

Some Thoughts on Our Messianic Future

by J.K. McKee posted 04 June, 2007 www.tnnonline.net

Many questions are being asked of today's Messianic movement as we reflect where we have been the past few years, and where we will be going in the future. I have stated in previous articles that I believe that while in the past ten years that the Messianic community has grown significantly, our theology has not been able to keep up with this growth. I believe that the next ten years are going to be a very "interesting" time in our Biblical Studies, particularly as we improve and refine our theology—meeting the challenges of the Twenty-First Century and address issues that we have commonly put aside.

But not all of us are called to be teachers; in fact, most of you will not be called to spend two to three weeks writing a commentary on *just one* chapter of Scripture (as I frequently find myself doing). So, I write this to *all of us*—from the Bible teacher to pastor/rabbi to the normal person who serves God with his or her unique talents and gifts. As we begin this season of growth, as one chapter closes in our development, and a new chapter begins—**what do we really need?** What must we have to make sure that we are fulfilling the mission and purpose that the Lord has given us regardless of our specific giftings?

Each one of us as individual Believers has a calling to be in ministry. This ministry may not be sitting in a office doing research, or out in the mission field with the natives. Each of us minister in the sphere of influences God has placed us in, interacting with people in the workplace, on the street, and perhaps even in other parts of the world. We are each God's representatives on Earth, calling the world to be reconciled with Him (2 Corinthians 5:20). And, while each of us may have a different sphere of influence, there are still common threads that are placed throughout what we must do. I believe that if we can recognize the common traits that we all must share *then we can truly be empowered to be a movement that can make a difference.*

Need #1:

Our Ability to Love God and Love Others

Each of us recognizes from the Torah and Gospels that the greatest commandments are to love God with all of our being, and love our neighbors (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Luke 10:27). Hopefully, we recognize that as a direct result of the born again experience, we are to have hearts that are supernaturally transformed by the love of God. This causes us to orient everything that we do in life toward God and toward whatever He desires of us. Everything we do should be directed toward glorifying Him and in seeing that His purposes are accomplished on Earth.

Admittedly, while having a love for God sounds wonderful on paper, truly loving Him will cause us to do things that may seem strange to worldly people. Not only are we to not act like the world (Romans 12:2), but we frequently make decisions as Believers that do not seem logical or well-considered to those of the world. As Believers, we do not go to the same places to hang out as we did prior to our conversion; we do not talk the same way; we have different priorities; we dedicate time to worship and meditation; we associate with different people; we live for a different reason. Certainly, this is not to say that Believers in Yeshua should not live lives without serious consideration—and just do things because they "feel" that God wants them to—but orienting one toward Him will certainly alter how we go about doing things.

A true love of God will be manifested in how we treat His most beloved creation: human beings. If we can interact with other people with the love and beneficence that He has bestowed upon us—then it is a definite sign that we are His! John tells us, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). If we can demonstrate this love toward people *whom we can see*, then it demonstrates *that we truly love a God whom we cannot see*. But this is not always easy—because people make mistakes and can be frustrating.

Interacting with other members of the human family is something that can be very difficult, because each of us is complex, has our own thoughts and desires, and will often look at the world in a unique way. **I am certainly no exception to this.** But, if we have truly experienced the love of God and the new birth via His Son, Yeshua—then we should be able to function in it.

God's love will give us the patience, tolerance, and respect we should have in order to interact with others. This is true of both how we interact with outsiders who do not know the Lord—and especially those of the community of faith who do know Him.

Operating in the love of God is a key element of establishing common ground with anyone we encounter. Each person desires love and acceptance. Each person wants to feel that they are valued. This is true of the Jewish person who believes that his culture and traditions have been discriminated against by many Christians, or even the Italian person who believes that legitimate Roman achievements are disparaged by some Messianics. But the unique thing about human beings is that any achievements—whether done in the name of God or someone/something else—still testify to the fact that human beings are made in His image (Genesis 1:27) and possess an intelligence given to them by Him. We have to learn to recognize the value that exists in every person whom God has made.

Today's Messianic community—which largely claims to uphold the Torah ethos of loving God and neighbor—needs to understand how important it is to operate in His love. Love does not insult others using slurs, or attempts to create contention. Love attempts to build bridges, focuses on what people have in common, and finds solutions to problems when they arise. A true love of God and neighbor will result in the unity that so many of us want—but often seem unable to find.

Need #2:

Our Ability to Have a Love for All of Scripture

One of the most important ways that we are to be changed by the Lord is by submitting ourselves to a consistent study of His Word. Certainly in today's Messianic movement, we encounter many people who have a hunger and thirst for truth, specifically truth that is Biblically supported. But much of this hunger and thirst comes from those who come from Christian backgrounds where only the "New Testament" or Apostolic Scriptures was considered to be relevant Scripture. Because such people wanted more out of the Bible than what they were receiving, a Messianic movement where the Torah is taught on a consistent basis was very appealing.

In the past decade, a significant part of the Messianic movement has grown because of its emphasis on Torah study. Every week in Jewish synagogues, a selection from the Torah is contemplated. This is a tradition that goes back beyond the First Century—and it is something that can be very helpful. At the same time, though, while the Messianic community is largely faithful to consider the weekly *parashah*, falling into the habit of *only examining* a 3-4 chapter Torah portion every week has its disadvantages as well. All too often, the cry is heard about "returning the people to Torah" or "proclaiming Torah"—when the Torah by no means makes up the entire Bible. In some sectors of today's Messianic community, an overemphasis on the Torah is beginning to reveal itself. It is no better a mistake than only focusing on the "New Testament" in certain Christian venues.

A definite solution to this can be to orient our weekly *Shabbat* services to models that we see present in Scripture. Paul's visit to Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13:13-52 is an excellent place where many of us could start. Whereas many Messianic congregations *only include* a teaching based on the weekly *parashah*, the model that we see at this synagogue includes much more. Acts 13:15 attests, "After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'" This indicates that there were probably two short teachings: one from the Torah, and the other from the Haftarah. This was then followed by some kind of a sermon or homily. This message may have been based on themes seen in the Law and Prophets that week—but it may also have been on topics unrelated, but necessary for the events of the day that the local community was facing. Paul used the opportunity to proclaim the gospel message to those assembled.

Having a love for *all of the Bible* is something that the Lord has been able to give me, especially as the Messianic community grows and deals with complicated issues. I know that He has given me a gift of not just surveying Scripture, but examining it systematically verse-by-verse,

consulting original language texts and technical commentaries. While most of you are not called to do this, reading large parts of the Bible on a consistent basis, understanding the broad message of Biblical books, and most importantly recognizing the intricate mosaic that we call Scripture, are things that all of today's Messianic Believers certainly need. When circumstances arise that *the Torah* does not address—directly or indirectly—yet *other parts of the Bible* do address, can we afford to be ignorant of them? How much of understanding who God is and how we can serve Him more effectively remains under-addressed because we really only have a love for *parts of Scripture* and *not all of Scripture*?

In your Messianic congregation or fellowship, what needs to be improved upon? Are you only studying the weekly *parashah*? Do the Apostolic Scriptures largely go unexamined? What do you do about expository preaching that goes beyond the Law and the Prophets? How might you have a better appreciation for the masterpiece that we call **the Bible**, which includes much more than just the Law of Moses?

Need #3:

Our Ability to be Forward Thinking

The ability to see beyond one's current circumstances can be a very serious challenge. This is especially true of today's Messianic movement *which is largely American*. North Americans have difficulty seeing the "big picture" due to the fact that most of the things built on this continent are not ancient, nor do they last very long when compared to the castles of Europe, pyramids of Egypt, or temples of Asia. The ability to easily access ancient things causes members of those societies to often look beyond their own lifespan and consider the passage of previous time and the advance of future time much easily than us as Americans.

As the Lord molds Messianic individuals into people who are transformed by His love and have a deep regard for His Word, we need to learn how to live lives that will not only have an impact on our current generation—but generations to come. How do we become a people who are forward thinking—"progressive" in the best sense of the word—and looking ahead toward the future? How do we prepare ourselves and our posterity for the challenges that lie ahead? How do we study Scripture and be empowered to respond to the issues that society at large will force upon us?

These questions are not easily answered by many in today's Messianic community, be they in positions of leadership, teaching, or just attendance. Much of the Messianic movement began as an evangelistic outreach of Jewish Believers to the Jewish community. Right now, an unforeseen side effect was the exposure of many Christians to their Hebraic Roots. What will be the next unforeseen development in the growth of the Messianic community? What might we consider, looking forward to the future?

One of the things that I have noticed most Messianic Believers do not handle very well is theological controversy. The Messianic movement—as a whole—tends to avoid issues that pertain to the historicity and reliability of the Bible, any kind of discussion relating to the nature of God and Yeshua, and for that same matter any kind of scientific criticism against the claims of God creating the universe via His intelligent design. Yet, these are issues that Christendom today is facing and debating. You only need to turn on the Discovery Channel or History Channel and hear liberal commentators say why this story or that account in the Bible is obviously mythology. Likewise, these same liberal trends are causing denominations to split in two over issues like homosexuality.

When we consider these things, what are we preparing ourselves for as Messianic Believers? Have you considered the possibility that in the future the Messianic community may swell significantly because of the effects of some of these denominational splits? In a movement that should emphasize the morality of the Torah, do not be surprised if it does. But if such a thing does happen—we need to be ready. We need to pray for God to give us the insight, discernment, and premonition regarding what to prepare for—**so we can be ready long before anything occurs.**

I know that the Messianic movement that I personally envision is a minimum of twenty

to thirty years away. This will be a community of people who are more than changed by the Lord. They will be people who also know more than just theology and have the established *Messianic doctrines* behind them complete with Bible commentaries and treatises on a wide variety of issues. They will be people who are relevant to the society where they are living and recognize the mission of God to not only testify of the salvation available in Yeshua, but can take responsibility for making disciples and enacting a substantial difference in the world. They will have respect for their shared Jewish and Christian theological heritage, and will service the unique needs of both Synagogue and Church.

In the meantime, we must be sure that we are people changed by God's love with a heart for others, and that we have a deep love for His Word so that we can have solid, reasonable answers that those others seek. Likewise, we must commit ourselves to the long-term work that He desires us to accomplish.

Where do you need to improve?

Do you have a heart for the Lord? When you pray to Him, do you ask Him to give you love for your fellow man? When you get around other people, do you think why you are with them and about what annoys you—or do you think that God cares for each person in a unique and compassionate way? When you see the achievements of any culture and society, do you try to pick apart the “paganism” in them—or do you recognize that the ability to build buildings, carve a statue, or compose music all come because God gave intelligence to human beings? How much more love and understanding might you need to be given? How might you be a person who can be a peacemaker and effect solutions when touchy subjects arise?

Likewise, when you read Scripture, do you find yourself or your congregation favoring one part of the Bible over another? Do you find yourself as a Messianic Believer exclusively focusing on the Torah? How do you respond to criticisms against your Messianic faith from the New Testament? Does your pastor or rabbi ever focus on issues that directly relate your own faith community or sphere of influence—that may not be directly addressed in the weekly *parashah*? How might you improve upon your understanding of all of Scripture? What books of the Bible might you be purposefully staying away from because your view of Scripture has become unbalanced?

Most importantly, are you considering what you are going to pass on to others as a Messianic Believer, hopefully one who is part of a faith community? Are you prepared to answer the challenges of tomorrow? Do you understand what it means to be part of a global society? Do you recognize what is going on in the greater religious world around you—and how we need to be there when the denominational splits come? What progress do you think needs to be made in the decades to come in today's Messianic movement? How are you connected to others?

All of the questions I have just asked are things that I believe we all need to be considering in this hour. We have some difficult choices to make in the immediate years ahead. We need to decide if we are going to be a Messianic movement that will be used by God to make a serious difference in our sinful world—or whether we will be focused on other issues.

The issues that we will be facing can be easily solved, though, by us first becoming diligent disciples of Yeshua the Messiah. By submitting ourselves to His teachings and example for life, we can be some of those who can make a difference in our world. But secondly, we also have to be more corporately and generationally minded. We should not be small little islands unto ourselves—and we need to pass on what we have learned to those coming after us. How these things will—or even can—be accomplished, though, is **entirely up to us, because the Lord gives us the free will to say yes or no to Him**. I pray that we make the right decisions as we try to see what the Lord is doing *from His eternal perspective*—even if just for a short time. As for me, I want to be that Believer who says “yes” to the Lord!

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A., Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of TNN Online (www.tnnonline.net) and is a Messianic apologist. He is author of several books, including: *The New Testament Validates Torah*, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, and *When Will the Messiah Return?* He has also written many articles on the Two Houses of Israel and Biblical theology, and is presently focusing on Messianic commentaries on various books of the Bible.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.