accompanied Paul to Jerusalem he was a rather young Believer, and Paul wanted to show him the holy city.

Titus probably worked with Paul during his time in Ephesus. It is notable that "We hear nothing further of Titus till the time of Paul's ministry at Ephesus on the third missionary journey" (*EXP*, 11:422). He likely grew leaps and bounds in his Messianic faith during this time. Titus was given the responsibility by Paul to deliver the letter of 2 Corinthians to Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:3). Later, we see that Paul and Titus worked together on the island of Crete (1:5), and Titus remained there to continue the work as Paul's representative (1:5; 2:15; 3:12-13). The last we see about Titus in the Biblical text is that he went on a mission to Dalmatia (1 Timothy 4:10).

The letter to Titus was almost assuredly written before 2 Timothy, in approximately 63-64 C.E. Some believe that Titus was written during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, but the text of Titus indicates that Paul asks him to meet him in Nicopolis (3:12-14), a town on the west coast of Greece. Titus was in Crete when the letter was addressed to him, and by extension Paul's instruction was not only to Titus, but to the Cretan assemblies. Crete, being an island in the Southern Aegean Sea, was at a deplorable moral level in the First Century. Paul actually quotes the Cretan poet Epimenides, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" (1:12), in pointing out that Titus had his work cut out for him. Titus was given apostolic authority to see that the congregations of Crete were well-cared for, and to prepare the way for Apollos and Zenas (3:13).

As with the other Pastoral Epistles, no one in the scholastic world has ever proposed a Hebrew or Aramaic origin for Titus. Contrary to what a few in the Messianic movement might want to believe, a Greek composition for Titus is absolutely certain. Titus "was a Greek"

(Galatians 2:3), and would have spoken Greek as his native language. Titus was operating in Crete when Paul wrote him from Nicopolis, all areas where Greek was spoken as the primary language.

The letter to Titus includes a strong emphasis by Paul on loving and doing good (1:8, 16; 2:3, 7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14), as true sanctification was needed in Crete (*NIDB*, 754). One explanation is that the letter was written by Paul because “Titus was directed to appoint morally and doctrinally qualified elders in the various” assemblies (*EXP*, 11:423). There may have also been some limited Gnostic influence circulating around Crete as well (*IDB*, 3:673). Yet another explanation is that “certain Jewish-Christian teachers [had] perverted the consciences of their fellow believers; the new Pauline presbyter-bishops must stop them” (*ABD*, 6:560). What is interesting about this explanation is that it places the context of Titus’ work as being within “the Jewish-Christian congregation” (*Ibid.*, 6:561). This would mean that Titus was overseeing various Messianic congregations, preparing the way for Apollos, who was strong in the Tanach (Acts 18:24), and Zenas “the Torah expert” (3:13, CJB). The letter by Paul to Titus presents no major challenges for the Messianic community today when placed in its historical context.

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updated 06 February, 2006

### **Tongues: What do you believe about speaking in tongues? What occurred on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out?**

The issue about speaking in “tongues” is as much a debate in mainstream Christianity as it is in the Messianic movement. There are people in the Messianic movement today who come out of the varied charismatic movements, which frequently emphasize the gifts of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, and other so-called “signs and wonders.” In our experience, many who come out of these backgrounds are some of the hardest to convince of Torah observance and the Messianic lifestyle, because many charismatics are of the opinion that they have “freedom in the Spirit,” yet this freedom often goes beyond what is Scripturally defined for us. We are also continually reminded of the Messiah’s warning to us, “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24, NRSV).

We are certainly not of the opinion that the “gifts are dead” and that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were only available to those in the First Century. *We are continuationists*,<sup>1</sup> but are also of the opinion that there has been gross misuse of the Spiritual gifts in recent years via some of the Pentecostal and charismatic groups that have popped up, and that we must return to a Scriptural foundation in what the Spiritual gifts actually are. God would not be doing a “new thing” in the world today that does not have some precedent or continuity with what is already seen in the Bible.

Speaking in “tongues,” as it is often manifested today in Christian assemblies and in some Messianic congregations, is often a person being “supernaturally empowered” to speak in some form of unintelligible gibberish. We certainly do not doubt the fact that we can be supernaturally empowered to speak in “groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26) or “groans that words cannot express” (NIV), as Paul calls them. But these groanings are only intended to be used when “the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit

<sup>1</sup> Consult “The Charismatic Gifts Debate,” in Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), pp 212-224.

Himself intercedes for us,” and these “groanings too deep for words” (NASU) are different than what is commonly thought to be “speaking in tongues.” These groanings could be called one’s personal prayer language with God, and only used when one has an urgent prayer to say and does not know what to say, so the Spirit takes over.

Speaking in “tongues,” as it is Biblically defined, is being supernaturally empowered to speak in an intelligible, foreign language that one does not know, or being supernaturally empowered to speak in one’s native language and being heard by others in their native language which is different. We see this occur in the Book of Acts at *Shavuot*/Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon those assembled: “And they were all filled of the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave *ability* to them to speak” (Acts 2:4, LITV). Acts 2:8 attests that those assembled said, “how do we hear each in our own dialect in which we were born?” (LITV). Those proclaiming the gospel at *Shavuot*/Pentecost not only were supernaturally empowered to speak or be heard in foreign languages, but were also speaking or being heard in the specific *regional dialects* of those assembled.

We believe that the gift of tongues is for today, but that it is not speaking in the meaningless gibberish that it is often credited as being. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:22, “So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is *for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.” This is because from the example given to us in Acts, the speaking in other languages occurred so that the good news of salvation in Messiah Yeshua could be proclaimed to those who needed it. This is why speaking in “tongues,” or more correctly **languages**, is a sign for unbelievers.

updated 26 February, 2010

**Torah, Command not to “Add to”:** In Deuteronomy 4:2 we are told not to add commandments to those of the Torah, yet in Judaism, and in the Messianic movement today, we have many people who follow traditions of men that some claim are “commanded by God.” I am confused.

Deuteronomy 4:2 does admonish us, “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.” The primary emphasis of this commandment, more than anything else, is that God Himself the only One who can tell the people of Israel what to do and not to do. However, if we were to hold to a strict interpretation of this, this means that when situations arise that require the religious community to make judgments on things that are not directly or indirectly addressed in the Torah, or any part of Scripture, that any decision could possibly be acceptable. In the independent Messianic community today this has led to many interpretations of the Torah that are foreign to mainline Judaism, and can be quite offensive to our Jewish brethren.

It can be irresponsible to strongly assert that traditions are not “commanded by God,” when the Torah itself says that if a matter rises in Israel we are to follow the rulings of the priests and judges that the Lord sets over us:

“If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is *in office* in those days, and you shall inquire *of them* and they will declare to you the verdict in the case. You shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left” (Deuteronomy 17:8-11).

Some would make the argument that *every Rabbinical ruling* made in Orthodox Judaism today needs to be followed by the Messianic community. Certainly, we would not make that

argument. But, neither would we make the argument that they *should be totally ignored*, either. The Messianic movement today should parallel the major *halachic* matters that bind the broad Jewish community together (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform). This would include when we celebrate the appointed times, including *Chanukah* and *Purim*, how we would dress in a congregational environment, how we generally eat kosher, and other traditions that are beneficial to our faith. Of course, there will be variance among Messianics, just as there is variance among Jewish sects today. If a person in the independent Messianic movement has never been exposed to Messianic Judaism, or if someone is naturally predisposed to “do his own thing” (or even worse, “buck the system”) and not respect order, then it should not be surprising to see a strong impetus to develop applications of the Torah that are foreign to Judaism.

The commandment in Deuteronomy 17:11 is that we are to “Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left” (NIV). We do not believe that what is implied here is a blind obedience to the rulings left by the Sages and Rabbis of Judaism. We have to judge their rulings against the Word of God, to see if something aligns with the spirit of the Word, as most major rulings relate to ethical value judgments that the Scriptures may not directly address. With all things, we have to see whether it parallels God’s written Word, and enhances our relationship and walk with Yeshua. There are clearly things that have come down through history that deter our walk with Him, but then there are many things that can enhance it. Each of us must use proper discernment.

What is perhaps most important more than anything else is that these rulings have to be made by recognized, qualified spiritual leaders of the community. The Torah is designed to be lived out in a community, as opposed to a “one-on-one” basis between oneself and God. A prime example of this is that when you see kosher-for-Passover food items that say “consult your rabbi” on the packaging. This indicates in some way that there is debate over whether or not an item is kosher for Passover, and that the ultimate determination should go to your local rabbi.

This can be a difficult concept for many who come from evangelical Christian backgrounds to accept, because we were often not used to our pastor making “rulings” on what we should do or not do concerning God’s commandments. Many of us were taught that our relationship with God was just between us and Him. While that is certainly true, we are also in covenant with other members of the faith community. Just like we probably went to a pastor for spiritual guidance, prayer, counseling, or just help regarding an issue, and took his advice and followed it, so do the rulings of the rabbis apply. Just as we would expect a pastor to be anointed by the Lord and for his words to carry authoritative weight, so can the rulings of the Rabbis.

Of course, as with all things, we should never follow the opinions of a pastor blindly, nor follow the rulings of the Rabbis blindly, either. We have to test everything against God’s Word, to make sure that it aligns with the character of our Heavenly Father, and we have to see if it is something that enhances our walk with Him, rather than takes us away from Him. More than anything else, we have to deal with things on a case-by-case basis, and recognize the fact that there is a great deal of “grey” when it comes to interpretation and application. In today’s emerging Messianic community, we have to extend grace and mercy to those who are more Rabbinical in their approach to God, and those who want nothing to do with it. Hopefully, we can find a proper balance between Scripture and tradition, where neither is considered unimportant.

added 29 December, 2005

**Torah, division of commandments:** How am I to appropriately understand the division of the Torah’s commandments?

Yeshua the Messiah did teach us that there were “weightier provisions of the law,” such as “justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23). He affirms that the greatest of the Torah’s commandments are the admonitions to love the Lord God and to love one’s neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). It is a fact that there is a prioritization among the Torah’s commandments between those that carry more weight and

those that may be considered “least” (Matthew 5:19), especially as there are differing penalties for the violation of various regulations. The teaching of our Messiah does indicate that the Torah’s commandments are divided in some way. Determining what this way is, however, has been a matter of theological discussion and debate for millennia.

Greg L. Bahnsen makes the important remark, “Christians throughout the history of the church who have advocated the authority of the Old Testament law in Christian moral instruction, such as the Reformers or Puritans, have not...done so because they make Moses the locus of their authority! Rather and more realistically, they have done so only because their true Lord and Authority, Jesus Christ, directs them to honor and obey the moral commandments of Moses” (“Response to Douglas Moo,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 391). In Reformed Christian theology (and to a lesser extent historic Wesleyan theology) the commandments of the Torah have been classified under the broad categories of: moral, civil, and ceremonial. It is believed that with the coming of Yeshua and His sacrifice, the civil and ceremonial laws of Ancient Israel have been abolished, but never the Torah’s commandments regulating ethics and morality which are to remain true for all people of all times. Reformed expositors interpret passages such as Ephesians 2:14-15 and Colossians 2:14 as relating to the annulment of not the Torah as a whole, but rather the ceremonial and civil law.

In the Twenty-First Century when the evangelical Church has largely cast aside any of the Torah as relevant instruction for Believers today, we as Messianics should rejoice with our Christian brethren who have always held the Torah’s ethical commands as *always* having relevance! We have more in agreement with them than in disagreement, as the same Biblical passages we look to for the continued validity of the Torah are the same passages they look to for the importance of the “moral law.” However, is the classification of the Torah’s commandments into moral, civil, and ceremonial laws something that is entirely accurate? No one would doubt that there are Torah commandments that appear to be moral, civil, or ceremonial—but does the Torah itself divide its commandments this way? This may be a place where the Jewish theological tradition can step in and provide us with another perspective.

Of the 613 categorized commandments in the Chumash/Pentateuch, it is held that there are 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. The negative commandments would largely relate to various prohibitions placed upon God’s people (i.e., the Sixth Commandment which forbids murder), but positive commandments could largely relate to things that would help God’s people and others in the larger community such as allowing the poor to glean one’s field. Within the Torah, we see its *mitzvot* (מצוות) often classified among three distinct categories:

1. *edot* (עדות): “warning signs, reminders, urgings” (*CHALOT*, 266).
2. *chuyim* (חוקים): “divine statute[s]” (*CHALOT*, 114).
3. *mishpatim* (משפטים): “decision by arbitration, legal decision” (*CHALOT*, 221).

Each one of these various divisions denotes a degree of significance for a Torah commandment. *Edot* would be those things that God has placed for His people to be safe and for their well-being. *Chuyim* are often likened to things that do not make logical sense to the human mind, but God has told His people to follow them to demonstrate proper obedience. *Mishpatim* would be the closest thing to what we would call case laws, things that one can turn to when trying to evaluate what would be the best decision in a situation that would be in line with God’s will and character.

While these are three broad categories of commandments, seen within the Torah itself, the Oral Torah as seen in the Mishnah and Talmud demonstrates that the Rabbis have spent considerable time into classifying the commandments (and their application/non-application) even further. The six significant divisions in the Mishnah, from the Second Century C.E., include:

1. Agriculture
2. Appointed times
3. Women
4. Order of Damages

5. Holy things
6. Purities

(English titles are taken from the Table of Contents in Jacob Neusner's translation.)

From those broad headings the Torah's commandments are often further divided into various sub-categories as titled by the Mishnah tractates, and the Talmud which is essentially commentary on the Mishnah.

The division of commandments seen in the Mishnah does appear to be much more natural from a reading of the Torah than the traditional Reformed Christian division of moral law, civil law, and ceremonial law. We would suggest that considering the Torah's commandments from the classifications offered by the Mishnah would be better for today's Messianic movement, especially as it is a major part of our Jewish theological heritage.

Of course, determining what part (if any) the Oral Torah and its commentary would play in our emerging Messianic theology and Torah *halachah* is another issue altogether. Many believe it should not be considered. But we believe that it should not be removed from the conversation of our Biblical Studies as we wrestle with how to properly live out the Torah today. Yet, this conversation should also include linguistic and historical analysis, comparison of the Pentateuch with other Ancient Near Eastern law codes, and most significantly the life example of Yeshua and His Apostles. Along with such analysis will come a realization of which commandments are "greater" compared to commandments that are "least." And as always, when tradition is considered we must not forget the instruction given by Paul in Philippians 4:8:

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

added 17 September, 2008

**Torah, moral and ceremonial law:** How do you respond to the claim that Christ has done away with the ceremonial law, but that the moral law of God remains?

The divisions of the Torah of Moses among sets of "moral law" and "ceremonial law" are artificial. While we certainly commend Christian theologians for wanting to maintain the integrity of at least *some* of the Torah, the Torah does not categorize itself in terms of a commandment being "moral" or "ceremonial." What many Christian denominations advocate is that some of the Torah's commandments, those pertaining to the Sabbath, the holidays of Israel, the kosher dietary laws, male circumcision, etc., were abolished by the sacrifice of Yeshua—things believed to fall under the classification of "ceremonial." They do not, however, advocate that Yeshua abolished commandments relating to personal relations, and how we are to love others, treat others with respect, not murder, steal, adulterate, etc.—things believed to fall under the classification of "moral." This is different from some other Christian denominations and traditions that advocate that the *entire Torah* was abolished by Yeshua.

When approaching the Torah and studying it on a regular basis, one quickly discovers that it makes no distinction between "moral" or "ceremonial" commandments. The Torah, rather, divides its commandments among one's status in society. If one is a male, one does commandments that are applicable for males, either married males or unmarried males. If one is female, one does commandments that are applicable for females. There are also commandments for children, priests, those in business, farmers, the Levites, and those living only inside the Land of Israel. The Torah is not difficult to follow as a Believer in Yeshua with the Holy Spirit, as not all of its commandments can be applied to our lives in a modern-day, Diaspora setting.

posted 07 June, 2006

**Torah, only focused on:** I have spent some time around "Messianic Believers," and all they seem to be focused on is the Law of Moses—yet they tell me that they are trying to live "fully Biblical" lives. Is it true you just focus on the Torah in your Bible studies?

Like any religious group, the persons you are describing must be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is absolutely true that there are Messianic congregations, fellowships, and individuals that *only* focus on the Torah in their Bible studies and exposition. When all one focuses on is the Torah—and sometimes the Written Torah in a vacuum devoid of its historical context in the Ancient Near East—one can become anemic in his or her understanding of God’s Word. This is no different than the many Christians who only focus on the “New Testament” in their reading of the Bible, and today’s emerging Messianic movement needs to avoid making the same mistake in reverse by only focusing on the Torah.

As a ministry, we fully encourage Believers to make use of the revelation God has given us in the Biblical Books of Genesis-Deuteronomy. They form the foundation that the rest of Scripture progressively builds upon; but they by no means make up all of Scripture. When we read the Torah on a regular basis, we are reminded that God has called us out as His people, and has great plans for us if we obey Him. The constant problem is that for many centuries God’s people have not obeyed Him, and we have all fallen into the traps of sin. This is why Yeshua had to come and die for us at Golgotha (Calvary). The Torah itself is not enough without Yeshua. The Torah shows us the high standard of God that He wants us to live up to, but as fallen human beings we are totally incapable of living up to that standard. The Torah shows us our inherent need for a Divine Savior because we fall short of keeping God’s commandments.

For us as Believers in Yeshua, the Torah reveals for us the character and holiness of our Heavenly Father, that we should diligently strive to integrate into our daily lives. It gives us foundational instruction on human interaction, and how we should be concerned about social justice and righteous behavior in our communities. It teaches us important things about the human condition that have remained true ever since Creation. Hopefully, these are the things that Messianic Torah studies focus on, as God empowers us to be about His work in today’s world that desperately needs the gospel message of salvation.

Our challenge during the next few years will be how we can balance Torah study with a study of other parts of the Bible. A Messianic fellowship or congregation that only focuses on the Torah will be just as incapable to address the challenges of today’s society as a church that only focuses on the Apostolic Scriptures. Furthermore, there are many issues in the Torah itself—primarily in terms of ancient history—that today’s Messianic movement is largely unprepared to address. We would encourage every one of you to regularly survey the Scriptures: reading the weekly Torah portions, being engaged in a mid-week study of another Biblical text, and then regularly reading yet another Biblical text for your own study and reflection.

Our ministry efforts to produce Biblical commentaries under the “for the Practical Messianic” banner will hopefully produce more studies that you can use, but these take a great deal of time and research—and it admittedly will be a *lifelong process* in order to complete the entire Bible. In the meantime, please do read through *all of the Scriptures* on a regular basis, so you can gauge where your life presently is in the Lord, and where you need to improve both in your understanding of the Word and in your relationship with Him and other people.

posted 22 January, 2007

**Torah, Yeshua:** I heard a Messianic Bible teacher say that Yeshua was the Torah made flesh. I do not understand this concept. Can you please explain?

According to John 1:1, Yeshua the Messiah is the Word, who is God. We are told, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). These words tell us that Yeshua, who is the Word and who is God, became flesh. We know as Believers that Yeshua is the Word made flesh because He embodies the Scriptures physically in His words, actions, and deeds recorded for us in the Gospels.

Hebraically, the Word of God is synonymous to the Torah or Law of God. The following passages from the Tanach equate God’s Word with His Torah or Law:

“According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left” (Deuteronomy 12:11).

“And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

“Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble and dry grass collapses into the flame, so their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 5:24).

“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” (Isaiah 8:20).

“Many nations will come and say, ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For from Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:2).

These Scriptures all equate God's Word with being His Torah. By saying that Yeshua is the Torah made flesh, Messianic teachers are communicating that Yeshua embodies the Torah's commandments in His teachings and actions, and thus in essence, in everything concerning Him.

posted 29 December, 2005

**Tradition, Role that it plays:** What role, if any, do you believe tradition should play in our examination and application of Scripture, particularly the Torah?

There is a wide variance of opinion in the emerging Messianic movement relating to what role, if any, tradition should play as we study and apply the Bible in our daily lives. This is particularly true regarding our individual pursuits of a Torah obedient lifestyle. How we follow the commandments of the Torah is a huge issue, and often the Torah itself gives us no explanation(s) of how various commandments are to be kept. The two basic options available at our disposal are to (1) develop our own opinions and applications of commandments, or (2) consult the traditional opinions and applications of commandments as developed by Judaism.

The classification of how much tradition should be followed by Messianics today can probably be listed under three broad categories: (1) staunch traditionalists, (2) anti-traditionalists, and (3) philo-traditionalists. **Staunch traditionalists** would be those who follow Jewish tradition without any hesitation and who may consider extra-Biblical works like the Mishnah and Talmud to be at the level of inspired Scripture. This would include those trying to emulate an Orthodox Jewish and/or Chassidic style of *halachah* in the Messianic community. **Anti-traditionalists**, in stark contrast, are those who want nothing to do with any kind of mainline Jewish tradition. This could include those who believe in following the Karaites, and/or insist on usage of the Sacred Name. Anti-traditionalists are often against practices like men wearing the *tallit* and *kippah* (*yarmulke*), wrapping *tefillin*, and celebrating holidays like *Chanukah* or *Purim*, and while promoting forms of “Torah observance” may actually appear to be anti-Semitic. **Philo-traditionalists** make up the centrist view between the two. This would include those who have a high respect for Jewish culture and tradition, and generally follow a Torah observant lifestyle quite consistent with Conservative Judaism, tempered by the fact that we live in a modern world. Philo-traditionalists value works like the Mishnah and Talmud, but do not consider them superior to the Tanach or Apostolic Scriptures. **Our ministry very definitely falls into the philo-traditionalist camp.**

The debate over “tradition” in the Messianic movement today is not going away. Most often, the argument against employing Jewish tradition and culture in one's personal *halachah* is going to come in the form of statements like, “You don't want to trade Church traditions in for Synagogue traditions.” While it is absolutely true that we want to have a Scripturally sound faith,

based on the Bible first, the fact of the matter remains that the Bible does not often tell us *how* to apply commandments in our lives, and we will face life situations that the Biblical text does not directly or indirectly address. Many hermeneutical systems employ tradition and history to be used when it is clear that Scripture does not address something.

It is very true that Yeshua the Messiah spoke against tradition when it invalidated the Word of God, and took people away from weightier matters of the Torah like love, mercy, and respect for others. Yet at the same time, socio-historical studies in the Gospels are revealing more and more that Yeshua's theology was closer to the Pharisees than any of the other sects of First Century Judaism, and that He indeed kept many of the traditions and customs extant in the culture of His day. The Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to "maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you" (1 Corinthians 11:2, NRSV), and studies in the Jewish background of his teachings are likewise revealing more and more that he continued to be a Pharisee long after his conversion (Acts 23:6). The independent Messianic movement today cannot dispense with the reality that while speaking against tradition when it annuls Scripture, Yeshua nevertheless lived out and followed much of the tradition of His time. This speaks to our ever-present need to be studying the Gospels and examining each event of His life on a case-by-case basis, employing the right background information.

added 26 December, 2005

**Tribulation, in it: Do you think we are currently in the Tribulation?**

There are currently no indications to us that the Seventieth Week of Israel has started. Some prophecy teachers have claimed that the Tribulation has started either through the initiation of certain peace negotiations in the Mideast or what they claim that God "has shown them," meaning *exclusively to them*. But, there have been no significant events of a prophetic, world changing nature that have occurred within any of the proposed timespans.

In spite of the fact that we are not in the Tribulation period, it is very important that we follow the Middle East peace negotiations, globalization, and other world events as each day we get closer to the return of the Messiah. This is true whether it will happen in our generation, or sometime beyond our lifespans.

added 05 January, 2006

**Tribulation, seven years: Why do you believe that the so-called "Tribulation" is seven years long? The Scriptures only say that it is three-and-a-half.**

The prophecies of Daniel 9 indicate that Israel has been allocated 70 weeks, each "week" or *shavua* (שבוע) being a period of seven years. The last of these 70 weeks, the Seventieth Week of Israel, is commonly called the Tribulation period by prophecy teachers. Because of Yeshua's words pertaining to the "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21; cf. Daniel 12:7), which will be three-and-a-half years in length, and the usage of the term "Tribulation" in reference to the entire Seventieth Week, some get confused. When most refer to "the Tribulation" they are referring to the entire seven-year period, whereas the term "Great Tribulation" is often used in reference to the last three-and-a-half years of terrible hardship and judgment.

added 05 January, 2006

**Tribal Identity: Why does your ministry not address the dispersion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim and to what countries the scattered tribes are found today?**

In the Biblical promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lord said that "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 26:4). We are told regarding these people that "Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out

to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 28:14).

In the Biblical account of the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim in 2 Kings 17-18, we know that following the Assyrian Empire’s invasion and sacking of the capital city of Samaria that corporately the Northern Kingdom was never heard from again. The Assyrian Empire transplanted those whom they conquered, and through forced intermarriage, conquered peoples would forget who they were after a series of several generations, lessening the likelihood of rebellion against the Assyrians.

From this point onward, if we believe in the Biblical promise that God made to the Patriarchs about their seed spreading “out powerfully westward, eastward, northward and southward” (ATS), then members of the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim went in all directions to the four reaches of Planet Earth. It is vain to try to determine “which tribe went where,” because it cannot be proven Biblically.

There are some who believe in the reunification of the Two Houses of Israel who think that they can prove where the scattered tribes of the Northern Kingdom were dispersed. At the most, all they can provide is speculation and their opinion. It has been our observation that much of the so-called “research” that has been done has been based on suspect readings of history, and a substantial amount of eisegesis where people are reading messages into the Bible. We believe that an objective reading of Scripture will reveal that there is a scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim *out there* in the world, and that they went north, south, east, and west—but not that one particular tribe became this country or that country.

There is evidence that the Apostles recognized that when the non-Jews were coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua that many of them were possibly members of the dispersed Northern Kingdom (Acts 15:15-19; John 7:35; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1). However, nowhere in their writings did they make the subject of “Israelite tribal identity” a major issue. They recognized that first and foremost Israel was to be restored through the restoration of the individual coming to faith in the Messiah, and his or her proper spiritual training and growth is absolutely paramount.

Regarding the potential “tribal identification” of anyone, we are told in the Apostolic Scriptures not “to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Timothy 1:4). One’s inclusion in the Commonwealth of Israel is ultimately contingent on faith in the Messiah of Israel, not that one is a physical descendant of one of the scattered tribes.

updated 23 November, 2006

### **Trinity:** Do you believe in the Trinity?

We believe that God, *Elohim* in Hebrew (אֱלֹהִים, a plural word), has revealed Himself to humanity in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is clear by any cursory reading of the Scriptures. What is commonly called the Trinity was determined by the emerging Christian Church to be the easiest attainable understanding of God that allowed for a plurality of manifestations to exist without succumbing to the heresies of Arianism, which denied the Divinity of Yeshua, or Modalism, which advocated that God could only exist in one particular form or “mode” at a single time.

Traditional Christian Trinitarianism asserts that God is three “Persons.” Sometimes these three “Persons,” depending on *which denomination* is defining the Trinity, while all being God, have different functions—meaning that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can possibly contradict themselves. **This is something we do not believe.**

We believe that the Scriptures are clear that God (*Elohim*) is a plurality. There may be additional elements of the Godhead that He has not revealed to us. The Hebraic understanding of “one” or *echad* (אֶחָד) implies that God (*Elohim*) is a composite, rather than absolute singular unity. This is what evangelical Christianity today considers the “Trinity” to be, yet in this oneness some (but certainly not all) in their theology have three Beings contradicting themselves. We believe

that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of the same Divine substance, and They all co-exist. They co-exist on a level that our human brains are incapable of fully comprehending. But most importantly, **They are of *one purpose* and do not contradict themselves.**

We run into problems when we say what God can and cannot do, and when we try to “figure Him out” from our position as finite mortals. People who try to define God (*Elohim*) as exclusively this or that have run into problems, and any “oneness” theology that denies the co-existence of the Father, Son, and Spirit does not account for the Biblical fact of God’s plurality. In describing God, we prefer to emphasize the “composite fluidity” that is implied by *echad*, rather than what can be implied sometimes by the term “Trinity.”

For a further study of the plurality of the Godhead, consult the editor’s article “**What Does the Shema Really Mean?**”

updated 08 May, 2006

**Two-House movement, beliefs of:** Do all people in the “Two-House movement,” or claim some adherence to the restoration of “all Israel,” believe the same way?

To answer this question with a question, do all people in Christianity believe the same way? Do all people in Judaism believe the same way? Do all people in Messianic Judaism believe the same way? For that same matter, do all Republicans believe the same way? Do all Democrats believe the same way? (Or, those of any political party?)

Not everyone who believes in the Two Houses of Israel coming together believes the same sorts of things. This is absolutely imperative to understand, because there are some that are saying things about Two-House advocates that *do not apply to everyone*. Statements like “they believe this” or “they believe that” may apply to only one ministry or congregation or outspoken individual that advocates some form of the Two-House teaching. This is especially true because the Two-House Messianic movement does presently suffer from a substantial amount of simplistic theology, and over time this will have to be moderated out if God is going to truly use us.

Differences in how the Two-House teaching is perceived largely results in different views of the theology itself, and how it is to be applied to individuals’ lives. We fully recognize that just as there are different “brands” and “flavors” of Christianity, so are there many derivations of what many are now calling “the Two-House movement.” This is to be expected, especially as this movement is still in its infancy and is evolving—and also maturing.

There are different opinions in regard to Torah obedience, the end-times, and theology in general. However, even with these differences, there is the general consensus that all Israel is in the process of being restored, and that this will consummate with the return of Yeshua and the restoration of Israel’s Kingdom on Earth. Aside from any internal differences or variances of opinion we may have among ourselves, we must be united around the message and steadfast in lifting up Yeshua as the Savior for all humanity, and in affirming His Divinity and Messiahship.

*Please note that just as there are many variances of opinion and belief in regard to theology among those who believe in the Two Houses of Israel, TNN Online and Outreach Israel Ministries have their own distinct viewpoint about the restoration of all Israel, which may differ from other Two-House advocates.*

added 28 January, 2006

**Two Houses of Israel, development of theology:** What is the history of the development of Two-House teaching?

The understanding of the Two Houses of Israel, Judah and Ephraim, as is often taught today, is relatively new in comparison to “established” theology. The belief that in the end-times the Lord will reunite the House of Judah or the Jewish people, and the House of Israel/Ephraim, those of the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel, runs contrary to a large amount of evangelical Christian and Messianic Jewish theology.

It has really only been since the late 1990s that the Two-House teaching has gained considerable numbers. This has been largely due to the fact that many non-Jewish Believers in mainstream Christianity have taken to studying the Hebraic Roots of our faith, and as a result have left their churches, in a desire to live a more Biblical, Torah-obedient lifestyle, consistent with Yeshua and the First Century Believers. As a consequence of many non-Jewish Believers wanting to be more Biblical, and thus feeling a strong connection to Israel, the question “What is my relationship to Israel?” commonly gets asked.

In regard to the Two-House teaching, these are some of the basic first steps that people take before beginning to consider it. While some people read books about the Two Houses of Israel, which may or may not answer all of their questions, for many non-Jews it usually starts with first wanting to seek out the Hebraic Roots of our faith and then wondering if there is a greater connection to Israel than meets the eye. In some cases, this involves people becoming involved in Messianic Judaism, but then often not being fully welcome in it because of not being Jewish. It is further complicated by the current controversy going on in Messianic Judaism whether or not non-Jewish Believers should keep the Torah, the same as Jewish Believers. This is often where most people, who are sincerely convicted that all of God’s people need to be following the Torah, become open to the message about Israel’s restoration.

The belief in Judah and Ephraim being reunited in our day is by no means a current part of the “establishment.” In modern terms, what we believe about God’s elect, and thus its theological and lifestyle applications, runs contrary to what mainstream Christianity and much of Messianic Judaism teaches. However, according to Scripture—in the end the Lord will have one people, the people of Israel, composed of the Two Houses of Judah and Ephraim, and all those who join themselves to Him from the nations. He knows the bloodlines of who everyone is, and He alone will determine it in the end. The prophecies of Israel’s restoration can by no means be “avoided.”

If you are in Messiah Yeshua, you are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12), and what happens to Israel happens to you. **This means being a part of Israel’s end-time restoration** before the Messiah’s return, a substantial part of which is the reunion of the Two Houses. While today the Two-House teaching is still in its relative infancy and developing—and certainly needs some theological maturation—Israel will be fully restored before Yeshua returns.

added 28 January, 2006

### **Two-House Teaching: Do you believe in the Two-House teaching?**

Yes, we do believe in the Two-House teaching of Judah and Israel/Ephraim being reunited.

There are many rumors circulating throughout the Internet about the “Two-House” teaching and what it is. This usually comes as a result of someone not examining it thoroughly and thus making a hasty judgment. We believe in the reunification of all Israel on the basis of unfulfilled prophecies such as: Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 10:6-10; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 10:6-10. **We do not believe in the reunion of the Two Houses of Israel because of this tribe going here or that tribe going there.** We believe, just as does Orthodox Judaism, that before the Messiah comes, or *returns* in our case as Messianic Believers, that all Israel will be restored.

Two-House advocates do *vary* in their doctrine, although there is a general consensus that what God is doing in this hour is reuniting the two sticks of Judah and Ephraim of Ezekiel 37:15-28. The Father is awakening many of Judah, the Jewish people, to salvation in Messiah Yeshua, and many non-Jewish Believers—possibly of scattered Ephraim—are awakening to their Hebraic Roots.

You will find specific analyses of the Two-House teaching and related issues on our **Two-House News Network** sub-website.

updated 23 November, 2006

**Two Houses of Israel, Biblical basis for: What is the Biblical basis and/or “story” behind the Two Houses of Israel and their division?**

Many do not realize this, but prior to the Divided Kingdom period following the reign of Solomon, there was a division in Israel. This division goes as far back as Joshua 11:21, which speaks of “the hill country of Judah and...the hill country of Israel.” The division between the South, or Judah, and the North, or Israel, extended into the period of Israel’s United Monarchy. 1 Samuel 17:52-54, detailing David’s slaying of Goliath during the reign of King Saul, tells us the following:

“The **men of Israel and Judah** arose and shouted and pursued the Philistines as far as the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the slain Philistines lay along the way to Shaaraim, even to Gath and Ekron. The sons of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines and plundered their camps. Then David took the Philistine’s head and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his weapons in his tent.”

This division between Judah and Israel, the latter also called Ephraim, extended until David’s kingship. 1 Samuel 18:12-16 attests,

“Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from his presence and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD *was* with him. When Saul saw that he was prospering greatly, he dreaded him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, and he went out and came in before them.”

Additional Scriptures detailing a pre-Divided Kingdom division between the Two Houses of Israel include: 1 Samuel 11:8; 2 Samuel 5:5; 11:11; 12:8; 19:11, 40-42; 20:2; 21:2; 24:1, 9; 1 Kings 1:35; 2:32; 4:20, 25.

A pre-Divided Kingdom division between the Two Houses of Israel is most evident in the secession crisis that ensued after Saul died, “to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and to establish the throne of David **over Israel and over Judah**” (2 Samuel 3:10). There was a crisis because 2 Samuel 2:10-11 tells us, “Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he was king for two years. The house of Judah, however, followed David. The time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months”

It is only in 2 Samuel 5:1a, 3 that we are told, “Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said...So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel.” When this happened, David then became king over **both Judah and Israel**. This is confirmed in the words of Biblical scholar André Lemaire, who comments that “When David brought the Ark [of the Covenant] to Jerusalem, the religion of Yahweh became a unifying factor, strengthening the bond between Judah and Israel” (*Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Destruction of the Temple*, p 103).

This division was probably tempered from the reign of King David, who was loved by all of his subjects and was devoted fully to the service of the Lord. Biblical history shows that the United Kingdom period of Israel under the reign of David and then Solomon was relatively prosperous. However, Solomon had many wives who did not worship or know the God of Israel, and as a result Solomon succumbed to idolatry. While he was responsible for building the Temple in Jerusalem, the Scriptures also record the fact that he built temples to pagan gods:

“For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father *had done*. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had

commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded” (1 Kings 11:4-10).

Because of Solomon’s idolatry, which was in direct violation of the Torah, God ruled that the United Kingdom of Israel would be divided between his son and his servant Jeroboam. Only the tribe of Judah, of which the small tribe of Benjamin was integrated, and the city of Jerusalem, would remain in the hands of Solomon’s house:

“So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, *but* I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, *but* I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen” (1 Kings 11:11-13).

The Lord tells Jeroboam that He wants him to be the ruler of the House of Joseph, or the ten Northern tribes:

“[B]ut I will take the kingdom from his son's hand and give it to you, *even* ten tribes. But to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen for Myself to put My name. I will take you, and you shall reign over whatever you desire, and you shall be king over Israel. Then it will be, that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by observing My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. Thus I will afflict the descendants of David for this, but not always.’ Solomon sought therefore to put Jeroboam to death; but Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt to Shishak king of Egypt, and he was in Egypt until the death of Solomon” (1 Kings 11:35-40).

When Solomon died and his son Rehoboam ascended to the throne, Jeroboam returned from Egypt. Due to unfair and heavy taxation that Rehoboam placed on the ten Northern tribes (1 Kings 12:1-4), the Northern tribes seceded and made Jeroboam their leader. This established the two separate kingdoms of Israel, the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim. We are told that once the Northern Kingdom seceded and formed its own separate “State of Israel,” the Southern Kingdom amassed a large military force to retake it:

“It came about when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, that they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. None but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David. Now when Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, 180,000 chosen men who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon” (1 Kings 12:20-21).

The Lord, however, tells the Southern Kingdom that the division of Israel is from Him and they are not to go and retake the Northern Kingdom:

“But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, ‘Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin and to the rest of the people, saying, “Thus says the LORD, ‘You must not go up and fight against your relatives the sons of Israel; return every man to his house, for this thing has come from Me.’”’ So they listened to the word of the LORD, and returned and went *their way* according to the word of the LORD” (1 Kings 12:22-24).

At this time there was now an independent Northern Kingdom of Israel, with Jeroboam as its leader. But Jeroboam had concerns. 1 Kings 12:26-27 says, “Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, *even* to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.’”

What ensued as a result of the newly established, independent Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim? Jeroboam was deeply concerned that the people would later demand a return to union with the Southern Kingdom of Judah because they would have to go to the Temple in

Jerusalem to perform various sacrifices and fulfill other commandments that the Torah required. As a result, Jeroboam *changed* the religious practices for the people:

“So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.’ He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went *to worship* before the one as far as Dan. And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam instituted a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; thus he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. Then he went up to the altar which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised in his own heart; and he instituted a feast for the sons of Israel and went up to the altar to burn incense” (1 Kings 12:28-33).

Everything that Jeroboam did was in direct opposition to what God had prescribed in the Torah. He first made two golden calves for the people to worship, claiming that these were in actuality Israel’s gods. He built temples on the high places, one in the southern parts of the Northern Kingdom and the other in the northern parts of the Northern Kingdom, for the “convenience” of the people, so they would not go to Jerusalem. He likewise instituted substitute festivals for the holidays that the Lord prescribed in the Torah and he created a priesthood that was not of the line of Levi.

We know what came about as a result of these sins. The Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim was conquered by the Assyrian Empire in 721 B.C.E. and assimilated into the nations. The Northern Kingdom Israelites corporately lost their Israelite heritage and through intermarriage were spread abroad. While a few of these Northern Kingdom Israelites remembered who they were and were faithful to the God of Israel, integrating themselves into the Southern Kingdom or not being assimilated in the Assyrian Diaspora, the vast majority of them were assimilated. They never corporately returned to the Land of Israel.

Of course, we also know that the Southern Kingdom of Judah also devolved into idolatry, just as the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim did. Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity about 200 years after Ephraim. But Judah returned to the Land of Israel 70 years later when Babylon was conquered by Persia. Judah, unlike scattered Ephraim, has maintained his Israelite heritage. While having experienced yet another exile in 70 C.E. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, the Jewish people began returning to the Promised Land in great numbers with the birth of Zionism in the late 1800s, and then established the State of Israel in 1948.

What we are waiting for is the prophesied unification of *both* Houses of Israel. In our day, many non-Jewish Believers are awaking to their Hebraic Roots and are feeling a strong kinship to the Jewish people. Are these people of scattered “Ephraim”? God only knows. But what we do know is that in Yeshua all are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12), and what happens to Israel affects non-Jewish Believers every bit as much as it affects the Jewish people. This includes the end-time restoration of Israel.

Perhaps scattered Ephraim includes many “Christians” who are presently studying their Hebraic Roots and wanting to obey the Torah. Many of these people do not know why they are led to do so, but Believers are being led to examine the Scriptures like never before. The prophecies of Israel’s restoration clearly state that scattered Ephraim will repent of the sins of Jeroboam, and we certainly know that many Jewish people are likewise seeing the truth of Messiah Yeshua and the gospel. Time will tell how this plays out, and we need to be patient.

posted 29 January, 2006

**Two Houses of Israel, in the New Testament:** I am having difficulty finding any references to the Two Houses of Israel in the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament. Can you help me?

One of the principal objections to the Two-House understanding of Judah and Ephraim coming together from many Christians is from the assertion that it is not directly spoken of in the Apostolic Writings (New Testament). There are, in fact, some references to the Two Houses of Israel in the New Testament. Like other aspects of our faith, some of these references are quite obvious, and others you must carefully look for. The following are a handful of examples:

In Matthew 10:5-6, Yeshua instructs His Disciples, “Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” With this in mind, Yeshua also tells us, “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again” (John 10:16-17). This indicates that Yeshua has a sheepfold that was not of the Jewish sheepfold that He mostly ministered to in the Gospel accounts.

There is a reference to scattered Israel in Acts 2:39 and Ephesians 2:13, both to those who were considered “far off”:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified...For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are **far off**, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:36, 39).

“Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles [nations] in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ *which* is performed in the flesh by human hands—*remember* that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were **far off** have been brought near by the blood of Messiah” (Ephesians 2:11-13).

In Acts 15:19 James the Just speaks of those who are “returning” to the God of Israel from the nations, as the text employs the Greek verb *epistrephō* (ἐπιστρέφω), meaning “**to return to a point where one has been, turn around, go back**” (BDAG, 382). James also addresses his epistle to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora:

“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning [*epistrephō*] to God from among the Gentiles” (Acts 15:19).

“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings” (James 1:1).

The Apostle Paul talks about “the fullness of the Gentiles” coming back into the fold as a requirement for the salvation of all of Israel. The scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim was to become this “fullness of the nations” according to the Patriarch Jacob’s words (Genesis 48:19):

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25).

Paul also writes, “Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, ‘THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY’” (Romans 9:27-28; cf. Isaiah 10:22-23).

The Apostle Peter writes new, non-Jewish, Believers in 1 Peter 2:9-10, telling them that “you are A CHOSEN RACE, a royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God’s* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.” This admonition includes a direct quotation from Hosea 1:10, which reveals for us again that “the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea,” a direct reference to the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim.

Finally, the Apostle John tells us in Revelation 7:4, “I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.” It

is extremely important that we understand that the 144,000 are not all Jews, as is commonly taught in Christianity today. Although many will be Jews of the House of Judah, many others will be of the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim, as both Judah and Ephraim comprise all twelve tribes of Israel.

Some of these references are notably not as direct as others. The Apostles by **no means** considered the spread of the gospel to be limited to just scattered Israel in the nations, and they **did not make any attempts** to identify any ethnicity with a particular tribe of Israel. They simply recognized that as the gospel message was going out to the nations, God was in the process of restoring Israel.

posted 24 March, 2005

### **Two-House of Israel, primary prophecies attesting to: What primary prophecies speak of the Two Houses of Israel?**

Noting that there were divisions in Israel, both prior to and then after the reigns of King David and King Solomon, there are some very specific end-time prophecies that detail the reunification of the Two Houses of Israel. These prophecies have not been fulfilled, and critics of the Two-House teaching are hard-pressed to provide a *viable alternative* interpretation of them. Here are a series of important texts, which for the sake of the reader have been left in their Biblical order as they appear in the Tanach (Old Testament):

#### ***Isaiah 11:10-16***

“Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious. Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He will lift up a standard for the nations and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Then the jealousy of Ephraim will depart, and those who harass Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not harass Ephraim. They will swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west; together they will plunder the sons of the east; they will possess Edom and Moab, and the sons of Ammon will be subject to them. And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt; and He will wave His hand over the River with His scorching wind; and He will strike it into seven streams and make *men* walk over dry-shod. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.”

This prophecy details the end-time regathering of Judah and scattered Ephraim and their coming into the Land of Israel. The Lord says that He will gather them from all over the world. When they return, they will perform mighty deeds, which if we relate to the present state of the Middle East, possibly involve Israel's annexation of the Gaza Strip, “the slopes of the Philistines on the west,” the West Bank, “They will possess Edom and Moab,” and the entire country of Jordan, “And the sons of Ammon will be subject to them.” Interestingly enough, hardliners in some Israeli political parties have historically believed that Israel should control what is today Jordan, so it is not improbable to see this prophecy fulfilled sometime in the future. If we believe in what is written in God's Word, these sentiments can be easily revived.

#### ***Jeremiah 3:18***

“In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance.”

This verse is commonly used as a support text for the present wave of Jewish immigration that is coming into Israel from the former Soviet Union. While this can be an appropriate application—and by all means we do support this—it cannot be a complete fulfillment because the House of Judah *and* the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim *both* have not returned to the Land of Israel. Judah is not the only one who has to return from “the North,”

because the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity, which is north of the Land of Israel.

**Jeremiah 30:3**

“For behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The LORD says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.”

Neither Judah nor scattered Ephraim have *both* returned to the Land of Israel. An explanatory note in the Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Tanach* reads, “This is the reason for writing down the prophecies: They are intended for the future (see v. 24), when the ultimate redemption will take place (*Radak*)” (p 1140). Jeremiah 30:24 tells us, “The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has performed and until He has accomplished the intent of His heart; in the latter days you will understand this.” While we have begun to see this prophecy fulfilled, notably with the creation of the State of Israel and the return of Jewish people to the Promised Land, it is by no means completed.

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

This prophecy speaks of the New Covenant or *b'rit chadashah* (בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה) that the Lord will make with His people, where He will write the Torah onto the hearts of His people. It is directly alluded to in Hebrews 8:1-13, where the author of Hebrews speaks of Messiah Yeshua as our High Priest in Heaven interceding for us. He relates this to His perfect sacrifice and how God will write His Torah or Law onto the hearts of His people:

“Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this *high priest* also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘SEE,’ He says, ‘THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.’ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first [*priesthood*] had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, ‘BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, “KNOW THE LORD,” FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.’ When He said, ‘A new [*priesthood*],’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”

As you can see, this text has a direct quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (LXX) in it. Surprisingly, many Christians will use these verses from Hebrews 8 to tell us that the Torah is no longer for today, when in fact the text says that when God fully institutes this covenant with His people, He says “I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM UPON THEIR HEARTS” (v. 10). When this covenant is fully instituted, all of God’s people will have the Torah written on their hearts. This prophecy is being fulfilled in our day as Believers are learning how to live as Messiah Yeshua lived, in obedience to the Torah. This is principal evidence that God is in the process of restoring all Israel.

**Jeremiah 33:7, 14-15**

“I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them as they were at first...I will dash them against each other, both the fathers and the sons together,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will not show pity nor be sorry nor have compassion so as not to destroy them.’ Listen and give heed, do not be haughty, for the LORD has spoken.”

This prophecy speaks of the restored Kingdom of Israel where Judah and Israel/Ephraim will be rebuilt up and Messiah Yeshua will be ruling and reigning from Jerusalem. The Two Houses of Israel have not been brought together, because when they are Yeshua the Messiah will have returned. There will never be any need for God to judge Israel any more.

**Jeremiah 50:4-7, 20**

“The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens *Me* morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient nor did I turn back. I gave My back to those who strike *Me*, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. For the Lord GOD helps Me, therefore, I am not disgraced; therefore, I have set My face like flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed...In those days and at that time,’ declares the LORD, ‘search will be made for the iniquity of Israel, but there will be none; and for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.”

This prophecy speaks of Judah and scattered Israel/Ephraim desiring to return together to the Land of Israel and seeking to find the Holy One of Israel. The Hebrew verb *baqash* (בָּקַשׁ) used in the phrase, “search will be made for the iniquity of Israel,” appears in the Pual stem (intensive action action, passive voice) and specifically means, “*be sought*” (BDB, 134). Has all Israel returned to Zion to seek the Lord and has no sin been found in them? Has all Israel sought and received corporate, national unification and redemption? Has all Israel appointed and recognized Messiah Yeshua, the sinless Lamb of God, over them?

**Ezekiel 37:15-28**

Ezekiel 37:15-28 is probably the most critical Scripture passage concerning the Two Houses of Israel and their prophesied reunification under David, or the Greater David, who is Messiah Yeshua:

“The word of the LORD came again to me saying, ‘And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, “For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions”; then take another stick and write on it, “For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.” Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. When the sons of your people speak to you saying, “Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?” say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.’” The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. ‘Say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but

I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.””

Ezekiel 37:15-28 is probably the most critical Scripture passage concerning the Two Houses of Israel and their prophesied reunification under David, or the Greater David, who is Messiah Yeshua. If you read these verses carefully, then you must come to the conclusion that this prophecy has yet to occur and the Two Houses of Israel have yet to be reunited. The House of Judah and the House of Israel/Ephraim both **have not** returned to the Land of Israel. David, the Greater David, or Messiah Yeshua, is not reigning over them from His throne in Jerusalem. The Messiah has yet to return to Earth, and Judah and Ephraim have yet to dwell securely in their own land. All of Israel is not observing the statutes and decrees of the Lord and obeying Him to their fullest extent.

Interestingly enough, noted pre-tribulationist Tim LaHaye writes in his *Prophecy Study Bible* concerning Ezekiel 37:15-23, “The Kingdom of David and Solomon split in 931 B.C., becoming Israel and Judah. In restored Israel, all tribes are represented and the nation will be united, as the sign of the fused stick reveals” (p 873). To the casual observer, from a dispensationalist pre-tribulationist publication, this implies that the two divided Kingdoms of Israel have yet to be reunited. LaHaye and others like him would not be advocates of the Two-House teaching, but this quotation certainly indicates what we believe: **the fact that all Israel is yet to be reunited!**

**Hosea 1:10-11**

“Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; and in the place where it is said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ It will be said to them, ‘*You are* the sons of the living God.’ And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one leader, and they will go up from the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.”

This prophecy of Judah and Ephraim attests that their numbers will be great, “like the sand of the sea which can neither be measured nor counted,” and that they will be “gathered together.” The Hebrew verb *qavatz* (קָבַץ) specifically means “gather, collect” (BDB, 867). This prophetic text specifically says that the Day of Jezreel, indicative of the valley in Northern Israel where the Battle of Armageddon is to occur (Revelation 16:16), is the day when Yeshua the Messiah returns to defeat His enemies and establishes His Millennial Kingdom. This is the time when the Two Houses of Israel will be fully reunited and appoint Messiah Yeshua as their Leader. The prophecy says that they will “ascend from the land” (ATS), meaning that just as Yeshua was taken up into the clouds, so will all reunited Judah and Ephraim recognizing Yeshua as their Leader, be taken up to meet Him as the Great Tribulation ends. How many prophecy teachers are aware of this? How many Messianic teachers are aware of this?

**Zechariah 9:13-16**

“For I will bend Judah as My bow, I will fill the bow with Ephraim. And I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece; and I will make you like a warrior's sword. Then the LORD will appear over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning; and the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet, and will march in the storm winds of the south. The LORD of hosts will defend them. And they will devour and trample on the sling stones; and they will drink *and* be boisterous as with wine; and they will be filled like a *sacrificial* basin, *drenched* like the corners of

the altar. And the LORD their God will save them in that day as the flock of His people; for *they are as* the stones of a crown, sparkling in His land.”

This end-time prophecy speaks of a future military conflict between the State of Israel and Greece. It is possible that this will occur during the future Tribulation period. Many, including the editor, believe that the antimessiah/antichrist will arise out of the old Roman Empire or today’s European Union. Greece is a member of the European Union, and as of right now is geographically the most powerful E.U. member closest to Israel. Nevertheless, even though Greece may attempt to attack Israel in the future, the Scripture says that it will not succeed. How many of us have objectively examined this prophecy and factored it into our understanding of the Last Days?

These texts provided about the Two Houses of Israel should provide you a good framework of what we believe and where we are coming from. As you hopefully can tell, there are some very important end-time prophecies that involve both Judah and Ephraim. They impact not only what we believe about the Last Days, but also how as Believers we relate to Israel, and then once believing ourselves to be a part of Israel, consider some of the specifics of Israel’s end-time restoration. How they will all be fulfilled we may never know, but we certainly cannot ignore them as the Messianic movement grows in larger numbers.

posted 05 February, 2006

**Two Houses of Israel, salvation:** Do you believe that God’s primary purpose is the salvation of “all Israel,” or individual persons?

There are some who teach about the Two Houses who place the salvation of “all Israel” at such a level as if personal salvation does not even matter. While it is very true that a major emphasis of Holy Scripture is the national salvation of all Israel, nothing is more important than personal salvation. If one has not experienced salvation and redemption in Yeshua on a personal level *first*, then there can be no hope of that person being part of a collective salvation of *all the redeemed* who compose God’s people of Israel.

Paul wrote the Ephesian Believers, “*remember* that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Paul writes that these Believers were “alienated” (RSV) from Israel prior to their faith. The Scripture continues, stating, “But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah” (Ephesians 2:13). This very clearly establishes the fact that these non-Jewish Believers, prior to their personal salvation, were separated from Israel. But as an effect of their personal redemption, they can now be part of the national salvation of all Israel.

Just as our own personal salvation is awaiting its consummation when Yeshua returns and we receive glorified bodies, so is our own collective, national “salvation” awaiting its own consummation. As part of the Commonwealth of Israel, we compose an amalgamation of people who have received the Messiah of Israel into our hearts and are waiting for the true fulfillment of the question the Disciples asked in Acts 1:6, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” This restoration will only occur when Yeshua sets His feet on the Mount of Olives and begins His eternal reign from Jerusalem at the Second Coming.

Furthermore, we need to understand that the teaching of the Two Houses of Israel is **not a salvation issue**; it is an issue of one’s ecclesiology or what one believes about the chosen people of God and who composes that people. There are many critics of the Two-House teaching out there. While we may disagree with some of their criticisms, and at times find some of their criticism unbecoming of mature Believers, we do not believe that if they do not accept the teaching of the Two Houses of Israel and Israel’s restoration that they are “unsaved.”

posted 16 March, 2006

**Two Houses of Israel, who are:** Who are the Two Houses of Israel that are so frequently talked about in sectors of the Messianic community?

The Two Houses of Israel are Judah and Israel, the latter also known as Ephraim, designations that go back to the Divided Kingdom period in Ancient Israel's history from after the reign of Solomon. Today, Judah is represented by the Jewish people, and scattered Ephraim is spread worldwide, with only God knowing where they are. They may include areas where Christianity has spread, as well as among religions that do not worship or recognize the God of Israel. Those who compose scattered Ephraim are the descendants of the dispersed Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim or the "Ten Lost Tribes" who went into Assyrian exile in 721 B.C.E. Perhaps many of these people are among Christians who are today being drawn toward their Hebraic Roots, who feel a strong kinship to the Jewish people.

There is an undeniable restoration place today as many Jewish people see the truth of Yeshua the Messiah, and many non-Jewish Believers embrace the Hebraic heritage of the faith and are becoming Torah observant. As many Jews and Christians are being drawn together, many do not know or are consciously aware that they may be fulfilling the prophecies of Israel's restoration.

The major difference between the Two-House position on Israel and the mainstream is that we believe that "Israel" is much more than just today's Jewish people. We believe that in addition to today's Jewish people that there are many more descendants of Israel on Planet Earth than are usually given credit. And, this makes us different from the many groups who have gone before us and have addressed the "Ten Lost Tribes," many of which discount the Jewish people as being legitimate Israelites and have aberrant doctrines associated with them. But in the end, inclusion in the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12) is contingent on belief in Yeshua, and likewise, only God will be able to sort out "who is who."

posted 29 January, 2006

**Tzit-tzits:** Do you believe that Messianics should wear *tzit-tzits*/fringes/tassels?

The commandment in the Torah regarding *tzit-tzits* or fringes appears twice:

"Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue" (Numbers 15:38).

"You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself" (Deuteronomy 22:12).

The singular Hebrew term employed for "tassel" is *tzit-tzit* (צִיִּצִית), with its plural form being *tzit-tzityot* (צִיִּצִיּוֹת). In the Greek LXX *tzit-tzit* was rendered as *kraspedon* (κράσπεδον), also employed in the Gospel narratives. The Gospels are clear that Yeshua the Messiah wore *tzit-tzits*:

"And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak" (Matthew 9:20).

"[A]nd they implored Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched *it* were cured" (Matthew 14:36).

"Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched *it* were being cured" (Mark 6:56).

"And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped" (Luke 8:44).

In Judaism today, as well as in the Messianic community, there is a great deal of variance regarding the application of this commandment. *Halachally* speaking, *tzit-tzits* are only to be worn on a four-cornered garment. This is why you will see Orthodox Jewish men wearing a *tallit* (טלית, Ashkenazic *talit*) or a prayer shawl in prayer times and synagogue services, and frequently a *tallit katan*, or a smaller version that is worn at all times. Whether one is Orthodox or Conservative, the ruling that the *tallit* is only proper to be worn during the daytime is followed, with the

exception of the evening services of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. In Conservative and Reform Judaism, wearing the *tallit* is not as common as it is in Orthodox Judaism. A notable difference between Orthodox Judaism and Reform Judaism is that Reform Judaism allows women to wear a *tallit*, whereas Orthodox Judaism largely does not.

It is important to note that most Jews wear *tzit-tzits* on their *tallit* that are all white, without any blue. This is because the traditional dye for the blue has been lost to antiquity. There are, however, groups like the Temple Mount faithful who claim to have found the specific dye for the required blue, and one can purchase untied wool *tzit-tzityot* with this blue. The validity of such dye, however, is debated (and even the editor is not fully convinced).

In the Messianic community, there is a wider variance of application of these commandments. A sizeable number of Messianics ignore the commandment entirely, thinking that it is unimportant. Likewise, there are those who follow these commandments almost exactly as Orthodox Judaism does.

A fair consensus of application in the Messianic community reveals that many men wear prayer shawls during prayer times and in congregational services, but will probably also wear *tallits* at night time, which is not followed in standard Jewish *halachah*. Many of these same Messianics will wear the *tzit-tzityot* with the blue thread, which may be the specialty blue thread from Israel, but sometimes with a generic blue thread that does not have the specific dye. It is notable that many men in independent Messianic groups, while wearing a Jewish *tallit*, do not wear a *kippah* or *yarmulke* on their heads at the same time, against standard custom and etiquette. Some Messianics wear *tzit-tzityot* all the time with a *tallit katan*, and others are prone to attach “home made” fringes to their belt loops. Some choose to tuck the *tzit-tzityot* into their clothing.

There is also some variance on how *tzit-tzityot* should be tied. The two most common ways you will see *tzit-tzityot* tied are the Ashkenazic Jewish way and the Sephardic Jewish way.

It is also debated whether or not Messianic women should wear *tzit-tzityot*. This command is given to *b'nei Yisrael* (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), but whether it is masculine in orientation or all-inclusive in orientation depends on whether one translates this as “sons of Israel,” “children of Israel,” or simply “Israelites.” While some Jewish women throughout history are accredited with having worn *tzit-tzityot*, they are the exception and not the longstanding rule.

The variance in how the command to wear *tzit-tzityot* is applied in the Messianic community will remain until Yeshua returns. We would encourage you to find an interpretation and application that you are comfortable with, consistent with mainline Judaism.

updated 21 September, 2006