

# The Work of the Holy Spirit: Perfection of the Mind

by J.K. McKee 01 September, 2006 www.tnnonline.net

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In my first teaching, which dealt with the perfection of the heart, I began to speak about our need to have the center of our beings transformed into the character of our Messiah Yeshua.<sup>1</sup> A transformed heart brings forth love, compassion, and mercy toward others, and is concerned about the salvation of the world. When we as individuals experience salvation we are to have a heart that orients itself toward God, and then every other aspect of our being begins to be changed. After the heart, **the first area of ourselves that must experience transformation is the mind.**

One of the challenges that we all face as a part of the fallen condition of humanity is that none of us will ever reach complete perfection. Even if we are redeemed souls who believe that Yeshua is the Savior, we will by-and-large be looking for that day when we wake up and we will be “entirely perfect.” Whether one is Jewish, Christian, or even Messianic, we largely adhere to an Aristotelian idea of perfection. The classical definition of perfection as given by Aristotle is that something is perfect when it “lacks nothing in respect of goodness or excellence” and “cannot be surpassed in its kind” (*IDB*).<sup>2</sup> The problem with this definition is that total goodness or excellence cannot exist in the fallen world in which we live. Even as Believers in Messiah Yeshua, we will not ever be “perfect” in this context because we live in a fallen world and will often slip up at times.

Of course, this does not mean that we are to not seek perfection, or be striving to overcome sin. Yeshua Himself taught, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). But this is something that we are to *strive for* in our daily walk of faith, as opposed to having it simply imparted to us. Notice that Yeshua issues this as a command. Perfection is something that must be sought out.

In the Scriptures themselves, we see a somewhat different portrayal of perfection than Aristotle’s definition. In the Hebrew Tanach, the term commonly indicating “perfection” is *tamim* (טָמִים). This can mean “whole, entire,” “intact,” “free of blemish,” and “blameless” (*CHALOT*).<sup>3</sup> In relation to human character, it is most often rendered as “upright” or “blameless.” In the Greek Septuagint and Apostolic Scriptures the term *teleios* (τέλειος) is used, primarily “**pert. to being mature, full-grown, mature, adult**” or quite possibly even “**to being fully developed in a moral sense**” (*BDAG*).<sup>4</sup> What all of these concepts indicate is that one who is striving to be “perfect” wants sinful behavior removed from his or her life, wants to be mature, and wants to be developing as an adult in the faith, able to deal with complicated ideas.

In Yeshua’s repetition of the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6, He says that the greatest command is to “LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND” (Matthew 22:37; cf. Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). One aspect of our faith that I think is frequently overlooked and downplayed is the need for us to worship God with our minds. When we come to gatherings such as this and assemble in worship, many of us are singing loudly, we are raising our hands, some are even dancing in the aisles, but do we ever seriously consider what it means to worship God with our minds? Do we know what it means to have a transformation of our minds?

After our heart, the mind is clearly the first part of our beings that is to experience transformation. If one examines Yeshua’s Sermon on the Mount and His sayings about one being angry with a neighbor, one having lustful inclinations, or simple hate for others, you can be rest

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<sup>1</sup> This article has been reproduced from the paperback edition of the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*, pp 219-230.

<sup>2</sup> J.Y. Campbell, “Perfection,” in *IDB*, 3:730.

<sup>3</sup> *CHALOT*, 391.

<sup>4</sup> *BDAG*, 995.

assured that the Lord does place a high priority on our thoughts. It is not solely enough for us to commit a sinful act to be guilty; it is sufficient for us to have thoughts of committing a sin for us to be guilty. While some of us may watch science fiction shows where human telepaths are used to probe the thoughts and feelings of criminals or potential criminals, and we might shake our heads about how ludicrous and subjective it might be, God probes our minds all the time. He knows what each one of us is thinking right now. He knows if our thoughts are focused on Him, His Word, and the work that He has assigned us to do—or if we are thinking things that will take us away from Him and damage the relationship that He desires with us.

I hope that every day you wake up and you spend several moments in one-on-one time with the Lord. I hope that you pray for Him to give you a heart toward other people, and that you can properly represent Him in our sin-cursed world. But how many of you pray that He gives you a mind that can focus on Him?

I do not think enough people realize this, but when you enter into the Messianic movement you will not only be spiritually challenged, but also mentally challenged. Not only does the enemy not want you to succeed in changing your lifestyles so that you can fully live like Yeshua lived, he does not want you to progress beyond the essentials of the faith. The enemy wants you to remain as a simplistic child *not able* to handle complicated ideas or concepts. The very word “theology,” meaning the study of God, summarizes it all quite well. Having a transformed heart should lead us to having a wonderful relationship with God and with other Believers, but having a transformed mind **should enable us to have a theology**, allowing us to understand who God is from His Word and in His Creation. I am readily reminded of the Apostle Paul’s words which speak to much of our situation. He says in 1 Corinthians 13:11, “When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.”

As a Reforming movement, we have a long way to go before a more definite Messianic “theology” can be established. While I am not a Calvinist—in fact, I am a strong Arminian—I nevertheless admire the work of John Calvin and how in the early decades of the Reformation he spent most of his life in Geneva writing commentaries on books of the Bible in an early Protestant movement that desperately needed some systematic view of the Scriptures. I believe that the Messianic movement is only now beginning to enter into that stage when we can begin to systematize our theology, and take into consideration a vast amount of Jewish literature and commentary that five-hundred years ago the early Reformers did not have access to, and only in the past fifty years or so have English speakers really been able to examine. Did you know that the Mishnah and Talmud were translated into French and German before English? That can seriously limit the amount of people who can access it.

A further challenge has been caused by the so-called Jesus Seminar of the past twenty or so years. This was largely a liberal compendium of theologians assembled to determine which parts of the Gospels are authentic and which are inauthentic. In their findings, they concluded that most of the Gospels were inauthentic, and evangelical Christians found themselves at a loss of knowing how to respond. When liberals say that it is not in Yeshua’s character to call Pharisees “vipers,” for example, because it does not seem to be loving, how do conservatives respond? The only way that one can respond is by understanding the distinct Jewish character and world in which Yeshua lived.

The mistake that is largely made is that we see Yeshua on the outside, criticizing others on the inside. This is not an historically valid way of looking at the Messiah. Evangelicals are now having to engage with the contemporary Jewish literature of Yeshua’s time, and they are beginning to see that Pharisees called other Pharisees “vipers” quite frequently. Yeshua’s criticism of them is largely done on an intra-mural level as though He were one of them. It is no different than me saying that my sister Jane is “something,” and getting away with it because we’re family. I would not be able to go to your family and easily call you “something.” But these theological ideas not only require that we have hearts open to change, but that we also have open minds and that we can comprehend new, and controversial ideas. Certainly, having entered into the Messianic

movement, none of you should be strangers to controversy. But too many are strangers to dealing with complex ideas.

The key to having a transformed mind more than anything else is that we need to have our thoughts focused on God. As we pray that the Holy Spirit renews us each day, we must focus our thoughts off of ourselves and onto Him. This is one of the reasons why education is so highly valued in the Jewish community. In all things a Jew is to bring glory to God. One need not be a rabbi to do this, but can be the best Jewish scientist, mathematician, soldier, and yes, even banker. But in the Messianic community too much has been said of the so-called Hebrew vs. Greek mind, when all the Bible itself tells us is to “have the mind of Messiah” (1 Corinthians 2:16). The mind of Messiah is focused upon our Heavenly Father and performing His tasks well in the world. What is ironic about some who promote the idea of a Hebrew versus Greek mind, is that what is often considered to be Hellenistic or Greek is actually not Greek, but is Twenty-First Century European-American and has nothing to do with classical Greek philosophy.

To demonstrate this point, I have prepared the following chart of four cities. These four cities represent power centers on Earth that have each affected us either religiously, socially, or economically:

Jerusalem	New York London Frankfurt
Athens	Geneva

I would like to briefly compare these four cities with a concept that each one of us has to deal with on a daily basis: **work**. Whether we like it or not, each of us has to work in some capacity. Each one of these cities has historically had a distinct position on “work.” Some of this you will be able to identify with, and other parts will seem somewhat strange.

What Jerusalem represents should be obvious. In Exodus 20:9 God commands us, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work.” The Hebrew verb *ta'avod* (תַּעֲבֹד) appears in the Qal imperfect tense, meaning that an absolute literal translation would appear as “You work” (context determines what English helping verbs should be added).<sup>5</sup> Whether we realize it or not, the Bible tells us that we should be working, *at least in some capacity*, for six days of the week. (Note: I do not think that the Bible is against us having a vacation from time to time.) In Jewish theology, work is viewed as a command from God, because the one who does not work has the propensity to sin.

The Athenian view of work sits in stark contrast to this. R. Paul Stevens writes in his book *The Six Other Days*, “Work was a curse, unmitigated evil; and to be out of work was a piece of singularly good fortune. Unemployment allowed for one to participate in the political domain and to enjoy the contemplative life...Not surprisingly, 80 per cent of the Greek city-states were comprised of slaves, which Aristotle defined as instruments endowed with life. Work was called ‘unleisure’.”<sup>6</sup> Many of the Athenians were, in no misuse of the term, “bums” who did not work. What I think is very important for us to note is that *ta'avod* was rendered in the Septuagint as *erga* (ἐργα) appearing in the future middle indicative tense. *Erga* would definitely be translated into English as “you will work,” and that you are involved in the work as though it is unavoidable. This is because work is a part of the human condition that each one of us must experience, and the Rabbis who rendered it knew exactly what they were communicating to Greeks who would hear it. Many of them, upon entering into the Synagogue as Jewish converts, may have had to “work” for the first time.

<sup>5</sup> In most cases, the Qal imperfect tense in Hebrew is rendered as the future tense in English. Cf. C.L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 207.

<sup>6</sup> R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 110.

The New Yorker view of work is distinct from these previous two. New York, along with London and Frankfurt, is one of the world's principal business centers. The whole focus of Wall Street is one acquiring wealth as quickly and cheaply as possible. Profit margins and the 24/7 ability to make money is the philosophy of this dog-eat-dog world. This is the primary view of work that saturates the industrialized world that we live in today, and sits in opposition first to the Athenian view of work, and then to the Jerusalemite view of work which at least recognizes that one day must be totally devoted to God.

The view of work represented by Geneva is actually the closest that we see connected to Jerusalem. The Protestant work ethic, which largely came from the teachings of John Calvin and others, was birthed out of the belief that if one is a member of God's elect, then a person will demonstrate it through faithful labors during the six days designated for work. This even led to some of the Reformers preaching that if an individual does not work during the designated time, that he or she is actually sinning! Of course, the Protestant Reformers were limited by their inability to see the validity of *Shabbat*, as opposed to the Christian Sunday, but to many of them a "Sunday sabbath" was rigidly enforced, and no work of any kind was permitted.

I mention these examples to point out that there are worldly philosophies beyond that of the Hebrew versus Greek mindset. There is an entire Oriental way of thinking espoused in the Far East that many of us likewise do not consider, because it is so foreign to us. The overwhelming fact of our lives is that the mind of Messiah is not focused on self-pleasure, or wanton acquisition of things, but on doing good works and in obeying the Lord. This is what we see modeled in the Jerusalem view of work, and surprisingly to some of you, what we also see represented by Geneva as well.

Every day we have to ask the Lord to transform our minds so that we can adequately perform the tasks and assignments that He has for each of us. We need to pray that our thoughts and contemplations are focused on Him and His Word, because His thoughts are certainly centered toward His Creation, and to us as humans, the pinnacle of that Creation. As we are continually sanctified and perfected, we have a responsibility to God and to ourselves, and even to fellow members of the community of faith, to move beyond some of the basic essentials of our faith. As we each progress toward adulthood in our faith, we need to ask the Lord to give us the capacity to deal with complicated thoughts and ideas that require the ability for us to use our brains.

An excellent example I can give you from the Bible is seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Anyone who has read Hebrews should be able to tell you that this is a letter that deeply ministers to the spirit. We see Yeshua exalted in Heaven, worshipped by angels. We see the humanity of Yeshua, as He suffered and died for us. We see Yeshua functioning in the priesthood of Melchizedek before the Father in Heaven, interceding for us. We see Yeshua's priesthood inaugurating the New Covenant with the Spirit writing the Law onto our hearts. And perhaps most importantly, we see Yeshua as being superior to all things. But when you go and read Hebrews a second time, your mind is deeply challenged. While on the first read, your spirit is to be enlivened and quickened, the second read requires us to use our brains because the author uses a very sophisticated and complex methodology in communicating to his audience.

What makes Hebrews unique among the texts of the Apostolic Scriptures, is that we do not know for sure who the author is, or for that matter the specific target audience. We can rightfully assume, for example, that the author was not the Apostle Paul, because he identifies himself in Hebrews 2:3 as having heard the gospel from "those who heard" it from the Lord Yeshua. This identifies him as being a second-generation Believer, excluding any of the Apostles or Paul because they had first-hand encounters with the Messiah. The theology of the letter does have some Pauline character to it, but the writing style does not. The author is more succinct, he does not go on extensive diatribes, and his vocabulary is much more advanced than Paul's. The author is direct and to the point, more than anything else. Most theologians are agreed that

someone in Paul's inner circle probably wrote the letter, perhaps either Barnabas or Apollos, accounting for the elements of Pauline teaching. But Paul writing it is a sheer impossibility.<sup>7</sup>

When it comes to the audience of the Epistle to the Hebrews, a Jewish audience is rightly assumed. The challenge with this is the fact that while most in the Messianic community would assume that it was written to Jews living in Israel, almost two-thirds of the Jewish population of the First Century lived outside of Israel in the Diaspora. If you take a look at this map, we see a large Jewish dispersion from as far east as Babylon, in modern-day Iraq, to as far West in what is today Belgium and southeastern England (even though some of the further reaching Jewish settlement may have come after the destruction of the Second Temple):



We certainly see the Jewish Diaspora presented to us in the Book of Acts, as significant pockets of Jews lived in Antioch, Cyprus, Corinth, Crete, Macedonia, North Africa, and possibly even Spain. Alexandria boasted a Jewish population of over 300,000, and Rome itself had a population of 40,000-60,000 Jews. These people cannot be ignored when it comes to our understanding of the New Testament. They have to be recognized as viable members of the Jewish community, and when we examine the letter to the Hebrews, it is more likely that it was penned for these Jews, than Jews living in the Holy Land.

Of course, since we do not know the exact audience, we cannot discount anyone. Jews living in the Holy Land, those living in the Diaspora, and even the sectarian Qumran community that gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls must all be considered. For that same matter, we cannot exclude non-Jewish Believers as being among the intended audience. The letter was written to address the impending destruction of the Temple in the late 60s C.E. and how Yeshua's sacrifice and priesthood supersede the Levitical priesthood. Many Jewish Believers in the First Century did not know what do to about this, and were questioning their faith as a result. The author had to assure them of the grave consequences of considering denying the Messiah. The most significant of those consequences, elaborated in Hebrews 4, would be that dissenters would never experience God's eternal rest not only typified in the weekly Sabbath, but in the Messianic Kingdom on Earth. They would be giving up on the time when humanity would be restored to its original position as second only to God in His universe.

Many Bible teachers, myself included, believe that the primary audience of Hebrews was actually the Jewish community in Rome. This is partially because we see it quoted in the Epistle of 1 Clement as early as 95 C.E., written from Rome. We also see some interesting parallels between Paul's letter to the Romans, and statements in Hebrews that appear to be amplifying Paul's previous teaching to them. The author, being a contemporary of Paul, may be reflecting on things that this group of Believers has already heard.

Paul writes in Romans 12:2, for example, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that

<sup>7</sup> For further consideration, consult the commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

which is good and acceptable and perfect.” The author of Hebrews parallels this by writing his audience, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Apparently, whomever this audience was, and we cannot disclude the Romans, and to a lesser extent probably also the Corinthians, they had been instructed by the Apostles adequately enough so that they could be teachers. But instead of being equipped in what the New English Bible renders as “the ABC of God’s oracles,” they must learn them all over again. They are still spiritually immature to be able to deal with “solid food.” Note that our author does not say that his audience are “children”; he says that they are “infants.” Paul issued similar words to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:2: “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able.”

When one is new in the faith, we are to be trained in what the NIV says are “the first principles of God’s Word.” These are the basic essentials of learning how to relate to God, loving God, loving one another, serving one another, learning about the characters and people of the Bible. We learn about Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Kings David and Solomon, Yeshua the Messiah, the Apostles, etc., etc. We learn how to pray. We learn how to demonstrate God’s grace and His mercy to others in the world we live. We learn how to make sacrifices and give Him complete control over our lives. These are the essential things in the faith, and I pray that each one of us has a firm basis in them in our relationship with the Lord.

However, a critical part of growing in our faith is being able to move beyond these things. These things are certainly not to be negated by moving beyond them, but as we strive for spiritual adulthood the challenges that will be delivered to us will get increasingly more difficult. When we strive for adulthood we should not have to go through the essentials of faith over and over again, specifically because the Holy Spirit has supernaturally empowered us with discernment and reasoning abilities to handle complex situations. These complex situations require us to have a mind and thought life that are focused on the Lord and on performing His work ably in the world in which we live.

There are any number of situations that I could go into that require us to think with godly reasoning skills, but most of them pertain to ethical subjects. Whether you are a pastor or teacher or not does not matter here, because each of you at one point in your life either have had, or will have to deal with a complex situation. Every pastor or spiritual leader is guaranteed that at one point in a thirty-fifty year ministry that he or she will have to deal with an unmarried pregnant teenage girl, or a teenage boy who has impregnated someone. Some have even more difficult situations to deal with. How do I counsel someone going through a divorce? How do I counsel someone who has just gotten cancer? And God forbid, what do I tell someone whose loved one is on life support, and may never come out of a coma?

What if, God forbid, someone in your Messianic congregation or fellowship were to have a massive heart attack? What if the only treatment for that heart attack would be to have a pig valve installed in the heart? Do you know that there are Messianic Believers who would just as soon die than have a pig valve installed in their heart? What is ironic about this is that many Orthodox Jews would have the pig valve installed, because Judaism allows for any ritual commandment to be broken, save idolatry, for human life to be preserved.

Some of these are hypothetical examples, but they speak of the need for one to have a mind transformed by the Holy Spirit and focused on God and His Word. There will be situations that you face in life that are not directly, or even indirectly, addressed in the Bible. For that same matter, they may not even be addressed in extra-Biblical literature. Many of the controversial issues that we are going to face today, or will be facing in the next few decades—and this includes mainline Judaism and Christianity—deal with bio-ethics. You know, I have never heard a single

Messianic teacher (as of 2006) ever talk about stem cell research. It is not addressed in the Bible, other than the fact that we are to respect life. I do not know what the answer is regarding cloning your organs should they fail on you. But I know that these are the kinds of issues that require us to move beyond the essentials of the faith. The great evangelical theologian F.F. Bruce observed, "It is ethically mature people...who have built up in the course of experience a principle or standard of righteousness by which they can pass discriminating judgment on moral situations as they arise."<sup>8</sup> Thus, my friends, we must not only have a relationship with God, but have a mind focused on God.

How do we experience a transformation of the mind in our own individual walks of faith? When each of you entered into the Messianic movement, you likely experienced—as I know I certainly did—a period of "information overload." Like some of the newer versions of Microsoft Windows, you likely froze up a few times, and felt like you needed a reboot. Some of your lifestyle practices and traditions that you had been raised with, more than anything else, were being challenged as non-Biblical. You got to hear about the significance of the weekly *Shabbat*, the appointed times, the kosher dietary laws, and got a taste of the Jewish character of Yeshua's teachings. For many of you, the introduction to the Messianic movement was an up and down roller coaster ride, or like being told by the pilot that the aircraft is about to experience some turbulence. But all roller coaster rides come to an end, and turbulence does not always last. We have to come to a point both individually and corporately where we can be comfortable, and above all stable, in this newfound walk.

I have been in the Messianic community for almost eleven years (since 1995). It is not an easy place to be, especially today. Our own ministry has dubbed 2006 "the transitional year out of the year of transition," as certain projects and teaching series have begun that I believe will help renew hearts, and yes, transform minds for the Lord's work that each of us must perform. Any of you who have spoken with me in private, or have corresponded with me in the past, **know that I am dead serious about studying the Bible.** I believe that a consistent study of the Bible is the only way for any person to experience a true transformation of the mind, because it is in a detailed study of Scripture where we can ask God to show us what the text meant "back then," and what it means for us today. In particular as a Messianic Believer, there should be three distinct things that you should be focusing on weekly as you open God's Word, and allow it to minister to your heart, as well as to your brain (keep in mind that this can be applied both congregationally and personally):

**1. You should be reading through and examining the weekly Torah portions on *Shabbat*.**

Much of this is accomplished in home fellowships or study groups. This is how many Messianic congregations get their start.

**2. You should be examining some kind of other Biblical text throughout the week as a group, independent of the Torah.**

Much of this can be done in some kind of mid-week study, where you go through a systematic examination of a text of the Apostolic Scriptures, or perhaps one of the Prophets or histories of the Tanach.

**3. You should be examining a text of Scripture yourself, different from the first two.**

The responsibility for teaching or examining the first two areas can rest entirely on a congregational or fellowship leader; you just need to make sure that you are engaged somehow in those two weekly studies. This third one you have to take the initiative on, and is entirely contingent on you and what the Holy Spirit is convicting you to examine in the Bible.

Now, with some of this said—and I believe that we have some important objectives to accomplish—I would like to briefly comment on some of the over-emphasis that has taken place in the Messianic community regarding the Torah. Over the past two to three years (2003-2006) I have personally witnessed a radical shift in the study habits of many Messianics, where it seems that the only Scriptures that matter to them, or have any relevance concerning their lives, are the

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<sup>8</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 136.

Torah or Pentateuch. In some extreme cases, it can appear that the relationship that is pursued is not with the Giver of the Torah, God Himself, but rather with the Torah. And what is ironic, is that having participated or being privy to some of these Torah studies, I really do not think that the Torah is being studied properly at all.

As a point of reference, many of you are aware that in the weekly audio studies that I have done, we have primarily focused on books of the Apostolic Scriptures. Going through a text verse-by-verse, we go through quite a bit of information that incorporates the Torah and Tanach, as well as some extra-Biblical literature. I do not believe it is enough for us to examine the Torah without seeing how it is embodied in the lifestyle and *halachah* of Yeshua and the Apostles. And, not knowing about this has caused some controversy when we see Yeshua and the Apostles living out the Torah *and* most of the contemporary Jewish traditions of their time. When we deal with the First Century, we actually have it quite easy. In an elongated sense, we are only dealing with a period of about 120 years. When we consider the large First Century world, we are, for the most part, dealing with about four language groups. Sadly, this is difficult for many Messianics to understand, because their focus can be on the tree called "Israel" so much, that the forest called "the world" is forgotten. The salvation of the world can likewise be forgotten, as well as God's desire to communicate His Word in tongues other than Hebrew or Aramaic.<sup>9</sup>

But this is only the tip of the iceberg, because as I believe that we, as a movement, are only now beginning to really see the need to examine the Apostolic Scriptures from a distinct Messianic point of view, I believe we also have quite a long way to go in our examinations of the Torah and Tanach. This is because when we deal with the Tanach, we are dealing with a period that begins with the creation of humankind and ends with the Jewish exiles having returned from Babylonian captivity. Conservatively, we are dealing with a composition period stretching anywhere from 3,000-4,000 years or longer. K.A. Kitchen, who is a professor emeritus at the University of Liverpool, summarizes it this way in his book *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*:

"Doing justice to the Old Testament meant a minimum span of two thousand years overall (three thousand for full background), ability to draw upon documents in vast quantity and variety in some ten ancient Near Eastern languages, and a whole patchwork quilt of cultures."<sup>10</sup>

Of course, thanks to people like Kitchen, and other commentators and theologians, most of us do not have to do primary research in fields like archaeology or have to sift through thousands upon thousands of pages of ancient texts to get a feel for the Ancient Near East. But we certainly need to incorporate available data into our Torah studies. After all, as I commonly say every Passover: "If you want to get the most out of Passover, we have to know a few things about Egypt." While some people have a fear that knowing about history may somehow subtract from the inspiration of a text, it actually enhances it and should make it more real to us.<sup>11</sup>

When we study the Bible, we have to understand that while it is the inspired Word of God, it was not written directly to us. We have to learn to examine texts of Scripture to the audience it was originally written to. We have to transport ourselves back in time and pray that the Lord is able to help us think in terms that can be foreign to us. When we can properly understand a text as it was originally given to an audience, and then when it comes to the Torah, see how it was lived out in the lives of Yeshua and the Apostles, then we can begin to make practical, real life applications for us today. This is the whole point of why we must study God's Word. Most of the time, the answer is there, we just have to dig for it and do a little work. I believe this bears witness with most of you here, and it would be my hope that in the years to come we can see more of an emphasis on examining the Bible, *realistically for what it originally meant*, than perhaps "fancifully" for what we think it might say. Yes, my friends, this might mean that we have to deal with some Biblical history, and even wade through some extra-Biblical

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<sup>9</sup> For further examination, consult this writer's workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>10</sup> K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), xiii.

<sup>11</sup> For further examination, consult this writer's workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

literature. But who ever said our faith was easy? Are we being transformed so that we will be able to deal with increasingly more difficult concepts? Is not the Holy Spirit to give us critical reasoning abilities?

We live in a fallen world that is only getting worse and worse. Many of the challenges that the Messianic community faces have to be dealt with by those who have minds that have been transformed by the Holy Spirit. A transformed mind is constantly thinking about God, His Word, His Kingdom's work, and about contemplating solutions for life's ills. Each of us must have a mind that thinks about the needs of others, not uplifting ourselves. We have to pray each day, that the Lord extends His hand from Heaven, and just for a moment, massages our brain so that we might be focused on Him and His plan for the world. Remember Yeshua's admonition to us that we are to worship God not only with our whole heart, but also with our mind...

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