

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

B

www.tnnonline.net

Babylon: What do you think end-time Babylon is?

There are various views and opinions among prophecy teachers, and likewise among Messianics, concerning what end-time “Babylon” is. These range from believing that end-time Babylon is the Roman Catholic Church, mainstream Christianity or today’s “Church system,” the United States of America, or a rebuilt Babylon in the Middle East. Some believe that “Babylon” is purely a system, whereas others believe that it is “just this” or “just that.”

In Hebrew, the word translated “Babylon” is *Bavel* (בָּבֶל). *BDB* defines *Bavel* as “confuse, confound.”^a Consequently, it should not be surprising that the world was first confused at Babel (Genesis 11). At Ancient Babel, God confused the languages and humanity was forced to scatter across the face of the planet. It should also be noted that Ancient Babylon (and the surrounding region of Sumer) is the same location that some of the pagan sun worship and rituals originated that impacted the Ancient Israelites, the same being responsible for many of today’s errant influences in Roman Catholicism. It can easily be said that the paganism originating in Ancient Babylon has been permeated throughout the globe.

We tend to be more “open minded” about any specific identification of end-time Babylon, because the very nature of the Babylonian phenomenon is something that is opposed to the Creator God. Understanding that *Bavel* means “confuse” implies that this is something that is purposely going to be confusing. Therefore, we see legitimacy in identifying end-time Babylon as composing religious, political, and societal elements which all make up the world system that is opposed to the Lord.

updated 16 February, 2006

^a *BDB*, 93.

Beards: Do you believe that men should wear beards?

It is not difficult for people to acknowledge how wearing beards (Heb. sing. *zaqan*, זָקַן), or facial hair in general, is quite commonplace among many male Jews. Many Jewish cultural features have been rooted within the instruction of Leviticus 19:27, “You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard” (Leviticus 19:27). There has been internal debate within Judaism what “the side-growth of your beard” (NJPS) actually means, though, with varied applications of this present among modern Jews.^a

Some interpret this command as relating to a man’s full beard, others only his sideburns, and others the extremities of the beard. Some believe that a man’s facial hair has actual “boundaries,” more or less defined, and others believe that the hair on a man’s face should just grow without any type of grooming. Some believe that a man can trim and groom his beard. Others believe that a man can shave his beard, provided it is with an electric razor. And, others even think that a man can shave his beard with a conventional depilatory razor, provided that it has at least two blades, and not a single cutting edge. Consequently, the same variance of interpretations has made its way into the Messianic movement, and one will see a wide array of applications.

In approaching the word of Leviticus 19:27, we should acknowledge the diversity of opinions within Judaism. Whatever interpretation you hold to about beards, you should respect others. It is notable that there is a distinct Messianic subculture that insists that all men wear beards, and there are those who will often be judgmental and quite harsh of men who do not have them. Having or not having a full beard is not an issue of a man’s spirituality, as one’s relationship with the Lord is contingent on having a heart and mind that has been transformed by the Holy Spirit, demonstrating God’s love to others in the world. As God had to remind the Prophet Samuel, “for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, NRSV).

Some men are incapable of growing beards, or even a moustache or goatee, and that is the way God made them. Are they less spiritual because they cannot have a beard? Others have beards as a matter of personal preference, and not necessarily because they think the Bible requires them. In some Messianic congregations, you will find that facial hair on men is not an issue, where in others it is an issue. Should we choose to make the facial hair we see or do not see on any man into an issue? It is true that men who wear beards can obviously be easily distinguished from women, but that should be the only major “controversy” present per this issue.

Concurrent with the variance of views concerning beards and facial hair within Judaism, is how much of Orthodox Judaism practices the custom of wearing *payot* (פְּאוֹת). This interpretation stems from the meaning of the Hebrew word for “corner” in Leviticus 19:27, *peah* (פֶּאֶה), “side, edge, border” (BDB).^b *Payot* are often curls that extend down from the area of the sideburns, and they vary in length from a few inches, to even eighteen inches. Alfred J. Kolatch explains that “many Jews, particularly members of *chassidic* sects, will not trim the sidelocks even of children. Long, curled sidelocks (*payot*) on the children of *chassidim* is a common sight.”^c Not very many in the Messianic community practice the custom of having *payot*.

updated 20 July, 2011

^a Consult Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), pp 590-592 for a summary of how the issue of beards, grooming beards, and shaving is approached in the mainline Jewish Synagogue.

^b BDB, 802.

^c Alfred J. Kolatch, *The Jewish Book of Why* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1981), 122.

Bible Versions: Is there any specific Bible version that you recommend that I use? I am new to the Messianic movement.

Two valuable resources that we recommend if you are brand new to the Messianic movement, that you will probably find extremely helpful, are the *Complete Jewish Bible* translated by David H. Stern (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998) and the *Hebrew-Greek Key New American Standard* edited by Spiros Zodhiates (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994). The CJB will familiarize you with many of the Hebrew words and Hebraic terms used throughout the broad Messianic community, and the *Hebrew-Greek Key NASB* has many words keyed to Strong's Concordance, with a Strong's dictionary in the Bible for easy reference.^a There are also the two companion dictionaries, the *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, eds., Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003) and the *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Spiros Zodhiates, ed., Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), for Hebrew and Greek, respectively. These are some resources that will be most useful for any Messianic home, and/or those who are investigating their Hebraic Roots.

Most of the articles and publications produced by our ministry employ the **New American Standard, Updated Edition** (1995) as their default Bible version. This is because the NASU is widely considered to be the most literal evangelical Christian version available on the market. (The New American Standard Bible or NASB is the 1977 edition, which still employs some Elizabethan period English via the King James and American Standard versions, which has been removed from the NASU.) The NASU represents a theologically conservative and evangelical translation ideology, and the NASB and NASU together have a longstanding usage in much of Messianic Judaism and the broader Messianic world. An advantage of the NASU over many other Christian versions, is how *italics* are employed to denote most added words (usually "to be" verbs understood by Hebrew or Greek construction), pronouns and possessive pronouns for the Father and Son are capitalized, and SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS are used in the New Testament to indicate most Old Testament quotations or allusions.

Other major Bible versions that you will encounter our ministry use in a secondary capacity, include, but are not limited to, the Revised Standard Version (1952)/New Revised Standard Version (1989)/English Standard Version (2001) family, the New International Version (1984)/Today's New International Version (2005), and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004). The two major Jewish versions you will see us use are the Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999) by the Jewish Publication Society, and the ArtScroll Tanach (1996). Another Messianic version that has been released only very recently, is the Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant (2011), which we appreciate given its overlapping qualities with the NASB/NASU and NIV. Our ministry does appreciate how some of the newer versions do employ various degrees of inclusive language, such as using the clearer "humanity" or "humankind" instead of "man," "people" instead of "men," and "brothers and sisters" instead of just "brothers" when a mixed audience of males and females is definitely intended.

Ultimately, every English Bible translation has its limits. This is why we encourage everyone to have a wide array of useful tools to understand Scripture, including Hebrew and Greek lexicons, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, and good commentaries. An English translation of the Bible cannot teach you how to read the Scriptures, nor can it investigate proper background and cultural issues germane to the ancient time period, the potential issues surrounding an intended audience of a text, and especially give you hints as to the relevant ancient literature that serves as a secondary or tertiary role in a reader understanding a text.

updated 03 October, 2011

^a We do not recommend that you become too attached to either Strong's Concordance or the rather incomplete Strong's Concordance dictionary, though. Consult the editor's article "Getting Beyond Strong's Concordance" for a useful discussion of various Hebrew and Greek language tools.

Bible Versions, Messianic: I have seen a variety of Messianic Bible versions on the market. Is there any particular one that you recommend? What is your opinion of them?

There are a wide variety of Bible versions available on the market, which to various degrees have been produced with a Messianic audience in mind. Some of them are good, and some of them are questionable, perhaps no different than the many Christian Bibles that are available today. Some of them represent a good, conservative theological position, and affirm foundational doctrines of the faith, and some of them skew foundational doctrines of the faith.

The most commonly encountered Messianic version encountered today, used within a great deal of Messianic Judaism and many sectors of the independent Messianic movement, has to be the *Complete Jewish Bible* translated by David H. Stern (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998). The CJB uses a wide array of Hebrew and Jewish terms, including personal names of Biblical characters, place names, and terms used for ritual objects and practices. “Torah” is most often used for “Law.” One feature of the CJB that all readers need to be aware of, is that even though it is commonly used throughout the Messianic world, it is nevertheless a paraphrased version, and is not as literal as Christian versions like the NASB/NASU, RSV/NRSV/ESV, or even NIV/TNIV, and because of this, our ministry has only used the CJB in a secondary capacity. It is most appreciated, though, that the reasons for some of Stern’s renderings are offered in his valuable companion, the *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995).

As of Summer 2011, the *Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011) has been released, with the complete Bible of both the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures (Old and New Testaments) to be released sometime in 2013. The TLV is largely a Messianic update of the 1901 American Standard Version, with a wide array of well known Messianic Jewish leaders having served on its editorial board. The TLV uses far less Hebrew and Jewish terms than the CJB, sticking primarily to Yeshua, Messiah, Torah, and various ritual items. Other than that, more customary English names like Jacob (for James), Peter, John, Paul, and Moses are used. Those Bible readers who are used to a relatively literal version like the NASB/NASU, or even a dynamic equivalency version like the NIV, will very much appreciate the TLV. The TLV can be easily used as a close second version, alongside of the more well known Bible versions employed today.

Aside from the Complete Jewish Bible, which is used throughout mainline Messianic Judaism, the next most common Messianic version one is likely to encounter is *The Scriptures*, published by the Institute for Scripture Research of Northriding, South Africa. It should be noted that the ISR Scriptures has both a 1998 second edition and 2009 third edition, with some changes made in the third edition. Unlike versions such as the CJB or TLV, the ISR Scriptures represents a Sacred Name theology, seen by their usage of יהוה in Hebrew letters for the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH, instead of either “the LORD,” “ADONAI” (CJB), or “HASHEM” (ATS) per the widescale Jewish practice of not speaking God’s proper name.^a The Hebrew title Elohim is used instead of “God.” Hebrew character and place names, as witnessed in versions like the CJB, are also used in the ISR Scriptures (even though the exact transliterations might differ). Unlike either the CJB or TLV, though, the Institute for Scripture Research has not been forthright in saying who served on its translation or editorial team, and as they have stated on their website (isr-messianic.org), “The ISR will not respond to doctrinal questions.” This means that there is no real way of knowing why certain things in the ISR Scriptures are rendered the way they are. Usage of the ISR Scriptures has doubtlessly grown because of how versions like the CJB were paraphrased, and the ISR Scriptures is far more literal. Still, because of the Institute for Scripture Research not holding to any definite doctrinal views, we must advise a high level of caution in using it.

Many of the other “Messianic” Bible versions that one may encounter (more likely being versions produced by the Sacred Name Only movement), tend to be little more than modified editions of the King James Version, with the Elizabethan period English updated with more

^a For an important review, consult the editor’s article “Sacred Name Concerns.”

modern terminology—and then with selective edits here and there, sometimes with Hebraic terms subjectively inserted with no substantial theological justification. Furthermore, a few of those who produce Messianic Bible versions exhibit no formal training in the Biblical languages of Hebrew or Greek, and appear to be nothing more than eclectic re-writings of Scripture to fit some kind of (gross sectarian) bias. Interesting renderings of various controversial verses may be offered, but they are then not joined with any kind of strong theological or exegetical defense in the form of associated research papers or substantial commentary.

Generally speaking, if today's Messianic Believers can be aware of some specific places within mainline Christian versions like the NASB/NASU or the RSV/ESV—which tend to reflect an anti-Torah bias—then they should be able to get by for most reading fairly well. Verses to definitely be aware of in the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament include:

- **Mark 7:19**, where “*Thus He* declared all foods clean” (NASU) appears, but where the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα) can be legitimately rendered as “cleansing all food” (TLV) or “purging all the foods” (editor’s translation), referring to the process of excretion.^b
- **Romans 10:4**, where the word *telos* (τέλος) is often rendered as “end,” in “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness” (NASU), has widely been recognized in theological studies as also meaning “goal” (CJB, Common English Bible, TLV), or at the very least something akin to “culmination” (TNIV), and not necessarily “end” equaling “termination.”^c
- **Romans 14:14**, where Paul says, “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (NASU), the term rendered as “unclean” is *koinos* (κοινός), which “**pert. to being of little value because of being common, common, ordinary, profane**” (BDAG).^d In the food lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, the Hebrew *tamei* (טָמֵא) or “unclean” is rendered as *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος) in the Septuagint, which is obviously not the term that appears in Romans 14:14. Food that is *koinos*, then, should be regarded as either “unholy” (TLV) or “common” (LITV), which may be viewed as “that which ordinary people eat, in contrast to those of more refined tastes” (BDAG).^e The situation in view would then pertain to various human judgments about what is acceptable for eating, but not have to do with the validity or abrogation of the kosher dietary laws.^f
- **Ephesians 2:15**, for most Bible readers, says that the work of the Messiah has been responsible for “abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances” (NASU). Much of how one approaches what *ton nomon tōn entolōn en dogmasin* (τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν) actually is, is in recognizing how *nomos* (νόμος) or “law” does not always mean the Mosaic Torah or Pentateuch, and how *dogma* (δόγμα) can relate to “*that which seems to one, an opinion, dogma*” (LS),^g or “**something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief, doctrine, dogma**” (BDAG).^h With the barrier wall of the Jerusalem Temple in view (Ephesians

^b Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, “Mark 7:19,” as well as the forthcoming *Messianic Kosher Helper* by TNN Press.

^c Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, “Romans 10:4.”

^d BDAG, 552.

^e Ibid.

^f Consult the editor’s article “To Eat or Not to Eat?,” as well as the forthcoming *Messianic Kosher Helper* by TNN Press.

^g LS, .207.

^h BDAG, 254.

2:14), and with this not at all specified by the Mosaic Torah, extra-Biblical regulations are instead targeted here. It would not at all be inappropriate to then render *ton nomon tōn entolōn en dogmasin* as “the *religious* Law of commandments in dogmas” (editor’s translation), with an italic “*religious*” specifying that man-made religious law and not Biblical law is in view.ⁱ

Other areas of potential disagreement among English Bible translations, in either the Tanach or Apostolic Scriptures, would then be those places where a spectrum of all interpreters and expositors—including Messianic teachers—do not necessarily see eye-to-eye.

In the near future, TNN Online is planning to release an article entitled, “**English Bible Versions and Today’s Messianic Movement**,” which will discuss various features of Bible translation, and offer some reviews of major Christian and Jewish versions, as well as some Messianic versions on the market.^j

updated 03 October, 2011

ⁱ Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, “Ephesians 2:14-15.”

^j This summary of Messianic versions will include a review of the 2011 Delitzch Hebrew Gospels (DHE) by First Fruits of Zion/Vine of David, which is a specialty English translation from Franz Delitzch’s Hebrew translation of the Greek New Testament.

Biblical Calendar: What is your opinion with the various calendar issues that seem to be dividing the Messianic community?

The new month, as originally specified by the Torah, was to be determined by the changing of the moon or *chodesh* (חֹדֶשׁ). Genesis 1:14 states how God originally made the lights of the sky, as the means by which His people were to keep time: “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.” Numbers 29:6^a records how there were to be a variety of special offerings presented to the Lord, during the time of the New Moon.

Since the Biblical period of ancient times up until modern times, there has been a diversity of opinion present within Judaism as to how time is to be reckoned. For practical purposes, this most often concerns the days on which the appointed times are to be observed. While residing within the Land of Israel in either the First or Second Temple periods, it would be quite easy for an enclosed group of Ancient Israelites or Ancient Jews to maintain a calendrical system via a visible sighting of the New Moon, things definitely changed in history with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and expulsion from the Holy Land. How was the Jewish community, the vast majority of which was spread abroad in Diaspora, to keep the appointed times and maintain some level of cohesion and unity? George Robinson offers the following fair summation in his book *Essential Judaism*, of how the Hillel II calendar was developed in the Fourth Century C.E.:

“In the time of the Temple in Jerusalem (the First Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C.E., the Second Temple, built in 538 B.C.E. was razed in 70 C.E.), communication over long distances was problematic. It was imperative, if all Jewish communities were to celebrate at the same time, that everyone know when the new moon occurred, since the date of a festival would be based on when the first of the month fell...Until 358 C.E., when Rabbi Hillel II introduced a permanent fixed calendar, it was up to the Sanhedrin, the governing body of rabbis in Jerusalem, to decide when the new moon fell, based on eyewitness testimony. They in turn would send a signal to a man on a neighboring hilltop who would light a signal fire; another fire would be lit on a nearby hilltop and so on, until a chain of signal fires was flickering through the known Jewish world, telling the Jews that the new month had begun.

“This was, needless to say, an inexact system. The rabbis of the Sanhedrin worried that communities outside the Holy Land would not know the exact date on which to celebrate a festival. In response to this problem, they instituted a second day for each festival in the Diaspora so that there could be no mistake. The second day is preserved in the practice of Orthodox and Conservative Jews in the Diaspora of celebrating a second day of major holidays. In Israel and the Reform movement, only one day of each festival is observed.”^b

With a few modifications since, the Hillel II calendar—which is all *pre-calculated* for the beginning of the month and days for the appointed times—is followed by the worldwide Jewish community today, as well as the considerable majority of Messianic Judaism. One of the biggest areas of divergence, that is easily detectable between much of the independent Messianic community (*especially* the Two-House sub-movement) and Messianic Judaism, is that the former tends to reject the validity of the mainline Jewish calendar. When various independent Messianic groups gather to remember the appointed times, such as Passover, it is usually not at the same time that Messianic Jewish congregations will gather.

The issue of the calendar in general, is often regarded as one of authority. Do the Rabbis of Judaism have *any* significant place in the *halachah* of today’s Messianic community? It is not

^a “[T]he burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD” (Numbers 29:6).

^b George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), pp 79-80.

difficult for a Messianic Jewish person, in respecting his or her heritage, to conclude that the Hillel II calendar should be followed, since it provides common dates for all Jews the world over to observe the appointed times. Believing in Messiah Yeshua does not all of a sudden make such a person un-Jewish or disconnected from the wider Jewish world, especially in matters like the calendar followed. Even if the Rabbis have been wrong in many theological areas, this does not mean that they are completely ignorant and totally devoid of wisdom.

Within much of the independent Messianic world and Two-House sub-movement, rather than the pre-calculated Hillel II calendar being followed, many instead prefer to follow the calendrical determinations by the Karaite movement. The Karaites were an ancient sect of Judaism that arose in the Middle Ages, that quantitatively rejected Rabbinical authority and the value of works like the Mishnah or Talmud. The Karaite movement in Israel, while extremely small, has its own calendar based on their visible sighting of the New Moon.

(It does have to be noted that a number of people within the broad, independent Messianic spectrum, do still follow the mainline Jewish calendar. But even in doing so, there are disagreements often present with the date for keeping *Shavuot*, or referring to the Feast of Trumpets as *Rosh HaShanah*.)

Within popular conference events held by various people promoting Hebraic Roots (or even at the events sponsored by various Two-House pseudo-denominations), it is not uncommon to find teachers who advocate things along the lines of, “The Father is restoring the Biblical calendar to us...” Within such teachings, one does not often find that much regard expressed for the complexities of ancient Jewish history, and the need for the Rabbinic authorities to develop a calendar that *the worldwide Jewish community* could use to keep them together as a people. Unfair accusations and disgust toward the Synagogue, are instead more easily detected.

Too much of the independent Messianic movement has many “restored Biblical calendars” littering its ranks. While various persons have taken it upon themselves to produce their own “restored Biblical calendar,” this has tended to only cause *more confusion* and division, as one does not know which calendar is to be followed from congregation to assembly to fellowship. Not all agree with the determination of the Karaite movement in Israel, or when the New Moon begins and ends. The default calendar choice for any Messianic, is understandably the mainline Rabbinical calendar used by Judaism today.

What really needs to be recognized about why there is so much diversity circulating in the independent Messianic world about the Biblical calendar, is that a group’s so-called “restored Biblical calendar” is really not a means by which to determine the “real date” for remembering Passover or *Yom Kippur*. Many have produced their own calendars as a means to promote their own predictions and calculations regarding the end-times and Second Coming. With this, the most amount of attention focused is not upon the determination of the New Moon, but rather **the year**. Many assumptions are made from mathematics, astronomy, chronology, and science. It is not too infrequent that someone’s “restored Biblical calendar” gets proven wrong, and suggested dates and times have to be adjusted and recalculated when predictions come and go when nothing happens.

There is likely a season coming when some of the presuppositions that have gone into the different “restored Biblical calendars,” will need to be radically reevaluated. Recalculating and recalculating the presumed year of Yeshua’s return (2000, 2007, 2012, 2017, etc.) cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. The severe challenge to people reconsidering the various presuppositions that are associated with highly-packaged teachings like the 6,000-year doctrine,^d is that it will open up areas of theological discussion that have largely remained closed to all sectors of the Messianic movement, particularly as it concerns the material of Genesis chs. 1-11.^e

^c Consult the relevant sections of the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper* and *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper* by TNN Press for a further discussion of these issues.

^d Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, “6,000 Year Teaching.”

^e For a worthwhile review, we recommend that you consider the views of Creationist Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, second expanded edition (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001) and *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004).

Anthropologically speaking, we see human cave paintings, such as those in Lascaux, France from an estimated 16,000 years ago^f (with some of the other cave paintings in France and Spain dating to as many as 32,000 years ago). One need not be an evolutionist to legitimately recognize that the popular 6,000-year doctrine has made some assumptions, about both eschatology and Biblical genealogies (i.e., Genesis 5, 11),^g that do not bear out in human history.

Yeshua will only return **when His people are ready**. The Apostle Peter says we “ought...to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:11-12). He employs the present active participle *speudontas* (σπεύδοντας)—“hastening”—to describe this action. The righteous behavior of Believers affects “the coming of the day of God,”^h not any human being’s mistaken calculation of it.

TNN Online sees absolutely no reason why today’s Messianic movement should not be observing the appointed times *on all of the same dates* as the rest of the worldwide Jewish community. The areas where the Rabbinical authorities should be rejected concern matters like Yeshua’s Messiahship, or Jewish and non-Jewish equality in the people of God. Matters like making sure that the assembly follows the same calendar, are in a quantitatively different category. Significant, unnecessary divisions have been caused by all of the “restored Biblical calendars” out there. Too many in the independent Messianic sector and/or the Two-House sub-movement, have created some deplorable schisms with Messianic Judaism over the calendar issue, which should not be present.

updated 20 July, 2011

^f Information on visiting the cave of Lascaux can be accessed on the French Ministry of Culture website: <<http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/arcnat/lascaux/en/>>.

^g Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, “Genesis 5, 11 Genealogies.”

^h Consult the editor’s blog editorial, “The Hastening of Righteousness.”

Biblical Faith, a Judaism: I am a non-Jewish person involved in the Messianic movement. I get a little nervous when I see some Messianic Jews talk about how Biblical faith is Judaism. Do you think that Biblical faith is Judaism?

From a strict textual perspective examining the Holy Scriptures, the concept of faith (Heb. *emunah*, אֱמוּנָה; Grk. *pistis*, πίστις) has no real label—be that label Judaism, Christianity, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Catholic, Protestant, evangelical, charismatic, etc. At best, any labels that people have associated with their belief in God, the Holy Scriptures, and certain values and traditions they hold dear, are so that they can be associated with other people who likewise share the same views. These labels even *include* calling oneself “Messianic.” While it is not wrong at all for human-applied labels to be associated with a religious group or sect or particular ideology, the God of Creation and Messiah faith will ultimately be found to transcend them. Even with many religious movements, denominations, and groups in history possessing many positive and edifying perspectives and customs—many of them to be genuinely regarded as Holy Spirit-inspired—the Lord is obviously much bigger than them all!

Many non-Jewish Believers involved in the Messianic movement can be a little taken aback, when they see Messianic Jews say that they are either practicing Judaism, or that Biblical faith is Judaism. Obviously, it does need to be considered that to a variety of Messianic Jews, asserting that they are practicing Judaism, or that Biblical faith is Judaism, may have a certain meaning to some and a different meaning to some others. To some Messianic Jews, asserting that they are practicing Judaism—while obviously recognizing Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah—this means that they have not had to give up on their ethnic and cultural heritage of being Jewish, and that Biblical practices that have been undoubtedly associated with the Jewish people throughout history do not have to be discarded. *To believe in the Jewish Messiah hardly means that a Jew stops being Jewish.* To other Messianic Jews, asserting that they are practicing Judaism means that their whole religious and spiritual construct is not only informed from the Second Temple Judaism of Yeshua and the Apostles’ day, or from later Talmudic Judaism, but even as far as the Jewish mysticism of the Middle Ages.

No one in any sector of the Messianic movement needs to be hostile to when Messianic Jews state, “Yeshua did not come to start a new religion.” Anyone in today’s Messianic community should be able to recognize that when the Messiah says that He came to fulfill the Torah (Matthew 5:17-19), this means that His mission was one of bringing the Father’s plan to full fruition—not one of abolishing His commandments.^a There is no doubting that Yeshua of Nazareth was a Torah observant, First Century Jew—and that He even bid His followers to respect Pharisaical Jewish authority (Matthew 23:2-3).^b That Yeshua practiced Judaism is an historically and theologically valid conclusion to make.

As always, though, the question needs to be posed: **Do the teachings and actions of Yeshua ever go beyond, or transcend Judaism?** When presented carefully and respectfully, there are many Messianic Jews today who will obviously have to answer “Yes” to this, as they do not want to be legitimately accused of placing God in any kind of a “box.” At the same time, there are other Messianic Jews who might take offense by the idea that God is bigger than Judaism.

It is fair to conclude that the majority of people who make up the broad Messianic movement, be they Jewish or non-Jewish, do rightly recognize that our Bible studies, exegesis, and faith application is significantly informed from Judaism. This means that when seeking to understand the First Century world of Yeshua, consultation of extra-Biblical literature such as the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Talmud, and the Midrashim is likely going to be necessary to some degree.^c Respecting the Jewish Synagogue and our Jewish theological and spiritual tradition is a given. Incorporating many customs and traditions in worship on *Shabbat*, our remembrance of the appointed times,

^a Consult the editor’s exegesis paper on Matthew 5:17-19, “Has the Law Been Fulfilled?”

^b This is further evaluated in the editor’s exegesis paper on Matthew 23:2-3, “Who Sits in the Seat of Moses?”

^c Consult the editor’s article “The Role of History in Messianic Biblical Interpretation.”

employing prayers and hymns from the *siddur*, and other edifying practices from Judaism, are also witnessed. However, the Biblical text is still **the first and final authority** for us.

Areas of conflict are not necessarily over whether Messianic Believers practice a Biblical faith *informed* from Judaism. Areas of conflict are over whether Messianic Believers should be informed from Medieval Jewish mysticism and literature like the Zohar, as representing ideas and concepts present in the Jewish world of Yeshua a millennium-and-a-half earlier.^d Areas of strong theological disagreement, which can occur among those who tend to brazenly insist that Biblical faith is Judaism, can erupt when it concerns the equality of all people in the Messiah,^e the applicability or non-applicability of the Torah to all of God's people,^f or issues such as the plurality of the Godhead and its relationship to the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4.^g Should all of the concepts and ideas of post-Second Temple Judaism be synthesized with Apostolic doctrine? **Where do the teachings of Yeshua and the Apostles get to definitively stand on their own?** This is where the issue of whether today's Messianics practice Judaism *or* a Biblical faith informed by Judaism sees (considerable) divergence.

It can be difficult for a few Messianics to acknowledge that Judaism might be in the wrong in some important areas, and for them to make the choice to stick with a Scripture First (*Prima Scriptura*) hermeneutic. Yet, most of today's Messianic Jews, will not be regarded as practicing Judaism by many other Jews—for the explicit reason that they acknowledge Yeshua as the Messiah.

It is safe for us to recognize that the considerable majority of today's Messianic Believers practice a form of Biblical faith significantly informed from Judaism (and for that same matter, likely informed from the Law-positive traditions of Protestant Christianity like Calvinism or Wesleyanism).^h Ultimately though, **Biblical faith is a practice of steadfast trust and reliance upon our Eternal, Unseen God** (Hebrews 11:1-2). Many of today's Messianic Jews rightly recognize that God is bigger than Judaism, but some definitely struggle with it. Likewise, to keep this all in proper perspective—we have to remember how many of today's Christians really fail to consider that God is bigger than Christianity...

posted 25 October, 2011

^d Consult the editor's article "The Effect of Mysticism and Gnosticism on the Messianic Movement."

^e Consult the editor's exegesis paper on Galatians 3:28, "Biblical Equality and Today's Messianic Movement."

^f Consult the editor's article "One Law for All."

^g Consult the editor's article "What Does the Shema Really Mean?"

^h Consult the relevant sections of the author's book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

Biblical Festivals: Do you think that Christians should observe the feasts/appointed times, the *moedim*, of Leviticus 23?

Our ministry encourages all Believers to keep the Biblical holidays that the Lord prescribed for His people in Leviticus 23, including: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost/*Shavuot*, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. This would include the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, as it is listed as one of the appointed times.

We are informed in Scripture that these appointed times of God, are “are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:17, ESV), meaning that we are all to see the Messiah and His salvation work represented by them. There have been many books and resources released in the evangelical Christian world during the past two decades, which to one degree or another addresses the topic of “Jesus in the feasts,” recognizing the significance of Yeshua’s salvation work—both past and future—via the themes of the appointed times. Recognizing the Messianic substance of Yeshua, for example, in something like the Passover, has helped significantly grow the Messianic community as inquiring evangelical Believers have wanted to know more about their Hebraic Roots.

It is important to note that common Christian celebrations do not equal the number of holidays that God prescribed. Christmas, Easter, and short Sunday services are *less than* the six or seven Biblical appointments (the lowest number count of the *moedim*), the weekly Sabbath (which lasts an entire day), plus additional holidays like *Purim* and *Chanukah*. If people want to honor God *as much as possible*, His way obviously has advantages, as today’s traditional Christian holidays were not celebrated by the early Believers, being instead instituted centuries after the death of the Apostles by the Roman Catholic Church. (In saying this, please understand that we are not saying that the commemoration of Yeshua’s birth and resurrection are unimportant; we are only saying that they should be integrated into our celebration of the Biblical holidays.)

There are a variety of New Testament passages commonly offered to say that the appointed times or *moedim* should not be observed by non-Jewish Believers (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17; Romans 14:5-6). Each of these verses was delivered within an ancient context, addressing some particular issues for its original audience, which needs to be seriously considered by Bible readers. Consult the editor’s article “**Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?**” for a further examination of Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17; and Romans 14:5-6.

updated 06 June, 2011

Birth Control: Do you believe it is wrong for Messianic Believers to practice birth control?

Among some sectors of Messianic Believers are those who believe that it is Biblical for a husband and wife to have large families, beyond the average family size of 3-4 children. Scriptural support that is frequently given for this may include God’s command to Adam and Eve to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). While the Scriptures do encourage human beings to be fruitful, and for married couples to procreate, do they encourage procreation beyond one’s means? Many of those who have large families beyond the average size look down upon those who only have 3-4 children. Do the Scriptures prohibit any kind of birth control or family planning?

This has certainly been a debated issue for many centuries, and is not limited to the Messianic movement by any means. The official dogma of Roman Catholicism, for example, prohibits any form of birth control. Liberal Christians and Jews, in stark contrast, believe that any form of birth control, *including abortion*, is acceptable. Many Conservative and Reform Jews, and evangelical Christians, take a middle position on birth control, advocating that some forms of it are acceptable, while other forms are unacceptable. Aside from a belief that abortion is

unacceptable, the Messianic world has those who favor forms of birth control, every bit as much as it has those who disfavor forms of birth control.

Those against birth control, in addition to arguing against it on the basis that God expects human beings to be fruitful, may argue against it from Genesis 38:8-10:

“Then Judah said to Onan, ‘Go in to your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother.’ Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother. But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD; so He took his life also.”

Those against any form of birth control will often make serious light of the fact that Onan “spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring” (NIV) and was killed by the hand of God for it. However, the context of this happening is very important so we do not make the automatic assumption that all forms of birth control are wrong. According to Deuteronomy 25:5, “When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be *married* outside *the family* to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.” Nahum M. Sarna informs us, “This institution is known in Hebrew as *yibbum*. In English it is called ‘levirate marriage’ (from Latin *levir*, ‘a husband's brother’).”^a

In early Biblical times, because marriages were property contracts every bit as much as individual bonds, for a woman not to produce an heir meant that the inheritance a deceased husband left would have to be divided, possibly weakening the family. Onan agreed to impregnate his sister-in-law in accordance with the custom of levirate marriage at the command of Judah. If he had not done this, then the portion of property he would have inherited from his brother would have been considerably more than if Tamar had not gotten pregnant and had given birth to a son. Onan begins the sexual act with Tamar, but withdraws at the last minute. God struck him down for not performing the proper act that he agreed to do.

We have to consider the fact that this was an isolated incident, and is not a blanket event condemning all birth control for all generations to come. Further instruction in Deuteronomy allows for a voluntary renunciation of the practice of levirate marriage:

“But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, ‘My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.’ Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And *if* he persists and says, ‘I do not desire to take her,’ then his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, ‘Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house’” (Deuteronomy 25:7-9).

Onan did not tell Judah that he would renounce Tamar, but instead agrees to go through with the sexual act. However, instead of performing the act of the levirate, Onan withdraws at the point of climax, ejaculating on the ground. It was for not performing his duty through to the end that Onan was killed—not that he withdrew.

EJ largely summarizes the viewpoints of the Orthodox Jewish community today, which is largely against birth control:

“It is in the rabbinic responsa, especially those of the past 200 years, that the attitude of Jewish law to birth control is defined and discussed in great detail. The many hundreds of rulings recorded in these responsa consider urgent medical reasons as the only valid justification for certain contraceptive precautions. Jewish law regards such decisions as capital judgments and it would, therefore, insist on dealing with each case on its individual merits and on the evidence of competent medical opinion. Where some grave hazard to the mother, however remote, is feared, as a result of pregnancy, the rabbinic attitude is usually quite liberal, all the more readily if the commandment of procreation (which technically requires having a son and a daughter) has already

^a Nahum M. Sarna, “Genesis,” in David L. Lieber, *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2001), 234.

been fulfilled. Under no circumstances, however, does Jewish law sanction any contraceptive acts or safeguards on the part of the male, nor does it ever tolerate the use or distribution of birth control devices outside marriage" (*EJ*).^b

The key to note here is that while Orthodox Judaism is largely against the practice of a couple not having any children, "Jewish law regards such decisions as capital judgments and it would, therefore, insist on dealing with each case on its individual merits and on the evidence of competent medical opinion." While dealing with each couple on a case-by-case basis, the Jewish community as a whole, including Conservative and Reform Judaism, has largely liberalized its stand on birth control due to the population explosion of the last century. "In common with the attitude of most Protestant denominations, Reform Judaism would generally leave the decision on birth control to the individual conscience, recognizing social and economic factors no less than the medical motivation" (*EJ*).^c

It is important to note, according to Sarna, that on the whole "Jewish law permits various forms of contraception for medical and other reasons but prefers methods that do not destroy the generative seed,"^d although there are certainly various opinions among the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform communities. Accepted forms of birth control that would be used today among the Conservative and Reform Jewish communities include the usage of vaginal sponges, the diaphragm, condoms, and the birth control pill. Preferred forms are those used by the woman that prevent the union of egg and sperm. In some cases withdrawal is permitted. Spermicide, because it kills sperm, is largely not permitted. There is also debate over forms of birth control that one has definite control over, such as the sponge, diaphragm, or condom, and those that alter the chemical and hormonal balance of a woman such as the pill. Likewise, vasectomy on a male is considered an unacceptable form of birth control, as is tubal ligation on a woman, except in extreme medical cases.

The issue of birth control is not frequently debated in the evangelical Protestant community. Not all evangelicals are in favor of birth control, even though some favor forms of it. Beliefs vary among denominations, although most conservative denominations encourage married couples to have children, but not at the expense of their own marriage. In other words, children are encouraged to come forth out of a love that a husband and wife have toward one another, not because they should feel obligated to have children and simply procreate for the sake of procreating.

The primary debate among Protestants often regards the morality of abortion, with many being against it *in any form*. While abortion-on-demand is an ungodly and horrific procedure, moderates on the issue do concede that there are exceptions. When a woman's life is in danger, abortion may be necessary. Likewise, a pregnancy involving gross psychological trauma, such as rape or incest, may require an abortion. These issues, of course, must be considered on a case-by-case basis and must involve the pregnant woman consulting her husband or father, as well as a pastor and/or doctor. This is consistent with much of the Jewish community, which also recognizes that there can be exceptions regarding abortion.

On the whole, our ministry adheres to the basic views of Conservative and Reform Judaism, as well as evangelical Christianity, when it comes to birth control. **We do not believe that all forms of birth control are prohibited by the Scriptures**, but we certainly encourage married couples to have children as a result of their love. However, a couple with children needs to be able to have them within their means. For some, having multiple children all at once can be a great physical and psychological strain—not to mention a financial burden. In Biblical times, having large families was every bit as much as an economic decision as it was procreative. One needed many children to perform household and agricultural tasks. Today, in strong contrast, having smaller families is often an economic decision.

^b Immanuel Jakobovits, "Birth Control," in *EJ*.

^c *Ibid*.

^d Sarna, in *Etz Hayim*, 34.

The decision how to have children ultimately involves a husband and wife and what they prayerfully decide between themselves and the Lord. It is not anyone's place to judge a couple for not having more than the average 3-4 children, any more than it is anyone's place to judge a couple for not being able to have children, or even to judge an unmarried man or woman who cannot find the proper spouse. This issue is one where a couple has to decide for themselves, based on what they read in Scripture, whether or not their marriage relationship is mature enough to allow for children, and the cultural and economic considerations that must be made. More than anything else, this is something that couples should not have outsiders unnecessarily interfering with.

posted 27 February, 2006

Birth of Yeshua: When should Messianic Believers remember Yeshua's birth?

Almost all authorities are agreed that Yeshua the Messiah was not born on December 25, and that the choice of December 25 for Christmas was an arbitrary date in ancient history, giving former pagans an opportunity to remember something different than what they had previously observed. Today's Messianics, recognizing the questionable origins and traditions associated with Christmas on December 25, will still often recognize that the birth of Yeshua, as principally recorded in Luke 2, is still an event worthy of remembering. But when should it be done? What would be a date or season that is much more appropriate for us considering the entry of the Messiah into the world at Bethlehem?

Many of today's Messianic Believers are of the conviction that Yeshua the Messiah was born in conjunction with the Feast of Tabernacles. This is primarily based on passages such as John 1:14, which speak of how "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." The Greek verb *skēnoō* (σκηνώω) is employed in this verse, with its noun form *skēnē* (σκηνή) frequently used in the Torah (i.e., Leviticus 23:34, 42-43) to render the Hebrew *sukkah* (סֻכָּה). YLT actually renders John 1:14 with "the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us." It is not at all inappropriate to connect the typology of *Sukkot* to the Incarnation of Yeshua. Yet, just like with those ancient Christian leaders who arbitrarily chose December 25 to remember Yeshua's birth, so might concluding that Yeshua was born during the Feast of Tabernacles also be a bit arbitrary. There is simply no way for us to know for certain.

It is sad, though, that those who are of the opinion that Yeshua might have been born during Tabernacles, have usually been met with varying degrees of resistance when they have tried to integrate this into their *Sukkot* festivities. Attacks along the lines of "We should not be remembering anyone's birth!" are usually issued. The actual, Biblical record of Yeshua's birth can be literally ripped to shreds. A few contentious people who will without hesitation claim that "Christmas is pagan!" now want nothing to do with what the Gospels tell us about the birth of the King of Kings, and prefer to excise it from their Bibles. So to avoid controversy and encourage unity during the *Sukkot* season, those who believe that Yeshua was born during this time often never bring it up, and keep their thoughts to themselves.

Certainly, it is justified to question the spiritual maturity (and even salvation) of those who will not even read passages like Luke 2 or Matthew 1-2 that detail the nativity, and what took place during the early years of Yeshua's life, yet claim Him as their Savior. **Anyone who has placed his or her trust in Yeshua still has to deal with the Biblical text.** Disregarding it completely, as though it does not exist or that it is too "Churchy" for us to consider—even when not celebrating Christmas—is sad evidence of how a few of today's Messianics are utter neophytes when it comes to reading Scriptures about Yeshua's life and ministry.

Not all are convinced that Yeshua was born during the season of *Sukkot*, or are at least skeptical of this proposal and think it needs more research. Yet, it is clear that because the birth of Yeshua is a part not only of Scripture—but also our faith—that we should find *a time* to consider what its message means for us. Aside from celebrating Christmas, or trying to remember the nativity during the Feast of Tabernacles, **it might be that the "safest" time to address the birth of**

Yeshua is when *Shemot* (Exodus 1:1-6:1) appears in the yearly Torah cycle. What makes this an appropriate time to consider the message of Yeshua's birth, is that parallels between the birth of Moses and the birth of the Messiah—who came as a “second Moses”—can be considered.

Of course, even if we choose to examine the birth of Yeshua when *Shemot* appears in the Torah cycle, there will still be those few who will oppose it, because they have adopted a very immature and ungodly attitude toward Christmas and their Christian brethren. Unfortunately, there is nothing that can really be done with this kind of people, other than to ask them whether they think the Biblical account of Yeshua's birth should be removed from the Holy Scriptures. And if they actually say yes—then we should wonder whether or not 2 John 7 applies concerning such people:

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Yeshua the Messiah *as coming in the flesh*. This is the deceiver and the antimessiah.”

posted 09 December, 2009

Body-Brain-Consciousness Interaction: To what degree do you think the human consciousness is reliant upon the body and the brain?

Various forms of dualism found in much of Christianity over the centuries, have most definitely taken a few of their cues from Platonic dualism. Classically understood, the human soul was trapped inside of the prison of the body,^a awaiting escape at the time of death. It could be thought that if the true person is something that is ultimately immaterial, then perhaps it is inconsequential how the “prison” of the body is really treated. Watching out for one's health, for example, really does not matter if a disembodied afterlife—even with a resurrection to follow in some far off distant eschaton—is the next stage of existence.

The idea that what a person does to himself or herself physically, does not have a spiritual effect, is **utterly absurd**. Much of how people consider and value themselves is by what they see in the morning in the bathroom mirror. Your average person makes decisions every day that affect to what degree of maintenance, improvement, and/or comfort will be allowed for the body. If people choose to either pamper or abuse themselves, such an environment can lead to extremes ranging from hedonism to self-mutilation. Most people on Earth today, whether they be rich or poor, do not fall into such a paradigm. However, a person's daily attitude and decision making abilities can certainly be affected by the kinds of substances ingested, or by how much they exercise. If people do not eat healthy meals, or get a reasonable amount of sleep every night, or even get a good amount of fresh air, their ability to think properly can be hampered. *This can, in turn, affect one's connection to the supernatural.*

Those who hold to anthropological models like that of either holistic dualism, or more especially emergent dualism, do certainly recognize that how one treats the body has a definite effect on the human mind or consciousness, and one's personality. In the view of William Hasker,

“[M]ental properties are ‘emergent’ in the following sense: they are properties that manifest themselves when the appropriate material constituents are placed in special, highly complex relationships....The mind...comes into existence when the constituents of its ‘material base’ are arranged in a suitable way—in this case, in the extremely complex arrangement found in the nervous system of humans.”^b

Hasker's basic conclusion is that when all of the parts needed for a human person to develop are in place, namely the body, brain, neurological system, blood, and other chemicals—the essential personality or mind will emerge from this. Yet in too many cases witnessed throughout history, various stimuli-constituents, either witnessed or experienced by people

^a Possible references to this include, but are not limited to: Plato *Phaedo* 81b; *Phaedrus* 250c; *Cratylus* 400c; Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* 3.7.

Consult the FAQ “Dualism,” seen earlier, for a further review.

^b William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp 189-190, 190-191.

externally, or taken or felt by them internally, can negatively impact the development of a personality.

An easy point in case to understand is how many people make decisions—sometimes poor decisions—when under *or* lacking the influences of various chemical substances. Most frequently, alcohol or drug abuse are cited as examples of how people can make really poor, or just flat stupid decisions when things count, *and* this can surely relate to spiritual decisions and matters as well. Yet, what about those who do not drink alcohol or use illegal drugs like heroine or cocaine? Obviously, many people are highly affected by nicotine, which most often comes from smoking cigarettes, and the stereotypical chain smoker needs his one or two packs a day to be efficient. Furthermore and far more common, those who need to drink large quantities of caffeine or consume large amounts of sugar every day, are surely not immune to making poor decisions. The human brain, which operates as the “hardware,” to the “software” of the human mind, must function at peak efficiency in order for the best reasoning skills and decision making processes to be employed.

When the body is not operating at an optimal level—being given a fair amount of exercise, a balanced diet, regular excretions, and yes for some people even a regular amount of married sexual intercourse—one’s mind, consciousness, or immaterial spirit can be resultantly affected. Some of this can relate to self-confidence or self-perception. Everyone who works a regular nine-to-five job, five days a week, recognizes that without the availability of weekends (think: *Shabbat*), and most especially vacation days, that (severe) exhaustion can set in. People tend to make very poor decisions when they are exhausted. This can affect relationships and proper communication between a husband and wife, parents and their children, but most especially how Believers are to regularly pray, study the Scriptures, and gather with other brothers and sisters in the Lord. If people are not trying to be reasonably healthy, then their relationship with God can be prone to suffer.

It might be said that for many people of faith—especially those with various disabilities or incurable diseases which they have to face for many years—that they might tend to look more beyond their physical condition to the time when they get to die and see their Lord in Heaven, being rid of their pain and frustrations. *This is not for most of us.* We have to live normally each day in relative health, recognizing how a positive physical state affects our relationship with the Heavenly Father. No one has any Biblical right to treat the human body as anything else than “wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14), because how we treat our outer physical self will undoubtedly influence our inner spiritual self, and in many cases vice versa. Until the time of death when temporary disembodiment will take its affect, we are embodied beings. **What we do to ourselves physically will often affect us spiritually.**

posted 29 March, 2011

Breath of life, humans and animals: If humans and animals have the “breath of life,” would it not seem logical that both experience the same kind of death?

Reading in English that “of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died” (Genesis 7:22), it can be easy for some to conclude that both human beings and animals have the same “breath of life.” For the psychopannychist who advocates a monist anthropology that the human person is a creature entirely of this dimension, the Flood narrative of Genesis states that *all* which possessed the breath of life died.

In Genesis 2:7, we see that when God created Adam, He “formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” What actually animated Adam was a distinct *nishmat chayim* (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים), which it is nowhere stated that the animals were given at their creation. With Ancient Hebrew largely lacking the vocabulary of “mind” or “consciousness” or “reason,” we are right to recognize, as many interpreters have over

the centuries, that the *nishmat chayim* or “breath of life”^a is a distinct, immaterial component granted to Adam and all human beings.

No one can overlook that later in the account of the Flood, creatures which do not possess the “breath of life” receive the effects of the judgment, otherwise what need would there have been for animals to be preserved on the Ark? In Genesis 6:17 we encounter God’s decree, “Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish.” Here, those creatures which possess *ruach chayim* (רוּחַ חַיִּים) are targeted as being those which will endure His judgment. Likewise in Genesis 7:15, *ruach chayim* is used to describe the entry of the animals into Noah’s Ark: “So they went into the ark to Noah, by twos of all flesh in which was the breath of life.”

Recognizing that human beings are the only creatures which truly possess *nishmat chayim*, what is to be made of the assertion of Genesis 7:22? “[O]f all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life [*nishmat-ruach chayim*, נִשְׁמַת־רוּחַ חַיִּים], died.” Is this to be taken as a reference to both the human sinners and animals that were caught up in the Flood? Or, does Genesis 7:22 only speak of the human sinners who were caught up in the Flood?

Whether or not animals too possess *nishmat chayim*, leaving the door wide open for both animals and humans being largely compositionally indifferent, can only be answered from Genesis 7:22 when we conclude **who the Flood was primarily intended for**. This should actually not be too difficult to figure out: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Genesis 6:5-6). The principal recipients of the Flood, those who caused the Flood and were to be judged by it, was **sinful humankind**. No one can argue at all that the animals were responsible for the Flood, because at most the animals were most literally in the wrong place at the wrong time. Hugh Ross validly observes,

“The Flood accounts tell us of God’s grief and agonizing over humanity’s corruption. With a heavy heart He cleansed the world to keep it from utter ruin. He found one man, just one, who with his family could keep the human race from self-extermination and further suffering in the process.”^b

The purpose of the Flood was to **wipe out sinful humanity**, and in Ross’ words, “God saved 100 percent of the noncancerous tissue in the body of humanity.”^c Those specifically to be eliminated by the Flood who possessed *nishmat chayim* were its human recipients. God as Creator was not hesitant to judge those within whom He placed a special consciousness-breath. 1 Peter 3:19-20 testifies to how in the period between His crucifixion and resurrection, Yeshua the Messiah made a proclamation of His victory to those who rebelled at the time of the Flood, being held in Sheol/Hades:

“He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.”

Animals and humans both have *ruach chayim*, but only humans have *nishmat chayim*. In the case of the Flood, the death of those beings which had *nishmat chayim* was by no means just the result of an ecological catastrophe; it was the result of the great sinfulness of man.

(The discussion that Genesis 7:22 is speaking of the human recipients of the Flood, and not animals, is of course heightened by the debate over how extensive the Flood actually was. Was the Flood something that covered over every single square inch of Planet Earth, or did it only extend out as far out as humanity had settled? If the Flood only devastated a localized, albeit

^a ATS actually renders this as “soul of life.”

^b Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, second expanded edition (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), pp 142-143.

^c *Ibid.*, 143.

rather broad area to the Ancient Near East, then the fact that those who possessed *nishmat chayim* were only human, is even more supported.)^d

posted 29 March, 2011

^d Consult "The Flood: Global or Local?" in *Ibid.*, pp 145-161 for a further discussion.

B'rit Chadashah: Why do you not call the New Testament the B'rit Chadashah as some other Messianics do?

There are several reasons why we as a ministry do not refer to the “New Testament” as the *B'rit Chadashah*, unlike many in the Messianic movement. First of all, the *b'rit chadashah* (בְּרִית הַדָּשָׁה) or “new covenant” is promised to the House of Judah and the House of Israel in Jeremiah 31. The text says,

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The *b'rit chadashah* is actually a covenant that the Lord has made with both the Houses of Israel to be fully realized in the end-times. This is what the author of Hebrews talks about in Hebrews 8:8-12:

“For finding fault with them, He says, ‘BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, “KNOW THE LORD,” FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.”

As a ministry we believe that it is a misnomer to call the Hebrew Scriptures the “Old Testament.” The more correct term to use is Tanach/Tanakh (תנ"ך), an acronym for *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). We certainly will use the term “Old Testament” in passing for those who are unfamiliar with the term “Tanach,” but Tanach by far is the preferred term.

The same is the case when we consider the “New Testament.” There is nothing “new” about these Scriptures other than the fact that they are the continual progressive revelation of God that attest to the work of Messiah Yeshua and His early followers. These are the Divinely inspired works of the early Disciples and Apostles. Messianics often compound the confusion that exists among many Christians regarding the “New Testament” by using terms such as New Covenant or *B'rit Chadashah*. More correct terms to use in reference to the “New Testament” would be the **Apostolic Scriptures** or **Apostolic Writings**, or **Messianic Scriptures** or **Messianic Writings**. The New Covenant or *b'rit chadashah* in actuality is the prophesied promise of God to write His Torah on our hearts. The Apostolic Scriptures do not make up a covenant but rather record the works of God in the period of the Messiah’s time on Earth and immediately following.

updated 26 June, 2006

British (word of Hebrew origin?): I have heard it said that the word “British” is actually a word of Hebrew origin. Is there any validity to this claim?

British-Israel proponents claim that the term “British” is actually combination of the Hebrew words *b'rit* (בְּרִית) or “covenant” and *ish* (אִישׁ) meaning “man,” which together would

supposedly mean “covenant-man.”^a Dr. Walter Martin validly noted the following in his classic work *Kingdom of the Cults*,

“It is sufficient to point out...that the Hebrew words *berith* [בְּרִית] and *ish* [אִישׁ] literally mean ‘covenant and man,’ not, ‘men of the covenant,’ as [Herbert W.] Armstrong and Anglo-Israelites maintain. When to this is added the unbiased and impeccably researched conclusions of the venerable *Oxford English Dictionary* and every other major English work on etymology, there is absolutely no connection between the Anglo-Saxon tongue and the Hebrew language.”^b

There is no legitimate linguistic basis to say that the English word “British” is of Hebrew origins. This is a claim that is often made by those who advocate British-Israel theology, many of whom are untrained in Biblical Hebrew. In actuality, the national designation “British” is derived from the Roman name for what is modern-day England and Wales: Britannia (modern-day Scotland was called Caledonia by the Romans; Great Britain is considered to be the whole island). a Semitic word. The modern Hebrew term for “British” is *Briti* (בריטי; bree-tee),^c which is hardly what one would expect if “British” were indeed a Hebrew word.^d

updated 07 July, 2011

^a In his pseudo-scholarly book *The “Lost” Ten Tribes of Israel...Found!* (Boring, OR: CPA Books, 1995), 392, Steven M. Collins confirms this view: “The ancient Hebrew word for ‘covenant’ still forms the root word for the modern English word ‘British.’ Since ‘ish’ is also a Hebrew word meaning ‘man,’ the word ‘Brit-ish’ is also Hebrew for ‘covenant-man.’”

Collins’ publication is one which has most lamentably had an influence on a wide number of people within the Two-House sub-movement.

^b Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), 309.

^c Hayim Baltan, *Webster’s NewWorld Hebrew Dictionary* (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 1992), 497.

^d For a further discussion, consult the editor’s article “The Ephraimite Error: Critical Errors,” and the information provided under the sub-section “Error #3: The idea that the Two-House teaching is only a reworked form of British-Israelism.”