

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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Calvinist-Arminian Controversy: Does your ministry have a position on Calvinism or Arminianism?

Hebrews 6:4-6 tells us, “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

These verses have probably had the most overall impact on theological discussions and debates outside of the text of Hebrews. What does it mean concerning “those who have once been enlightened” who “have tasted the good word of God”? As many of you are probably aware, this is a strongly debated Scripture among Calvinists and Arminians in Protestant Christian theology pertaining to concepts such as predestination, the free will of humans, and God’s elect. Is it possible for the emerging Messianic movement to have its “own” position on the Calvinist-Arminian controversy?

The major issue of man’s responsibility and God’s redemptive power in the salvation experience actually goes back to the Fifth Century with the Pelagian Controversy. The British monk Pelagius (354-415) advocated that human beings were embodied with a complete free will, and he completely denied the sovereignty of God in worldly affairs. Salvation in the Pelagian schema is solely a human work, and something that is not in any capacity accomplished by God. Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo, refuted Pelagius’ heresies, but in so doing focused extensively on God’s sovereignty and His work in salvation. Augustine was right to emphasize that salvation was a work of God, largely focusing on John 15:5: “apart from Me you can do nothing.” As Alister E. McGrath summarizes, “Augustine understood grace as the real and redeeming presence of God in Christ within us, transforming us; something that was internal and active.”^a Augustine rightly rejected Pelagius’ view that grace was something outside of us that was passive.

Moving forward to the Protestant Reformation, the French Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) was largely influenced by Augustine’s view of Divine grace, with his followers often emphasizing it as “irresistible grace,” something that one could not refuse. Calvin was certainly a brilliant scholar and able exegete of the early Reformation, and much is to be gained by examining his works. Calvin’s theology is noted by his emphasis on the sovereignty of God and His predestination of all human events. Followers of Calvinistic theology believe that salvation is entirely a work of God. However, the Calvinistic theology of election emphasizes that God has chosen only some to be redeemed, and others He has selected to be damned. In the schema of God having predestined all events in human history is the debate over whether God is the author of the Fall and thus the author of sin (*supralapsarianism*), or God’s predestined choices come after the Fall (*infralapsarianism*). Calvin’s system of theology is generally known as Reformed, and in America is largely adhered to in the Presbyterian Church and many sectors of the Baptist Church.

A major issue arose in the Reformation when challenges to Calvin’s theology of specific foreknowledge arose in Holland. Dutch pastor Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), who had been trained as a strict Calvinist, was asked to refute Dirck Koorenhert, who did not believe in specific foreknowledge. Arminius examined his beliefs and became convinced that Yeshua the Messiah did not just die for the elect, but for all the world. Justo González summarizes Arminius’ principal view that “the final destiny of each individual was based, not on the sovereign will of God, but rather on divine foreknowledge, by which God knew what each person’s response would be to the offer of salvation.”^b Arminius argued for a general foreknowledge in that God has certainly predestined particular events to take place in human history, but has left individuals to decide for

^a Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 447.

^b Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1985), 180.

themselves whether or not they want to receive His salvation or reject it. The Remonstrance movement in the Netherlands issued what would become known as “the open decree of predestination.” While often confused with Pelagianism, the Remonstrance movement emphasized “that humans can do nothing good on their own account, and that the grace of God is necessary in order to do good.”^c In America today, forms of Arminian theology are largely present in the Methodist Church, and various Pentecostal denominations and sects such as the Assemblies of God.

The major difference between Calvinists and Arminians today pertains to the issue of salvation. Did Yeshua die only for the elect? Or, did He die for all the world? Both views rightly emphasize that salvation is to be a work of God via His Holy Spirit. But Calvinists largely emphasize that salvation is something that remains permanent and cannot be lost, often referred to in the vernacular as “once saved, always saved.” They frequently base this on John 10:27-29: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand.” Calvinists argue that God knows who His chosen ones are, and no one is capable of removing them from Him—even the people themselves.

Arminians, in stark contrast to this, will argue on the basis of Hebrews 6:4-6 that an individual can be enlightened and spiritually regenerated, having received salvation, but can then reach a point where this salvation is lost. Arminians argue that salvation is a work of God, but that the free will of humans can interrupt that salvation. Case studies such as Ancient Israel in the wilderness, Judas Iscariot, Simon Magus, and perhaps even King Solomon can be offered as examples of those who experienced God's salvation, but then at a later point rejected it because of sin. Arminians are generally in agreement with Calvinists over the fact that God has certainly decreed particular events to occur through the prophecies of His Word, but would not make the argument that God has decreed that every event of every single second has been decreed from eternity.

We are infrequently asked if there is a distinct Messianic view of the Calvinist-Arminian debate. Based on our family's experience in the Messianic movement since 1995, there *is no distinct view* at this point in time. Almost anyone taking a position as either a Calvinist or an Arminian is taking that position because he or she was raised or trained in a denominational setting that adhered to a Calvinist theology or an Arminian theology. Sometimes Calvinistic or Arminian theology is moderated by Messianics as the “nature of God's universe” is something that cannot be fully understood by us as humans. As a former United Methodist and student of the teachings of John Wesley (1703-1791), **the editor is no exception to being affected by this debate**, having been in an Arminian environment. He believes in the general foreknowledge of God, but also that people can lose their salvation. Wesleyan-Arminianism, however, does emphasize the personal holiness and sanctification of the individual—concepts that should be emphasized in today's Messianic movement through Torah observance—as well as experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit. In stark contrast to most Calvinists, Wesleyan-Arminians believe in the continuance of the gifts of the Spirit, but may not emphasize it to the same degree of many of the new “charismatic” movements today.

While we should respect some of the theological tenets of Calvinism and the benefits that it has brought to Western society—in particular its emphasis on hard work—we have two principal problems with Calvinism. Our first problem with Calvinism is its doctrine of limited atonement. This is the belief that Yeshua the Messiah *only* died for the elect, and thus He did not die for all of sinful humanity. Surprisingly, this teaching is actually based on the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 9-11 on the olive tree of Israel, where he writes that “those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened” (Romans 11:7). Wesleyan-Arminianism does differ from other forms of Arminianism in that it does advocate that certain individuals may be chosen by

^c Ibid., 181.

God for damnation, such as Pharaoh, Judas Iscariot, and the coming antimesiah/antichrist, but this is few and far between. A question each of us has to ask is whether or not Yeshua the Messiah died for the whole world, or only a small sector of chosen. Some in the Messianic movement believe that Yeshua died *only to save Israel*, and not the whole world, and in their own way are actually supporting some form of Calvinist dogma.

Our second major problem with Calvinism is its emphasis on eternal security, lived out in much of modern Christendom by people “making decisions for Christ” and then living ungodly lives inconsistent with that of our Lord. Many believe that salvation is not something that needs to be maintained by holy living and the sanctification process, much like one would maintain one’s own car, house, or yard. Where is the evidence of our salvation? John Wesley summarizes it well (on 1 John 2:3) for us by stating, “*we know that we truly and savingly know him—As he is the advocate, the righteous, the propitiation. If we keep his commandments—Particularly those of faith and love.*”^d Our faith is to be evidenced by our works, and those works—most importantly love for God and one’s neighbor, emphasized by Yeshua (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28)—are to give us the assurance we need that we are in the Lord.

The argument over whether or not a person can lose his or her salvation, however, may ultimately be solved by personal experience. Many moderates on the issue believe that it is pointless trying to figure out whether or not someone falling away was once “saved,” or had a false conversion, because *the point* of Hebrews 6:4-6 is to never be in the position of even thinking of leaving the faith. We generally agree with this sentiment, because most who deny Yeshua the Messiah have never known Him as their personal Lord and Savior or have experienced the Holy Spirit. Still, does this mean that every single person who denies Him *never knew Him*? In the Messianic community today, we sadly encounter an increasing number of people who question and deny the Divinity of, and later the Messiahship of, Yeshua. Are they all “unconverted”? We must see to it that these people never question the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

It is notable that the debate over God’s foreknowledge and man’s free will is not given as much attention in Jewish theology as it is in Protestant Christian theology. There are certain examples of these two facets of existence that are often given for discussion, such as Abraham’s binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) and the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 9). *The Jewish Philosophy Reader* notes, “In the volume of the Mishnah known as the *Pirke Avoth* (‘Sayings of the Fathers’) Rabbi Akiba proclaimed: ‘Everything is seen, yet freedom is given’ (3.19). It is clear from this brief statement that already in the 2nd century Jewish theology had at least recognized, if not solved, the apparent incompatibility between divine omniscience and human freedom.”^e When it comes to the issues as presented by both Calvin and Arminius, the Jewish position is much more “let God be God.”

Messianics who are either Calvinist or Arminian in their orientation are often so because of their upbringing or theological training. Certainly, we have the responsibility to foster a Messianic environment where those leaning toward Calvinism or Arminianism are both welcome, so a more distinct Messianic viewpoint can be developed over time. One’s ultimate decision regarding the loss of salvation may have to be experiential, which was a critical part of Wesley’s theology (Scripture, tradition, reason, experience). This is an old debate, and *only time* will determine if developing a distinct Messianic position is possible. In the meantime, we need to make sure that people truly do have salvation in Messiah Yeshua, have experienced the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit, and are strong in their faith so that they do not even consider abandoning the Lord.

(This entry has been adapted from the Excursus “Calvinism, Arminianism, and the Emerging Messianic Movement” in the editor’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.)

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^d Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 905.

^e Seymour Feldman, “The Binding of Isaac: A Test-Case for Divine Foreknowledge,” in Daniel H. Frank, Oliver Leaman, and Charles H. Manekin, eds., *The Jewish Philosophy Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 122.

Chanukah, Actions of Antiochus: In what way did Antiochus Epiphanes commit the “Abomination of Desolation”? I thought this was a future event.

The event describing the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus, even though it actually was carried out by an Athenian senator (2 Maccabees 6:1), was in fulfillment of the Prophet Daniel’s words in Daniel 11:31: “Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.” It may seem confusing for us because the eschatological term that often describes “the Abomination of Desolation” in most pre-millennial prophecy circles is used to refer to another event, that of Daniel 9:27:

“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

Without a doubt, what happened in the period of the Maccabees was an abomination before the God of Israel. But it was not the final abomination spoken of by Daniel that occurs at the end of the seventy-weeks prophecy. A future leader, much like Antiochus, eager to unite the world as one people worshipping him, will make all of the previous abominations that have occurred on the Temple Mount seem like nothing. The text uses the plural *kenaf shiqutzim* (כַּנַּף שִׁקוּצִים), indicating that there have been *multiple abominations* committed,^f but this one will be the *extreme abomination*, topping all the others. This is perhaps reflected in the NLT rendering, “And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration.” The Apostle Paul describes this in greater detail in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4:

“Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”

From Paul’s vantage point, the Abomination of Desolation has yet to occur; and from our view today, it likewise has yet to occur. Yeshua the Messiah makes this clear in His Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24:

“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath” (Matthew 24:15-20).

Some have claimed that the Abomination of Desolation occurred in ancient times when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in 70 C.E. But that is contingent on several things. While Yeshua has Daniel’s description of the Abomination in mind, His statement is preceded by the ever-critical, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). Even today, almost 2,000 years later, this word has yet to be fulfilled. Furthermore, we see the statement “let the reader understand” inserted into the text, presumably by Matthew when he composed his Gospel. When Matthew wrote his Gospel also tells us quite a bit as to whether or not this has occurred. If Matthew’s Gospel post-dates the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., as most conservative and

^f While many interpreters connect *kanaf* (כַּנַּף) or “wing” (NASU) to a part of the Temple, it can also relate to the extremity of a garment or the wing of a bird (BDB, 489). Because of the ambiguity of prophecy, while *kenaf shiqutzim* has most often been interpreted as “a wing of the temple” (NIV), we should be inclined to remember how *kanaf* is used to speak of a cloak spread out or the extreme ends of the Earth (H.F.W. Gesenius: *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 406), connecting it to how this final Abomination of Desolation will stretch far over the other abominations previously committed on the Temple Mount.

liberal scholars believe, then it is indeed an indication that this Abomination of Desolation is to occur in the future.

There has been no leader like Antiochus, or even an emissary of his, who has entered into the Temple in Jerusalem to be worshipped as God. In fact, there is no Temple in Jerusalem today where this prophecy could even be fulfilled. The seventy-weeks prophecy of Daniel has yet to be completely fulfilled, as when it is all over we are to see the restoration of God's Kingdom on Earth, stated clearly in Daniel 9:24:

“Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*.”

We are still awaiting to see everlasting righteousness established in the Earth. That has not happened, and any claim by theologians or teachers that it has is totally misguided.

The example of Antiochus Epiphanes is very, very important to understand. It lays the historical precedent as being one of the many abominations that has occurred on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This abomination in 167 B.C.E. was followed by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., and the subsequent erection of a temple to Jupiter. Likewise, when Islam expanded throughout the Middle East the Dome of the Rock was built on the Temple Mount. Today, we await the reconstruction of the Temple by many of the Temple Mount faithful groups in Israel, and then we can see the climax of all of these abominations. Unlike those who committed abominations in the past, though, the man of lawlessness will be able to broadcast himself to the world, so everyone, not just those in Jerusalem, will be able to see him declare himself as God. Do you think Antiochus Epiphanes would have liked to do this? Well, the same spirit of antimesiah that was in him will be in someone else in the future.

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Virtual Chanukah

Chanukah, Celebrated instead of Sukkot: What can you tell me about the Feast of Dedication being celebrated in place of *Sukkot* by the Maccabees when they rededicated the Temple?

When the Seleucid Greek invaders occupied the Land of Israel, it was forbidden for any of the Biblical holidays to be celebrated, possibly under the threat of death. Obviously, this would have included *Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles. Many Jews continued to celebrate the appointed times in secret, or in some limited way without being caught.

Some in the independent Messianic community, who largely frown on observing *Chanukah*, say that when the Maccabees rededicated the Second Temple that the eight-day festival they celebrated was Tabernacles, which they were unable to celebrate prior to this time. They base it on statements made in 2 Maccabees 10:5-6:

“It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. And they celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the feast of booths, remembering how not long before, during the feast of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals.”

The REB actually says “they recalled how, only a short time before, they had kept that feast while living like wild animals in the mountains and caves.” Did the Maccabees actually try to “keep *Sukkot*” while evading the Seleucid armies in the wilderness? We might never have an answer to this question. But what we do know is that while there were various elements and themes of *Sukkot* brought into the first Festival of Dedication, it was celebrated and mandated as its own unique holiday. The text continues, clarifying what the Jews assembled in Jerusalem were actually doing:

“Therefore bearing ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy

place. They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year” (2 Maccabees 10:7-8).

We are told that this new holiday, commemorating the rededication of the Temple, was “decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year” (NRSV). This makes *Chanukah* something new and unique that was not intended to be a substitute for *Sukkot*, even though *Sukkot* may have served as a template for much of it to be based upon.

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Virtual Chanukah

Chanukah, Eight Days of Oil: Where can I find information about the *menorah* being lit for eight days, on one cruse of oil, following the Maccabees’ rededication of the Temple?

The Maccabees drove the Seleucids out of the Land of Israel in the month of Kislev 165 B.C.E., which is in about the month of December. They had the task of cleaning up the mess that the Seleucids had left, notably in the city of Jerusalem and in the Temple complex. Antiochus’ forces had completely ransacked the Temple and made it into a haven of idolatry. The Temple needed to be cleansed of its defilement and restored to its previous position so proper sacrifices could once again be performed. Of all of the items of Temple furniture that had to be cleansed and rededicated, one of the most important was the great lampstand or *menorah*. The *menorah* required special consecrated oil in order to be lit. Some historical traditions actually indicate that the Maccabees had to setup a “makeshift *menorah*” out of iron bars covered with zinc (Scholium to *Megillat Ta’anit*),^a while a new gold *menorah* (מְנוֹרָה) was being crafted.

The Festival of Dedication or *Chanukah*, as attested in the historical record, was mandated as a national celebration so that the community could remember the sacrifice of the Maccabees, and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem:

“Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev” (1 Maccabees 4:59).

The historian Josephus wrote about the establishment of *Chanukah* as a new, national celebration for the Jewish people in his work *Antiquities of the Jews*:

“Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days; and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon: but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honored God, and delighted them, by hymns and psalms. Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that thence was the name given to that festival” (12.323-325).^b

The Greek name for this holiday as recorded by Josephus was *phōta* (φῶτα), meaning “Lights.” The connection of *Chanukah* to the lighting of the *menorah* goes all the way back to the First Century B.C.E. Talmud tractates b.*Shabbat* 21b and 23a detail various *halachic* rulings from this period regarding the lighting of the *chanukia*, and debates between the Rabbinical Schools of Hillel and Shammai. These rulings date anywhere from 50-100 years before Messiah Yeshua.

The wonderful story that enlivens our *Chanukah* celebration concerns the fact that when the Maccabees were cleansing the Temple, only one cruse of consecrated oil was found to light the *menorah*. The Torah says that the oil used in the Tabernacle/Temple service was to be “clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually” (Exodus 27:20; cf. Leviticus 24:2), and the prevailing *halachah* of the day required eight days for this oil to be produced. While

^a Cf. Moshe David Herr, “Hanukkah,” in *EJ*.

^b *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 328.

there was plenty of olive oil present to use in the Land of Israel, only special consecrated oil could be used for burning in the *menorah*. The miracle of the eight days of oil is spoken of in the Talmud, in the midst of the arguments about how the *chanukia* was to be lit:

“What’s the point of Hanukkah? It is in line with what our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev the days of Hanukkah, which are eight, begin. On these days it is forbidden to lament the dead and to fast.

“For when the Greeks entered the sanctuary, they made all of the oil that was in the sanctuary unclean. But when the rule of the Hasmonean house took hold and they conquered them, they searched but found only a single jar of oil, lying with the seal of the high priest. But that jar had enough oil only for a single day. But there was a miracle done with it, and they lit the lamp with it for eight days. The next year they assigned these days and made them festival days for the recitation of Hallel psalms [Psa. 113-118] and for thanksgiving” (b.Shabbat 21b).^c

This story can be certainly deduced from the historical events recorded for us in 1-4 Maccabees, the writings of Josephus, and others. While some people today brand the miracle of the oil remaining lit for eight days as only a “legend,” the fact of the matter remains that Orthodox Jews, most Conservative Jews, and the vast majority of the Messianic Jewish community today, believe with great faith that it actually happened. The challenge for some in the independent Messianic Two-House movement today is the fact that many are unwilling to accept Jewish works like the Mishnah or Talmud as having any valid history (or for that same matter, the writings of the Church Fathers). Many are disrespectful to Jewish custom and tradition, and assert that it has no place in their interpretation and application of God’s Word.

The social *Sitz im Leben* (Ger. situation in life) of the Biblical text plays no part in the hermeneutics of some in the independent Messianic community, which is very sad because a critical part of returning to the faith of the First Century Disciples and Apostles of Yeshua is knowing the history of the times. In order to do this we have to piece together information from the Biblical texts, Jewish history, Greco-Roman history, early Christian writings, and archaeology. We also have to take much on faith, and make some value judgments. For some, custom and tradition are not important in determining how we should live our lives. But for many, especially in the Jewish community, custom and tradition are very important factors. As Messianic Believers who live in the Twenty-First Century, we have to ask ourselves what the Apostles would do regarding *Chanukah* if they lived in our time. **We believe that they would celebrate it.** Others believe that they would not. The debate is not going away until Yeshua returns.

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

Chanukah, Nine-Branched Menorah: Why is there a nine-branched *menorah* used for *Chanukah*, when there was a seven-branched *menorah* used in the Temple?

By and large in Judaism, there is a prohibition on recreating objects used in Tabernacle/Temple worship to be used in the local synagogue. This tradition developed during the time when the Temple was still in operation, and the synagogue was largely a place of assembly for teaching. As *Chanukah* developed as a holiday, the *chanukia* was formulated as an emblem that looked substantially similar to the seven-branched *menorah*, but it was intended to be lit for eight days to memorialize the miracle of the oil, mimicking the *menorah*, but not to be exactly like it. Today, of course, there are many kinds of *chanukias*, which range from traditional ones looking similar to the Temple *menorah*, to others that only allow eight candle spaces for lighting that are anything but traditional.

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Virtual Chanukah

Christianity, Negativity Toward Two-House Teaching: When I share the Two-House teaching with my evangelical Christian family and friends, they do not seem to “get it.” Why can I not get my Christian friends to be reasonable and sit down and examine the Scriptures?

As is frequently the case, getting a Messianic Jew to sit down and examine the prophecies of Israel’s greater restoration is often difficult enough—so getting an evangelical Christian to examine the same prophecies is usually much more difficult. Why this is the case has an entire host of varied reasons, most often relating to how a Christian sees himself related to, *or* not related to, Israel. Christians who obviously believe that “the Church” has replaced Israel in God’s economy will probably not see the relevance of examining prophecies that relate to Israel in the end-times, when they can be conveniently interpreted as something other than what they mean. Likewise, Christians who believe in dispensationalism and that God has two groups of elect think, that Israel is just the ethnic Jewish people, and that as part of “the Church” various Scripture passages that apply to Israel do not apply (or perhaps even relate) to them.

Perhaps the biggest stumbling block as it relates to the Two-House teaching and Christians examining it has nothing to do with the prophecies of Israel’s restoration as much as it has to do with the Messianic, Torah observant lifestyle. This is where the bulk of criticism against the teaching rests from evangelical Christians who we have interacted with as a ministry. Ultimately, the Two-House teaching advocates that all Believers in Yeshua, be they Jewish, or scattered Israel/Ephraim, or truly of the nations, are a part of Israel and are expected to live as Israel in obedience to the Torah. The “Two-House” part relates to how God will restore Israel in the end-times to be culminated at Yeshua’s return, with many of the *specific* details to be left in His hands.

In time, it would be our anticipation that more and more evangelical Christians will awaken to their Hebraic Roots and be convicted about the same things that we have been. This will only occur, though, when non-Jewish Messianic Believers mature and are able to testify to others how the Lord has brought them into a more vibrant and active relationship with Him by adopting a Messianic style of faith. Our positive testimony of becoming more like Him—more than anything else—will cause our Christian brethren to ask us questions of how they too can acquire these blessings. This has been considerably complicated because a great deal of the Two-House sub-movement in the Messianic community employs anti-Christian *and* anti-Jewish rhetoric in their teachings, and as such it can keep people away from wanting to examine Biblical passages like Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 16:14-16; Ezekiel 37:15-28; and Zechariah 10:6-10, among others.

For a further discussion of these issues, consult the editor’s article “**Christian Problems With the Two Houses of Israel.**”

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Christian, Title: Is it true that the early Believers did not call themselves “Christians”?

In Acts 26:28, the Apostle Paul is called before King Agrippa who asks him, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” (NIV). This statement is made after Paul defends himself for believing in the resurrection of the dead and for the decisions that he made as a Jewish Believer who preached in the name of Yeshua. But was Paul going out and making “Christians” of those to whom he preached? Many people believe so, and would say that if you are not a “Christian” then you cannot be a Believer in the Anointed One or *Christos* (Χριστός).

Another place where the term “Christian” is seen in the Bible is in 1 Peter 4:15-16: “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone* suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

This is a very perplexing statement made by this disciple of Yeshua’s, who many consider the preeminent of the original twelve. Peter says “let him glorify God in this respect” (YLT), in reference to Believers being called “Christians.”

The third location that this title appears is in Acts 11:25-26: “And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the [assembly] and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

There is considerable debate among theologians regarding what context “called” means in this passage from Acts. *LS* defines the verb *crēmatizō* (χρηματίζω), as “to take and bear a title or name, to be called or styled so and so.”^a Many today readily assume that “Christian” is a title that was given by God to identify those who have placed their trust in His Son. However, this title, *Christianos* (Χριστιανός), only appears three times in the Bible. *AMG* indicates, “It does not occur in the NT as a name commonly used by Christians [i.e., Believers] themselves...The believers first became known as Christians as an appellation of ridicule.”^b *Vine* adds that “the Christians do not seem to have adopted it for themselves in the times of the Apostles...As applied by Gentiles there was no doubt an implication of scorn...”^c The Greek seems to indicate that the term “Christian” was used by outsiders as a term of insult to the early Believers.

By the beginning of the Second Century, however, the assembly of Believers, predominantly made up of non-Jewish people, had taken this title as one of honor and it subsequently remains to this day. It is possible that the term “Christian” began to be used in great numbers at the time following the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and when anti-Semitism in the Roman Empire rose in great numbers because of the Jewish revolt. It was also at this time when many Believers in Yeshua began being barred from the Jewish Synagogue, and Jewish animosity toward them was enflamed. Many non-Jewish Greek and Roman Believers probably wanted to separate themselves from the Jewish Believers. But it is notable that the term “Christian” was never applied or used by the Apostles. You never see them calling themselves “Christians.”

The inherent problem here with the term “Christian” is that it was not given by God to His people. It was given as an insult by outsiders to the early Believers in Yeshua and consequently it stuck in certain communities. Christian is not a title that God gave to His people, but it is ultimately a man-made title.

What the Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:15-16 concerning the title “Christian” was that if you suffer for the Messiah being called this, do not be ashamed. But “Christian,” which was originally implied as a term of insult, is compared to “a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler.” Peter does not say that we are to readily call ourselves “Christians.” When we as Messianic Believers are asked whether or not we are a “Christian,” we should change the focus of the discussion to the Messiah and the work that He has done in our lives—not whether we are “this” or “that.” This is because a born again Believer is one who has been spiritually

^a *LS*, 894.

^b *Zodhiates, Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1483.

^c *Vine*, 643.

regenerated by the power of God via His Son Yeshua, and continually trusts and believes in Him. **This is what each of us must be known by.** What a person is called is entirely irrelevant if there is no faithful life of obedience to the Lord, and the love of God emanating from one's heart toward others.

(For a further discussion, consult Chapter 3 of the editor's book *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, "What Does it Mean to be 'Messianic?")

posted 17 July, 2006

Christian, Website: Is TNN Online a Christian website?

Many Christians we have encountered would not consider TNN a "Christian" website by the simple fact that we prefer to use "Yeshua" rather than "Jesus," and promote an understanding of our faith's Hebraic origins. However, we do believe in the foundational orthodox principles such as the final authority of Holy Scripture, the Divinity of the Messiah, and salvation by grace through faith, consistent with what most evangelical Christians believe.

We do disagree with common mainstream Christian beliefs as they relate to things such as the Torah, the seventh-day Sabbath, the appointed times, and the dietary commandments of Scripture, believing that these and other things still apply today. But, we *first* try to focus on what we have in common with our Christian brethren and what unites us, recognizing that we do have a shared theological heritage with the Christian Church, every bit as much as we do with the Jewish Synagogue. Yet, we are fully a Messianic website and are best considered as such.

We do our best to be fair and respectful where we disagree with some of the practices and teachings of today's Church. We do not unfairly criticize or condemn Christians mercilessly as is the pattern of some Messianics, and readily speak against it. We encourage fair and tactful dialogue with Christians, constructively working through those issues where we may not currently see eye to eye. We engage with evangelical scholarship, rather than tossing it aside as though it has no value.

updated 14 September, 2006

Christianity, Pagan?: Do you believe everything in Christianity is pagan?

We believe that evangelical Christianity, as it stands today, has some non-Biblical practices which stem from Roman Catholicism that need to be eliminated. But we are not prepared to say that every aspect of Christianity is "pagan," although certain practices that are not found in Scripture are no doubt of questionable origins (i.e., Christmas trees, Easter eggs, etc.). If everything in Christianity is "pagan," does that suddenly make all things in Judaism "kosher"? No.

Those who try to make pagan connections with virtually "all" aspects of Christian doctrine and practice are fooling themselves. Satan is the Father of Lies and is going to mimic God on all plains. We must recognize that while there are non-Biblical elements of Christianity, Satan is also a masterful counterfeiter.

We have serious concerns for those who try to equate "everything" that Christianity has stood for as being "pagan" because in the future such individuals may deny that Yeshua is God, or perhaps even deny His Messiahship because these beliefs are from "the Church." There is a plethora of pagan myths that speak of gods ("mighty ones") coming down from the sky to help humans, and who is to say that the early Believers in Messiah did not just "copy off the pagans"? **We cannot accept this and neither should you.** (See the editor's article "Is the Story of Yeshua Pagan?") Furthermore, what parallels exist between the Hebrew Tanach and Ancient Near Eastern mythology? Such people need to hold *all* of the Scriptures to the same standard if they are searching for connections to paganism.

We recognize that there are areas of Christian doctrine that need serious reevaluation in the light of the understandings that the Holy Spirit is leading many of us into as Messianic

Believers. But to say that “everything” that Christianity has stood for is “pagan” is inaccurate and absurd, and is certainly not something we advocate.

updated 28 July, 2006

Christian Scholars: Why does today’s Messianic movement generally frown on the works of Christian Biblical scholarship?

Today’s Messianic movement does have a significant challenge when it comes to considering the theological contributions made by Christian Biblical scholarship. The reasons for this are varied and complex, but they largely have to relate to perceived Christian animosity toward the Torah. It is very true that many Christian theologians have a negative and pessimistic attitude when it comes to the Torah or Law of Moses and how it is talked about in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament). But this is certainly not all Christian theologians, and theological works and commentaries from the past thirty to fifty years have become increasingly more Jewish-sensitive and cognizant of Jewish theological views of Scripture. The problem with this is not that there are theologians who are writing commentaries with more Jewish opinions in mind; it is that your average pastor and/or layperson is unaware or uninformed of these resources.

Ignorance of knowing about important trends such as the New Perspective in Pauline studies—a renaissance of understanding Paul as a First Century rabbi—even carries over into the Messianic movement. While it is true that New Perspective advocates are not going to teach that today’s Christians should follow the Torah as Messianics do, they will teach that Paul had a much more moderate view on the Torah than is perceived by much of today’s Christianity. This is certainly a step in the right direction! The rise of so-called “Karaites” interpretations of the Torah in the independent Messianic movement comes as a direct result of not recognizing and interpreting Paul as a First Century Pharisee—something that many Christian theologians are beginning to recognize.

One of the things that Messianics today are often not aware of is the fact that Jewish Biblical scholarship—which often is consulted by Messianic teachers—is **largely polarized between the extreme-Right and extreme-Left**. If one reads the Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Chumash*, and then compares it to the *Jewish Study Bible*, he or she will see two largely different points of view on an issue. One will advocate that Moses wrote every single letter of the Torah, and then the other will tell you that Moses may not have existed. One will advocate that the Israelites’ conquest of Canaan included more than is mentioned in the Biblical text, and the other will say that it never took place. Consequently, many Messianics today will only examine Orthodox and/or Chassidic Jewish opinions on certain subjects that often disregard ancient history and criticism from skeptics.

Conservative, evangelical Christian scholars often compose the middle position between the Right and the Left on these issues. While affirming the historicity of a key event like the Exodus, evangelicals are willing to place the Exodus in the context of Ancient Egypt. Evangelicals are willing to engage with liberal criticism, and place a much higher value on historical and linguistic studies of the Scriptures than most in the Orthodox Jewish community. Interestingly enough, there are more Christian commentaries on the books of the Torah than there are Jewish commentaries. Casting these aside as though they have no value is ill-advised in a movement that will have to increasingly deal with more criticism against the Scriptures—particularly the Torah or Pentateuch because of the “modern age” in which we live. Furthermore, these same commentaries will point out Messianic symbolism that is fulfilled in the life of Yeshua, whereas most Jewish commentaries—if not ignoring them—will discredit the life of Yeshua.

Our ongoing challenge as the Messianic community and our own Biblical scholarship relates to how we can incorporate the best of Jewish and Christian scholarship and make it our own. We have a shared theological heritage with both the Synagogue *and* the Church. We cannot

disregard either one, but have to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of both. Doing this properly will admittedly take time.

posted 08 January, 2007

Christmas: Do you celebrate it?

Christmas is, without question, a very sensitive subject for many Believers—and we would emphasize understanding between those who do not celebrate it, and those who celebrate it in ignorance. We cannot find in Scripture where God mandates that we observe a holiday with decorated trees, mistletoe, holly, Santa Claus, and presents. On the contrary, the Prophet Jeremiah tells us that we are to not be as the heathen who adorn trees:

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens although the nations are terrified by them; for the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. They decorate *it* with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter” (Jeremiah 10:2-4).

This same concept is reemphasized for us in Deuteronomy 16:21: “You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the LORD your God, which you shall make for yourself.”

We do not celebrate Christmas, nor do we endorse a “substitute” for it, either. We do not believe that the celebration of Christmas was God’s original intention. Christmas today is highly commercialized and is often more about self-indulgence than anything else. Of course, we are not against “giving gifts,” but the purpose of Christmas today for many people, including Believers, is about *self* rather than about seeing the Messiah lifted up.

We do not celebrate Christmas. But, we are not against people remembering the birth of Yeshua, either, although it probably did not occur during the Winter. The birth of Messiah Yeshua is a part of the Bible that is to be remembered and taught upon, something appropriate for *any* time of year. So with this in mind, it is important to remember that at “Christmas time,” people are relatively free to talk about Yeshua and the gospel, and many are presented to Him who would normally not be during the rest of the year. Obviously, in spite of the questionable origins of December 25, God is going to work through those who sincerely believe that they are honoring Him.

Without question, this issue will continue to baffle many Messianic Believers in years to come, as we learn to properly deal with those who celebrate Christmas in ignorance, not knowing where it comes from. As a faith community we will need to change all the “Christmas is pagan!” rhetoric to something less sensationalistic, yet still be able to properly communicate that we do not celebrate it. We also must emphasize understanding and fairness for others in this area. Christmas as it is known today is not a Biblically mandated holiday, and on this basis we do not celebrate it. But there is also the Biblical reality of the Child born at Bethlehem who is our Savior, so with this issue, let us truly not “throw out the Baby.”

Consult the article “[The Christmas Challenge](#),” for a further discussion of this issue.

updated 09 December, 2009

Christmas, Dinner: Should I attend Christmas dinner with my extended family?

Many of today’s Messianic Believers, who once celebrated Christmas, still have to interact with their Christian family during the Winter holiday season. The Spring holiday season is admittedly much easier, because Easter does not have the same kind of commercialism associated with it as Christmas, and many churches today hold some kind of Passover *sedar* meal. It is much easier to tell Christian family, who are familiar with the Passover *sedar* to some degree, that you

remember Yeshua's resurrection in conjunction with your Messianic congregation's Passover remembrance.

How you answer your family's request as to what Messianics do to remember Yeshua's birth is not as easy, not only because there is no agreement in today's Messianic community as to what is to be done, but even more so because of the significant commercialism during this time of year. Christmas parties are held throughout the month of December, and traditionally extended family does get together for some kind of Christmas dinner. It is easy for Messianics who do not live close to extended Christian family to say that it will be difficult to attend Christmas dinner, but this is not everyone.

Too frequently, our ministry has heard stories of Messianics who will write mean-spirited letters to Christian family, telling them not to send them any Christmas presents or invite them to Christmas dinner as they "are not pagans anymore." This implies to extended family, who are God-fearing Christians who love Jesus, that they really do not know the Lord. The damage that this has done, and the bad reputation this has given our faith community, is **immense**. A person can always choose his or her friends, but a person can never choose his or her family. When you face the most difficult seasons in your life such as when a member of your immediate family dies, or when you are facing severe financial problems, your extended family will often be there to help, whereas your friends may not. You have the responsibility to always have good relations with your extended family, beyond the Fifth Commandment's requirement to honor father and mother (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

So when the month of December comes, should you turn down an invitation to Christmas dinner? *Only you can decide this for yourself*. Some will answer "No!" But some will attend. They will recognize that this might be the only time of year to see all of their extended family, especially those who are aging and who may not live long. Many of us just recognize Christmas dinner as yet another meal, and will keep our comments regarding "Christmas" to "Did you have a good holiday?" **Some of us desire good relations with our extended family**. And, in demonstrating a degree of good will to them, we actually find it appropriate to invite them into our homes during one of the nights of *Chanukah*—even if it might be under the "guise" that we will be eating some rather tasty fried foods!

added 09 December, 2009

Church, missing after Revelation 4:1: As post-tribulationists, how do you respond to the fact that the word "church" does not appear after Revelation 4:1? This means that the Church is missing and has been raptured to Heaven.

In the opening chapters of Revelation (chs. 1-3), the Apostle John is given specific instruction by Yeshua the Messiah that he is to deliver to the seven assemblies of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea). After John relays Yeshua's messages to these congregations, John is told by the Lord, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things" (Revelation 4:1b). Notice what John says as this command is given to him: "After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me" (Revelation 4:1a). This is a directive that is given only to the Apostle John, as he is called to step into the Heavenly realm, and be shown a vision of the future that, as far as Yeshua and those assembled are concerned, has already taken place. John is asked to step forward in time and be shown things that he does not know about.

This is not a command that is given to "the Church." As Messianics are keen to emphasize, the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) should be properly translated as either "assembly" or "congregation" in our English Bibles, as opposed to the anachronistic term "church." Likewise, *ekklēsia* was used in the Greek Septuagint to render the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל), referring to

the congregation or assembly of Israel, and the Apostolic writers most often use *ekklēsia* with this understanding in mind.

In Johannine literature (John, 1-3 John, Revelation) *ekklēsia* is never used to refer to the **Body of Messiah at large, but instead the localized assembly**. Douglas J. Moo poignantly remarks in *Three Views on the Rapture*, “John, himself, never uses ἐκκλησία other than as a designation of a local body of believers. Moreover, it is important to note that John never in chapters 4-19 calls any group in *heaven* the church.”^a The reason that *ekklēsia* does not appear after Revelation 4:1 is because the letters Yeshua has John write to the seven, localized assemblies of Asia Minor are complete. It is not because “the Church” has been raptured to Heaven. In fact, at the end of Revelation, we are told that the apocalyptic revealing of Yeshua to John is for the *ekklēsia*, indeed implying that the Body of Messiah will be on Earth when these events take place:

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16, ESV).

It is notable that there is an urban myth that frequently circulates among Messianic post-tribulationists relating to Revelation 4:1. It often goes along the lines of, “The Church is mentioned after Revelation 4:1—and it is the whore of Babylon!” Unfortunately for those who adhere to this line of reasoning, it is not based in a sound exegesis of the text, neither in a sound examination of what end-time Babylon actually is. While there are religious elements of the end-time Babylonian system, there are also political and economic elements. To simply say that that end-time Babylon is “the Church,” is to misidentify end-time Babylon, which is the multifaceted, anti-God world system.

posted 12 January, 2006

^a Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Paul D. Feinberg, Douglas J. Moo, Richard R. Reiter, *Three Views on the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 201.

Church, word of pagan origin: I have heard that the English word “church” is of pagan origins. Is there any substantiation to support this?

There is debate over the origins of the English word church, but before we can address this, we need to have a proper understanding of the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), which in our Bibles is commonly rendered as “church.” Is “church” an appropriate translation of this word?

LS defines *ekklēsia* as “an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned, the legislative assembly” and “in N.T. the Church, either the body, or the place.”^a In the Apostolic Scriptures, *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and thus by extension, is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. TDNT remarks that “Since the NT uses a single term, translations should also try to do so, but this raises the question whether ‘church’ or ‘congregation’ is always suitable, especially in view of the OT use for Israel and the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic... ‘Assembly,’ then, is perhaps the best single term, particularly as it has both a congregate and an abstract sense, i.e., for the assembling as well as the assembly.”^b This Christian commentary says that “assembly” would be the best, consistent translation for the word *ekklēsia*.

The ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanach, the Septuagint (LXX), produced approximately 300 years before Yeshua the Messiah, frequently translates the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל), or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. TWOT tells us that “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX.”^c When the Apostolic writers used the Greek word *ekklēsia*, often rendered as “church” in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate assembly or group of people away from Israel. Rather, they considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel (albeit an Israel internally diverse, incorporating many more from the nations alongside of the Jewish people). It is not surprising by any means that one of the definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include “Israel.” Thayer states that “in the Sept. often equiv. to קָהָל, the assembly of the Israelites.”^d It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as “church,” whereas it would be best rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation.” Two Christian translations that render *ekklēsia* as “assembly” include Young’s Literal Translation and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green. The Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern often uses phraseology like “Messianic community.”

As it relates to whether or not the English word “church” is of pagan origins, there are a number of differing opinions. ISBE indicates that it comes from “Gk. *kuriakós*—‘belonging to the Lord’; NT *ekklēsia*—‘gathering’; Lat. *ecclesia*.”^e NIDB further remarks on how, “The English word derives from the Greek *kuriakos* (belonging to the Lord), but it stands for another Greek word *ekklēsia* (whence ‘ecclesiastical’), denoting an assembly.”^f *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* has a slightly different view of the origins of the English word “church,” remarking, “The derivation of the word is generally said to be from the Greek *kuriakon*, ‘belonging to the Lord’. But the derivation has been too hastily assumed. It is probably connected with kirk, the Latin *circus*, *circulus*, the Greek *kuklos*, (κύκλος), because the congregations were gathered in circles.”^g

Regardless of if you believe that the English word “church” comes from the Greek *kuriakos*, meaning something that belongs to the Lord, or the Latin *circus* via *circulus*, because the early congregations gathered in circles, there is no substantial proof that it is from a word of pagan religious origins.

There are a few Messianics you may encounter, in their criticism of our Christian brothers and sisters who are not Torah observant, who say that they are part of “the kirk” or “the kirch” and

^a LS, 239.

^b K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in TDNT, 397.

^c Jack P. Lewis, “*qāhāl*,” TWOT, 2:790.

^d Thayer, 196.

^e G.W. Bromiley, “Church,” in ISBE, 1:693.

^f Bromiley, “Church,” in NIDB, 218.

^g E-Sword 8.0.8: *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*. MS Windows gx. Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation,

that the English word “church” is of pagan origins. (*Die Kirche*, pronounced *keer-kay*, is simply the German word for “the church.”) Their problem, aside from this being a non-substantiated belief, is that they are trying to insult others and incite them, rather than reason with them from the Word of God about who the true assembly is.

The true assembly or *qahal/ekklēsia* is the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12). While we believe that *ekklēsia* is properly rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation” in English (“assembly” is probably slightly better than “congregation”), saying that the word “church” is of pagan origins is a poor excuse in light of a bigger problem. The bigger problem is getting people to theologically see that there is no separate assembly of elect called “the Church,” and that there is only one *ekklēsia*, the assembly of Israel. This has to be proven from more than just vocabulary, but specifically from the calling and mission the Lord has placed upon His people—a separate “Church” *or* not.

updated 06 July, 2006

Church Fathers: What is your opinion of the writings of the “Church Fathers”?

The writings of early Christianity from the late First to Fourth Centuries C.E., commonly termed the writings of the “Church Fathers,” is a body of religious literature not unlike the Jewish writings of the same period. These writings demonstrate the various theological opinions and controversies that existed in early Christianity, the persecution that the Believers experienced at the hands of the Roman Empire, and the overall challenges that they faced.

There are some in the Messianic community who readily criticize the writings of the “Church Fathers,” as it was during this period that the *ekklēsia* largely divorced itself from its Hebraic Roots. But in total fairness, it is necessary to consult these writings to understand the development of the early Church, and to understand that not all of the Church Fathers were “bad.” Many of the “Church Fathers” had good, Spirit-inspired things to say and were sincere Believers. Many of them have spiritual insight on Biblical matters just as do many of the Rabbis of Judaism. With all things, we are called to use wisdom and discernment and remember the circumstances in which these people lived. We cannot afford to over-simplify things.

updated 10 July, 2006

“Churchy,” Why is your website: Why is your Messianic website “churchy”?

(This is a common question asked by critics of our approach to Messianic ministry, particularly from those who would prefer us to “beat” on Christians and the Christian Church, rather than show them grace and mercy.)

When objectively reading the information and articles on the TNN Online website, how could you come to the conclusion that TNN Online is a “churchy” website? We are actually quite Messianic, meaning that we are very pro-Torah and pro-Jewish. We encourage all Believers to live a Torah obedient lifestyle like Yeshua and His Apostles, we encourage regular study of the Torah, and we advocate that all Believers in Yeshua are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. These, and other beliefs we hold to, run contrary to a great deal of today’s evangelical Christian theology.

It is true that some believe that TNN Online is a “churchy” website because we try to be fair to those in mainstream Christianity, as opposed to many other “independent” Messianic websites. We do not unfairly criticize Christians, insulting and harassing them, as is the pattern of others. We focus on areas of common agreement with our Christian brethren. We do our best to treat Christians with love and respect, encouraging reasoned dialogue and discussion from the Scriptures so that we can all learn something and bring glory to the Lord. We treat Christians as fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, unless *they say otherwise*.

Our website is not “churchy,” but we are fair to the Church, which is something that sadly is not evident among enough Messianics today. We do recognize that the Messianic community

does have a Christian spiritual and theological heritage, just as it has a Jewish spiritual and theological heritage.

updated 14 September, 2006

Circumcision: Do you believe that males should be circumcised?

We are aware that the issue of circumcision is extremely controversial in the Messianic world, whereas most of Christianity has decided to largely ignore circumcision as an “Old Testament rite” entirely unimportant for Believers today.

Circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:11). The Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all circumcised. Yeshua the Messiah was circumcised (Luke 2:21). The Apostle Paul was circumcised (Philippians 3:5). If we intend to follow the example of these men, then men should not look down on the practice of circumcision, and they should be encouraged to have this sign as a matter of simple obedience. Yet, being circumcised as a male adult must always be tempered with knowing that Abraham was considered righteous while uncircumcised (Romans 4:9-10; cf. Genesis 15:6), later being circumcised (at the age of ninety-nine) as he advanced in faith (Romans 4:11; cf. Genesis 17:1, 10-11).

We do not consider circumcision to be a salvation issue at all, as the power of the gospel is blind in saving males who are either circumcised or uncircumcised (Colossians 3:11). We do, however, encourage circumcision for the *appropriate* reasons (concurrent with the example of Abraham). The reason circumcision was such a controversial issue in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) is that the non-Jewish males coming to faith were not circumcised as infants as the Scriptures prescribe. Had they been circumcised as infants, even as some kind of ancient medical procedure, then the controversy may not have really arisen. The foolish Galatians believed that circumcision of the flesh would assure them a place among the righteous, to which the Apostle Paul said, “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Messiah will be of no benefit to you” (Galatians 5:2; cf. Acts 15:1). To these people he said that if you think circumcision will save you, do not even bother receiving it. (Note that circumcision was required of proselytes to Judaism, and there is good cause for us to believe that the phrase “receive circumcision” in Galatians is more concerned with being “converted to Judaism.”)

Circumcision has become a common medical practice for non-Jews in North America and in other parts of the world since the late 1800s. We do not believe this is by coincidence. As the Father is in the process of restoring all of Israel, it is probably not by happenstance that many non-Jewish males in the United States and elsewhere have been circumcised as a simple medical practice not looked at as strange or taboo. (Please note that this is not to exclude those elsewhere who are not circumcised; we are only making an observation). Yet, in recent days in Western Europe, legislation has been proposed that would make infant circumcision illegal under the guise of it being “genital mutilation.” Sadly, many Christians are in support of making infant circumcision illegal.

We believe that Messianic families—either Jewish or non-Jewish—should be encouraged to circumcise their infant males. Although the practice of circumcision is not a salvation issue, it does have medical and health benefits, and it can be employed as a simple memorial of the Abrahamic Covenant. Circumcision for *all* Believers—male *and* female—should be of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:6; 30:6; Romans 2:29) more than anything else, but this is in no way nullifies the benefits of a male being circumcised in the flesh. Being circumcised as an adult male should be an issue of maturity, as Believers are called to “continue” (Grk. *menō*, μένω) in the faith (1 Corinthians 7:20). It may not be necessary to be physically circumcised in order to be saved, but going through the procedure as a simple act of obedience (not as some kind of proselyte procedure) should not be discouraged. This kind of obedience would be no different than a urologist advising a man that circumcision would be useful for his penile health.

The issue of circumcision is especially touchy during the Passover season, as the Torah clearly specifies that “no uncircumcised person may eat of it” (Exodus 12:48). Within the Messianic community, there are some groups that do not let uncircumcised males attend their Passover *sedars*. Is this right or is it wrong? We do need to keep in mind the fact that a Messianic Passover *sedar* conducted today is often just a memorial of the Passover, and there are many elements that are not observed because there is no Temple to go to where the sacrificial lamb can be offered. Because we are in the Diaspora, there are things that the Torah originally specified that cannot be followed. And in our Passover memorials, we have to not only weigh in the difference of venue, but also the reality of the post-resurrection era in which we live.

We do not believe that it is necessary for males to be circumcised to attend a Messianic Passover memorial. However, it should be encouraged that participation of individuals within the order of service or events at a Messianic *sedar* could be limited to only those males who are physically circumcised. (And, by extension, it would be appropriate to require any males within the leadership structure of a Messianic congregation to be physically circumcised.)^a

updated 23 February, 2010

^a For a further discussion of this issue, consult the article “Is Circumcision for Everyone?” by J.K. McKee.

Colossians 2:14: How can you say that the Law of Moses is still to be followed by Christians today, when it is quite clear that the Law was nailed to the cross of Christ?

This entry has been reproduced from the forthcoming paperback edition of *The New Testament Validates Torah* (due sometime 2011)

Pastor: Colossians 2:14: Christ took the decrees out of the way on the cross.

“[H]aving canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Colossians 2:14 is the common verse that is quoted by many Christians to assert that “the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ.” But is this truly what is being said in Colossians 2:14? Did the Torah truly get nailed to the cross, with its high and holy standard of conduct nullified for the post-resurrection era? Could the idea that “the Law was nailed to the cross,” be little more than a sound bite that fails to take into consideration the actual issues present in the surrounding context?

Many of today’s Messianic Believers struggle with the Epistle to the Colossians, and the wider issues that this letter originally communicated to a group of Messiah followers in this small First Century city in Asia Minor. One of the main thrusts of Paul writing to the Colossians was to get their attention **exclusively focused upon Yeshua the Messiah**, who was not only the Father’s Agent in creating the universe before time began—but is the One in whom the universe was made, and is the One in whom and for whom the cosmos are held together (Colossians 1:15-20). Yeshua the Messiah is the One in whom “all the fullness of [the] Deity^a dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9), a definite statement of Yeshua being God. Contrary to this, a false teaching and philosophy had been circulating in Colossae (Colossians 2:8), which was not only discounting the supremacy of Yeshua as the Divine One, but was appealing to various astral powers and spirits (Colossians 2:15), treating Yeshua as just another intermediary force. The false teaching not only included errant actions like angel worship, self-abasement, intense fasting, and asceticism—but had incorporated a misuse of Torah practices like Sabbath observance or the appointed times—all in an effort to appease various spiritual powers (Colossians 2:16-23).^b

The only way that Paul can get the Colossians’ attention re-focused, onto Yeshua the Messiah, is to understandably explain to them how significant the salvation work He has accomplished actually is! Paul explains,

“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, **having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross**” (Colossians 2:13-14).

For the Colossians, *tē akrobustia tēs sarkos humōn* (τῆ ἀκροβυστία τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν), paraphrased by the CJB as “your ‘foreskin,’ your old nature” (Colossians 2:13), represented their pre-salvation state. The same power, that resurrected Messiah Yeshua, has now forgiven them and has given them all circumcised hearts and minds. The Colossians have been brought into a realm of life and restored communion with God.

Making the Colossian Believers alive—bringing them to redemption via the work of His Son—God has done something very important on their behalf. As the ESV renders Colossians 2:14, He “cancel[ed] the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” What is this “certificate of debt,” and what are the “decrees against us, which were hostile to us” (NASU)? All readers of Paul’s letter can agree that Colossians 2:14 represents a damning indictment against people that needed to be dealt with via the sacrifice of

^a Grk. *to plērōma tēs Theotētos* (τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος); with *the* Deity including the definite article.

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

Yeshua on the cross. Is this the Torah or the Law of Moses? The Greek *nomos* (νομός) or “law” is noticeably absent from this verse. The clause of interest is: *to kath' hēmōn cheirographon tois dogmasin* (τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν). This is literally rendered as “**the handwriting in the ordinances [or, dogmas]^c that is against us**” (YLT).

There are three main views of what “the certificate of debt” represents, which one is likely to encounter in reviewing the Epistle to the Colossians:

1. The debt or penalties incurred from human sin toward God, condemning people without a permanent sacrifice
2. Some kind of a book or record in Heaven that kept a roll of condemned people
3. The Law of Moses, which if not kept perfectly, condemns all people who break it

Traditional views of Colossians 2:14 dating back to the Protestant Reformation often associated the certificate of debt as either the record of human sin, or the guilt of human sin incurred before God.^d Another common view of Colossians 2:14, similar to this, sees this certificate of debt as the pronouncement of condemnation that hung over Yeshua as He was dying on the cross (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). Both would fit within the scope of what is seen in the lexical definition of *cheirographon* (χειρόγραφον): “**a hand-written document, specif. a certificate of indebtedness, account, record of debts**” (BDAG).^e

One suggestion among some interpreters is that the “certificate of debt” is somehow similar to a Jewish apocalyptic view in which a book recording all of one’s evil deeds was to be remitted. The existence of this book is derived principally from passages seen in the Tanach. Moses appeals to God after the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, “But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” and is told by the LORD, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book” (Exodus 32:32, 33). The Psalmist indicates how sinners should “be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous” (Psalm 69:28). And Daniel prophesies how in the end, “everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued” (Daniel 12:1). Furthermore in the Book of Revelation, Yeshua promises those in Sardis, “He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life” (Revelation 3:5). So, the “certificate of debt” includes a record of human sin that has now been erased or blotted out (Grk. *exaleiphō*, ἐξαλείφω)^f by the sacrifice of Yeshua at Golgotha (Calvary).

The most common view of the “certificate of debt” that one will find today among lay readers of Colossians is that it represents the Law of Moses nailed to the cross of Yeshua. It proposes that the Torah as *cheirographon* was a note of indebtedness that required cancellation. Sometimes, scholars who argue for this view provide external evidence from Jewish literature to support this proposal. *Testament of Job* 11:9-12 from the Pseudepigrapha is one reference to be considered:

“Sometimes they would succeed in business and give to the poor. But at other times, they would be robbed. And they would come and entreat me saying, ‘We beg you, be patient with us. Let us find how we might be able to repay you.’ Without delay, I would bring before them the note and *read it* granting cancellation *as the crowning feature* and saying, ‘Since I trusted you for the benefit of the poor, *I will take nothing back from you.*’ Nor would I take anything from my debtor.”^g

^c This is where the definition of *dogma* (δόγμα) as “a public decree, ordinance” (LS, 207) prescribing a death penalty, is useful to keep in mind.

^d For one example, John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 747 says: “This was not properly our sins themselves (they were the debt), but their guilt and cry before God.”

^e BDAG, 1083.

^f In a classical context, the verb *exaleiphō* means “to wipe out, obliterate,” or “metaph., like Lat. *delere*, to wipe out, destroy utterly” (LS, 269).

^g R.P. Spittler, trans., “Testament of Job,” in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 844.

Today's Messianic Believers are of the conviction that God's Torah is still relevant Instruction for His people. While many contemporary Christians have concluded that Colossians 2:14 relates to the Law of Moses being nailed to the cross, many are not, in fact, convinced that the Law in its totality was nailed to the cross. The following are some important opinions to consider, with the last two theologians notably believing that the Torah is not to be followed in the post-resurrection era:

- Donald Guthrie: "Paul dwells on God's method of forgiveness. He uses the metaphor of a *bond*...a 'statement of indebtedness' which had to be signed by the debtor as an acknowledgment of his debt. The debt was impossible to pay. Moreover it was backed by *legal demands*, since every trespass is a violation of the law of God...Paul imagines God taking the statement of debts and nailing it to the cross of Christ."^h
- James D.G. Dunn: "The metaphor is probably adapted to the earlier Jewish idea of a heavenly book of the living...as developed in apocalyptic circles into that of books whereas deeds of good and evil were recorded with a view to the final judgment...This is most obviously the background of thought here, with *καθ' ἡμῶν* ('against us') confirming that the document in question was one of condemnation, that is, presumably the record of their 'transgressions'...[W]e should note that it is not the law which is thought of as thus destroyed, but rather its particular condemnation (*χειρόγραφον*) of transgressions, absorbed in the sacrificial death of the Christ (cf. Rom. 8:3)."ⁱ
- Douglas J. Moo: "In causing him to be nailed to the cross, God (the subject of the verb) has provided for the full cancellation of the debt of obedience that we had incurred. Christ took upon himself the penalty that we were under because of our disobedience, and his death fully satisfied God's necessary demand for due punishment of that disobedience."^j
- Ben Witherington III: "V. 14 says Christ's death wiped out the IOU (a record of debts owed written by the hand of the debtor; cf. Phlm 19; *Testament of Job* 11.11) which stood against believers. While *cheirograph* is used of a receipt in Tob[it] 5.3 and 9.5, it is not found elsewhere in the NT. Here it seems to be a reference to the heavenly book of deeds in which a record of one's wrongdoings is kept. In fact in *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 3.6-9; 7.1-8 the same word is used for that book (cf. *Apocalypse of Paul* 17; Rev. 5.1-5; 20.12)."^k

The view of Andrew T. Lincoln also cannot go without mentioning. In his estimation, "to argue that what is in view is not the law per se but only the law in its condemnatory function is to have read too fine a distinction into the verse." This he has to say to recognize that there have been many throughout Christian history considering Colossians 2:14 to only speak of condemnation upon sinners, a debt that has been incurred. Perhaps this was caused by human disobedience to the Torah, but the Torah itself as intended by God was not the cause (i.e., Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:33; 8:1; et. al.). In contrast to this, Lincoln concludes, "The document itself is said to be opposed to humanity and, when one brings into play the ascetic regulations mentioned later, the clear implication is that it is condemnatory of humans because of their body of flesh."^l But why would the Torah be opposed to people if God gave it for the benefit of people? It is only opposed to people when they violate it—not when they follow it! So, Lincoln is correct when claiming that the Torah condemns people because of their uncircumcised body of flesh

^h Donald Guthrie, "Colossians," in *NBCR*, 1147.

ⁱ James D.G. Dunn, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp 164, 165, 166.

^j Douglas J. Moo, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp 211-212.

^k Witherington, *Philemon-Colossians-Ephesians*, 158.

^l Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Letter to the Colossians," in *NIB*, 11:625.

(Colossians 2:11), or their sin nature, but is incorrect when claiming that the Torah as a whole was just given to condemn. And, the promise of the New Covenant is God writing the Torah onto the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:16-36) needs to be seriously considered here.

Moo, interestingly enough, points out that the view of “certificate of debt” being the Torah in totality, has some problems. He says “that the word [*cheirographon*] may refer to the Mosaic law, viewed by Paul as a record of human obligation that has not been met...fits a bit awkwardly with the basic sense of the word, since, of course, an IOU is written not by the one to whom the obligation is due (God, the author of the law), but by the one who is in debt (human beings).”^m The Lord did not give His people the Torah as a record of what they had done, but rather what they should do to live properly: “All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 28:2). Severe violation of His Instruction incurred penalties, and so those penalties—which were backed up by certain stipulations that required capital punishment—needed to be dealt with.

What does the work of Yeshua as depicted in Colossians 2:14, with *something* nailed to the cross, describe for us? Is it the Torah of Moses in its entirety? Or, is it the condemnation upon sinners that He has taken away for us, receiving upon Himself the death that is required of us all? Please consider how of all animal sacrifices specified in the Torah, there is no sacrifice available for intentional sins. Roger Bullard accurately summarizes how, “By forgiving our sins...God erased the record of those sins. What happened on the cross...abolished it and freed us from the grasp of the angelic beings.”^m **The record of sin has been abolished! For this we should all rise in great praise!** With the record of sin nailed to Yeshua’s cross and the penalties now remitted, all people have to do is acknowledge this, confessing their sins, and asking the Lord for forgiveness and reconciliation. The Torah has not been abolished, but the capital penalties that stand over those who break it (making unredeemed sinners “under the Law”) have now been paid in full. In nailing the Torah’s condemnation to the cross of Yeshua, we can each realize the full thrust of Isaiah 43:25: “I [the Lord], even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

Could earlier generations of Christians indeed be right in concluding that the condemnation and/or record of sin is the whole issue of what was nailed to the cross in Colossians 2:14?

It is perfectly legitimate to recognize how the “certificate of debt,” that has been paid by Yeshua’s sacrifice, is the **condemnation and record of human sin**. The power of this condemnation was found in various “decrees against us,” the stated death penalties for high crimes as specified in the Torah. It is not at all incorrect to recognize that *by His death and shed blood*, our relationship to the Torah has certainly been changed, but that does not mean that the Torah is to be thrown by the wayside and never studied or meditated upon (Psalm 119:15, 27). The Torah remains relevant instruction that is to be upheld and taught as a standard of God’s righteousness and holiness (Romans 3:31), but the problem of a permanent sacrifice for sin has now been taken care of (Hebrews 10:11-12).

(It is noteworthy that many evangelical Protestant churches today hold services on Good Friday where people can write their sins or transgressions on small pieces of paper, and then actually nail them to a cross in the sanctuary, representative of how the record of human sin has been taken care of by Jesus’ sacrifice. This concurs with Colossians 2:14 representing the condemnation upon human sin.)

With this in mind, though, I have still encountered people in today’s Messianic movement who would argue for a kind of theonomy.^o They think that the death penalty decreed upon

^m Moo, *Colossians-Philemon*, pp 209-210.

ⁿ Roger Bullard, “The Letter of Paul to the Colossians,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2111.

^o D. Thomas Lancaster, *Restoration: Returning the Torah of God to the Disciples of Jesus* (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2005), 76 indicates, “the strict measures of Torah justice—stoning and the like—are not applicable unless one is in the land of Israel under the authority of a duly ordained Torah court of law like the Sanhedrin.” While he

sinner for various crimes in the Torah should still be enacted—even with Yeshua’s sacrifice permanently atoning for the human sin problem. This would mean, at least in principle, that if one were to discover adulterers or homosexuals in the assembly, they should be tried and executed. This does make many, most especially myself, **feel very uncomfortable**. In 1 Corinthians 5, rather than demanding that the sexually immoral be executed for their sins, the Apostle Paul rules that they be excommunicated from the assembly. This is not because there was no proper Jewish court for them to be condemned by, but as he states it, their sin will get the better of them and they will die as a consequence if they fail to repent (1 Corinthians 5:5).^p Paul knew the gravity of the cross, and would never promote stoning people as a method of handling sins after the resurrection—since he himself was responsible for errantly stoning or overseeing the deaths of many Jewish Believers (Acts 7:58; Galatians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:9) prior to encountering the Lord on the Damascus Road!

History is replete with post-crucifixion examples of where various societies and religious movements have tried to, albeit unsuccessfully, enact capital punishment for every high crime specified in the Torah. There is perhaps no worse example of this than the complicated record of the English Reformation, where Catholic and Protestant monarchs alike would try those of the other side as heretics, believing them to be in violation of God’s Law, and burning many at the stake. About the only significant exception for executing a criminal would be for murder, the death penalty for murderers being a Creation ordinance (cf. Genesis 9:6). **And even that has to be done very, very carefully.**^q

Even with the Torah’s death penalty upon sinners now remitted via the sacrifice of Yeshua, **this does not at all mean that it is unimportant to know those sins in the Torah that prescribe the death penalty**. While all of our collective human sin is what nailed the Lord to the cross, it is those very specific sins that carry capital punishment which ultimately condemned Him. When we review the weekly Torah portions and examine those regulations, which if violated caused ancient persons to be stoned or hanged until dead, we should stop for a moment and recognize that the Messiah came so that those penalties would not need to be enacted any more (cf. Romans 10:4, Grk.). *They have all been wiped away by His suffering for us*. With final redemption now available, we need to remember how “the kindness of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4). If we should ever suffer for Him, it should only come as we serve Him and are possibly persecuted—not that we have to suffer as He did to attain eternal life.^r

posted 12 May, 2011

admits that a Sanhedrin court in Israel would be able to stone someone, he thankfully says, “As much as we might sometimes like to stone someone, the Torah forbids us from vigilante justice of that sort,” recognizing how only authorized people could do this. But in holding to this opinion, he does overlook the great significance of Yeshua’s sacrifice for the covering of such sin and how these penalties have now largely been remitted. (Furthermore, even with the possibility of a Sanhedrin court reestablished in Israel sometime in the future, it seems unlikely that the Israeli government would give up control of the criminal justice system.)

Perhaps the only exception, this side of Yeshua’s resurrection, would be the death penalty for murder as a Creation ordinance (cf. Genesis 9:5-6)—and even this should be used quite *infrequently*.

^p “I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Yeshua” (1 Corinthians 5:5).

^q For a further discussion, consult Walter C. Kaiser’s remarks in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, pp 155-156.

^r For a further discussion of these and the relevant surrounding passages, consult the author’s article “The Message of Colossians and Philemon” and his commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*.

Communion: Do you think that Messianic congregations should practice communion with bread and wine on a regular basis? I have noticed that some do, and some do not.

When Paul writes the Corinthians, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26), he delivers this instruction in the context of speaking to them about the yearly Passover meal (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:8-9). Many over the centuries, though, having been separated from the Hebraic Roots of our faith, have interpreted this as relating to the sacrament of communion. Certainly, while Christian communion has been a spiritually beneficial practice for many to remember the Last Supper, it is often removed from its First Century Jewish context, or its origins in the Passover. What we are to remember is the point in the *sedar* meal where Yeshua lifted up the *afikoman* and said: “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19; cf. Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22).

It is our opinion that the Lord’s Supper, our remembering of when He said “This is My body,” should be observed once a year during Passover at a very solemn point in the *sedar* meal. However, with this said we should understand why many Christians observe it more frequently. Remembering Yeshua’s Last Supper is by no means something that is wrong or “evil.” But, most Christians’ understanding of this is separated from the Last Supper being a Passover meal, and that is why communion is often observed with leavened bread in many churches (even though various Christian traditions do use some kind of leavenless bread).

Some Messianic congregations observe a form of “communion” with *matzah* or unleavened bread. This would be more accurate than what many churches do, but it is still a definite holdover from Christian observance. It is not “wrong” to partake of a communion when it is offered, especially if you are visiting a church with a friend or relative. Yet, proper *halachah* for the Messianic community should more closely try to keep it in line with the season of *Pesach*. If Messianic congregations serve a communion with leavened bread, typically *challah*, and wine, it can only be taken as *kiddush* and not a true remembrance of Yeshua’s Last Sedar where *matzah* was used. If you are in an environment that observes this kind of an observance weekly, then partake of it, but if not and you are leading a home fellowship or study group, then we recommend you keep it consigned to Passover.

posted 10 July, 2006

Commonwealth of Israel: In examining some Messianic Jewish teaching materials, they explained to me that the Commonwealth of Israel is made up of both the Jewish people and the Church, sort of like the British Commonwealth. They have actually said that as a non-Jewish Believer, I am really not a part of Israel, only the Commonwealth. Does this viewpoint have any legitimacy?

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

“[R]emember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

In Ephesians 2:12 Paul uses ancient political terms to describe what his largely non-Jewish audience had been separated from. Prior to their faith in the Messiah, they were removed from *tēs politeias tou Israēl* (τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ). The key term here is *politeia* (πολιτεία), “**the right to be a member of a sociopolitical entity, citizenship**” (BDAG).^a Yet, now having access to this citizenship, they have to start considering another part of *politeia*: “**behavior in accordance with standards expected of a respectable citizen, way of life, conduct**” (BDAG),^b something which

^a BDAG, 845.

^b Ibid.

surely dominates Ephesians chs. 4-6 (and has a definite Torah background). As David H. Stern remarks, “it implies an obligation to observe a godly life that has its origin in God’s relationship with the Jewish people. More than that, it implies an obligation to relate as family to the Jewish community to whom their faith has joined them...”^c He considers Ephesians 2:12 to relate to the inclusion of individuals like Ruth (Ruth 1:16) among Israel, and that it requires non-Jewish Believers “being involved with the Jewish people, both Messianic and non-Messianic.”^d It would imply that non-Jewish Believers should have a relationship not only with their fellow Jewish brothers and sisters who have acknowledged the Messiah, but that they should take a keen interest in the well being of those Jews who have not yet acknowledged the Lord Yeshua.

Stern is absolutely right to say that non-Jewish Believers “who regard Jewish Christians as the strangers and themselves as the rightful possessors and those who accept Jewish believers but reject nonbelieving Jews, are not submitting to the message of these verses.”^e Non-Jewish Believers, as made clear by Paul’s words, had no hope and were without God in the world *without Israel*. As the origin of their salvation is Israel, when bad things happen to the Jewish people, bad things happen to all of those who believe in Israel’s Messiah. When good things happen to the Jewish people, non-Jewish Believers should rejoice with their Jewish brothers and sisters. Non-Jewish Believers are called to befriend the Jewish people and be grateful to them, not only because of the spiritual heritage they have in the Synagogue, but also for the great contributions the Jewish people have made to the world.

Stern is proper to emphasize that non-Jewish Believers should not regard the Jewish people as alien or strange. But what happens when Jewish Believers treat non-Jewish Believers, *who desire to grasp hold of their responsibilities as members of Israel’s Commonwealth*, as strange or second class? This is a great dilemma, and one that has arisen in the past decade or so because of the significant growth of the Messianic movement among evangelical Christians. Taking hold of their Hebraic and Jewish Roots, non-Jewish Believers have often been treated with extreme suspicion, if not hostility at times, by some Messianic Jews. Is this appropriate? While non-Jewish Believers are to surely respect and support the Jewish people, what if Jewish people *who know Messiah Yeshua* (and presumably have been transformed by His love) do not treat them with such respect in return? Why at times do Messianic Jews not recognize them as a part of or even related to the “community of Israel” (Ephesians 2:12, NEB)?

While the spiritual roots of why some Messianic Jews might not recognize non-Jewish Believers in their midst as their equals is a complicated, and rather difficult subject to diagnose—the theological roots are quite easy to diagnose. There is often a large misunderstanding and application of the term *politeia* (πολιτεία), as employed here in Ephesians 2:12. Throughout various Messianic Jewish theological materials, it is taught that the Commonwealth of Israel is actually to be viewed as something similar to today’s British Commonwealth of Nations, a Commonwealth of Israel made up of two sub-groups: the ethnic Jewish people and the Church.^f Messianic Jewish scholar David Rudolph claims that *politeia* “in the first-century Greco-Roman context could mean a community of nations or ethnic groups sharing a common allegiance to a monarch.” He considers the Commonwealth of Israel to be a broad federation or confederation made up of two groups: Israel and “the Church,” and that “commonwealth” is an ideal rendering of *politeia*, being “a relatively simple way of describing the relationship between the Church and Israel.”^g

^c David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 582.

^d Ibid.

^e Ibid.

^f Daniel C. Juster, *Growing to Maturity* (Denver: The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations Press, 1987), pp 221-222; David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 57; cf. Daniel C. Juster, *Jewish Roots* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1995), 35.

^g David Rudolph, “Mashiach” *Verge* Vol. 2, Iss. 2, February 2010:2.

D. Thomas Lancaster, *Grafted In: Israel, Gentiles, and the Mystery of the Gospel* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2009), 5 only does a little better than this, in concluding that “Though [Paul] had full participation in Rome and

While the English term “commonwealth” may allow at times for one thinking of the people of God as akin to a British Commonwealth of Nations,^h with multiple sub-groups, the Greek term *politeia* in its classical usage does not easily allow for this. The *Liddell-Scott* lexicon, chiefly interested in classical Greek, defines *politeia* with:

- *the condition and rights of a citizen, citizenship*
- *the life of a citizen, civic life*
- *as a concrete, the body of citizens*
- *the life and business of a statesman, government, administration*
- *civil polity, the condition or constitution of a state*
- *a republic, commonwealthⁱ*

While these definitions surely do allow for an internally diverse community of people who should contribute to the well being of all, they do not lend support for a collection of multiple, largely autonomous and independent communities which make up a broad “commonwealth.” Consider the following examples from ancient classical and Jewish sources, which employ the term *politeia*. You will not see a single monarch ruling over a collection of separated states implied:

ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑ POLITEIA IN ANCIENT USAGE	
EPHESIANS 2:12	CLASSICAL REFERENCES ^j
<p><i>remember</i> that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.</p>	<p>He was one of the souls who had come from heaven, having lived his previous life in a well-governed state [<i>en tetagmenē politeia, ἐν τεταγμένῃ πολιτείᾳ</i>], but having owed his goodness to habit and custom and not to philosophy... (Plato <i>Republic</i> 10.619c).^k</p> <p>A constitution [or <i>politeia</i>] may be defined as ‘the organization of a city [or <i>polis</i>], in respect of its offices generally, but especially in respect of that particular office which is sovereign in all issues’. The civic body is everywhere the sovereign of the city; in fact the civic body is the constitution itself [<i>to politeuma tēs poleōs, politeuma d’ estin hē politeia, τὸ πολίτευμα τῆς πόλεως, πολίτευμα δ’ ἐστὶν ἡ πολιτεία</i>] (Aristotle <i>Politics</i> 3.1278b).^l</p> <p>The term ‘constitution’ [<i>politeia</i>] signifies the same thing as the term ‘civic body’ [<i>politeuma</i>]. The civic body in every city [<i>polis</i>] is sovereign [<i>to kurion</i>]... (Aristotle <i>Politics</i> 3.1279a).^m</p>

fell under the jurisdiction of Roman law...He did not live in Rome, but both Tarsus [where he was born] and Jerusalem were cities within the Roman Empire. He seems to have looked at a Gentile believer’s relationship to Israel in similar terms.” This leaves the door open for a British-style of Commonwealth model for the *politeia* of Israel, where non-Jewish Believers could be distant members of Israel away from their fellow Jewish Believers.

^h The first definition of “commonwealth” in *Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc, 2002) is, however, “the people of a nation or state” (p 123), implying a single body politic.

ⁱ LS, 654.

^j The Greek source text for these works has been accessed via the Perseus Collection <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>>.

^k Plato: *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 366.

^l Aristotle: *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 97.

^m *Ibid.*, 100.

JEWISH REFERENCES	
	<p>And to set before their eyes the injury that they had unjustly done to the holy place, and the cruel handling of the city, whereof they made a mockery, and also the taking away of the government of their forefathers [<i>tēs pragonikēs politeias</i>, τῆς προγονικῆς πολιτείας] (2 Maccabees 8:17, KJV).</p> <p>Among other things, we made known to all our amnesty toward their compatriots here, both because of their alliance with us and the myriad affairs liberally entrusted to them from the beginning; and we ventured to make a change, by deciding both to deem them worthy of Alexandrian citizenship [<i>politeia</i>] and to make them participants in our regular religious rites...[T]hey not only spurn the priceless citizenship [<i>politeia</i>], but also both by speech and by silence they abominate those few among them who are sincerely disposed toward us; in every situation, in accordance with their infamous way of life, they secretly suspect that we may soon alter our policy (3 Maccabees 3:21, 23).</p> <p>The Jews also obtained honours from the kings of Asia when they became their auxiliaries; for Seleucus Nicator made them citizens [<i>politeia</i>] in those cities which he built in Asia, and in the Lower Syria, and in the metropolis itself, Antioch; and gave them privileges equal to those of the Macedonians and Greeks, who were the inhabitants, insomuch that these privileges continue to this very day (<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i> 12.119).ⁿ</p>

The classical Greek meaning of *politeia* (which I was certainly taught at the University of Oklahoma as a political science undergraduate), also witnessed in ancient Jewish works, does not imply a kind of citizenship where a single monarch rules over a collection of separate states, but rather speaks of either a single government or a way of conduct within a society (sometimes within the context of a city). Of critical importance to us are those notable places where *politeia*, and a related term like *politeuma* (πολίτευμα),^o appear in the Apostolic Scriptures, designating citizenship:

“The commander answered, ‘I acquired this citizenship [*politeia*] with a large sum of money.’ And Paul said, ‘But I was actually born a citizen’” (Acts 22:28).

“For our citizenship [*politeuma*; ‘commonwealth,’ RSV] is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (Philippians 3:20).

ⁿ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 315.

^o Meaning, “the business of government, an act of administration” (LS, 654).

Often together, the related terms “πολιτεία [*politeia*] and πολίτευμα [*politeuma*] are said to have the same force” (Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, Vol. 42 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990], 137).

Anyone who would try to equate the Greek term *politeia* with a kind of multiple nation-state commonwealth in mind, does not have strong support either from classical usage or Biblical usage of the term.

What Paul describes as Believers possessing *politeuma* in Heaven, should not escape our notice. No one would honestly argue, for example, that born again Believers have different kinds of “citizenship” within the Kingdom of Heaven; it is all the same citizenship. Some might represent themselves as citizens of God’s Kingdom better than others, and some Believers do not always take advantage of all the spiritual benefits of being citizens of God’s Kingdom—but all who profess Yeshua are still citizens of the same Divine state. The difficult concept that many Believers have to recognize is that God’s Kingdom *happens to be Israel*. Today’s Messianic Jews need to understand that while they are honored and respected members of this Israel to be sure (cf. John 4:22; Romans 3:1-2; 11:29), *they are not at all the only members*. The Commonwealth of Israel is to be viewed as a single state ruled by the King Messiah, but one which is internally diverse in terms of its ethnic makeup. The non-Jewish Believers were at one time “strangers to the covenants of promise” plural, *tōn diathēkōn tēs epangelias* (τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας), and having been integrated into the community of Israel are to look at Israel’s story as their own story (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1).

It is sad to say, but many of today’s Messianic Jews have forgotten the citizenship responsibility placed on Ancient Israel for it to be a kingdom of priests and a light to the nations (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6), with the imperative *ki-li kol-ha’eretz* (כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאֶרֶץ), “because for Me (is) all the Earth” (Exodus 19:5; my translation). Notably, a part of having citizenship in Israel—whether native born or not—is being a conduit of God’s light to others. What kind of a testimony would (or will) it be if non-Jewish Messianic Believers are those who fulfill this calling better than a number of today’s Messianic Jews? Is today’s Messianic community due for a major shaking in the future, as our Heavenly Father looks for willing vessels able to accomplish His mandate for Israel? If today’s Messianic Judaism, or parts of it at least, continue on a path toward wanting the Commonwealth of Israel to be defined in terms other than being a single yet internally diverse people of God, how much will it really achieve for Him? It may achieve some things, *but surely not as many as it could*.

posted 29 June, 2011

Concubines: Can you explain to me what a “concubine” is in the Bible?

When your average person encounters the subject of concubines in the Tanach or Old Testament, it can be difficult if the reader is not informed as to what a concubine was in ancient times. The term *pilegesh* (פִּילְגֶּשֶׁת) “seems clearly to be a word of non-Semitic origin... The fact that there are clear cognates in Greek (*pallakis/pallekē*) and Latin (*paelex*) suggests that the word is Indo-European in origin, borrowed into all three languages” (*EDB*).^a

Concubinage in the Tanach is often associated with some kind of slavery, as Bilhah was called both a slave (Genesis 29:29; 30:3) and a concubine (Genesis 35:22). Likewise, Gideon’s unnamed concubine (Judges 8:31) is also called his slave (Judges 19:19), with him actually being considered her “husband.” *TWOT* explains, “A concubine was a true wife, though of secondary rank... the concubine was not a kept mistress, and did not cohabit with a man unless married to him. The institution itself is an offshoot of polygamy.”^b Among those who practiced concubinage, the concubine was “A female slave regarded as part of the Israelite family, generally designated as bearing children... In addition to providing offspring and sexual activity (Eccl. 2:8), concubines were responsible for care of the those (2 S. 15:16; 16:21; 20:3...)” (*ISBE*).^c

^a Peggy L. Day, “Concubine,” in *EDB*, 273.

^b Victor P. Hamilton, “pilegesh,” in *TWOT*, 2:724.

^c Allen C. Myers, “concubine,” in *ISBE*, 1:758.

As concubinage is connected to polygamy, it was often only the rich and/or powerful who were able to afford concubines, as most of those who had concubines were kings (i.e., Esther 2:17; Song of Songs 6:8; Daniel 5:3, 23). Keturah, taken as Abraham's wife after Sarah's death, was considered both his wife (Genesis 25:1) and concubine (1 Chronicles 1:32), perhaps as a way to honor Sarah as Israel's matriarch with Keturah being considered of lesser status. Unlike those women who would have been considered wives, "concubines were of a lower status than primary wives because no brideprice (*mōhar*) was paid for them, or they brought no dowry (*šillūhîm*), or both" (EDB).^d As a result, any children born of concubines only inherited land at their father's discretion (i.e., Genesis 25:6), rather than those children born of actual "wives."

The Torah's legislation is mute on regulating the practice of concubinage, as "Concubines are mentioned almost exclusively in the patriarchal period and early monarchy" (ISBE).^e "The fact that the word *pilegeš* is nowhere mentioned in the legal collections of Exodus and Deuteronomy, nor in the lists of proscribed sexual relationships in Lev. 18, 20, should further caution against too quickly positing that this form of connubial arrangement was widely practiced" (EDB).^f Indeed, the fact that the families of Israel's kings suffered from polygamy—with concubinage as an extended form of this practice with added "lesser-wives"—demonstrates that it was indeed a practice never blessed or sanctioned by God.

With the unfortunate rise of a sector of Messianic polygamist men among us today, it should not be surprising that some are now discussing whether or not concubinage is also acceptable. If polygamy is unacceptable given the Genesis ideal of marriage being between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24), a principle upheld by Yeshua and His Apostles (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31)—then just as polygamy would be absolutely unacceptable in view of the equality of the genders He has restored (Galatians 3:28), **so would concubinage be even more unacceptable!** Messianic men today wanting to take concubines to themselves or "lesser-wives" into their homes are doing so only for the purpose of having a sexual outlet. They forget the fact that the Hebrew Tanach depicts both the ups *and the downs* of its chosen people, and simply practicing polygamy or concubinage because the Patriarchs or kings of Israel did it fails to consider the severe negative consequences that both brought upon their households and the Kingdom as a whole.

(For a further discussion, consult the editor's articles "Is Polygamy for Today?" and "Addressing the Frequently Avoided Issues Messianics Encounter in the Torah.")

posted 23 November, 2008

^d Day, "Concubine," in EDB, 273.

^e Meyers, "Concubine," in ISBE, 1:758.

^f Day, "Concubine," in EDB, 273.

Conspiracy Theories: I have seen some prophetic end-time websites, some of which are Messianic, which advocate various conspiracy theories regarding groups like the Illuminati or Freemasons. What do you think of these theories? Is there any merit to them?

We do not engage in these types of theories. For quite some time there have been people associated with Messianic beliefs who believe that the Illuminati and Freemasons are trying to take over the world, and in actuality control all of the world's politics behind the scenes. We do not doubt the fact that these groups may exert some influence behind the scenes, as the Scriptures are clear that there is a conspiracy against the Lord (Psalm 2:1-3). However, most of those people who address these groups, and try to connect them to end-time prophecy, have been discredited due to either failed end-time projections or outright distortion of facts or lack of primary evidence. Because of this and the strong connection to fear that is often associated with these theories, we choose not to address them and are often skeptical of those who do. We believe that there is little merit to them, especially if fear is the primary motivation. God's people need to spend more time on the work of His Kingdom, recognizing that the Kingdom of Darkness *responds* to us.

updated 18 December, 2006

1 Corinthians 6:12: How can you say that the Law of Moses is still to be followed by Christians today, when it is quite clear that all things are now lawful?

This entry has been reproduced from the forthcoming paperback edition of *The New Testament Validates Torah* (due sometime 2011)

Pastor: 1 Corinthians 6:12: All things are now lawful.

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

The pastor's statement “All things are now lawful,” on the basis of 1 Corinthians 6:12, can be a very slippery slope if it is viewed from the perspective that there are no boundaries whatsoever for the conduct and behavior of Messiah followers. If “All things are now lawful” means that born again Believers are not to keep *any* laws or commandments from God, then could this not be taken as meaning that we are allowed to do whatever we want, regardless of Divine consequences? Would this, at least, not mean that those things which are considered sin in the Torah or Law of Moses—which (poor) Ancient Israel was prohibited from doing, sometimes with violation meriting capital punishment—are now permitted? This could mean, among other things, that:

- thievery and burglary are neither crimes nor sin
- lying in a court of justice is neither a crime nor a sin
- pre-marital sex, extra-marital affairs, and homosexuality are not sin
- murder is neither a crime nor a sin
- idolatry is not sin, even when practiced alongside the worship of the God of Israel

If the Apostle Paul is actually communicating in 1 Corinthians 6:12 that God's Law is to be cast aside, then we really should have a problem with Paul. The statement “**All things are lawful for me**” would flat contradict what the Apostle John's communicates at the end of Revelation: “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). Fortunately, though, I think enough mature Christians are aware of the potential problems with *only* reading 1 Corinthians 6:12, perhaps *significantly* removed from the verses which immediately surround it. Paul's words in 1

Corinthians 6:9-10 preceding, quite surprisingly to some, closely mirror what John says about those who will suffer eternal punishment:

“Or 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.”

There has to be a better explanation of 1 Corinthians 6:12, than it somehow allowing for blatant violation of God’s Torah, with people totally dismissing the Law.

Any Bible reader who has surveyed the Pauline Epistles is aware that the Apostle writes more to the Corinthians than to any another audience, and much of what he has to say is delivered in a rather sharp, corrective tone. There is internal evidence from 1 Corinthians 5:9, where Paul says, “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people,” that he wrote a previous letter to them before what we now call 1 Corinthians, which is no longer extant. The assembly at Corinth was riddled with problems, as many of the Corinthian Believers were not being properly trained up in the foundational guidelines of God’s Word and what He considered acceptable and unacceptable—or they simply disregarded such principles as not being necessary.^a

One of the most serious problems that the Corinthian assembly faced was that of sexual immorality. This apparently did not only include sexual promiscuity between males and females, but extended to homosexuality and even incest. In 1 Corinthians 5:1 Paul attests to the fact that “It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife.” He says quite candidly “there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans” (RSV). This is how bad things were in Corinth, and with this backdrop, how on Earth would Paul be telling them that “all things were lawful,” to be construed as meaning that a Torah-less kind of behavior was acceptable?

It should be first noted that the rendering “All things are lawful” in the NASU (and similarly the RSV, NRSV, ESV) is a translation mistake. A Greek term that would correctly be rendered as “lawful” or “lawfully” in the Apostolic Scriptures is *nomimōs* (νομίμως), “in accordance with rule(s)/law” (BDAG),^b which appears in 1 Timothy 1:8: “we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully [*nomimōs*]” (NASU). But *nomimōs* (or some other derivation from the root *nomos*, νόμος) is not what appears in the source text 1 Corinthians 6:12.

The actual clause in question, which appears twice in 1 Corinthians 6:12, is *panta moi exestin* (πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν). The term of interest is *exesti* (ἔξεστι), defined as either “it is allowed, it is in one’s power, is possible” (LS),^c or perhaps also “it is proper, permitted” (CGEDNT).^d J. Paul Sampley notably explains how “The...translation of ἔξεστιν (*exestin*) as ‘lawful’ is misleading; the maxim’s contention has nothing to do with the law, but with what is permissible, allowable, or authorized for the believer.”^e The NIV rendering of 1 Corinthians 6:12, “Everything is permissible for me,”^f does much better justice to what *exestin* actually means; the NEB has the similar “I am free do to anything”^g (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:4). Anthony C. Thiselton reflects the viewpoint, “The traditional translation *all things are lawful* (AV/KJV, NRSV) does not mean *all things are sanctioned* by the law, but denotes that which the law *no longer prohibits*, i.e., it is part of the Corinthian theology that Christian believers have been granted *liberty from* the law,” as he argues

^a Consult the author’s entries on the Epistles of 1&2 Corinthians in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

^b BDAG, 676.

^c LS, 273.

^d CGEDNT, 64.

^e J. Paul Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians” in *NIB*, 10:860.

Sampley is working from the NRSV in his commentary.

^f The TNIV has, “I have the right to do anything.”

^g The 1993 German Elberfelder Bibel has “Alles ist mir erlaubt.” The adjective *erlaubt* means “permitted, allowed,” notably in the sense of something like “*Rauchen ist hier nicht [erlaubt]*” or “smoking is not allowed here” (*Langenscheidts New College German Dictionary*, 195).

for the rendering “**Liberty to do anything.**”^h While the Torah is a factor in properly interpreting 1 Corinthians 6:12, we will see that more is in view as these Corinthians who were addressed basically threw off all restraints in following *any* code of conduct.ⁱ

The major question that often goes unrealized by many Bible readers when encountering 1 Corinthians 6:12, is whether the Apostle Paul could himself—who has *just affirmed* in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that there are high sins which will merit exclusion from God’s Kingdom, denounced as sin in the Torah—personally conclude “Everything is permissible for me.” Regardless of which position they take regarding the validity of the Torah in the post-resurrection era, 1 Corinthians commentators widely agree that “Everything is permissible” (*panta moi exestin*) was a slogan adhered to by many of the Corinthians, which Paul thought it quite necessary to address in his letter.^j Unlike the NASU, versions like the RSV, NIV, NRSV, ESV, and HCSB include what is stated in quotation marks “ ”, to reflect the view that Paul is repeating what many of the Corinthians have either been saying to him, possibly in a letter to Paul, or what has been reported back to him as what they had been saying (the NLT actually has “You say, ‘I am allowed to do anything’”).^k And, this is not the only Corinthian slogan that interpreters have detected within the Epistle of 1 Corinthians that Paul had to address in his letter, which possibly involved:

- “Everything is permissible for me” (1 Corinthians 6:12, NIV; 10:13).
- “[I]t is good for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Corinthians 7:1).
- “[W]e know that we all have knowledge” (1 Corinthians 8:1).
- “[W]e know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world” (1 Corinthians 8:4).
- “But food will not commend us to God” (1 Corinthians 8:8).
- “[T]here is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:15).^l

It is true that there were no punctuation, quotation marks, or even commas in the original Greek letter written to the Corinthians. But in light of how Paul precedes in his comments, chastising the Corinthians for their sin and how he says that such individuals have no place in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), viewing “**Everything is permissible**” (1 Corinthians 6:12) as an errant Corinthian slogan, separated out with quotation marks “ ”, is most appropriate. Bruce asserts, “these words...are rightly placed within quotation marks; they appear to have been a slogan of the gnosticizing party in the church which was impatient of the restraints of conventional morality.”^m While there are those who would say that the Apostle Paul could have been in agreement with this slogan, others would note that his intention is to at least issue some kind of response, if not a rejoinder or rebuttal. Fee thinks that it is hard, at least here in 1 Corinthians 6:12, to think that Paul really likes what he has heard the Corinthians say:

“[H]e does not begin by attacking their illicit behavior; rather, he confronts the theology on which that behavior is predicated. ‘Everything is permissible for me’ is almost certainly a

^h Anthony C. Thiselton, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 461.

ⁱ With the Greek term *exesti* (ἐξεστι) in view, other places where “permitted” or “permissible” (or even “allowed”) would be a much better rendering, include: Mark 2:24, 26; 3:4; 6:18; 10:2; 12:14; Matthew 12:2, 4, 10, 12; 14:4; 19:3; 20:15; 22:17; 27:6; Luke 6:2, 4, 9; 14:3; 20:22; Acts 16:21; 22:25.

^j F.F. Bruce, *New Century Bible: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 62; Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 95; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp 251-253; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp 167-168; Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), pp 101-103; Thiselton, pp 460-462; Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:860-862.

^k The CJB follows this with, “You say, ‘For me, everything is permitted?’”

^l Cf. Witherington, *1&2 Corinthians*, 167; also see chart in Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 102.

^m Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 62.

Hays, *1 Corinthians*, pp 102-103 notes how “The translator must decide where Paul is quoting a slogan and where he is offering his own rejoinder,” something which admittedly involves a degree of “guesswork” with value judgments to be made.

Corinthian theological slogan. This is confirmed by the way Paul cites it again in 10:23; in both cases he qualifies it so sharply as to negate it—at least as a theological absolute.”ⁿ

It is important to recognize from the surrounding context that nowhere does the Apostle Paul truly agree with the idea *panta moi exestin*. Paul may have previously told the Corinthians that many things were permissible for Believers, but this slogan was clearly a deliberate misinterpretation of it. He informs his Corinthian audience that “you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). These are people who benefit from the resurrection power of God, the power that raised Yeshua from the dead (1 Corinthians 6:14) and is to give them the strength to submit themselves—especially their bodies—to Him (1 Corinthians 6:15-20) and to the ways of proper conduct. This would most especially include a continual resistance of ancient (temple) prostitution (1 Corinthians 6:16-17; cf. Genesis 2:24), which while technically legal in the Roman Empire and in Corinth, was not permitted for Messiah followers.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12 (NIV), Paul repeats what at least one influential group of Corinthian “Believers” has been saying, and then he issues correction to it:

THE CORINTHIANS	THE APOSTLE PAUL
“Everything is permissible for me”	— <i>but not everything is beneficial.</i>
“Everything is permissible for me”	— <i>but I will not be mastered by anything.</i>

Witherington astutely informs us, “It is possible to argue that Paul begins his *refutatio* in 6:12,” as “he begins to question and refute their answers in the form of these slogans.”^o Paul has to confront these Corinthians’ logic head on, in getting them to be shaken out of their stupor that *panta moi exestin* or “Everything is permissible for me” (NIV).

Paul’s first response to *panta moi exestin* in 1 Corinthians 6:12a is: *all’ ou panta sumpherei* (ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει), “**but not all things are profitable**” (NASU). The verb *sumphereō* (συμφέρω)^p has also been rendered with “helpful” (RSV), “beneficial” (NIV), or “expedient” (KJV); the point taken is that the Corinthians may think that all things they can do are permitted, but they will certainly find out that it will not prove to be for their benefit or usefulness. They might think that they have the freedom to do whatever they want, but many of the Corinthians may have had to find out the hard way that such thinking would be to their severe detriment. This would have been especially true in light of various sexual sins and devious actions being a major issue for the Corinthian assembly.

Paul’s second response to *panta moi exestin* in 1 Corinthians 6:12b is: *all’ ouk egō exousiasthēsomai hupo tinos* (ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπὸ τινος), “**but I will not be brought under the power of any**” (KJV). Initially, this rebuttal of the Corinthians’ slogan might seem a bit out of place. Some Corinthians say that they have the freedom to do whatever they want, and then Paul says that he “will not be mastered by anything” (NASU). Could Paul have been agreeing with the Corinthians, or is this an observation on what will ultimately happen to some Corinthian “Believers” who throw off all of God’s instructions and commandments—much less what is in proper decorum—and live unfettered? The reality is that people who think they can do whatever they want, ultimately become subjected under the dominance of sin, with their so-called freedom actually leading to bondage. As Fee describes, “There is a kind of self-deception that inflated spirituality promotes, which suggests to oneself that he/she is acting with freedom and authority, but which in fact is an enslavement of the worst kind—to the very freedom one thinks one has.”^q

ⁿ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 252.

^o Witherington, *1&2 Corinthians*, 167.

^p “to be advantageous, *help, confer a benefit, be profitable/useful*” (BDAG, 960).

^q Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 253.

With some instruction on marriage and sexuality in immediate view in 1 Corinthians ch. 7, Hays offers the further appropriate observations:

“The danger is particularly great that the person seeking to exercise freedom through promiscuous sexual activity will end up as a slave to passion. The verb translated ‘dominated’ here [*exousiazō*, ἐξουσιάζω] is the same one that appears in 7:4, where husband and wife are said to ‘have authority’ over one another’s bodies: by using this term Paul may be suggesting subtly that the ‘wise’ Corinthians who go to prostitutes are in effect surrendering control over themselves to the prostitutes.”^f

Further in 1 Corinthians 8:9, Paul speaks rebukingly of “this liberty of yours,” demonstrating how the Corinthian attitude can cause serious problems for the *ekklēsia*.

Only those who have chosen not to read 1 Corinthians 6:12 carefully, with the wider issues in view, could conclude that Paul actually thinks the Torah or Law of Moses to be irrelevant to Believers’ lives. In 1 Corinthians 5:13 Paul surely quotes from the Torah when it comes to ex-communicating sinners from the assembly: “But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES” (cf. Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7). For some reason or another, those in Corinth who advocated *panta moi exestin* had to be reasoned with on the basis of logic alone, and with whether what they did truly helped them in life.

It is important to keep in mind that 1 Corinthians was one of the first letters written after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, where the Apostolic decree directed the new, non-Jewish Believers coming to faith that they *must* follow four prohibitions in order to assemble with the Jewish Believers (Acts 15:19-21), which included observance of the Torah’s sexual code. In his instruction to the Corinthians, Paul does reflect on the tenor of the Apostolic agreement. But why does Paul not specifically mention Jerusalem’s authority, as at least a co-authority of himself, to get the Corinthians to change in 1 Corinthians? It has been validly proposed among some that in his personal teaching to the Corinthians, Paul’s previous implementation of the Apostolic decree had failed, manifested by the Corinthians’ low moral state. Richard N. Longenecker describes how it could “well be argued that Paul’s problems with the ultraspiritual segment of the church arose, at least in part, because he had originally delivered the Jerusalem letter to them and thus in correcting them was forced to argue on different grounds.”^g

Paul’s written instruction in 1 Corinthians does, in fact, affirm the substance of the Apostolic decree, but from another angle. The Apostolic decree may not have worked, and so the Corinthians have to be brought back from an abyss of severe spiritual confusion using other means. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul has to directly refute the slogan *panta moi exestin*, by getting those who have adopted such an errant viewpoint, to think **whether they will truly be better because of it**. People who are supposed to be joined to the Messiah need to be candidly asked if—as they compose the Temple of God—it is appropriate to join themselves to a prostitute:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Messiah? Shall I then take away the members of Messiah and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, ‘THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’ [Genesis 2:24]. But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:15-19).

Thankfully, we get the impression from later Pauline correspondence that he was able to get many of the Corinthians to turn from their sinful ways (2 Corinthians 7:7-10).

Unfortunately, when we look at the slogan “**Everything is permissible for me**” (1 Corinthians 6:12, NIV) that the Apostle Paul refutes, we see that we have much of the same

^f Hays, *1 Corinthians*, pp 103-104.

^g Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 9:452.

situation today in modern Christianity. There are people who actually think that once they “get saved” and have been forgiven of their sins, and since they have the covering of grace, they do not have to live in real accordance with any commandments or instructions or protocol—and perhaps are not even subject to some kind of Divine correction. We can legitimately wonder if such individuals are indeed spiritually regenerated, but ultimately God only knows if they are truly born again or not.

What we do know is that as Believers we each have the responsibility to obey the Lord and not fall prey to the kinds of gross immoralities in which many of the Corinthians participated. The Lord’s standard of holiness, godliness, and permissible living is certainly defined for us within the commandments of the Torah. The Torah clearly defines what sin is and what He considers acceptable and unacceptable. By obeying the Torah, we find ourselves able to experience the blessings of God—rather than the penalties, curses, and pain that follow from disobedience to Him.

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1 Corinthians 10:23: How can you say that the Law of Moses is still to be followed by Christians today, when it is quite clear that all things are now lawful?

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Pastor: 1 Corinthians 10:23: All things are lawful so we can edify the body.

“All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

The statement, “All things are lawful so we can edify the body” is an extreme stretch of what 1 Corinthians 10:23 communicates. This verse repeats the slogan “Everything is permissible” (NIV) or *Panta exestin* (Πάντα ἔξεστιν), which Paul has refuted earlier in 1 Corinthians 6:11, chastising various Corinthians for thinking that they could get away with certain sinful activities, which he has said is something not at all profitable or useful. Later on in the letter of 1 Corinthians, more has to be communicated, and it surely behooves a responsible Bible reader to view 1 Corinthians 10:23 in light of the wider context of 1 Corinthians 10.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 Paul issues an important reminder to the Corinthians, specifically how what occurred to the Ancient Israelites in the past, took place as examples for Messiah followers to consider, with the expressed reason “so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved” (1 Corinthians 10:6). Paul is clear to direct his audience, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). Given the fact that much of what the Torah says is to be understood as a “warning” (RSV), so that previous mistakes committed by God’s people, like fornication and idolatry, are not subsequently repeated (1 Corinthians 10:7-9)—the Apostle Paul by no means should be considered as someone opposing the Law of Moses here. A major focus of his admonishment to the Corinthians is precisely so they can resist lawlessness, and in particular the idolatry present in their local community:

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:13-14).

The Apostle Paul is very concerned about what various Corinthians have been participating in, referencing how at the Lord’s Supper multiple people partake of the wine and bread (1 Corinthians 10:16-17), and multiple people also participate in the animal sacrifices of the

Temple in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 10:18). While these are persons who participate in useful, edifying exercises intending to honor God in some way, what of those who participate in sacrifices made to idols? While an idol may be made of gold, silver, stone, or wood—there is a definite spiritual presence that sits behind an idol—and those who participate in its veneration associate themselves with Satanic demons:

“What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? *No*, but *I say* that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:18-21).

While the Apostolic decree of Acts 15:19-21 forbade the new, non-Jewish Believers from participating in idolatrous activities, the Apostle Paul has told the Corinthians why it is unacceptable. He has referenced the infamous scene of the golden calf (1 Corinthians 10:7; cf. Exodus 32:4), and also the Numbers 25 encounter of the Moabite prostitutes brought in by Balaam and consequent slaughter of the offenders (1 Corinthians 10:8). The blight upon much of Greco-Roman paganism was worship of idols associated with gross sexual immorality. While some of the Corinthian “Believers” were **most unfortunately** involving themselves in these activities, others had probably just looked at them from a distance, perhaps feeling a pull from various family members and friends who did not recognize Yeshua.

The thrust of the Apostolic decree was that the new, non-Jewish Believers did not have to have the Torah’s Instruction forced upon them; it was, rather, to make sure that they could fellowship with their fellow Jewish Believers and be steadily instructed at the local synagogue from the Torah—starting with what the four prohibitions meant (idolatry, fornication, things strangled, blood). Yet as Acts 18 testifies, the Messiah followers were driven out of the Corinthian synagogue. This could certainly have affected the thinking of many, and the lure of one’s previous lifestyle in paganism was still present. The slogan *Panta exestin* or “**We are free to do anything**” (NEB) once again has to be responded to by Paul (NIV):

THE CORINTHIANS

THE APOSTLE PAUL

“Everything is permissible”

—*but not everything is beneficial.*

“Everything is permissible”

—*but not everything is constructive.*

While Paul has just upheld the authority of Israel’s Scriptures for the instruction of born again Believers—referencing examples of idolatry and sexual immorality—he still has to refute what various Corinthians have been saying. The statement, of 1 Corinthians 10:23a, is practically identical to what was asserted earlier in 1 Corinthians 6:12a, with Paul’s response being *all’ ou panta sumpherei* (ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει), “but not all things are helpful” (RSV). Repeating the slogan in 1 Corinthians 10:23b, Paul responds to “Everything is permissible” (NIV) with, *ou panta oikodomei* (οὐ πάντα οἰκοδομεῖ), “but not all things edify” (NASU). In this second response, the verb *oikodomeō* (οἰκοδομέω)^a is employed, which not only should immediately key us into Yeshua’s mission to come and restore Israel (Matthew 16:18; cf. Jeremiah 33:7, LXX), but as Thiselton indicates, “**building up** presupposes the logical grammar of **building the community**.”^b The Corinthians have been saying “**Everything is permissible**” (NIV), but it is quite obvious that not all things are at all edifying or “constructive” (NIV) for the Body of Messiah and its mission in the Earth.

Again, we have to be reminded that when people think that they are free do to whatever they want (as these Corinthians were), challenging such views frequently has to be done on logical

^a “to construct in a transcendent sense” or “to help improve ability to function in living responsibly and effectively, *strengthen, build up, make more able*” (BDAG, 696).

^b Thiselton, 781.

grounds and not just Scriptural grounds. Paul does not agree that “Everything is permissible” (1 Corinthians 10:23, NIV), because most frequently what people think that they can get away with will be to the detriment of Body of Messiah. Paul is quick to assert, “Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor” (1 Corinthians 10:24), a definite application of the Torah’s requirement to love neighbor. Does the Corinthians’ behavior help the Body of Messiah and its purposes, much less outsiders to the faith who need to see the power of the One God of Israel operating through them? Witherington’s comments are useful to consider here:

“Paul once again reports the Corinthians’ inevitable response to his argument: ‘Everything is permitted’ (v. 23). But not everything is useful or profitable or builds up the body of Christ, and in a deliberative argument it is critical to stress what is beneficial or advantageous. The Christian is one who does not seek his or her own advantage but rather that of others.”^c

So, with Paul having just asserted that Believers need to be highly concerned with the spiritual edification of others, what follows in 1 Corinthians 10:24-33 is a potential application of this for the Corinthians themselves. This section is admittedly difficult for many of today’s Messianics, who believe in the continued validity of the kosher dietary laws, to understand (in fact, those who are highly *or* even hyper-sensitive about what they eat, frequently ignore this section of Paul’s letter).

Has the Apostle Paul cast aside the commandments of *kashrut* and/or the Apostolic decree by writing, “Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake; FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD’S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS [Psalm 24:1]” (1 Corinthians 10:25-26)? Many readers take this statement as meaning that, at the very least, Paul considers the kosher dietary laws to be a matter of *adiaphora*, something that really does not matter the way one views it, one way or another. When it comes to eating, a commentator like Fee thinks that “Paul takes a decidedly ‘liberal’ stance on this issue,” arguing that unlike scrupulous Jews who were likely to investigate the origins of everything they would eat, “Paul is telling the Corinthians not to conduct such inquiries. Meat is meat; buy and eat.”^d The main issue of concern here is how the Apostolic decree forbade the non-Jewish Believers from eating things strangled and blood. Does this now no longer matter? Is Paul “going rogue”?

On the one hand, it could possibly be argued that if in a metropolitan area like Ancient Corinth there were ever significant food shortages—that eating whatever was sold in the meat market (*makellon*, μάκελλον) was preferable to starving.^e This would fit with the ancient Jewish principle of *Pikku’ach Nefesh* or regard for human life, where unclean things could be consumed in order to maintain or extend life. On the other hand, though, the argument that the Corinthians were to “buy and eat” whatever they pleased is one which has been eisegeted into the text. The clause *Pan to en makellō pōloumenon* (Πάν τὸ ἐν μακέλλῳ πωλούμενον) notably includes the present passive participle *pōloumenon*,^f and is better rendered with “Eat everything **being sold** in a meat market...” (LITV). Would the Corinthian Believers be those who actually purchased the meat?

The flesh of the animals being sold is certainly made by the Creator God (cf. Psalm 24:1), and all creatures are inherently “good” to some degree or another. Likewise, the scene of various festal gatherings at the local shrine or pagan temple is certainly not in view. Bruce is right to conclude, “Even if the meat did come from a sacrificed animal, they are not going to eat it as part of an idolatrous feast or in company where they risk becoming ‘partners with demons.’”^g Ultimately, while one can participate in idolatrous worship in the company of dark spiritual forces, when one possibly eats meat that has originated from such services in the privacy of another’s home, the supremacy of the One God of Creation must be recognized (1 Corinthians 8). Paul has rightly said, “Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that

^c Witherington, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 226.

^d Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 481.

^e Cf. Thiselton, 783 on “food shortages.”

^f The verb *pōleō* (πωλέω) means “to exchange or barter goods, to sell or offer for sale” (LS, 713).

^g Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 98.

there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4).

The real reason why Paul has just stated to eat whatever is being sold in the meat market is not so that the Corinthian Believers can disregard the Apostolic decree. There are specific conditions which must be in place, specifically as it concerns accepting an invitation to visit a non-Believer’s home and be served a meal: “If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience’ sake” (1 Corinthians 10:27). Fee is correct to assert, “Paul has absolutely forbidden attendance at temple meals,” but the scene here is dining “in a pagan home.”^h If a non-Believer wants to demonstrate his hospitality to one of the Corinthian Believers—and it might especially be a chance to testify of Yeshua the Messiah—then Paul’s instruction is to go and eat what is served. Such Corinthian non-Believers would have been those who frequented the local meat market,ⁱ and as Thiselton indicates, “The meat almost certainly *will* be what had been offered in a temple, especially since the host serves good quality fare.”^j

The Corinthian Believers, as a matter of respect to the host, are simply not supposed to ask about what they are served. This would pertain to whether the meat was something kosher like beef or lamb, or something unclean like pork. It would also pertain to various meat ingredients possibly used in side dishes. Morris is right to conclude that Paul “discouraged over-scrupulousness.”^k The likelihood that if a Corinthian Messiah follower goes to the home of a pagan friend, or even family member, and finds out that meat served was presented before idols, then the Apostle Paul is clear that for conscience’s sake he or she was to refuse the meal:

“But if anyone says to you, ‘This is meat sacrificed to idols,’ do not eat *it*, for the sake of the one who informed *you*, and for conscience’ sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other *man’s*; for why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?” (1 Corinthians 10:28-30).

Some Believers, in finding out that meat served at someone’s private home had been sacrificed to idols, would realize that the God of Israel is all-powerful, and that willful participation in idolatry is not occurring. Yet at the same time, if Messiah followers discover that they are served meat sacrificed to idols, it is to be refused on account of what it communicates to others, particularly those brothers and sisters who could easily relapse back into paganism. Paul warned earlier in 1 Corinthians 8:10, “For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?” This is not something that Paul wants in the least! Witherington also rightly says, “if one would go ahead and eat, then the host would see that as a violation of one’s own religion. It would be a bad witness to that person.”^l Here, the errant Corinthian slogan in action, “All things are permitted,” could certainly backfire if a Corinthian Believer continued eating once knowledge of where meat originated was stated. Fellowship with the Corinthian non-Believers had some definite risks.

Paul directs the Corinthians, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). With *doxan Theou* (δόξαν θεοῦ) in view, there are obviously limits as to how far one can go with fellowshiping or interacting with non-Believers. In many cases, while the invitation to eat at the home of a non-Believer’s table would be good, as one could share the gospel, the chance that it would negatively affect younger and weaker brethren

^h Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 483.

ⁱ Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:921 makes the appropriate linguistic connections between 1 Corinthians 10:25, 27, which serves to support that it is the Corinthian non-Believers who purchase that which is being sold at the meat market:

“[T]he same wording used in 10:25 (πάν... ἐσθίετε *pan...esthiete*, ‘eat everything’—with the ‘everything’ placed first for emphasis—without any problems for your moral consciousness) urges the believer to feel conscience-free to eat whatever is placed before him or her.”

^j Thiselton, 786.

^k Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 146.

^l Witherington, *1&2 Corinthians*, 227.

could require it to be turned down. Paul is concerned with the Corinthians not unnecessarily offending anyone (1 Corinthians 10:32), recognizing “I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:33, NRSV). But even while a level of self-identification with a potential audience is good (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23), it is obviously something that has to be kept within appropriate boundaries. Everything that one does in terms of seeing people brought to salvation must be done via the rubric of imitating Yeshua. Paul requires, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Messiah” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Because the need to share the good news with a pagan Corinthian family might be too great, some Corinthian Believers may have found it necessary to just eat whatever these people set before them out of their genuine hospitality. Temporarily suspending things like kosher eating, for the needs of the moment, may be necessary. But participating in sins such as idolatry, to the point of eating any kind of meat that was knowingly sacrificed to idols, was to Paul unacceptable. **It was a bad witness to non-Believers** once a Believer found out the meat originated from the pagan temple.

This conclusion does run contrary to the sentiments of many in today’s Messianic movement (especially those in the self-labeled Torah movement), for whom keeping the kosher dietary laws is sometimes more important than basic morality and love for neighbor. Yet, nowhere does the Apostle Paul allow for the Corinthians to participate in idolatry, which is a capital offense in the Torah. Eating unclean things is *not* a capital offense, as the Lord only says, “You shall not eat any abomination” (Deuteronomy 14:3, ATS), ultimately placing one’s being “abhorrent” (NJPS) as a personal condition. Eating unclean things set before oneself is considered to be on a different level than committing idolatry and denying the God of Israel. At the very most, would any Corinthians be served unclean things, the worst thing they would really experience could be indigestion.

The Torah does not specify what one eats at the level of high offenses like idolatry, sexual immorality, or murder. And, unless one holds to an impossibly rigid application of Moses’ Teaching, there are life exceptions to the rules of *kashrut*, as indicated by the conditional invitation of Corinthian Believers being asked to the home of a non-Believer (1 Corinthians 10:28)—an invitation which *could* have been turned down by many of them. **Nowhere** in 1 Corinthians 10 does Paul uphold the slogan “All things are permitted,” because he certainly does not allow—once it is discovered—for the Corinthians to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Unfortunately in much of contemporary Christianity, the maxim of “All things are permitted” now includes much, much more than what one might be served at a non-Believer’s dinner table.^m

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^m For a further evaluation, consult the author’s article “The Message of 1 Corinthians.” Also consider reading the author’s articles “To Eat or Not to Eat?” and “How Are We to Properly Keep Kosher?”

2 Corinthians 5:8: What do those who believe in psychopannychy/soul sleep do about 2 Corinthians 5:8, and in being absent from the body *and* present with the Lord after death?

2 Corinthians 5:8 is the first most commonly quoted passage about the afterlife that one will probably encounter. Addressing the subject of the Heavenly dwelling that born again Believers will one day possess (2 Corinthians 5:2), the Apostle Paul discusses the more probable likelihood of how rather than living long enough to be further clothed by it over our mortal bodies, we are more likely to die. Death, aside from its many unknowns, is not something that Believers are to fear. Paul expresses confidence in asserting that if death comes to us before the Second Coming, “we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8, HCSB). As you will see, advocates of psychopannychy (or “soul sleep”) who think that when a person dies, he or she enters into a state of complete unconsciousness until the resurrection, have a **very difficult time** with this verse. Paul affirms that not only can Believers enter into a disembodied condition prior to the resurrection, but it is one where we will be found to be in the company of the Lord Yeshua in Heaven.

No one instinctively wants to die, *including* those who believe in a conscious intermediate afterlife in Heaven prior to the resurrection. The Apostle Paul was no exception to this, expressing in 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4: “Here indeed we groan, and long to [further] put on our heavenly dwelling [to *oikētērion hēmōn to ex ouranou*, τὸ οἰκητήριον ἡμῶν τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ]..For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (RSV). Paul details how “we have a building from God [*ek Theou*, ἐκ θεοῦ], a house not made with hands” (2 Corinthians 2:1),^a which we should all eagerly desire to be clothed with. The important verb appearing in both vs. 2, 4, to describe this being clothed is *ependuomai* (ἐπενδύομαι), actually meaning “**to put a garment on over an existing garment, put on (in addition)**” (BDAG).^b F.F. Bruce describes what this communicates: “[I]t almost suggests that the new body could be put on like an overcoat, above the clothes already being worn.”^c As the NEB renders 2 Corinthians 5:4: “we yearn to have our heavenly habitation put on over this one.”

Why someone like Paul wants to be further clothed with an immortal body originating from Heaven is patently obvious: **he does not want to die** (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51). This is not only due to the pain and unpleasantness frequently caused by death, which for Paul personally would later have meant martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:6a), but also because at the Second Coming of the Lord—when living Believers are *further clothed*—we see the next major stage of salvation history occur! When given the choice of death, *or* seeing Yeshua return and one’s mortal body be further clothed with immortality, the resurrection of deceased saints, and His Kingdom reign fully coming to Planet Earth—it is **pretty obvious which option we should naturally choose**.

Paul describes the mortal body we possess to be a *skēnos* (σκῆνος) or “tent.”^d In the estimation of Bruce Milne, “Being a tent-maker by trade (cf. Acts 18:3), this image would have been an obvious one for the apostle...[T]ents are exposed to storms and other external forces. They provide no great security, as every camper has learned. By the same measure, life here is vulnerable, subject to chance and change.”^e At the *parousia* or coming of the Lord, He brings with Him permanent security. The analogy of being further clothed would be like the present tent of the body being further established into a sturdy temple. Yet, as much as both Paul and many others may have wanted to go immediately from tent to temple, an existence defined as being

^a Noting the different clauses in 2 Corinthians 5:2, 1, Paul Barnett, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 261 fn#31 indicates:

“Gk. ἐξ οὐρανοῦ should be matched with ἐκ θεοῦ (v. 1). The dwelling is ‘from heaven’ because it is ‘from God.’”

^b BDAG, 361.

^c F.F. Bruce, *New Century Bible: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 203.

^d A related term, *skēnōma* (σκηνωμα), is employed in 2 Peter 1:14, where the Apostle Peter says, “I will soon lay aside my tent [*skēnōma*], as our Lord Jesus Christ has also shown me” (HCSB), as his death is surely in view.

^e Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 263.

“naked” (2 Corinthians 5:3) is instead what they have had to experience. Paul is quite clear, “we do not want to be unclothed” (2 Corinthians 5:4), with the verb *ekduō* (ἐκδύω) meaning “to put off one’s clothes, strip” (LS),^f as death will result in a person being stripped from his or her tent/body,^g losing what we already have. Far be it from those who die becoming like a permanent stone temple, they instead may be likened to a piece of Tabernacle/Temple furniture—quite useful and valuable, but undeniably incomplete.

One of the main reasons why God has implanted His Spirit within the hearts of His people (2 Corinthians 5:5), is to give them the faith and assurance not only that “what is mortal will be swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:4) at the Second Coming, but all of the attendant events involving the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom and restoration of Israel will occur. The salvation of “all Israel” is a definite feature of Paul’s eschatology (Romans 11:25-26). Yet from an individualistic perspective, as much as he might want to see Yeshua return and Believers enter into His Kingdom on Earth, a condition of nakedness or being unclothed is far more probable. Paul says how when one is at home in body, a Believer is separated from the Lord—but contrary to this is how when one is separated from the body, a Believer is at home with the Lord:

“Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Two locations of existence are contrasted here:

1. *endēmountes en tō sōmati* (ἐνδημοῦντες ἐν τῷ σώματι), “in home,^h in the body” (literal translation).ⁱ
2. *ekdēmēsai ek tou sōματος* (ἐκδημηῆσαι ἐκ τοῦ σώματος), “out of home,^j out of the body” (literal translation).

As long as Believers are “in home, in the body,” they are *apo^k tou Kurion* (ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου) or “away from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6). Yet should a period of being “out of home, out of the body” present itself, then this can hardly be something to complain about, as it means being *pros ton Kurion* (πρὸς τὸν κύριον), “with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). The preposition *pros* (πρός), occurring with an accusative case noun (indicating direct object), can indeed regard to “*be (in company) with someone*” (BDAG).^l Being “out of the body” for the Believer definitely means being with the Lord. If death arrives for a born again individual prior to the Second Coming, it is not something to be feared, even if it means a temporary disembodied period in Heaven with Him. Reflecting on 2 Corinthians 5:8, John Wesley was entirely correct to conclude, “This demonstrates that the happiness of the saints is not deferred until the resurrection.”^m

Most interpreters up until today rightly acknowledge that when Paul testifies, “we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8), that he is speaking of a temporary condition of disembodiment with Yeshua the Messiah in Heaven prior to the resurrection.ⁿ Most appropriately, commentators who

^f LS, 237.

^g Previously in 2 Corinthians 4:16, Paul has noted a kind of outer and inner dualism present in the human being: “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” The aging process might bring with it physical deterioration of one’s body, but does not bring with it a deterioration of one’s personality of self, which is to continually be empowered by a vibrant relationship with the Heavenly Father through His Son.

^h Grk. *endēmēō* (ἐνδημέω); “to live in a place” (LS, 260).

ⁱ This is comparable to “in the tent,” *en tō skēnei* (ἐν τῷ σκηνῆι; 2 Corinthians 2:4).

^j Grk. *ekdēmēō* (ἐκδημέω), “be in a strange land...**be away**” (BDAG, 300).

^k The preposition *apo* (ἀπό), occurring with a genitive (indicating possession), is often used as “a marker to indicate separation from a place, whether person or thing, **from, away from**” (Ibid., 105).

^l Ibid., 875.

^m John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, reprint (Peterborough, UK: Epworth Press, 2000), 655.

ⁿ Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, Vol 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), pp 111-113; Colin Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp 116-117; Ben

recognize an intermediate state in Heaven, making reference of 2 Corinthians 5:8 and deceased Believers being “out of home, out of the body,” **never lose sight of the eventual resurrection of the dead.** Ralph P. Martin indicates, “The point [here] is that Paul sees nakedness as a state not to be feared ultimately because it looks forward to a prospect of embodiment.”^o With the whole of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 in view, Ben Witherington III asserts how for Paul, “His point is that he longs to bypass the intermediate condition altogether and allow this mortality to be swallowed up by real life—life in the resurrection body. In short, he would rather live on earth till the resurrection.”^p Still, with death most likely to intervene, being disembodied and present with the Messiah, is something from which one can derive great joy and comfort!

What does the psychopannychist do with 2 Corinthians 5:8, who thinks that when a born again Believer dies, he or she falls into complete unconsciousness until the resurrection? Does the psychopannychist really deny what Paul says in terms of the Believer being “out of home, out of the body,” and in the company of the Lord Yeshua in Heaven? Certainly, there might be a few out there who would say that it is appropriate to interpret Paul as believing that he thought that he would go to be with the Lord in a disembodied state, but that Paul might have been wrong. *This would betray a liberal bias, though.* Most psychopannychists you encounter, given the impossible situation they face in trying to reinterpret 2 Corinthians 5:8, simply avoid it. Still, there are a few who try to offer what they think is a valid alternative interpretation.

In their theological textbook *Across the Spectrum*, Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy do their best to respond to the view that “out of home, out of the body” (2 Corinthians 5:8, lit.) means something other than a temporary disembodied state prior to the resurrection. They propose,

“The present time is a time of struggle in our fallen bodies. It is a time when we are only partially clothed with Christ and when we are in a significant sense ‘away from the Lord.’ When the eschaton arrives, however, we will be ‘away from the body’ and fully clothed with the Lord (if we are faithful). We will at that time be ‘at home with the Lord.’”^q

While it may be true that our current lives on this side of the Second Coming may include various struggles with sin and temptation, the mode or quality of one’s existence is *not the issue* which has prompted Paul’s discussion on being clothed or unclothed, appearing in the larger context of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. The question in view is: “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1, KJV). What is to be done if the tabernacle of the body is “torn down” (NASU),^r that which is “mortal”^s (2 Corinthians 5:4; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:53-54), or as Peter says, what occurs after his “put[ting] off my tent” (2 Peter 1:14, NKJV)? The issue of 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 is *locational*.

For an audience like the Corinthians, who really struggled with the doctrine of resurrection and the reality of the Second Coming (1 Corinthians 15; cf. 2 Timothy 2:18), what is

Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 391; Barnett, pp 270-272; N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp 364-370.

^o Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 112.

He further states, “to die was not the consummation of salvation for the Christian, but it was, in terms of fellowship with Christ, better than staying in the body.”

^p Witherington, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 391.

^q “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), 98.

Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998), pp 184-186 follows a similar line of reasoning, that Earthly and Heavenly modes/qualities of existence are instead in view.

Notably not present in either one of these analyses is *any examination* of the Greek source text, in particular what *ekdēmēsai ek tou sōmatos*, “out of home, out of the body,” really means.

^r Grk. *kataluō* (καταλύω).

^s Grk. *thnētos* (θνητός); “pertaining to being liable to death (that which will eventually die)” ([BibleWorks 7.0: Louw-Nida Lexicon](#)).

going to happen? If people die, they are by no means to think that this is the end of their bodies. From Heaven at the time of the Second Coming and resurrection they will be given immortal bodies. We cannot avoid recognizing that this discussion has been prompted by addressing what occurs in relation to death, the resurrection, and the time in between. Psychopannychists, given the strong evidence from 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 in support of an intermediate afterlife before resurrection, have literally no choice but to try to claim that a different subject matter is being addressed. The locational nature of the verbs and prepositions employed (2 Corinthians 5:2, 4, 6, 8) has to basically be ignored.

The real challenge to what Boyd and Eddy have said above is very obvious. They claim that in the eschaton Believers “will be ‘away from the body’ and fully clothed with the Lord.” Exegetically speaking, this is a completely untenable position. The desire of the Apostle Paul was not to die, but to instead be further clothed and be swallowed up in immortality (2 Corinthians 5:4).¹ No one on any side of the debate honestly believes that at the resurrection, those whose physical bodies are reanimated, exist in any kind of condition, or even quality, that can be legitimately described as “away/absent from the body.” In the resurrection age, **the opposite is true:** the righteous will have a *fully and permanently embodied* condition, as their salvation has been fully consummated with the redemption of their bodies (Romans 8:23). Psychopannychists themselves especially and most correctly argue that physical matter and the human body are good, and not evil.² Boyd and Eddy have played a real theological shell game by actually suggesting that being “out of home, out of body” in 2 Corinthians 5:8 means the *fully embodied* future state, and could be legitimately accused of sounding Gnostic.³

The only real exegetical option, before the psychopannychist, is for them to propose that being “out of the body” is an unconscious period of being held in a bodiless state of suspended animation with the Lord in Heaven prior to the resurrection. This might not do real justice to how being “out of the body” results in being “present with the Lord,” but it would not try to avoid how the subject of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 actually pertains to the state of the dead.⁴

Just like the Apostle Paul, we should to a degree not look forward to the thought of our Earthly tabernacles/bodies being torn down (2 Corinthians 5:1)—and should instead desire to be further clothed, as the Messiah returns from Heaven (2 Corinthians 5:2, 4), never having died (1 Corinthians 15:51). Reality being what it is, most of us are probably going to die before the Second Coming, and we will experience a season of being “away from the body.” Acknowledging that our current life “at home in the body” means that we are “away from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6), we should not at all find it displeasing that a temporary disembodied state means being “with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8) we serve and love, in Heaven. But as always, it is our responsibility to remember that a going to be with the Lord in Heaven is not the ultimate destination—because the resurrection and Messianic Kingdom and Earth and into eternity is where redeemed humanity is going. As Milne properly concludes,

“[T]he intermediate state...while offering a new sense in the presence of the Lord, is an another sense ‘less’ than life here because of the loss of embodied existence. This lack will be more

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:50 also states a corresponding thought: “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” A physical transformation must occur in order to enter into the eschaton and Messianic Kingdom on Earth.

² If a mode or quality of existence were really in view in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, then it would have been far more appropriate and normative for Paul to have used *sarx* (σάρξ) or “flesh.”

³ It is worth noting that their chapter in *Across the Spectrum*, “The Human Constitution Debate,” pp 87-100, has been removed from its 2009 Second Edition.

⁴ Another way 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 has been interpreted, has been from the vantage point of an instantaneous resurrection. It is thought that Believers have new bodies already awaiting them in Heaven upon time of death. Cf. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp 203-205; Paul Beasley-Murray, *The Meaning of the Resurrection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), pp 152-155.

While the position of an instantaneous resurrection does much better justice to passages like 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 or Philippians 1:23, and by no means advocates an unconscious period for the deceased, its significant weak point concerns what happens to human remains, which are presumably to be reanimated at the time of resurrection (i.e., Ezekiel 37:5-6; Daniel 12:2).

than corrected when the provisionality of the intermediate state gives place to the full life of glory, and we reach the true goal of existence...^x (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:44b-49).

In the meantime as we edge closer and closer to the future, there is much important work that needs to be accomplished. As Paul plainly emphasizes, “whether at home or absent, [we must] be pleasing to Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). When we do finally see our Lord, we will each have to answer for the works we have done (2 Corinthians 5:10).

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^x Milne, 264.

Creationism: What is the Messianic position on Creationism?

Surveying today's Messianic movement, it is fair to say that the vast majority of Messianic Believers adhere to some kind of Young Earth Creationism. They believe that Planet Earth (and perhaps the whole universe) is approximately 6,000-7,000 years old, and was created in six literal 24-hour days. They believe that science supports these beliefs, and that the genealogies in Genesis chs. 5 and 11 can be used to calculate the age of the Earth. Frequently when the readings *Bereisheet* and *Noach* are examined at the beginning of the Torah cycle, theological critiques of Young Earth Creationism are often not considered.

In evangelical Christianity, however, not all adhere to Young Earth Creationism. Many evangelicals hold to the alternative view of Old Earth Creationism, and believe that Young Earth Creationism often follows what can be called “pseudoscience.” While affirming that human beings are a fiat creation of God—and did not appear because of millions of years of evolution—these views do espouse a much older age for Planet Earth and the universe. Of important note to Old Earth advocates is Genesis 1:2: “The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep.” Old Earth Creationism generally advocates that the universe was formed by God in six “days” or *yamim* (יָמִים) equaling periods of time (about 14-16 billion years), and that the “rock” known as Planet Earth remained unused by God for human habitation for about 4.5 billion years. In this schema human beings only started appearing on Earth perhaps a minimum of 14,000-20,000 years ago, to 40,000-50,000 years ago.

This is not to say that there are not some theological critiques of Old Earth Creationism or variation among its proponents. In its defense, this view often does take into consideration factors such as the speed of light, the rotation of the Solar System in the Milky Way Galaxy, and the rotation of the galaxy in the universe—things that Young Earth Creationists generally ignore or try to avoid. They also do not advocate a strict “black-and-white” reading of the Genesis 1 account, allowing for some poetic or literary creativity on behalf of its author, given its ancient genre. Old Earth Creationists do affirm the inerrancy of Scripture and the existence of Adam and Eve as historical people. One frequent critique is that most advocates hold that the Noahic Flood of Genesis 6-8 was just a regional catastrophe to the Ancient Near East and not a global catastrophe. Yet, the Flood would have affected all of humanity in existence at the time, and all of the animals associated with humanity, being “worldwide” from the vantage point of its participants.

As the Messianic movement grows and expands, more proponents of Old Earth Creationism or forms of Old Earth Creationism will be present. **This includes the editor.** This growing minority position will affirm the antiquity of the Earth and the universe, but also recognize that humans are a relatively new arrival on Earth. It will affirm that we are indeed made in the image of God for His purposes, but we preside over a Creation that God has been preparing for us for much longer than 6,000-7,000 years. Adopting a more moderate position on Creationism will also require that today's Messianic movement reevaluate some of its current views on Biblical chronology, which are often used to calculate the return of Yeshua in the so-called Biblical Year 6,000—something that our ministry believes that we are **not supposed to do**.

If you are unfamiliar with this issue, we would recommend that you consult the book *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, eds. J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), or purchase the DVD set [The Great Debate on Science and the Bible](#) by the Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, where proponents of both Young and Old Earth Creationism discuss their views. For an introduction to Old Earth Creationism, consult the book *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, second expanded edition by Hugh Ross (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001).

updated 26 August, 2008

Crucifixion: I have heard some Messianic teachers say that Yeshua was not crucified on a cross. Can you clarify this for me?

Many Messianics have been hesitant to use terms like “cross” or “crucifixion” for any number of reasons. The Complete Jewish Bible, for example, uses the term “execution stake” instead of cross, and it is not uncommon to also hear the term “tree” being used. While these are perfectly acceptable alternatives to the more common terms “cross” or “crucify,” it by no means negates them. Much of the Messianic movement, sadly, has an immature attitude when it comes to the symbol of the cross. Many Messianic Jews, for whatever reason, are offended by it. Perhaps some of this is due to historical Christian abuses of the Jewish community done in the “sign of the cross,” but the same can be said of just about any religious symbol. While we should be sensitive to those who may not always like the term “cross,” the Apostle Paul himself writes that “we preach Messiah crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). For Believers in Yeshua, the cross is a bittersweet symbol of the pain and suffering that the Lord endured for us.

History fully attests that criminals in the Roman Empire were crucified upon some kind of a cross. It was an extremely brutal, humiliating, and painful way to suffer and die. It was intended to serve as a public warning to others not to infuriate the Roman state:

“Under the Roman Empire, crucifixion normally included a flogging beforehand. At times the cross was only one vertical stake. Frequently, however, there was a cross-piece attached either at the top to give the shape of a ‘T’ (*crux comissa*) or just below the top, as in the form most familiar in Christian symbolism (*crux immissa*). The victims carried the cross or at least a transverse beam (*patibulum*) to the place of the execution, where they were stripped and bound or nailed to the beam, raised up, and seated on a *sedile* or small wooden peg in the upright beam. Ropes bound the shoulders or torso to the cross. The feet or heels of the victims were bound or nailed to the upright stake. As crucifixion damaged no vital organs, death could come slowly, sometimes after several days of atrocious pain” (ABD).^a

When we consider this scholastic description of crucifixion, it portrays exactly what Yeshua did for us. Yeshua’s crucifixion on a cross at Golgotha (Calvary) in the vicinity of Jerusalem was an historical fact. **You can stand rest-assured that the traditional view of Yeshua being executed on a Roman cross is generally accurate**, even though it was by no means something elaborate or glorified as some Christian portrayals may make it. Crucifixion was common in the First Century world. Any “alternative theories” that many Messianics may try to offer describing Yeshua’s execution often try to make it something less brutal and horrific than it was. In fact, the Messianic immaturity concerning Yeshua’s death can be so bad in some cases, that the book *Come Out of Her, My People* actually concludes that the cross could be the mark of the beast:

“What is the ‘mark of the beast’ of which we read in Rev[elation]...a mark on people’s foreheads and on their right hands?...Different interpretations have been given to the ‘mark of the beast,’ and also the cross has been suggested.”^b

If true, these are blasphemous statements designed to trivialize the sufferings that our Lord experienced for us. The fact that Yeshua was crucified on a cross does not necessarily make the cross a “holy symbol.” The cross is, first and foremost, an instrument of death. When Yeshua says “take up your cross and follow Me” (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23), He means that you must follow Him to the point of dying or being martyred—an unpopular subject in just about any religious venue.

It is also important to note that if Yeshua had been executed as solely a Jewish criminal, then He would have been stoned. But Yeshua was not stoned; He was executed by the Romans. This is because the sin of the *entire world*—and not just the Jewish people—was responsible for His death. **We are the ones responsible for Yeshua’s crucifixion, and we should not try to**

^a Gerald G. O’Collins, “Crucifixion,” in *ABD*, 1:1208-1209.

^b C.J. Koster, *Come Out of Her, My People* (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 1998),

trivialize His death. Crucifixion is one of the most painful and humiliating forms of execution that humans have ever devised, and those who would try to make Yeshua's death something that it was not are on extremely dangerous ground.

updated 24 February, 2010

Cult: I have been told that because I am now pursuing a Messianic walk that I have joined a cult. How do I counter these claims?

It is not uncommon for people who enter into the Messianic movement to be accused of joining a "cult." This is often done by Christian family or friends who do not understand what the Messianic movement and/or Torah observance are about. Rather than investigate the Hebraic Roots of our faith, many decide to accuse those who have done so as being part of a "cult," when in actuality such a claim is made with no substantial basis other than complete misunderstanding and lack of knowledge.

Technically speaking, any group that is dedicated to any cause is a "cult." *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines the word cult as "devoted attachment to person, principle, etc.," which would include religious or social devotion to anything. It could include those who are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, or are dedicated to entertainment phenomena such as Star Trek or Elvis Presley. Just about everyone on Planet Earth is part of some kind of "cult," when this definition is applied.

Theologically speaking, however, a cult is a group which advocates aberrant theology which is clearly in violation of the Scriptures. The term cult is often used more frequently than it should, but when correctly applied it should be applied to groups that deny core essentials of the faith such as denial of the Divinity and/or Messiahship of Yeshua, the inspiration of Scripture, and salvation by grace through faith alone. If any one of these three areas is violated by a group, be they Messianic or Christian, than such a group may be rightfully considered a cult. A cult also may be defined as a group with a domineering leader who demands the complete loyalty of that group's members, and who says that his teachings may not be challenged.

Are there groups claiming to be "Messianic" that classify as being "cults"? Yes. But in complete fairness there are "Christian" groups which likewise fall into the same classification. If you are challenged as being part of a cult, please ask the person making the accusation on what specific theological reasons and what significant basis that the claim is being made.

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