

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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6,000 Year Teaching: Do you believe that we are rapidly approaching the Biblical year 6,000?

In the past ten to twelve years in the Messianic movement (1996-2008), there has been a great number of predictions released relating to the so-called “Biblical year 6,000.” All of these predictions relate to the Second Coming of Yeshua, and as of today almost all of them **have failed to one degree or another**. While the Bible itself is completely mute about a year 6,000—and instead focuses on various spiritual and/or sociological phenomena as being the clues to consider regarding the Second Coming—this still does not stop people from running numbers and releasing new and revised time charts.

It is undeniable to anyone who examines Jewish history that the 6,000 year teaching is a teaching of many of the ancient Sages (b.*Sanhedrin* 97a-97b). The premise for the 6,000 year teaching comes from the seven-day week, and that man has been allotted six 1,000-year periods since Creation, with the seventh 1,000-year period picturing the Sabbath and/or the Millennial reign of the Messiah. But is the 6,000 year teaching an implicit teaching of Scripture, or is it too “packaged” or even artificial? How do some of the passages used to support the 6,000 year doctrine stand under some scrutiny?

Psalms 90:4 proclaims, “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or *as* a watch in the night.” The Psalmist could be declaring something about Biblical chronology, but it seems much more likely that he is speaking of God’s timelessness. A thousand Earthly years do not seem that long at all to the Almighty, Eternal One. The Apostle Peter builds on this sentiment when he writes, “But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Is Peter talking about a date calendar on which the Lord operates, or might he also be speaking of His timelessness? Certainly while Peter has the judgment of God in mind (2 Peter 3:10-14), too many overlook these critical words:

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Our Heavenly Father is very patient when it comes to judging the human race. While He is absolutely faithful, “not slow about His promise,” He still desires all to come to repentance. It is perfectly valid for one to ask whether or not Peter would allow God to be held to a 6,000 year time calendar, when his own view is that God is going to be patient for as many as possible to be allowed an opportunity to be saved.

Hosea 6:2 is also commonly offered as support for the 6,000 year teaching, as the Prophet says, “He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him.” Using the one day=1,000 years presupposition, many assume that this refers to the past 2,000 years since the First Coming of Yeshua and that we stand on the brink of the “third day,” i.e., the Millennium. But we do have to ask ourselves whether or not this view is consistent to the larger scope of Hosea’s prophecies, which specifically concern the redemption and salvation of Israel:

“Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn *us*, but He will heal us; He has wounded *us*, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him. So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth” (Hosea 6:1-3).

The answer of “He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him” is given regarding how Ephraim and Judah (Hosea 6:4) are to be restored before the Lord. Hosea is clear to say, “like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me” (Hosea 6:7), indicating that Israel stands before God as a representative of all humanity. The issue in Hosea 6 is not the Second Coming and some long term future end-time scenario, it is rather *how* Israel can be restored to faithful covenant status

before God no different than how Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, whose descendants (all mankind) also must be restored.

The answer to Israel's deliverance is found in two days, and a third day. Many historical interpreters have never associated Hosea 6:2 with some end of the world timetable, but instead upon the need for Israel to be identified with *the Messiah* in His death, burial, and resurrection. This would be akin to the Apostle Paul's words, "do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Messiah Yeshua have been baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3). The answer for the salvation of Israel is to be found in the Messiah's resurrection and atonement for not only Israel's sin, but sin going all the way back to Adam!

The common passages used in support of the 6,000 year doctrine can be demonstrated to have alternative meanings that do not at all require Yeshua the Messiah to return on, or even around, the so-called "Biblical year 6,000." But there are other things that need to be considered regarding a 6,000 year chronology for human history.

Many point to the genealogical charts of Genesis chs. 5 and 11, add up the lifespan numbers of the people listed, and believe that human history extends for approximately 6,000 years. But the Biblical text itself does not add up any of the numbers, and the actual numbers for the ages of these people differs substantially among the witnesses of the Hebrew Masoretic Text, Greek Septuagint, and Samaritan Pentateuch. Furthermore, if Genesis chs. 5 and 11 are two telescoped genealogies as is consistent with Ancient Near Eastern forms of reckoning, how many actual people are missing from the lists? If parts of these lists go from great-great-great grandfather to great-great-great grandson, human history can be considerably longer than 6,000 years. (Consult the FAQ entry "**Genesis 5, 11 Genealogies.**")

The validity, or non-validity, of the 6,000 year teaching is also a very difficult subject to consider in today's Messianic community, particularly as it relates to different forms of Creationist cosmology. Are we dealing with 6,000 years of just human history, or a 6,000 year old universe? While the significant majority of Messianics today are advocates of Young Earth Creationism which posits a six 24-hour day Creation cycle, a growing minority of Old Earth Creationists is beginning to assert itself in the Messianic movement (including the editor). These people strongly repudiate the Darwinian theory of evolution, but do acknowledge the antiquity of the universe as created in six *yamim* (יָמִים) or "days" equaling long periods of time. Such views have the capacity to change much of today's Messianic thought regarding the validity of the date setting for Yeshua's return, which we currently witness en masse. (Consult the FAQ entry "**Creationism.**")

Almost all of the people in today's Messianic movement are pre-millennialists, believing that Yeshua the Messiah will return before His Millennial reign on Earth. No one argues that the reign of Yeshua on Earth during this time will be at least 1,000 years (cf. Revelation 20:2ff). Yet, there is much that is not given to us regarding this time, and the Lord Himself will be present among us to answer many of our presently unanswered questions about it. For the present, let us not find ourselves slacking off in His Kingdom's work *now* looking for an elusive "Year 6,000," which may not come *because it has already passed*. Let us, rather, be earnestly considering our mission and calling as His people, and how we are to change the lives of men and women who need to enter into His Kingdom—by experiencing His salvation!

Regarding future developments of the 6,000 year teaching, too many Messianics have used the so-called "Year 6,000" coming as an excuse not to plan or prepare for the future, and this has not helped the long term growth or viability of this movement. As a movement, we are behind where we need to be spiritually and theologically. (Consult the editor's article "**Where Should the Messianic Movement be in 2107?**") Due to the scores of failed end-time predictions associated with a 6,000 year chronology and date setting, it is entirely valid to re-examine, if not severely question, whether the 6,000 year teaching really does have Biblical support. In the future, while more predictions are likely to be formulated, there will also be Messianics who abandon the 6,000 year teaching altogether.

posted 15 April, 2008

Abomination of Desolation: What do you believe the Abomination of Desolation will be? Do you believe the Temple will be rebuilt?

Yeshua indicates in His Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24:15, that the Abomination of Desolation is the key sign that will occur indicating that His return is near. We believe that the Abomination of Desolation is when the antimessiah/antichrist “will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” (Daniel 9:27) on the Temple Mount, will proclaim himself to be a god (2 Thessalonians 2:4), and the false prophet will erect an image of him (Revelation 13:14). The antimessiah will demand worship, and those in the city of Jerusalem at this time are commanded by Him to flee (Matthew 24:16-20).

Some in the Messianic community believe that the Temple does not have to be rebuilt in order for these prophecies to take place, and only an “altar” will be erected. They view the Temple as only being the “holy place” of the Temple Mount. This, however, is not what the Apostle Paul says, as specific vocabulary is employed in his letter to the Thessalonians. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Temple of God is usually called the *beit ADONAI* (בֵּית־יְהוָה), literally “House of the LORD,” and the Tabernacle is called the *mishkan ADONAI* (מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה). The Greek LXX renders *mishkan* as *skēnē* (σκηνή), “tabernacle” or “dwelling,” and *beit* as either *oikos* (οἶκος), meaning “house,” or as *naos* (ναός), “temple.” Paul says that the antimessiah “will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Paul says that this takes place in *ton naon* [accusative masculine singular] *tou Theou* (τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ), or the Temple.

Given the differences between *skēnē*, *oikos*, and *naos*, Paul chose *naos* meaning “Temple.” It is thus a prerequisite that in order for the Abomination of Desolation to occur the Temple should be rebuilt in Jerusalem. In many cases, those claiming that the Temple does not have to be rebuilt are making hastily drawn conclusions about prophecy, and are trying to force current events to fit the Biblical text, rather than let events play out naturally.

updated 06 April, 2006

Acts 15:21: Does the Apostolic decree really include the inference for the ancient Gentiles to go to the local synagogue and hear the Torah taught? Are you not aware that there is a great deal of criticism against this interpretation?

This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic*.

“For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath,”

There is probably no verse more important for today's Messianics, in the deliberations of the Jerusalem Council, than James' summarizing statement of Acts 15:21. There is also probably no verse more ambiguous or head-scratching for today's Christian interpreters, than Acts 15:21. What was specifically intended by James' closing word, “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath”? *Mōusēs gar ek geneōn archaiōn kata polin tous kērussontas auton echei en tais sunagōgais kata pan sabbaton anaginōskomenos* (Μωϋσῆς γὰρ ἐκ γενεῶν ἀρχαίων κατὰ πόλιν τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν ἔχει ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἀναγινωσκόμενος). This verse involves no small discussion as to the role that the Torah plays in the faith expression of non-Jewish Believers. One of the things that we can immediately note, though, is that Acts 15:21 is an historical reference to the fact that the tradition of consulting a section from the Torah every week in the Synagogue goes back to at least the First Century.

David H. Stern, in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, lays out six different views of Acts 15:21,^a which are more or less represented by today's Acts commentaries. There are three notable views of Acts 15:21 that we need to be considering in our deliberations of what James has ruled:

1. This was only a reminder for the non-Jewish Believers to be sensitive to Jewish scruples from the Law of Moses, which they hear read every week in the local synagogue in cities throughout the Roman Empire.
2. This was to remind the Jerusalem Council that the prohibitions of Acts 15:20 are rooted within the Law of Moses, in passages like Leviticus chs. 17-18, and the Apostolic decree has a Biblical basis.
3. This was to instruct the non-Jewish Believers that in needing to know more about these four prohibitions, and about what God considers proper behavior of Messiah followers to involve, hearing the Law of Moses read on the Sabbath should be in order. There are synagogues in cities all over where Moses can be heard.

Acts 15:21 begins with the clause *Mōusēs gar* (Μωϋσῆς γάρ), and as *LS* points out, the conjunction *gar* (γάρ) is “regularly placed after the first word of a sentence: to introduce the reason.”^b But what would this reason be, and how would the reading of the Torah of Moses affect the prohibitions listed by James in Acts 15:20? The additional lexical meanings of *gar* that *BDAG* provides might only further add to the debate over v. 21, as it notes how it can serve as a “**marker of clarification, for, you see,**” or be used as “**marker of inference, certainly, by all means, so, then.**”^c This could relate to qualifications met, in order for later action to be followed. Daniel B. Wallace considers *gar* to be in an explanatory conjunction, detailing how “This use indicates that additional information is being given about what is being described. It can often be translated *for, you see, or that is, namely.*”^d

All interpreters are agreed that once the definite prohibitions of Acts 15:20 were followed by the non-Jewish Believers, then they could participate in table fellowship with Jewish Believers. So, is Acts 15:21 only to serve as a reminder that the prohibitions are rooted in the Torah, which the Jewish Believers hear every *Shabbat*? To what degree is the reference to Moses being preached on the Sabbath, related to the four prohibitions? Could there be something more in play?

We need to note the usage of the two main verbs in Acts 15:21: *kērussontas* (κηρύσσοντας) is a present active participle, describing how there are those “proclaiming him” (LITV); *anaginōskomenos* (ἀναγιγνωσκόμενος) is a passive active participle, describing how the scroll of the Torah/Moses is “being read” (KJV/NKJV) every Sabbath, with the action obviously being performed to the Torah/Moses.^e Neither one of these things—“proclaiming” or “being read”—is some action in the past.^f The text describes current actions that directly affected the First Century *ekklēsia* in some way, which had their roots in an ancient tradition of public Scripture reading

^a David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 279.

^b *LS*, 160.

^c *BDAG*, pp 189, 190.

^d Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 673.

He continues, stating, “Key conjunctions here are: γάρ, δέ, εἰ (after verbs of emotion), and καί.”

^e Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 472 render Acts 15:21 from the source text as:

“For~Moses, from ancient~generations in every city **the ones preaching** him has in the synagogues on every Sabbath **being read.**”

^f Contrary to this, Messianic Jewish teacher Derek Leman insists, “James used the past tense, not the present or future. That is, he did not say, ‘After all, Moses is being preach [sic] in the synagogues.’ He said, ‘Moses has from ancient times been preached in synagogues’” (*Classic Reprint: Acts 15. Messianic Jewish Musings*. Retrieved 31 March, 2010, from <<http://derek4messiah.wordpress.com/>>).

Leman's error here is seen in that he relies exclusively on an English translation (RSV), and not the two active participles as seen in the Greek. Even though I challenged him on his view from the source text of Acts 15:21, he did not fix his statements.

likely going back to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.^g The non-Jewish Believers being reminded that there were Jewish Believers out there who would take offense if some of the Torah’s major ethical commandments were violated—“Moses has those proclaiming him” (LITV)—which they hear every week on *Shabbat*, is the baseline explanation that can be offered for Acts 15:21.

Is there anything more that can be deduced from James’ statement in Acts 15:21? Is there an implied impetus in Acts 15:21 that the non-Jewish Believers would need to know more about Moses’ Teaching, as the guidelines James has listed in Acts 15:20 were rooted within its commandments? Were the non-Jewish Believers to hear the Torah and the Prophets taught in any capacity, or were they just to *exclusively rely* on the Holy Spirit to disciple them without the aid of the Scriptures?

The chart below has summarized a number of significant opinions present in Acts scholarship, and has separated it between those who think that Acts 15:21 does include, in some sort of way, a recommendation for the non-Jewish Believers to learn more about the Torah, and those who think that Acts 15:21 only regards being sensitive to First Century Jewish taboos:

ACTS 15:21	
LEARNING OR POSSIBLY KNOWING MORE ABOUT MOSES’ TEACHING	BEING SENSITIVE TO JEWISH TABOOS
<p>This proposal, James urged, would not work to the detriment of Israel’s mission in the Gentile world; there was still ample opportunity for Gentiles to learn the law of Moses, for it was read publicly every sabbath in synagogues throughout the civilized world...This observation was perhaps intended to calm the apprehensions of the Pharisaic party in the Jerusalem church, in whose eyes it was especially important that the whole Torah should be taught among the Gentiles; this, said James, was being attended to already in the synagogues.^h F.F. Bruce</p>	<p>The fact that the law is read every sabbath throughout the empire may be taken either to support the Gentile mission (vss. 16-18) or to confirm the decree.ⁱ William Baird</p>
<p>James’s concluding statement is puzzling. It may be regarded as saying that since there are Jews everywhere who regularly hear the law of Moses being read in the synagogues, Christian Gentiles ought to respect their scruples, and so avoid bringing the church into disrepute with them. Alternatively, the point may be that if Christian Gentiles want to find out any more about the Jewish law, they have plenty of opportunity in the local synagogues, and there is no need for the Jerusalem church to do anything about the matter.^j I. Howard Marshall</p>	<p>Circumcision and the ritual requirements of the Hebrew religion should not be imposed on the Gentiles. Only an appropriate conduct after conversion should be expected.^k Lloyd J. Ogilvie</p>

^g Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 8:1-3.

^h F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 312.

ⁱ William Baird, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 749.

^j I. Howard Marshall, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 254.

^k Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Preacher’s Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 231.

<p>James's concluding point in verse 21 was probably made to reassure the Christians who had come from the Pharisees and who wanted to see the Torah taught among the Gentiles. He says that this was happening in the synagogues in every city each Sabbath.¹ Ajith Fernando</p>	<p>The point is that the Mosaic Law, and not least the Ten Commandments, is already proclaimed throughout the Empire in synagogues. The witness of Gentile Christians was important to James. They must not give Jews in the Diaspora the opportunity to complain that Gentile Christians were still practicing idolatry and immorality by going to pagan feasts even after beginning to follow Christ.^m Ben Witherington III</p>
<p>The practical result of listening to Moses according to James is that people will be prepared for a right hearing of the gospel. In other words, those who are most likely to respond to the gospel and grow in God's grace are those attached to the congregation where the truth of Torah is embraced in faith and its core values embodied in human relations." Robert W. Wall</p>	<p>[T]he Gentiles do not have to be circumcised nor must they observe the entire law of Moses, but they should abstain from a few 'essential' moral and religious taboos (15:19-29).^o F. Scott Spencer</p>

In surveying these opinions of Acts 15:21, did James' ruling imply anything *beyond* the non-Jewish Believers being sensitive to Jewish concerns from the Torah? Darrell L. Bock summarizes our options as follows:

"The remark makes one of two points: (1) Moses is read every week, so be sensitive to those who read him; or (2) as a Gentile, if you need more guidance as to Jewish concerns, these can be determined by hearing Moses, who is read regularly in the synagogue."^p

The prohibitions James issued in Acts 15:20 are certainly based in Moses' Teaching, and the new, non-Jewish Believers would definitely need to know not only more about these four things, **but also about *why* God considered these practices unacceptable.** This could only really come by hearing the Torah expounded upon every week in the local synagogue, with concrete examples from real life circumstances in Israel's history explaining them. Many of the first non-Jewish Believers had already been doing this. Of the interpretations Stern provides for Acts 15:21, he describes how "These Gentile Christians have been hearing the *Tanakh* in the synagogues but have chosen not to convert to Judaism. Why press them now and put this obstacle in their way (v. 19) precisely when they have made a heart commitment to follow the God of Israel and his Messiah Yeshua?"^q This seems to be a good explanation for a large number of the early non-Jewish Believers, as they were to be accepted into the faith community not on the basis of proselytization, but rather their trust in Yeshua (cf. Galatians 5:6).

While some of the non-Jewish Believers had already been attending synagogue services, and were familiar with the Torah's code of morality in varying degrees—there would be many more coming into the *ekklēsia* who would not be. Another interpretation that Stern provides would seem to work well for the wider term, especially as the gospel would go forth and people

¹ Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 419.

^m Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 463.

ⁿ Robert W. Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles," in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:223.

^o F. Scott Spencer, *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 162.

^p Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 507.

^q Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 279.

would be coming to faith *directly* from pagan backgrounds. He says, “Let Gentiles enter the Messianic Community without becoming Jews, and don’t be troubled over it, because, no matter where these Gentile believers live, they will continue visiting the local synagogue and hearing what Judaism teaches about living a godly life.”^r Keep in mind that with their previous social spheres of the pagan temple and marketplace now largely off limits, their new social spheres would be their fellow Jewish Believers and other Jews who acknowledged Israel’s One God. And, in order to know more about following James’ prohibition (Acts 15:20), the practical reality was that they would have to go to the local synagogue to hear from Moses’ Teaching. *In so doing, they would naturally learn much more.*

The non-Jewish Believers following the decree issued by James would no doubt go a long way, not only as Jewish Believers could see that these people have turned, **but Jews who had not yet acknowledged Yeshua could see a difference in them.** The normal Jewish Believer of the Diaspora may not have been as stringent toward Greeks and Romans as those who arrived at Antioch (Acts 15:1-2), but he or she would definitely have wanted to see some serious changes take place regarding the former, idolatrous lifestyle of the non-Jewish Believers. The Apostolic decree would serve this purpose, and more.

James’ statement of Acts 15:21 is definitely meant to remind the Jerusalem Council that the prohibitions he gives are rooted in the Torah. These non-Jewish Believers clearly had to go somewhere to be instructed in the teachings of God’s Word, and the Synagogue was the obvious place to which they had to go. Following James’ decree, the implication is that the non-Jewish Believers would be able to easily enter the local synagogue, and learn more about what God expected of them. They would hear the accounts of Abraham, Moses, King David, the division of Israel, the expectation of Israel’s Prophets for God’s salvation to reach to the ends of the Earth, and...the Messiah.

It would be fair to say that the Apostolic decree in Acts 15:19-21 was intended to place the new, non-Jewish Believers onto what might be described as a “trajectory of Torah.” Obedience to God’s Law was not to be something strictly mandated or ordered (Acts 15:5), but “the words of the Prophets” (Acts 15:15) were to be facilitated and allowed to occur according to the Lord’s grand design. *If* the Apostolic decree was properly followed by those who would receive it, consider how for Acts 15:21, **“For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath,”** something similar to the following was likely intended to take place:

1. Moses’ Teaching was already being proclaimed and read every week by Jewish people, following ancient tradition, in synagogues all over the Mediterranean basin.
2. The prohibitions of Acts 15:20 were rooted in Moses’ Teaching, and were things that the Jewish people who heard the Torah read every week (whether they were Believers in Yeshua or not), found considerably offensive and abominable. Violating these stipulations would mean a breach of fellowship and certain rejection on the part of the non-Jews coming to faith in Yeshua.
3. The new, non-Jewish Believers would logically need instruction in what the prohibitions of Acts 15:20 were, and by extension the local synagogue was the only real place found in cities all over, where the Scriptures could be accessed.
4. The prohibitions of Acts 15:20, when followed by the new, non-Jewish Believers, would effectively **sever these people** from their old spheres of social and religious influence. This, in turn, would make a community, which acknowledged the One True God of Israel *and* where Moses was being preached and read every Sabbath, their new sphere of social and religious influence.

^r Ibid.

Were the non-Jewish Believers anticipated to steadily keep more of God's Law, given both time and diligent discipleship? If the prophecies about the Word going forth, and people streaming to Zion to be taught the Torah are accurate (Isaiah 2:3-4; Micah 4:2), **then yes**. The promise of the New Covenant, though, was that the Spirit of God would write the Torah onto human hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27)—as opposed to anyone ordering them to do it (Acts 15:5). Only through the power of the Holy Spirit, and not a forced conversion to become ethnic Jews, were the new, non-Jewish Believers to learn, appreciate the value of, and steadily follow the righteous guidelines of God's Torah. It was by no means to be a matter of their salvation or something to be strictly “obligated” or bound on them—but instead was to be a matter of their continual progression in holiness.

One of the legitimate questions that is to be asked, is that if the Apostolic decree anticipates the non-Jewish Believers having to go to the local synagogue in some way to be instructed from the Torah, then why is there not more instruction seen in the Apostolic letters, Paul's, in particular, telling these people to keep things like the Sabbath, appointed times, kosher, or circumcision? Are these not some important aspects of the Torah?

Where issues like these are considered, it is usually thought that Apostles like Paul really did not regard them as applying to non-Jewish Believers (i.e., Galatians 4:9-11; Romans 14:5-6; Colossians 2:16-18),^s or that he considered them to be abolished. Some of these passages have important First Century background issues that need to be properly explored (like the scene of fellowship meals in Romans 14, and the role of the term *koinos*, κοινός), going beyond the scope of this Acts 15/Jerusalem Council analysis. When a proper evaluation of the data is considered, there are actually no prohibitions against these Torah practices in the Pauline Epistles—as much as there is teaching about their proper usage, an acknowledgement that these things are not “salvation issues,” and often including words on how Jewish and non-Jewish Believers were not to be unnecessarily divided.^t

What there is undoubtedly more Torah-based instruction about—seen in all of the Apostolic letters—regards proper ethics and morality, which is fully consistent with the message of the Prophets (Acts 15:15), and indeed, most of the Torah obviously concerns ethics and morality. How often is it easily forgotten that most of the early non-Jewish Believers came from the lower classes, and even though having welcomed Yeshua into their lives, *they still needed basic ethical and moral teaching*? Principles such as the Ten Commandments will always be given more attention than any other part of the Torah. Ephesians 4:28, written in 60-62 C.E., demands “He who steals must steal no longer.” If the Eighth Commandment were still being violated by a large number of the non-Jewish Believers (Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19) in Asia Minor,^u then this is at least one possible reason of why more specific attention to Torah-related issues like the Sabbath or appointed times is not seen in the Apostolic Scriptures. *Basic moral matters still needed to be expounded upon.*

The need for the non-Jewish Believers to attend the local synagogue hearing God's Torah read—turning their backs on idolatry, fornication, things strangled, and blood (Acts 15:20)—is not difficult to conclude when we consider the degradation of the larger Greco-Roman society. *They needed instruction.* First of all, how many of these people could even read? If they came from the lower classes, they would have to hear the Bible read to them. Secondly, how many of the non-Jewish Believers still struggled, having family members and friends still very much involved in Greco-Roman civic religion, who pulled on them to join back in? Only by seeing them implanted within a sphere that honored God and/or His Messiah, could they really be set on the right track.

^s Consult the author's article “Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?”

^t For further examination, consult the author's books *The New Testament Validates Torah* and *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* (and forthcoming *Volume II*), and various other volumes in the *for the Practical Messianic* commentary series.

^u Maxie D. Dunnam views these remarks by Paul as a strong indication that the early non-Jewish Believers “came from the dregs of society (cf. 1 Cor. 1:28-29; 1 Pet. 4:16). Many of them were slaves, and among slaves, stealing was regarded as normal” (*The Preacher's Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Vol 31 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982], 214).

And third, why do many of today's Bible readers somehow think that there were bookstores in every town? The only place where the Scriptures could really be accessed in the Diaspora—even in their Greek Septuagint form—would largely be in the local Jewish synagogue (cf. Acts 17:2). The only other major options for accessing the Scriptures would be from a wealthy family who may have owned some scrolls, or knowing people who really did memorize it. The highly educated Alexandrian Jew, Apollos, was one who “was mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24) and probably did know much of the Word (in its Greek LXX form) from memory.^v Obviously, though, people like him were few and far between.

The need for the non-Jewish Believers to understand the Torah and Tanach, and begin the process of discipleship with their fellow Jewish Believers, is also clear if for any other reason—because much of what is seen in Paul's letters would have made little sense given all of their intertextual references. As a simple example (of many possible quotes) of this, commenting on Philippians 1:1-2 and Paul's reference to him and Timothy being “servants of Christ Jesus” (RSV, NIV), Gordon D. Fee indicates, “They had entered the ‘society’ of a people whose roots were in Judaism and whose story had its origins in the Old Testament, a story that the Philippians by now would have known well in its Greek form—the Septuagint (LXX).”^w This is an academic testimony to the fact that the early non-Jewish Believers were being trained in the foundational accounts of the Tanach (cf. 1 Timothy 4:13).

What do you do when you see intertextual references from the Tanach or Old Testament, appearing in the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament? Are you at all curious as to which passages are being referred to, and how they play into an author's message or argument? Today, simply consider an English version like the New American Standard, which makes a point to use SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS in its New Testament translation, to point out to the reader where an Old Testament quote likely appears. (The United Bible Societies Greek New Testament uses **bolded** Greek text.) Have you just glossed over something like this thinking that it is just stylistic? Or, should you have encountered it before, do you sometimes realize that in examining a Tanach passage referred to, that your understanding of the passage needs improvement? Evangelical Christians today, who “rediscover” the Old Testament, still largely have a cursory knowledge of what it is simply because they have their own Bibles—quite contrary to the new, non-Jewish Believers frequently depicted in the Apostolic Scriptures.

Early in the history of the Messiah movement, the Believers often met in some kind of association with the local Jewish synagogue. James himself, in his epistle dating to perhaps the early 40s C.E., taught about, “Suppose a man comes into your synagogue [*sunagōgē*, συναγωγή] wearing gold rings and fancy clothes, and also a poor man comes in dressed in rags...” (James 2:2, YLT). He recognized the local synagogue as a place to receive proper instruction and fellowship, and this perspective is reflected in v. 21.^x

Of course, even with Acts 15:21 including a prescription regarding Moses being proclaimed and heard at the local synagogue, where non-Jewish Believers could receive instruction, this does not always mean that it would be possible in all cities. Bock does point out how, “Meeting regularly in the synagogue was no longer possible for the new community. They were forced to meet elsewhere, and they did so in house churches.”^y Yet he notes this happened because of the *persecution* that the Jewish establishment enacted upon many of the Believers, ejecting them from the Synagogue. Simply consider the complex scene in Corinth in Acts 18:7-8, and how the

^v Apollos is notably a major candidate for the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Notably, Hebrews includes over thirty direct quotations from the Greek Septuagint.

^w Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 63.

^x Some may try to argue that James' epistle is only directed to a Jewish audience, given how it could have been written prior to the Jerusalem Council. The challenge with this view is that while James' words have parallels with ancient Jewish literature, so do they also have parallels with ancient classical philosophy as well, indicating a broader audience of non-Jews.

Consult the author's commentary *James for the Practical Messianic*.

^y Bock, 38.

Believers met in a house right next to the synagogue. Stern himself notes how going to the local synagogue in Acts 15:21 “is a ‘temporal’ interpretation applicable to first century conditions,”^z as the impetus for James appears to be the non-Jewish Believers understanding what the prohibitions of v. 20 are, and the other godly principles and instructions that they would hear about. Going to the local synagogue to hear Moses’ Teaching, would not exclude the need for the Believers to specifically get together themselves for times of reflection on the teachings of Yeshua, to pray and to worship Him, for counseling one another as fellow Messiah followers, and for working through the issues that affected *their* emerging and developing community.

Many Christians today have heard the Messianic interpretation of Acts 15:21, and that it includes an implied impetus for the non-Jewish Believers to go to the local synagogue and hear Moses taught. They do not agree, particularly because in Acts 15:23-29 following the text does not really include anything about Moses or synagogues. It is thus thought to be incorrect for any reader to conclude that the Apostolic decree includes the expectation for the non-Jews to go to the local synagogue in their town or city, and begin some kind of instruction from God’s Torah. Yet, is Luke’s letter in vs. 23-29 following, the actual letter that was sent *or* an abridged summary of what was sent? Also not to be overlooked is the role that the Apostolic representatives sent to Antioch play, whose specific role would have been to explain what James’ ruling meant (Acts 15:30-33). Would they have told the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch that they need to be sure that they were hearing from the Scriptures every week? Where would these Scriptures be found?

James’ decision is directed to the First Century non-Jewish Believers. In making due diligence to follow his four prohibitions (Acts 15:20), they would likely have to know what they involved by hearing the Torah taught in a local synagogue *and* in turn would naturally hear more about proper living from God’s commandments (Acts 15:21). Contrary to the hyper-conservative Pharisees who wanted to order them (Acts 15:5) to follow the Torah, the Holy Spirit could work on each heart and the Father’s prophetic plan could naturally take shape (Acts 15:15). We can certainly envision a scene of where Jewish and non-Jewish Believers would attend mainline Jewish services together at the local synagogue on *Shabbat*, and then later when the services were over, they would discuss what they had learned and how it applied to their shared Messianic faith—and they would discuss if anything taught by Jews, who had not yet acknowledged Yeshua, ran contrary to the imperatives of the gospel. The Jewish Believers would very much have the responsibility to mentor the non-Jewish Believers, and be very welcoming and loving toward them.

But while the salvation and proper behavior of the nations is the main subject of James’ speech (Acts 15:14-21), and how while ritual proselyte circumcision was not required of non-Jewish Believers to be received as fellow brethren—it is nowhere implied that Jews should *forsake the Torah* to be Messiah followers. Jews should continue to live as Jews as they always have,^{aa} although they were to understand the position of the new, non-Jewish Believers who had received Israel’s Messiah. These people were not to be unnecessarily troubled (Acts 15:19), and be shown some forbearance and patience as the two distinct groups of people came together and started to form the “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV/CJB). Where this would lead, as James’ testified, is the ultimate restoration of the Kingdom of Israel detailed in the Prophets (Acts 15:15).

When the Jerusalem Council met, the Apostles were aware of the social prejudices that the mixed group of Believers would have to overcome. What they were not aware of is that their ruling (Acts 15:19-21, 23-29) would not always have success. The Apostles’ intention was to likely see a steady restoration of David’s Tabernacle take place (Acts 15:16), a unique ministry of spiritual service steadily developing into all of the Believers united in community as a *singular* living sacrifice able to positively impact the world (1 Chronicles 25; Romans 12). The new, non-Jewish Believers would steadily learn and incorporate all of the things from the Scriptures that would make them truly be a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. In so doing, the Jewish Believers would be able to see transformed people from the nations changed by the Spirit every

^z Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 279.

^{aa} Cf. Wall, in *NIB*, 10:214.

bit as much as they were. *Both groups would rely more and more on one another*, and they would socially accept the other as true brothers and sisters in the Lord—not just some kind of extended family members. Within such a community, non-Jews would not have to give up their ethnic identity to be welcome, even though both study of and obedience to the Scriptures would be required. In fact, their own cultures might have possessed a few virtues that could aid the Body of Messiah in its mission, which the Jewish Believers could probably appreciate.

While this goal was achieved in many places, the Apostles who met at the Jerusalem Council could never have predicted the negative fallout of the Jewish revolt in 70 C.E., the destruction of the Second Temple, and the subsequent rise in Roman anti-Semitism. The gradual path of obedience they laid forth in the Apostolic decree found itself largely halted because of the negative forces of history. And to this, it cannot be overlooked how the early Jewish Believers thought that more of their fellow Jews would come to faith in Yeshua, than actually did.

Today's Messianic movement has the responsibility to focus once again on what the Jerusalem Council wanted to see achieved. We need to demonstrate the universal availability of salvation *to anyone*, regardless of ethnicity (against: m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1). We need to demonstrate that all Believers can consider themselves a part of Israel, living in obedience to God's Instruction, and accomplishing His purposes. Yet as we have probably witnessed too frequently in recent history—even us as Twenty-First Century, relatively pluralistic people—there are still various obstacles to overcome. Will we listen to the Holy Scriptures? Or, will we place our own interests ahead of the good news?

posted 15 July, 2011

Acts 15:24: Acts 15:24 says that the non-Jews in Antioch were not expected to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. I understand that your Messianic interpretation of Acts 15:21, "Moses is preached in the synagogue every Sabbath," is that they were expected to eventually keep the Torah. What do you do about this verse?

This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic*.

"Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls,"

Acts 15:24-29 contains the main substance of the message that the Jerusalem leaders want conveyed to those in Antioch. They relay how, "we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions"^a (RSV). The Greek *tines ex hēmōn* (τινὲς ἐξ ἡμῶν) or "certain persons" (NRSV), by no means included the views of all of the Jewish Believers in Judea and Jerusalem, or the Jewish Believers who were Pharisees, although those who had come to Antioch could have very easily been perceived as representing most of them.

What the hyper-conservative Pharisees were responsible for doing is labeled as "troubling your minds" (NIV). The severity of this is seen in the verb *anaskeuazō* (ἀνασκευάζω), for which at least one classical meaning as employed by Xenophon is, "to waste, ravage, destroy" (LS). This same term has various military connotations, possibly involving the taking of plunder.^b Recognizing that the grievances they brought to the Jerusalem Council about circumcision as proselytes and Torah-keeping as being required for salvation is very serious. Those who went to Antioch held to a very rigid religious ideology **that would probably cause the faith of the non-Jewish Believers in Yeshua to be ravaged** in some way. The scene depicted by Paul in Galatians 5:1-3, and how the life

^a Grk. *diastellō* (διαστέλλω), "to define or express in no uncertain terms what one must do, order, give orders" (BDAG, 236); to be slightly contrasted with *parangellō* in Acts 15:5 regarding "ordered" (NRSV).

^b LS, 62.

emphasis of the new proselyte will become the Torah *and not the Messiah*, should be considered. This is not the New Covenant power of the Torah being supernaturally written onto a new heart (Ezekiel 36:25-27; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34), and how love for God and neighbor as most important will motivate one to further obedience.

The letter's intention as conveyed in Acts 15:24 is for the Jerusalem leaders to recognize how the hyper-conservative Pharisees were some individuals "who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us" (NRSV). They claimed an importance that they did not have, and said things that were completely unauthorized in requiring proselyte circumcision and mandated Torah-keeping from them—for salvation no less! As a result, these people caused some unneeded problems for the non-Jewish Believers in Antioch, and the Jerusalem leaders will communicate to them the definite things that they need to make sure they are following (Acts 15:29).

Anyone who has a KJV or NKJV Bible will immediately see a difference that appears in Acts 15:24, when compared to either an RSV, NASB, NIV, CJB, or one of the other modern versions that employs a critical Greek New Testament. There is some additional information seen in the younger Greek Textus Receptus:

ACTS 15:24 TEXTUS RECEPTUS	ACTS 15:24 CRITICAL TEXT
<p>Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no <i>such</i> commandment (NKJV).</p>	<p>Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions (ESV).</p>
<p>Ἐπειδὴ ἠκούσαμεν ὅτι τινὲς ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξεληθόντες ἐτάραξαν ὑμᾶς λόγοις ἀνασκευάζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν λέγοντες περιτέμνεσθαι καὶ τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον, οἷς οὐ διεστείλαμεθα</p>	<p>Ἐπειδὴ ἠκούσαμεν ὅτι τινὲς ἐξ ἡμῶν [ἐξεληθόντες] ἐτάραξαν ὑμᾶς λόγοις ἀνασκευάζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν οἷς οὐ διεστείλαμεθα,</p>

The additional information that is seen in the Textus Receptus stands out to anyone.^c Whereas the critical Greek text only informs those in Antioch that some people, to whom the Jerusalem leadership gave no instructions, exceeded their place, the Textus Receptus says that what these people were saying is "You must be circumcised and keep the law" (NKJV). Seeing these variants, the interpreter of the Jerusalem Council is left wondering. While Torah-keeping can by no means merit eternal salvation—of either non-Jews *or* Jews (Acts 15:8-9)—was the Torah now to be left out of the equation as a part of the non-Jewish Believers' growth in holiness and piety? The latter is the conclusion that many interpreters draw: the Law of Moses is a part of Israel's past, and not a part of any Christian's future.

Where does the additional information, appearing in the Greek Textus Receptus, originate from? Metzger notes how the additional information likely originated in the form of an interpolation,^d or some kind of an explanatory side comment that made its way into the text itself:

"The expansion, which, though absent from D, is probably part of the original Western text, appears to be an addition derived from verses 1 and 5 and inserted here in order to

^c The Fifth Century Aramaic Peshitta also includes this extended reading of Acts 15:24:

"We have heard that certain men have gone out and disturbed you with words, thus upsetting your souls, saying, You must be circumcised and keep the law; concerning these things we have never commanded them" (Lamsa).

^d For a further explanation on how determining an original reading works, consult Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text& Canon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), Part VII: "Textual Variants & the Practice of Textual Criticism," pp 137-149.

specify in what particulars the Judaizers had sought to trouble the Antiochian Christians. The interpolation passed into the Textus Receptus.”^e

The clause *humōn legontes peritemnesthai kai terein ton nomon* (ὁμῶν λέγοντες περιτέμνεσθαι καὶ τηρεῖν τον νόμον) is something that is omitted from the oldest extant Greek texts of Acts. What are the oldest textual witnesses that include this reading? In its explanatory notes which demonstrate the alternative reading among extant texts of the Apostolic Scriptures, United Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* cites a variety of ancient witnesses, most of which (significantly) post-date the early centuries of our Messianic faith.^f Here is a chart of when a selection of these main textual witnesses (mostly miniscules) are dated, along with the early Christian sources that include this clause:^g

ACTS 15:24 TEXTUAL WITNESSES “you must be circumcised and keep the law”	
MSS	CENTURY DATE (A.D./C.E.)
36	XII (Twelfth)
181	X (Tenth)
307	X (Tenth)
453	XIV (Fourteenth)
610	XII (Twelfth)
614	XIII (Thirteenth)
945	XI (Eleventh)
1409	XIV (Fourteenth)
1678	XIV (Fourteenth)
1739	X (Tenth)
1891	X (Tenth)
l 1178	XI (Eleventh)
Irenaeus <i>Latin trans.</i>	died II (Second)
Chrysostom	died 407
Socrates	died after 439

Not to be overlooked are the main, ancient textual witnesses which *exclude* the clause “you must be circumcised and keep the law,” something followed by most modern Bible translations today:

ACTS 15:24 TEXTUAL WITNESSES EXCLUDING “you must be circumcised and keep the law”	
MSS	CENTURY DATE (A.D./C.E.)
ϐ ³³	VI (Sixth)
ϐ ⁴⁵	III (Third)
ϐ ⁷⁴	VII (Seventh)
Ⲛ	IV (Fourth)
A	V (Fifth)
B	IV (Fourth)
D	V / VI (Fifth / Sixth)
33	IX (Ninth)
81	10 ⁴⁴ C.E.
2344	XI (Eleventh)

Looking through this data, we see that most of the textual witnesses that include that clause “you must be circumcised and keep the law” in Acts 15:24 date from over a millennium *after* the Jerusalem Council convened. There are some ancient quotes of Acts 15:24 from early

^e Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 436.

^f Aland, *GNT*, 467; cf. Nestle and Aland, *GNT*, 367.

^g The dates are taken directly from the charts provided in Aland, *GNT*:

The different sub-categories of textual witnesses are: papyri, pp 6-9; unicals, pp 9-16; minuscules, pp 16-18; lectionaries, 21. Also to be noted should be the list of Greek Church Fathers, pp 31-34; and Latin Church Fathers, pp 35-36, where different readings may be quoted.

Christian leaders, perhaps dating to the late Second Century C.E., and certainly by the Fourth and Fifth Century C.E., which include this clause. But, we stand on very good ground in recognizing that this clause was **not a part of the original letter written to Antioch**, appearing in Luke’s record. At most, this extended reading of Acts 15:24 was a side explanation of later centuries of Christians, which eventually found its way into some texts. Why this expression got added to the text is something that we need not speculate on too much (and anti-Semitism may very well be a factor), as we should simply be very thankful for the science of textual criticism that has noted it is unoriginal.^h

The conclusions of those who read Acts 15:24 from a Bible that uses the Textus Receptus and its extended reading (like the KJV or NKJV), is something that today’s Messianics will frequently encounter. Yet, even those who use a Bible translated from more critical texts may not disagree with the idea that the Jerusalem assembly gave no instructions for the non-Jewish Believers to keep any of the Torah. The differences, however slight, between vs. 1, 5 and the extended version of v. 24 in the Textus Receptus, are important to be aware of:

ACTS 15:1, 5	ACTS 15:24 TEXTUS RECEPTUS
Some men came down from Judea and <i>began</i> teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”...But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses” (NASU).	Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “ <i>You must</i> be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no <i>such</i> commandment (NKJV).

The actual statements that the Jerusalem Council met to address involved the absurd claim that circumcision as proselytes, and Torah-keeping, were to be ordered (Grk. *parangellō*; Acts 15:5) upon the non-Jewish Believers *for salvation*. If the non-Jewish Believers did not do these things, they ultimately could not be considered redeemed by the hyper-conservative Pharisees. The extended reading of Acts 15:24, contrary to this, does not include any reference to salvation, and could be read from the perspective that the Jerusalem leaders did not expect the non-Jewish Believers to keep any of the Torah *for holiness*. Yet, the implication of the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:19-21) was that some kind of synagogue attendance and hearing of Moses’ Teaching, was not only going to occur to understand the four prohibitions—but also to be steadily understood via the prophetic expectation of Israel’s restoration (Acts 15:15).

The more ancient reading of Acts 15:24, which we can be confident is more or less the original to Luke’s composition, read as: “We have heard that some people went out from among us without our authorization, and that they have upset you with their talk, unsettling your minds” (CJB). The letter written to those in Antioch was specifically concerned about enforcing the Apostolic decree, *and* upholding the authority of leaders like Paul and Barnabas, who had been specifically called by God with the skill to minister to the nations (cf. Galatians 2:1-10). Anyone else did not receive Jerusalem’s authorization or approval.

updated 20 February, 2011

^h In their article “‘One Law’ and the Messianic Gentile,” Boaz Michael and D. Thomas Lancaster draw the conclusion, “In the epistle that the council sent to the Gentiles, James clearly stated that the council did not demand full Torah observance from the Gentiles” (*Messiah Journal* Issue 101, Summer 2009/5769:54). They then appeal to the NKJV reading of Acts 15:24.

Why a supposedly scholarly Messianic ministry like First Fruits of Zion would overlook such a major textual variant like this, is certainly deserving of an explanation or correction—especially as they have quoted what is most likely an anti-Semitic reading! A rudimentary survey of New Testament textual criticism by them would have noted this problem with the verse.

Afterlife, negates need for resurrection: Going to Heaven makes no sense in light of the doctrine of resurrection. What is the point of the future resurrection if Believers just go to Heaven when they die?

One of the most frequent arguments against a conscious, intermediate afterlife in Heaven, is that going to be with the Lord is thought to negate the significance of the resurrection, making it a bit anticlimactic. It is very true that many of today's Believers think that salvation is to be understood exclusively in terms of "going to Heaven when you die," and the future resurrection of the body, the Millennial Kingdom, and a restored Kingdom of God on Earth are distant afterthoughts. But how much of this is due to much of today's popular preaching, and not a careful and reasonable reading of Scripture? Admittedly, most people are more concerned about the place they will *immediately* go after they die, which most rightly consider to be the realm of another dimension, than they are about the long term plan of salvation history. Unfortunately, the whole picture of what comes *after* the intermediate state has not been told to enough of today's Believers.

Is going to Heaven immediately after death akin to "canceling" the significance of the resurrection? Perhaps this is best answered with another question: *What do we consider the resurrection to be?* Do we consider it to be re-creation from personal extinction—or the recapitulation of a deceased human person: with the consciousness placed back into a reanimated body?

One of the most serious problems regarding the concept of psychopannychy or "soul sleep" is what happens to human memory, which is chemically stored in the brain. In holding to a monistic anthropology of the human person effectively being a body, then when a deceased body decomposes, so does a person's memory. What happens at the resurrection? *Where has the memory gone?* Psychopannychists could argue that human memory is stored in the mind of God, but then that would require them to at least accept a quasi-dualism—where the "self" or "personality" part of a deceased person has to be stored outside of the body for a time.

From a monistic perspective, the human being is entirely physical, quantitatively the same as an animal like a dog or cat. If a deceased person has completely decomposed into base atoms, has to be re-created, and then outside memories are implanted—then philosophically there is enough doubt for us to wonder whether or not the one who is to be "resurrected" is the same person who lived a life on Earth before. Such atoms could, after all, have become part of someone else after decomposition has had its way and someone's remains end up in the food and water supply. Boyd and Eddy as monists have to at least acknowledge,

"Some have argued that if the self does not exist between death and resurrection, then the Lord literally re-creates us on the resurrection day. This is problematic, they argue, for it is tantamount to claiming that God creates different people who replicate us in a previous life."^a

All that they can appeal to though, as monists, is some level of mystery on how God might preserve the memories and thoughts of a person who has died. Those who believe in a conscious intermediate state do not have to appeal to any degree of mystery to know how a person remains the same in the time between death and resurrection. The anticipation of the dying Stephen, who had seen Heaven opened up, was clearly "Lord Yeshua, receive my spirit!" (Acts 7:59). We might not be told all of the things that go on during the intermediate state, but an intermediate afterlife in either Heaven or Hell, before final rewards and punishment, undoubtedly assures us that the person who once lived an Earthly life is the same authentic one who is to be resurrected—and not a copy or clone. Holistic dualism emphasizes that ideally a person is a fully embodied being, but recognizes the *temporary* separation of the consciousness between death and resurrection.

^a "The Human Constitution Debate," in Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), pp 98-99.

If we ever think that as Believers looking forward to seeing our Lord in Heaven at time of death, makes the resurrection a bit of an add-on or appendage, then we really do need to think about what we are told goes on in Heaven. Revelation 6:10, for example, includes the martyrs in Heaven entreating the Divine throne: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" These deceased saints, conscious and undoubtedly having seen the Savior, **are very much eager to see salvation history progress forward.** They are eager for Yeshua to defeat His enemies, to be resurrected, and to be reunited with their loved ones who are still living on Earth. This will only take place at the Second Coming of the Messiah.

In the estimation of Bruce Milne, "we [must] carefully maintain the clear New Testament focus on the parousia [or, coming] of Christ as the true goal and crowning expression of the Christian's victory over death...For [these saints] the focus is on the coming of the Son of Man."^b So, as exciting as going to Heaven might be, those in Heaven know that more is to come! They know that it is only at the resurrection when all the saints, both deceased and living, can be a unified company (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

posted 29 March, 2011

^b Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 168.

Afterlife, negates significance of death: Is it not true that an afterlife in Heaven before the resurrection, would subtract from the significance of death?

Psychopannychists or “soul sleep” advocates claim that the power of death is something that is entirely physical. If Believers live a life on Earth, and then in the process of dying go to Heaven to be with the Lord before the resurrection, it is claimed that “death” really has no significance. **This is an incorrect assumption about the significance of death**—because even if survivors of a deceased person might believe that a loved one is in the presence of Yeshua in Heaven, such survivors still have to cope with the loss or vacuum that the deceased has left. *Death separates people*. Even with some people able to experience a degree of comfort knowing that a loved one is with the Lord, survivors are still separated from those who they knew, and they have to bear the brunt of living their lives on Earth without their loved ones’ company, council, and involvement in life-cycle events.

Death as a force to be reckoned with often leaves a very bitter aftermath for those who have had to confront it. Even if all of the persons involved have confessed faith in the Lord, and know Yeshua as Savior, and believe in an intermediate afterlife in Heaven before resurrection—the force of death will take its (serious) toll. Simply consider the child who will never grow up having met a grandparent or a parent, who pre-deceased birth or who died when the child was very young. Even if this child grows up hearing stories about a grandfather who died before he was born, the most personal connection the grandchild can make to the person is probably visiting a cemetery plot. Even if it is believed that a family member is in Heaven, there is still very much a desire in the heart of a survivor to see the Lord return in glory, so an extended family can be fully reunited across the generations. Bruce Milne further describes,

“Death’s sting [1 Corinthians 15:55-56] is truly felt, no matter the circumstances or the degree of conviction with which Christians experience the passing of a loved one. The pain often goes very, very deep, and commonly the wound never fully heals. A conviction that the loved one is now ‘with the Lord’, while clearly a source of comfort, may do little even after the passage of time to counteract the numbing blow of the loss.”¹¹

Each one of us in our lives has had to experience the death of a loved one—a husband or wife, a father or mother, a close relative, a dear friend, a mentor—and throughout our lives we will always entertain thoughts, at least in part, wondering what it would or could mean to us were they still with us. All of us who believe in an intermediate afterlife in Heaven, and who believe that a deceased loved one is presently basking in the presence of Yeshua HaMashiach and all of the other saints—have wanted such a person alive *and with us*. Each day we wonder what our lives would be like with them present with us, especially at those most happy moments like a wedding, a birth of a new child, a graduation, or even a special trip. Every day, we have to carry with us the resonating pain that the power of death has caused. We eagerly anticipate the day when we can see our departed grandparents, parents, extended family, and friends again!

The psychopannychist is directly guilty of robbing a survivor of the little bit of comfort he or she has in knowing that a loved one is in Heaven until the time of the resurrection (John 10:10a). While there is a significant error of many people thinking that those who die in faith go to Heaven, never to have their bodies resurrected—those of us who have always believed in the provisionality of the intermediate state are told to think that our loved ones are only steadily decomposing in a grave. What does such a thought do especially to those who have derived comfort from their loved one being in Heaven, a family member or friend who may have died suddenly or tragically? *Their mangled corpse is just falling apart even more as though a dog was hit by a car?!*

Every one of us who has lost a loved one carries with us the pain and effects of their departure, and are quite aware of the power and significance of death on human existence. We know that death is an enemy that needs to be defeated!

posted 29 March, 2011

¹¹ Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 169.

Alcohol: Do you think it is acceptable for Believers to consume alcoholic beverages?

We do not see any specific prohibition in the Bible against the drinking of alcoholic beverages, including wine, beer, or other forms of liquor. Wine was used in the Tabernacle and Temple service by the Levites, and the consumption of alcohol in moderation is not prohibited in Judaism. However, there are many sins in the Bible associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages, mostly the consumption of wine in extreme excess.

There are various Christian denominations which consider drinking alcohol to be a “sin,” on the basis of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, which tells us that our bodies are the Temple of God and the habitation of the Holy Spirit, and that we are not to harm our bodies. Certainly, we can harm our bodies by drinking alcohol, but we can also harm our bodies by eating too much, failing to exercise, or working in toxic environments. We understand how this Scripture has been applied by some to prohibit drinking alcohol, but do not entirely agree with it. Yeshua’s first miracle was forming water into wine at Cana, and the Apostle Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for his frequent stomach ailments (1 Timothy 5:23).

While there are no Scriptures that directly prohibit the consumption of alcohol, we are told in Ephesians 5:18, “do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” We are also told, “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy” (Romans 13:13). Drunkenness is not a quality becoming of Believers in Messiah Yeshua, as Paul asks the Corinthians, “do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, **nor drunkards**, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). There are no Scriptures which tell us that we “must drink,” and there are repeated warnings against becoming drunk with alcohol.

We do not think that the Bible tells us that we cannot drink, but we do not believe that it is entirely appropriate for us as Messianic Believers to always drink in public, either. There are Messianics who come from Christian backgrounds which prohibited drinking alcohol, who sometimes go to an extreme with their “newfound freedom” when they enter into the Messianic community, which by-and-large does not discourage drinking. We urge caution and consideration of outsiders’ opinions of drinking, and believe that if you do drink alcohol occasionally, that you do it in the privacy of your home or solely around trusted friends in public.

updated 21 November, 2006

Alef-Tav, Yeshua as the: In what way is Yeshua the Messiah the Alef and the Tav? Some interesting teachings circulate around the Messianic movement about the first and last Hebrew letters, and their association with Yeshua.

For a great number of Messianic people, Yeshua the Messiah being associated as the Alef and the Tav, is no different than how Christians see Jesus Christ as the Alpha and the Omega. The first and last Hebrew letters are *alef* (א) and *tav* (ט), just as the first and last Greek letters are *alpha* (Α) and *ōmēga* (Ω). In a publication like the Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible, we see the rendering “I am the Alef and the Tav” employed in Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13. Surprisingly, though, the Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern actually has “I am the ‘A’ and the ‘Z’” in these verses. The purpose of this is to serve as an appropriate counterpart to “I am the first and the last” (Revelation 1:17; cf. 2:8; 22:13). That the LORD God is the only first and the last is something affirmed in Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12. Yeshua as the Divine Savior, being God the Son, is something realized in that He too is to be considered the first and the last.

It is not uncommon in various Messianic circles to hear that there might be some kind of a connection between Yeshua being the Alef and the Tav, and what is witnessed in the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” in Hebrew reads as

b'reisheet bara Elohim et ha'shamayim v'et ha'erezt (בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ). A non-translatable particle word, *et* (אֶת), appears in the Hebrew text, relating to the action of creation. Many of today's Messianics, who rightly hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God, see this small word composed of *alef* and *tav*, and conclude that this is an indication of Yeshua being present at the Creation of the universe.

Does the presence of the *et* (אֶת) in Genesis 1:1, indicate that Yeshua the Messiah is intended to be identified as the Alef and the Tav/the Alpha and Omega/the A and the Z in this verse? The identification of Yeshua as the *et* (אֶת) in Genesis 1:1 can be disputed. This is because *et* (אֶת) in Hebrew grammar serves as the marker of a definite direct object, and it is used all throughout the Hebrew Tanach—in places that often have absolutely no direct or indirect Messianic significance. *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* by C.L. Seow informs us what the purpose of the *et* (אֶת) actually is:

“Almost always in Hebrew prose, and less commonly in poetry, an untranslatable particle אֶת/אֵת is used to mark the definite object of the verb. A noun is said to be definite when it is a proper name, a noun with a definite article, or a noun with a suffixed pronoun.”^a

The examples given to explain this are *sholeiach et-Moshe* (שָׁלַח אֶת-מֹשֶׁה), “sending Moses”; *sholeiach et-ha'eved* (שָׁלַח אֶת-הָעֶבֶד), “sending the servant”; *sholeiach et-avdi* (שָׁלַח אֶת-עַבְדִּי), “sending my servant.”^b Passages or verses in the Tanach which tend to have Messianic significance, usually have things detectable via connections made by the actions or sayings of particular Tanach figures, and things witnessed in the ministry and service of Yeshua in the Gospels.

It is most admirable for Messianic Believers today wanting to make a connection between the presence of the *et* (אֶת) in Genesis 1:1, in an effort to affirm the pre-existence and Divinity of Yeshua. However, what has probably not been probed enough are definite claims in the Apostolic Scriptures of Yeshua's pre-existence, and His role in creating and sustaining the universe:

- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:1-3).
- “[Y]et for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him” (1 Corinthians 8:6; cf. Deuteronomy 6:4).
- “[W]ho, existing in the form of God^c, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage” (Philippians 2:6, HCSB).
- “[F]or in him all things were created^d, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things [exists before everything, TLV]^e, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17, RSV).
- “[I]n these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:2-3).

The following five verses quoted above—because of their undeniable ambiguity of Yeshua the Messiah being present at Creation and upholding Creation—should be far more

^a C.L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 98.

^b Ibid.

^c Grk. *en morphē Theou huparchōn* (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων); *huparchōn* is a present active participle, properly rendered as “existing” (HCSB/TLV).

^d Grk. *hoti en autō ektisthē ta panta* (ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα).

^e Grk. *estin pro pantōn* (ἔστιν πρὸ πάντων).

important for us to consider, than the presence of a common particle word like *et* appearing in the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1.

posted 20 September, 2011

All Israel: What do Two-House teachers do with references from the Tanach or Old Testament that seem to indicate that “all Israel” was reunified after the Babylonian exile?

The following entry has been adapted from the editor’s article, “What Is the Two-House Teaching?”

There are those who believe that the reunification of Judah and Ephraim has already taken place in past history, and that the basic Two-House view of this as a future event is misplaced. One of the contentions that “all Israel” has been reunited concerns post-exilic statements made in the Tanach that regard “all Israel.” But a careful reading does not conclusively prove that Judah and scattered Israel/Ephraim have been fully reunited. This is a convenient way for those who do not wish to examine the subject matter in any detail to dismiss it.

Perhaps the most significant reference to be considered is seen at an oath taking ceremony, where the returned Jewish exiles were forbidden from intermarrying local pagans. Ezra 10:5 tells us, “Then Ezra rose and made the leading priests, the Levites and **all Israel**, take oath that they would do according to this proposal; so they took the oath.” According to some, because this event took place after the Babylonian exile, all Israel—both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms—were reunified because “all Israel” is mentioned. Yet a study of significant end-time prophecies that speak of the Two Houses of Israel demonstrates that the Two Houses have not been reunited. The *kol-Yisrael* (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) mentioned here in Ezra should be understood as all Israel present or available for this event. This is confirmed by what we see earlier in Ezra 8:25, when gifts for the Second Temple had been collected:

“I weighed out to them the silver, the gold and the utensils, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes and **all Israel present there** had offered.”

The *kol-Yisrael ha'nimtza'im* (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּמְצָאִים), “all the Israelites who were present” (NEB), could have been “all the Israelites of that region” (New American Bible) who were able to attend. The verb *matza* (מָצָא), appearing in the Nifal stem (simple action, passive voice), means “be found,” or possibly even “be found incidentally, by chance, happen to be found” (*CHALOT*).^a The thought of the *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* is that it was “all Israelites who were found, met with, in Babylon, and were not going with them to Jerusalem.”^b The offerings presented were done so on behalf of the *known* community of Israel, those who survived the challenges and difficulties of the exile, and who only by the sheer grace of God were able to be freed from Babylonian oppression. Even though the returnees to the Land of Israel were largely those of the Southern Kingdom, there is no reason why they should never have referred to themselves as *kol Yisrael* or as *b'nei-Yisrael* (בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל), the “sons/children of Israel” (cf. Ezra 6:21). There is also no compelling reason, that when the Second Temple was dedicated to God, that there should not have been various twelve sets of animal sacrifices made for all twelve tribes (Ezra 6:17; 8:35). The hope, after all, was that all Israel would return to the Promised Land and be restored to right relationship with God. Yet, those who issue a natural confession to the Lord, notably call themselves *pelei'tah* (פְּלִיטָה),^c an “escaped remnant” (Ezra 9:13-15).

Those of Israel who were found, who presented material offerings, and then presented various animal sacrifices, surely did so with the hope that there would never again be a terrible

^a *CHALOT*, 209.

^b *E-Sword 8.0.8: Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*. MS Windows 9x. Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation, 2008.

^c Meaning either “a survivor, survival, someone or something remaining,” or “escape, deliverance” (*HALOT*, 2:932).

calamity befall the people. The “all Israel”^d represented likely included some survivors from the Northern Kingdom who had not been fully assimilated into the Assyrian Empire, and who joined with the Jewish exiles when Persia freed all of the conquered peoples of the region.^e Also not to be overlooked is how various Northern Kingdom families and individuals had migrated into the Southern Kingdom centuries earlier, had been integrated into the Southern Kingdom, and then were taken to Babylon and subsequently returned.^f Yet, while language such as “all Israel that were found” (LXE)^g is witnessed in the post-exilic scene,^h there is still a **significant, futuristic prophetic expectation** that still cannot be disregarded (i.e., Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 31:6-10; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 10:6-10). And, “all Israel found,” after all, can be an admission that there was still some or much of Israel still lost.

If the Two Houses of Israel have been fully reunited, then what do Bible readers do with the prophetic oracle of Ezekiel 37:25-28?

“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.”

Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Is God’s Sanctuary established in the Land of Israel for all the nations of the world to see? Also consider the fact that Ezekiel 37:24 plainly states, “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.” “David,” we should rightly conclude, is a reference to the Messiah. If indeed the Two Houses of Israel were reunited in past history, then Messiah Yeshua would be present in Jerusalem **right now** ruling and reigning over the world. (At the very least, we would see Israel in a position of significant prominence and respect in the world.) But He has not yet returned, and we are still waiting for the complete reunion of all Israel and the mighty acts that it involves.ⁱ

Popular author Tim LaHaye tells us, in regard to Bible prophecy, “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.”^j John F. Walvoord observes in his *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, “The situation where these two kingdoms were divided will end, and as this and other prophecies predict, the two kingdoms will become one nation (cf. Jer. 3:18; 23:5-6; 30:3; Hosea 1:11; Amos 9:11). No fulfillment has ever been recorded in history, and

^d *Context* should always determine who “all Israel” is, when being referred to. Consider how 1 Kings 12:20 speaks of “all Israel,” and it is not “all Israel” in the sense of *both* the Northern and Southern Kingdoms: “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.” In this verse “all Israel” referred to is the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim. In a similar manner, Ezra 10:5 refers largely to those of the Southern Kingdom.

^e I.e., people possibly like Tobit of the tribe of Naphtali, exiled to Nineveh (Tobit 1:1-3).

^f 2 Chronicles 11:16; 15:9; 30:11, 18; 34:9; cf. 35:16-19 and the *kol-Yehudah v'Yisrael ha'nimtza* (כָּל־יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּמְצָא), “all Judah and Israel who are found” (35:18, YLT), who were participants in King Josiah’s Passover.

^g The Greek Septuagint of Ezra 8:25 has *pas Israēl hoi euriskomenoi* (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ οἱ εὐρισκόμενοι); the verb *euriskō* (εὐρίσκω) actually meaning, “to come upon someth. either through purposeful search or accidentally, *find*” (BDAG, 411).

^h Commenting on King Cyrus’ decree made in Ezra 1:3, “Whoever there is among you of all His people...,” *m'kol-amo* (כָּל־עַמּוֹ), H.G.M. Williamson, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah*, Vol 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 13 notably says,

“[I]t is highly unlikely, either historically or on the basis of the ideological outlook of the writer, that any reference is intended to the lost tribes of the old Northern Kingdom.”

ⁱ Take important note of the fact that the Two-House reunification involves the companions of Judah and Ephraim (Ezekiel 37:16, 19). This means that more people than *solely* physical Israelites are involved—those who have joined themselves to either House are involved and are thus considered joined to Israel. This means that *all* who are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel, regardless of ethnicity, are to be a part of the restoration process.

^j LaHaye, *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, 873.

the future regathering of Israel will occur in the Millennium.”^k These two dispensationalists validly recognize some level of future fulfillment that cannot go unaddressed.^l

Noting the contents of Haftarah *Va'yigash* (Genesis 44:18-47:27), Ezekiel 37:15-28, in the *JPS Bible Commentary: Haftorot*, Michael Fishbane rightly summarizes some of the main points of what the fulfillment of the two-stick oracle is to involve:

“The haftarah emphasizes the theme of national restoration, with specific focus on the promised reunification of the northern and southern tribes, the renewal of the Davidic royal lineage, and the reestablishment of the covenant between God and Israel....Another theme of the haftarah is that of stability, expressed as a permanent change from the past and as a vision of a permanent future....[T]he haftarah achieves an intensity of focus and emphasis. Indeed, through [the terms used] the dispersed nation is given hope in a new future—unsullied by the defilements of sin and restored to their Land of God, one people forever. This is the new covenant of *shalom* prophesied to the people. It is a promise without condition....In the haftarah, God prophesies the unification of the northern and southern tribes, symbolized respectively by Judah and Joseph, along with their ingathering to the ancestral homeland.”^m

Have all of these things, notably called by Fishbane to be “a vision of a permanent future,” **all come to pass?** Note how the descendants of the post-exilic community were eventually exiled again when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Fulfillment of the Ezekiel 37:15-28 prophecy, subsequent to the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah, has to instead be on the horizon.ⁿ And not at all to be overlooked is Fishbane’s assessment, “In the haftarah, the initiation of redemption belongs to God alone, as does its consummation.”^o This should draw our attention to the fact that even though there might be much abuse surrounding the issue of scattered Israel/Ephraim frequently found among those who address it, ultimately the sovereignty of our Creator as the One orchestrating events has to be supremely acknowledged.

In our day many of us believe the Two Houses of Israel are in the process of being reunited in fulfillment of critical end-time prophecies. They are being reunited as many Jewish people of the House of Judah turn to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and many non-Jewish Believers (perhaps of that scattered House of Israel/Ephraim?), turn toward their Hebraic Roots and embrace the truths of God’s Torah. Many of us are honestly trying to answer the question, “**Will you not show us what you mean by these?**” (Ezekiel 37:18, RSV). We do not know if we will be direct or indirect participants of what is to come, but we are certainly inquiring of our Heavenly Father to know what is going on and what He wants us to do.^p

For a further evaluation of this, consult the editor’s articles “**What Is the Two-House Teaching?**” and “**Revisiting the Two-House Teaching.**”

^k Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, pp 186-187.

^l Referring to Ezekiel 37:15-28, a One Law/One Torah proponent like Tim Hegg, who is not an advocate of “the” or “a” Two-House teaching, still must observe how “the Scriptures make it clear that in the end times three groups, not two, are gathered to faith in the One true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These three groups are Judah, Israel, and the nations” (*The Two House Theory: Three Fatal Flaws. Torah Resource*. Retrieved 30 March, 2009, from <<http://torahresource.com>>), which at least acknowledges some level of future prophetic fulfillment to be completed.

I agree with his statement that the Two-House restoration is *not limited* to just Judah and scattered Israel/Ephraim, but also the nations—a **point requiring clarification among many proponents**.

^m Michael Fishbane, *JPS Bible Commentary: Haftorot* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), pp 71, 72, 74.

ⁿ Even the largely liberal *Jewish Study Bible*, remarking on the genealogy of Ezra 8:1-4, leaves open the possibility for future prophetic fulfillment between Judah and Ephraim, noting:

“While...these [ten] tribes had assimilated due to the Assyrian policy of forced population exchanges, the tradition of their continued existence is found in, for instance, Tobit...Emphasis is placed on genealogical connections to the priesthood and the Davidic line. These links are necessary if the preexilic and exilic Israelite prophecies of return are to be fulfilled (See, e.g., Ezek. 37:24-28)” (Hindy Najman, “Ezra,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, NJPS [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 1682).

^o Fishbane, 75.

^p Consult Chapter 14 for a further analysis of Ezekiel 37:15-28, the author’s exegetical paper “Have the Two Sticks Been Reunited?”

updated 19 July, 2011

Annihilation (eternal punishment): Do you believe that the condemned suffer eternal torment in the Lake of Fire or are destroyed?

We believe that the condemned who do not receive Yeshua the Messiah as their Personal Savior will spend a conscious eternity separated from God. This period will be never-ending and is described all throughout Scripture by a number of descriptions such as separation, outer darkness, torment, banishment, etc. It is possible that Biblical language describing fire and smoke in the Lake of Fire may be figurative, or would only be part of the scenery of the dimension that those who are condemned are consigned to. Many conservative Bible scholars who defend an ongoing eternal punishment actually consider the diverse images we see in Scripture to point to them serving as metaphors—so while the punishment goes on forever, the idea that sinners will writhe in fire and brimstone, and have to drink molten lead, would be an inaccurate or an exaggerated conclusion of the wider picture.

We consider an annihilation or extinction of the condemned to not be a viable punishment because it does not substantiate a viable penalty for sinners. Atheists and agnostics who deny the place of an Eternal Judge do not believe in an afterlife or that they will face any kind of penalty or reward for their deeds. They simply believe in eternal non-existence. And, eternal non-existence is precisely what annihilation advocates.

Exegetically speaking for Messianics, saying that “eternal punishment” is not eternal is also problematic. Messianics who advocate that the Sabbath, the Biblical holidays, the kosher laws, and that God’s Torah is eternal and relevant, meaning never-ending, but then who advocate that eternal punishment is not eternal, are being inconsistent with the word “eternal.” If they were consistent in their application of something being “eternal,” then it would mean that the Torah and punishment for sinners are *both* never-ending. This selective usage of the term “eternal” reveals that Messianic annihilationists do not like the concept of a never-ending and ever-lasting punishment for the condemned, and that they are probably applying their own humanistic character traits to God.^a

updated 23 February, 2010

^a For a further discussion, consult William V. Crockett, “The Metaphorical View,” in *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp 43-76.

Antimesiah/Antichrist: Who do you think the antimesiah/antichrist is?

We believe that the man of lawlessness will be of Roman ancestry considering that the prophecy of Daniel 9:26 speaks of “the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary,” in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. More than likely, this man will be European, but by no means can he be limited to Europe. The only way we will know whether or not a person is the antimesiah/antichrist is when he receives a deadly wound (Revelation 13:3, 12, 14), which some believe will result in blinding of his right eye and loss of mobility in one of his arms (Zechariah 11:17), and whether or not he initiates the Abomination of Desolation. We do not want to pinpoint any individual that might later prove not to be the one.

updated 17 April, 2006

Antimesiah, Makes or Confirms Agreement: Do you believe that the antimesiah/antichrist makes or confirms the covenant with Israel?

In recent years there has been a substantial amount of discussion of the premise that the antimesiah “signs a treaty with Israel” initiating the Seventieth Week, in light of some of the events that we have seen throughout the history of the Middle East peace process. As these are things that have yet to occur, we would like to present several plausible interpretations of how the Seventieth Week will begin from Daniel 9:27.

In the KJV, Daniel 9:27a is translated as “he shall **confirm** the covenant with many for one week.” Some have interpreted this as meaning that the antimesiah will not initiate a peace treaty or agreement, as is commonly interpreted, but rather give his assent to an already existing one. The interpretation of “confirm” is also resonated in the NIV translation of Daniel 9:27a: “He will **confirm** a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’” The verb translated as either “forge a strong covenant” (ATS) or “make firm” (NASU) or “confirm” (KJV, NIV) in these passages is *gavar* (גָּבַר), appearing in the Hifil stem (casual action, passive voice) meaning, “**be strong, mighty,**” which *BDB* indicates means “*confirm a covenant*” in this context.”^a

Considering the fact that we are dealing with future events in this text, we must consider several interpretational possibilities. It is clear that the Seventieth Week either begins when this leader makes an agreement with the government of Israel, or confirms and gives his support to an existing treaty and strengthens it. Either way, the overwhelming conclusion we must draw from this is that the Seventieth Week *does not begin with the rapture* as so many falsely believe.

posted 10 April, 2006

^a *BDB*, 149.

Anti-Semitism, Luther: What can you tell me about the anti-Semitism of Martin Luther? Is it true that Luther said some ungodly things about the Jewish people, actually having advocated violence against them?

The following entry has been adapted from the editor's article, "The Top Ten Urban Myths of Today's Messianic Movement"

The need for radical change in the Medieval Church was recognized by many Catholic scholastics who saw the high level of corruption and political intrigue, at the expense of the work of helping the common people. Martin Luther had difficulty with the Catholic practice of selling indulgences, and while he originally intended to simply reform the Catholic Church from within, he eventually had to break from it, and was declared a heretic.

Luther, as one of the early Reformers, was challenged left and right from many of his former Catholic colleagues. Some accused him of denying the Divinity of Yeshua, and claimed that he only said that He was a human. In the course of the accusations levied against him, Luther published many works. One of his early works, published in 1523, was the sermon *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*. This was specifically intended to show that Luther believed in the virgin birth, but he had also hoped to convert Jews to his beliefs as a secondary result of this. His comments in this work demonstrate that early on Luther was very gracious toward the Jews in Germany, recognizing many of the errors made by the Church, and that he hoped to see them come to faith. He wrote,

...Our fools, the popes, bishops, sophists, and monks-the crude asses' heads-have hitherto so treated the Jews that anyone who wished to be a good Christian would almost have had to become a Jew. If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian.

They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. When they baptize them they show them nothing of Christian doctrine or life, but only subject them to popishness and monkery. When the Jews then see that Judaism has such strong support in Scripture, and that Christianity has become a mere babble without reliance on Scripture, how can they possibly compose themselves and become right good Christians? I have myself heard from pious baptized Jews that if they had not in our day heard the gospel they would have remained Jews under the cloak of Christianity for the rest of their days. For they acknowledge that they have never yet heard anything about Christ from those who baptized and taught them.

I hope that if one deals in a kindly way with the Jews and instructs them carefully from Holy Scripture, many of them will become genuine Christians and turn again to the faith of their fathers, the prophets and patriarchs. They will only be frightened further away from it if their Judaism is so utterly rejected that nothing is allowed to remain, and they are treated only with arrogance and scorn. If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among the Gentiles. Since they dealt with us Gentiles in such brotherly fashion, we in our turn ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner in order that we might convert some of them. For even we ourselves are not yet all very far along, not to speak of having arrived.^a

Perhaps the most important statement to take note of are Luther's words, "If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian." Martin Luther recognized here, that the Church of his time had hopelessly failed in its job to provoke Jews to faith in Jesus the Messiah, and actually used some very crass words to describe this.

^a Martin Luther (1523). *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations. Retrieved 19 August, 2011 from <<http://www.ccejr.us/dialogika-resources>>.

Some twenty years later, though, in 1543, Martin Luther published another work on the Jewish people, called *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Here, Luther treated the Jews as a cursed people and worthy of nothing less than God's wrath. While there are many damning excerpts from this work, the following quote sums up Luther's thoughts fairly well:

In brief, dear princes and lords, those of you who have Jews under your rule: if my counsel does not please you, find better advice, so that you and we all can be rid of the unbearable, devilish burden of the Jews. Lest we become guilty sharers before God in the lies, the blasphemy, the defamation, and the curses which the mad Jews indulge in so freely and wantonly against the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, his dear mother, all Christians, all authority, and ourselves. Do not grant them protection, safe-conduct, or communion with us. Do not aid and abet them in acquiring your money or your subjects' money and property by means of usury. We have enough sin of our own without this, dating back to the papacy, and we add to it daily with our ingratitude and our contempt of God's word and all his grace; so it is not necessary to burden ourselves also with these alien, shameful vices of the Jews and over and above it all, to pay them for it with money and property.... With this faithful counsel and warning I wish to cleanse and exonerate my conscience.^b

Luther actually instructed the German princes in this piece, "to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians. For whatever we tolerated in the past unknowingly and I myself was unaware of it will be pardoned by God."^c

How could Martin Luther have gone from being a supporter of the Jewish people, to one who advocated that the German princes burn down their synagogues and eject them from their lands? ***How could he become an advocate of such violence?*** What were the series of circumstances that precipitated these horrendous things said by Luther?

Did Luther experience a great deal of rejection from the Jews, and that is why he lashed out against them? Was Luther under political pressure from the German princes to write a treatise against the Jews? Did Luther suffer from poor health, and if so did Luther possibly suffer from a mental disorder like dementia (or perhaps even Alzheimer's disease), which would surely not have been able to be diagnosed by Sixteenth Century medicine? Sadly, we will never know the definite answer, even though these are all possible factors.

What we do know for certain is that Martin Luther died three years after the publication of *On the Jews and Their Lies* in 1546. Luther was born and lived in a society that had anti-Semitic currents, as the Christians and the Jews seldom interacted, and people were subjected to a great deal of anti-Jewish stereotypes. Near the end of his life, Luther had definitely fallen prey to all of the stereotypes and urban myths circulating about the Jewish people. He made a foolish and egregious error in writing *On the Jews and Their Lies*, which Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party were able to use for anti-Semitic propaganda in the 1930s.

The challenge with Martin Luther and today's Messianic community is that many fall into the reverse errors that Luther did. Luther fell for much of the unsubstantiated prejudice against Jews that was present in Sixteenth Century Germany, and some in today's Messianic community have invented their own prejudice against today's Christian Church. Martin Luther was by no means the only Reformer, and he was clearly a human who made mistakes. In spite of his mistakes, God was still able to use him, just as He is able to use any of us in spite of our own weaknesses. King Solomon, for example, composed many valuable proverbs—but at the end of his

^b Martin Luther (1543). *On the Jews and Their Lies*, Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations. Retrieved 19 August, 2011 from <<http://www.ccrj.us/dialogika-resources>>.

^c Ibid.

life he was an apostate against God, responsible for the ultimate split of Ancient Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, and in all likelihood will suffer eternal punishment.

Much of the anti-Jewishness that we see in any writings of Martin Luther and any of the other Reformers are largely the result of figures like Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, and others who never had any kind of substantial interaction with European Jews. Many were simply repeating the anti-Semitic social prejudices that they encountered, in the cultures into which they were born. We need to understand Luther and the Reformers for the times and cultures in which they lived.

Interestingly enough, it was not until after the Napoleonic Wars that anti-Semitism in Europe began to change. With Napoleon providing equal citizenship for all in France, and then moving throughout Europe, particularly in the German states, Jews began to receive equal rights with their Christian neighbors. They began to be integrated into society and religious ideas began to be shared between Jews and Christians. Today in the Twenty-First Century, those of us in the West are the product of a society that encourages tolerance and diversity, but we still fall prey to many stereotypes about the Jews or other ethnicities. But when it comes to the errors of Martin Luther, both the Lutheran Church and many of its clergy have been very repentant in denouncing his anti-Semitism.

In the Messianic movement today, we do have a great deal of maturing to do. We have a shared theological heritage with both the Church and Synagogue. **Both groups of people have made errors.** Jews have fallen prey to anti-Christian prejudices because of the religious culture into which they have been born, just as Christians have fallen into anti-Jewish prejudices. And it does not just stop with the Jews, because many Christians in North America have been guilty of holding on to many other racial prejudices, all of which are ungodly and unacceptable in the Body of Messiah. Each of us has been guilty for holding to prejudice at one time or another in our lives, so to point fingers at Martin Luther without pointing fingers at ourselves is judging with an unfair scale. There is a great deal of prejudice in the Messianic movement toward Arabs and Muslims today, and on the whole we seldom pray for their salvation.

Messianics need not have any prejudice, and we need to let God be the final judge of all human beings—including Martin Luther. We have to make sure that we are faithful to the work that the Lord has given us, and learn from the mistakes of history.

updated 23 August, 2011

Apocrypha: What is your position concerning the Apocrypha?

Protestants do not consider the books of the Apocrypha to be canonical because Jews do not consider them to be canonical. Jews do not consider these books to be canonical because the principal copies we have of them are written in Greek, and not Hebrew, and were an adjunct part of the Septuagint. The Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican traditions, however, do consider these books to be canonical. The principal books of the Apocrypha include:

3 Esdras

4 Esdras

Tobit

Judith

The Additions to Esther

Wisdom

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

Baruch

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Youths, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon

The Prayer of Manasseh

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

The Eastern Orthodox Church adds 3&4 Maccabees to its Apocryphal canon.

We would not consider the books of the Apocrypha to be “inspired Scripture,” per se, but do believe that they should be consulted as a valuable historical and cultural reference. They do play a significant role in historical Christian theology, and certainly cannot be ignored. The traditions and points of view that the Apocrypha often records do make their way into many parts of the Apostolic Scriptures, so the Apocrypha should have some secondary place after Scripture in determining one’s theology. You will see Apocryphal books quoted from time to time with this purpose in mind. Generally speaking, we quote from the Revised Standard Version translation of the Apocrypha, as it is literal and in modern English.

updated 14 August, 2006

Apocrypha, Versions of: I know that the Apocrypha is not considered canonical Scripture by Jews or Protestants, but I am interested in finding a suitable modern English translation to use for reference. Which one(s) can you recommend?

There are five main versions of the Apocrypha included with some major Bible versions that our ministry employs in our research. These include the following in the order of their publication, along with a brief description of the Bible they are included with. This same order happens to be the order in which we generally use them for study:

1. **Revised Standard Version** (1952): This is considered today to be a centrist-liberal Bible version, even though about 95% of it is reproduced word-for-word in the more conservative New American Standard. Its Apocrypha translation is somewhat literal, and true to the Septuagint Greek text behind it. It represents an ecumenical Protestant perspective, with some Anglican and Catholic influences.
2. **New English Bible** (1970): This was the first modern Bible translation produced for Christians in the United Kingdom, and represents an ecumenical perspective including the Church of England, British Protestant denominations, and British Catholicism. Its Apocrypha translation represents a more “dynamic equivalency” translation, than the RSV Apocrypha. Overall, the translation is left of center.
3. **New Revised Standard Version** (1989): This is the revised edition of the RSV, which primarily updates the RSV to include new scholarship unavailable when the RSV was produced. The NRSV represents a liberal ecumenical perspective, and employs the concept known as inclusive language, whereby terms relating to “man” or “mankind” are replaced with the more neutral “human” or “humanity.” The NRSV Apocrypha, while not being as literal as the RSV Apocrypha, notably includes the Eastern Orthodox Apocrypha, and texts that neither Roman Catholicism nor the Anglican Church consider canonical.
4. **Revised English Bible** (1989): This is the revised edition of the NEB, produced primarily for Christians in the U.K. It employs inclusive language, and represents a liberal ecumenical perspective.
5. **New Jerusalem Bible** (2000): This is a Catholic Bible translation that is Catholic-conservative in its approach, but employs a total dynamic equivalence. Its Apocryphal books are not organized between the Old and New Testaments, but instead are sorted in with the Old Testament books.

added 01 January, 2006

Virtual Chanukah

Aramaic Peshitta: What is your opinion of the Aramaic Peshitta New Testament? Do you think that the Peshitta New Testament might be more original than the Greek New Testament?

The following entry has been adapted from the editor's article, "The Hebrew New Testament Misunderstanding"

It is not surprising, given some of the theological trends within our Messianic faith community, that many would be interested in the Aramaic Peshitta New Testament. Aramaic is a Semitic relative to Hebrew and was a local language of the Land of Israel during the time of Yeshua. It is historically accurate that an Aramaic version of the Apostolic Scriptures was in existence in the early centuries of Christianity. While there are many Messianics who believe that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew (please be aware that this does *not* include Outreach Israel Ministries and TNN Online),^a one growing trend in some sectors of the Messianic community is not proposing that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, but instead Aramaic.

Arguing for an original Aramaic version of the Apostolic Scriptures *is not the same as arguing for an original Hebrew version*. While the Aramaic language is related to Hebrew, it is nevertheless *not Hebrew*. Arguing for an original "Aramaic New Testament"—as far as we are concerned—is totally different than arguing for an original "Hebrew New Testament." Nevertheless, similar rhetoric is advocated by Aramaic New Testament advocates as it is from Hebrew New Testament advocates. One advocate of an original Aramaic New Testament, revealing a severe lack of objectivity, states,

"I...could not understand how Elohim could reveal half of His Word in the holy tongue of Hebrew and the other half in the language of Greek paganism and the Romans, who burned Jerusalem to the ground."^b

What is ironic about this statement is the fact that while Greek is assumed to be the pagan language of those who destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple, Aramaic was used by the pagan Assyrians who carried away many exiles from the Northern Kingdom, *and* the pagan Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem and the First Temple. Aramaic was "an international language of diplomacy in the latter days of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and the dispersal of Aramaic-speaking peoples from Egypt to Lower Mesopotamia as a result of the Assyrian policies of deportation" (*ABD*).^c To somehow assume that the Greek language is "totally pagan" and that Aramaic is "just as pure as Hebrew" is totally confounded. **Aramaic was used by pagans every bit as much as Greek.**

Parts of the Tanach were written in Aramaic, including sections of Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1&2 Chronicles. As *ABD* notes, "Late biblical Hebrew and rabbinic Hebrew were heavenly influenced by Aramaic in both grammar and vocabulary."^d Aramaic or a hybrid Hebrew-Aramaic was spoken in much of First Century Galilee. Many people in the province of Syria also spoke Aramaic or Syriac as their primary language, and were evangelized and received the gospel in great numbers. The *History of the World Christian Movement* indicates that "Syriac became the language of choice among Christians in eastern Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, and eventually India, Mongolia, and China. Late in the first or early in the second century, a Syriac version of Old Testament texts began to appear in the form of a rough translation or paraphrase known as the Peshitta."^e Later, the complete version of the Aramaic Bible, including (most of) the Apostolic

^a Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, "New Testament, Written in Hebrew."

^b Andrew Gabriel Roth, *Ruach Qadim: Aramaic Origins of the New Testament* (Malta: Tushiyah Press, 2005),

20.

^c Stephen A. Kaufman, "Languages (Aramaic)," in *ABD*, 4:173.

^d *Ibid.*

^e Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 57.

Scriptures, began being known by this name. A fair-minded approach to the Aramaic New Testament is seen in the opening preface to *The New Covenant Aramaic Peshitta Text* published by the Bible Society in Israel:

“In the Mediterranean regions of the Roman Empire, the New Covenant writings of the Gospel, Acts, Epistles and Revelation were handed down in Greek, lingua franca of the West. In the Holy Land, Syria, Mesopotamia, and other countries of the Parthian Empire, these writings were circulated in Aramaic, lingua franca of the East. The apostles and disciples obeyed the command to proclaim the tidings of the kingdom of God. This they did in the Holy Land and the diaspora communities through the empires of Rome in the West, and of Parthia in the East. For this goal they had at their disposal the two international languages of their times, Greek and Aramaic, through which they reached their people, Jews and Israelites, and the nations in those two realms (Matthew 10:6; 28:19; Acts 2:9-11).”^f

This preface goes on to explain how “In the Greek text of the new Testament one finds Aramaic locutions in disguise, in addition to several words and phrases in Greek transcription, such as ‘talitha qumi [טְלִיחָא קוּמִי, Mark 5:41]’, ‘lema shevaqtani [לְמָנָא שְׂבַקְתָּנִי, Mark 15:34]’, ‘mamona [מַמּוֹנָא]’ and others, indicating that Yeshua spoke in Aramaic, and no doubt used Hebrew in conversations with scribes and other religious leaders, in addition to the synagogue use of Hebrew.”^g It is fair and proper to emphasize that being able to work with some degree of Biblical Aramaic is necessary for those in Biblical Studies.

No one can deny that the Aramaic Peshitta New Testament has significant value among the early translations of the Apostolic Scriptures. That the Aramaic Peshitta New Testament was used to help spread the good news of Yeshua the Messiah, to many in the East, should be something looked at with great thankfulness. The issue, of course, is how some have thought that the Aramaic Peshitta New Testament is original, and the Greek New Testament is not original. The intended audiences of the Epistles of the Apostolic Scriptures, at least, were all directed Westward—notably *disallowing* for them to have been written in Aramaic.

It is quite commonplace to see proponents of an original Aramaic New Testament, claim that there are various Aramaic expressions in the Gospels, which have been mistranslated into the Greek New Testament. Perhaps the most common one is how within the three Synoptics, one sees Yeshua issue the remark, “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24, NASU; cf. Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). On the surface to some readers, this does not make any sense. Why would a camel pass through the eye of a needle? One explanation offered in history has been to suggest that there was a small passageway in Jerusalem, called the Eye of the Needle, and it would have been most difficult for a beast of burden like a camel to pass through. This has been largely rejected by modern scholars as a tall tale.^h

The explanation for “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,” as offered by many proponents of an Aramaic New Testament, is to suggest that the Aramaic term *gamla* (גַּמְלָא) or “camel,” can also mean “rope.” Hence, a better reading for Yeshua’s word should be “It is easier for a large rope to enter through the eye of a needle” (Mark 10:25, HRV). On the surface, this would seem to make sense, as a rope is kind of like a hopelessly large piece of thread, and perhaps the Aramaic New Testament advocates have a made a point. It would seemingly make sense that *gamla*, meaning either rope or camel, was mistranslated as *kamēlos* (κάμηλος) into the Greek.ⁱ

^f *The New Covenant Aramaic Peshitta Text with Hebrew Translation* (Jerusalem: Bible Society in Israel, 1986), i.

^g *Ibid.*, ii.

^h Cf. James R. Edwards, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 314.

ⁱ James Scott Trimm, trans., *The Hebraic-Roots Version Scriptures* (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 2006, 1259).

We should have reason to pause, though, and consider some of the observations made by R.T. France in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, in the *NIGTC* series. He indicates something rather important that need not be overlooked:

“The grotesque idea of a camel going through the eye of a needle is a proverbial way stating the impossible: a rabbinic saying (*b. Ber.* 55b; cf. also *b. B. Meş.* 38b; *b. ‘Erub.* 53a) uses an elephant going through the eye of a needle (along with a date palm made of gold) as an image of the impossible.”^j

France references some places in the Talmud, where Rabbinical voices have apparently used the analogy of an elephant passing through an eye of a needle:

- “Said R. Samuel bar Nahmani said R. Jonathan, ‘What a man is shown [in a dream] is only his own fantasy [Simon: what is suggested by his own thoughts]. For it is said, “As for you, O King, your thoughts come into your mind upon your bed” (*Dan.* 2:29). *If you prefer, I offer proof from the following verse: “That you may know the thoughts of your heart”* (*Dan.* 2:30).’ *Said Raba, ‘You may know that that is so, for people are not shown in dreams [such impossibilities as] either a golden palm tree or an elephant going through the eye of a needle’*” (*b. Berachot* 55b).^k
- “*He said to him, ‘Perhaps you come from Pumbedita, where they can pass an elephant through the eye of a needle...’*” (*b. Bava Metzia* 38a).^l

It is not difficult for one to figure out how an elephant is a much larger beast of burden—conservatively three to four times—larger than a camel. Yet, the Jewish literature cited here indicates that various Rabbis are said to speak in terms of an elephant passing through the eye of a needle.^m *A large beast of burden passing through a portal of only one or two millimeters wide!* As impossible as we might think it is, to hear Yeshua speak in terms of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, how much more impossible would it be for an elephant to do this? We do not need to disregard the primacy of the Greek New Testament, on account of the Aramaic Peshitta New Testament, because of this sort of example. Statements like “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (*Matthew* 19:24, *NASU*; cf. *Mark* 10:25; *Luke* 18:25), can be regarded as authentic to the Jewish world of Yeshua.

While many people who spoke Aramaic or Syriac as their primary language did come to faith in Yeshua, too much can be made by Aramaic New Testament advocates by thinking that the Syrian Christians were somehow “Jewish,” and especially “Torah observant.” We need to understand that “Culturally the Christians appear to have shared much with their Jewish neighbors, but theologically they sought to distinguish themselves.”ⁿ There were many ethnic similarities between the Syrian Christians and the Jews, **but that is where it ends.** The Syrian Orthodox Church is much more identical in many ways to the Greek Orthodox Church, including the veneration of icons and the Virgin Mary.

^j R.T. France, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 405.

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

^l *Ibid.*

^m Other commentators who have noted the connection between the camel and elephant referenced in Rabbinic literature, include *Matthew* 19:24: Hagner, 561; France, *Matthew*, pp 737-738; Nolland, 795. *Mark* 10:24: C.E.B. Cranfield, *Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 332; William L. Lane, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp 369-370 fn#52; Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 284. *Luke* 18:25: I. Howard Marshall, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 687; Craig A. Evans, *New International Biblical Commentary: Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 276; Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* 9:51-24:53 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1486; Joel B. Green, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 657 fn#152.

How and why advocates of an Aramaic New Testament in today’s Messianic community, who often claim to be familiar with ancient Rabbinical literature like the Talmud—actually missed some of this—is hard to tell.

ⁿ Irvin and Sunquist, 64.

On the contrary to what many advocates of an original Aramaic New Testament may try to advocate, or what new adherents in their theories may believe, the Aramaic Peshitta is well known to textual critics of the Bible. Preceding the Peshitta New Testament was the production of a work called the *Diatessaron*, produced by Tatian, a student of Justin Martyr. This work was a harmony of the four Gospels produced in Aramaic. As it is described in *History of the World Christian Movement*,

“Tatian’s most lasting contribution to the Christian movement came not through his school...but in the form of this harmony of the gospels in Syriac....Known as the *Diatessaron* (Greek for ‘From Four’), it was for at least two hundred years the preferred edition for many Syrian churches and theologians. Tatian’s project sought to present the message of Jesus in Syriac, not Greek, to its readers.”^o

If the *Diatessaron* had to be produced to present Aramaic speakers with the gospel message, it indicates that there was no previous New Testament Scripture in Aramaic, discounting a written Aramaic origin for the Apostolic Writings. In fact, there is ample evidence that indicates the *Diatessaron* was originally a Greek work, later translated into Syriac. Bruce M. Metzger states in his book *The Early Versions of the New Testament*, “In support of a Greek origin is (a) its Greek title, by which it was known even in Syriac; (b) the silence of Eusebius, who, though mentioning the *Diatessaron*, says nothing of its composition in Syriac; and (c) the circumstance of the very considerable influence that it exerted on the text of the Gospels of the West.”^p

The Peshitta New Testament actually dates from the Fourth to Fifth Centuries C.E. All major textual scholars today recognize the Peshitta as a translation from the Greek Apostolic Scriptures. While the Peshitta is an important translation to be surely consulted, there are too many time-sensitive additions to the text that are not borne out in older versions of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures. Metzger indicates, “toward the close of the fourth or at the beginning of the fifth century, a version of twenty-two books of the New Testament was available in a translation which came to be called at a later date the Peshitta Syriac version.”^q He goes on to record that “In its official form it includes twenty-two books of the New Testament, the four minor Catholic [meaning, universal] Epistles (2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude) and the Apocalypse being absent.”^r **Any acceptance of the Peshitta New Testament as being primary to the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, discounts these texts as being inspired Scripture.**^s Are we prepared to rip out 2 Peter, 2&3 John, Jude, and Revelation from our Bibles? We should be prepared to consider this, if the Peshitta New Testament is primary to the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.^t

Advocates of Aramaic New Testament primacy have arguments that are widely discounted among those of the academic community, and that do not historically align like the Hebrew New Testament arguments. Many will defend their position on the basis of various Aramaisms, but like Hebraisms these must be considered on a case-by-case basis, and have strong parallel support in contemporary literature and scholastic opinion. Of course, it is very important to understand that the Peshitta is consulted by many scholars of the Bible, as it is one of the earliest New Testament translations. If anyone consults a critical commentary on the Scriptures, the Peshitta is likely to be referred to, and it is employed frequently in textual criticism. But it is

^o Ibid., 58.

^p Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 32.

^q Ibid., 3.

^r Ibid., 48.

^s Cf. *The New Covenant Aramaic Peshitta Text with Hebrew Translation*, pp iii-iv.

^t Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, “Acts 15:24,” for an analysis of the different textual variants of this important verse. The elongated reading of Acts 15:24, “Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’—to whom we gave no such commandment” (NKJV), appears in both the Greek Textus Receptus and Aramaic Peshitta.

This reading is notably lacking from the critical edition Greek New Testament used for most modern Bible versions: “Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls” (NASU).

Also be sure to consult the commentary *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

not the only text employed in textual criticism, nor it is treated as being superior to the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.

updated 30 October, 2011