

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Easter: Do you celebrate Easter?

Easter is a non-Biblical holiday that is not listed among the appointed times that God gave to His people in Leviticus 23. Because Easter is not listed as a holiday that has been ordained by the Lord, we do not celebrate it. The majority in the Messianic movement do not celebrate Easter because it is something that He has not commanded us to do.

Many sincere Christians today observe Easter because in their minds they believe they are commemorating the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah. We believe that the resurrection of our Lord and Savior is something that is certainly worthy of commemoration, but is “Easter” the proper time to do it? The name “Easter,” for example, has absolutely no connection to the resurrection, and the customs and traditions that have become commonly associated with it, namely the Easter Bunny and egg hunts, have nothing to do with commemorating what the Lord has done for us by His atoning work at Golgotha (Calvary), and instead stem from Babylonian fertility rites. If we are to truly commemorate Yeshua’s sacrifice and resurrection for us, then we believe that it should be done as part of our celebrating the Spring festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread.

There are Messianics who unfairly criticize and condemn our Christian brethren who celebrate Easter in ignorance, who sincerely believe that they are honoring the Lord. We believe that this is inappropriate, and that it is our responsibility to show them the right way to do things from the Scriptures, yet while remembering that while many of us were still in mainstream Christianity we celebrated Easter with similar intentions. Believing in ignorance that we were celebrating Yeshua’s death, burial, and resurrection, the Lord in His mercy honored us for what we did. We have to extend that same mercy to our brothers and sisters who do not celebrate His appointed times, so that the Holy Spirit might convict them about what they should truly be doing from the Word.

Consult the editor’s article “**What is the Problem With Easter?**” for a further discussion of this issue.

updated 23 October, 2006

Ekklēsia/Qahal (English word “church”): I have heard that there really is no such thing as “the Church” in Scripture, and that the Hebrew and Greek terms used in the Bible can support this. Can you help me with this issue?

Some form of this summary appears in a wide array of articles and publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and TNN Online

In the Apostolic Scriptures no reader can deny how *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and so by extension it is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. But whether this is an appropriate rendering or not is something critical to ask, because when many people encounter the word “church” they think not of a living and breathing group of Messiah followers, but instead of a building with a steeple.^a *TDNT* offers some rather important remarks on the term *ekklēsia*:

“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

^a Note how there are various people one will encounter in the Messianic community, who will not use the term “church” because they somehow think it has pagan origins. **But** we do not readily use the term “church” to describe God’s people on theological grounds, and the confusion it frequently can cause. When “the Church” is typically referred to in the editor’s writings, it is primarily to refer to a religious institution.

Consult the FAQ on the TNN website “Church, word of pagan origin.”

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*.^c The Septuagint, or ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible dating three centuries before Yeshua, frequently translates the Hebrew word *qahal* (קָהָל), or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *Qahal* is one of the main Hebrew terms for “assembly” or “congregation” used in the Tanach, which almost exclusively refers to Israel. TWOT informs us that “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX.”^d When the martyr Stephen speaks of “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV), *tē ekklēsia en tē erēmō* (τῆ ἐκκλησία ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ), “the church” here he is speaking of is actually the assembly/congregation of Israel.

The Hebrew word *qahal* is used in the Tanach to describe the people of Israel. TWOT indicates that “*qāhāl* may... designate the congregation as an organized body. There is *q̄hal yisrā’el* [קָהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל] (Deut 31:30), *q̄hal YHWH* [קָהָל יְהוָה] (Num 16:3, etc.), and *q̄hal ēlōhīm* [קָהָל אֱלֹהִים] (Neh 13:1) and then at other times merely ‘the assembly’ (*haqqāhāl* [הַקָּהָל]). We encounter... ‘the assembly of the people of God’ (Jud 20:2). Of special interest is the phrase ‘congregation of the Lord’ (*q̄hal YHWH*) of which there are thirteen instances (Num 16:3; 20:4; Deut 23:2-4; Mic 2:5; 1 Chr 28:8). It is the nearest OT equivalent of ‘church of the Lord’”^e (emphasis mine).

When the Apostolic writers used the Greek word (ἐκκλησία), often rendered as “church” in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate assembly or group of people removed from Israel. They considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel, perhaps better viewed as an *Israel maximized* by the arrival of the Messiah, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

It is not surprising by any means that one of the lexical definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include “Israel.” Thayer states that “in the Sept. [*ekklēsia* is] often equiv. to קָהָל, the assembly of the Israelites.”^f BDAG further summarizes that not only does *ekklēsia* correspond to the “OT Israelites assembly, congregation,” but asserts how it was used by the early Messianic Believers “in Greek-speaking areas for chiefly two reasons: to affirm continuity with Israel through use of a term found in Gk. translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to allay any suspicion, esp. in political circles, that Christians were a disorderly group.”^g This is because in an entirely classical context *ekklēsia* could have been used to describe a civil assembly, such as that of the Athenians,^h or even the Roman Senate. It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as “church,” whereas it would be best rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation,” with people able to have an easier time seeing that when Yeshua said that He came to “build” His assembly (Matthew 16:18), it is undoubtedly connected with the Father’s promise to “rebuild” Israel (Jeremiah 33:7).ⁱ

There are many references one will find in a diverse array of technical commentaries on the New Testament, where linguistic and theological connections between *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) and *qahal* (קָהָל) are made.

^b K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397.

^c 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.”

^d Jack P. Lewis, “*qāhāl*,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:790.

^e Ibid.

^f Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 196.

^g Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303.

^h H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 239.

ⁱ Consult the editor’s article “When Did ‘the Church’ Begin?,” which includes discussion on the linguistic connections between the verbs *banah* (בָּנָה) and *oikodomeō* (οἰκοδομέω), employed in Jeremiah 33:7; Matthew 16:18; and Jeremiah 33:7 (LXX).

posted 07 September, 2011

Elements of the World (Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20): I have heard that the Torah actually composes the “elemental things of the world”? Is there any truth to this claim?

The specific clause *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου)—“the elemental things/spirits of the world”—appears in full in Galatians 4:3 and Colossians 2:8, followed by the shorter *stoicheia* in Galatians 4:9, and *tōn stoicheiōn* (τῶν στοιχείων) in Colossians 2:20. There is no single interpretation as to what this encompasses, agreed upon by all interpreters, as such “principles” could involve: (1) the ABCs of one’s religious observance, (2) what many of the ancients believed were the basic elements of the universe (i.e., earth, water, air, fire), or (3) cosmic spiritual powers like angels or demons. With these three major options alone to be considered, it should not be surprising as to why there is no full consensus as to what *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* means when read within the Pauline letters.

The second usage of “elemental principles of the world” in Colossians 2:8, 20 is much easier to consider, as more information is given to us within the wider text of Paul’s writing. A fair number of Colossians interpreters are agreed that the issue confronted by Paul to his audience relates to a proto-Gnostic, mysticized Judaism, involving appeals (or even worship of!) made to angels (Colossians 2:18) and/or various spirit powers rather than Yeshua the Messiah.^a The local Judaism infecting the Believers at Colossae, which in turn had been infected by the local mishmash of Hellenistic, foreign, and mystical religious and philosophical beliefs in Phrygia, was leading many of the Believers astray. Some have concluded that the errors present among the Colossian Believers may be appropriated as a warning for people today errantly influenced by horoscopes or fortune-telling, yet in the Colossians’ case there may be more of a connection to mystery religions and cults.

While it is not at all difficult to see what *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* can mean in regard to Colossians 2:9, 20—as there are concrete examples of religious asceticism stated in the text (Colossians 2:18, 20-23)—what *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* might mean in regard to Galatians 4:3, 9 is much more complicated.

Being subject to *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* is a problem that can be Jewish (cf. Galatians 4:3), while at the same time it is more easily discernible as pagan. Paul writes the non-Jewish Galatians, “now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?” (Galatians 4:9). Various Galatians interpreters conclude that here Paul has just associated God’s commandments and paganism as basically being the same thing.^b The foolish Galatians, being led astray by the Influencers/Judaizers, are returning to a style of life that they should have left behind in paganism, following rules and regulations that are nothing more than worldly principles. While it is likely that Paul used *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* in Colossians to refute errant, Gnostic/mystical practices, the first usage of *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* is said to be employed in a much different way.

Is God’s Torah nothing more than “elementary principles of the world” to Paul? While it is not difficult to see how human beings approaching God’s Torah can turn it into something via their own observance (i.e., like the sectarian “works of law” witnessed in 4QMMT) into just fleshly rudiments—**this is surely not the Torah’s fault!** Paul is the same one who would communicate “we know that the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14) and “We know that the law is

^a Cf. F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp 97-98; Peter T. O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians, Philemon*, Vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 110; *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp 187-193.

^b Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990), pp 180-181; Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp 298-299.

good if one uses it properly” (1 Timothy 1:8, NIV). In fact, he says “the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7, NIV).

Is it at all possible that there is another explanation for what Paul means in Galatians 4:3, 9? While it may not be a popular one among today's Galatians expositors, there is indeed another way we can look at this. Paul asks the Galatians, “how can you turn back again...?” (RSV) or return (Grk. *epistrephō*, ἐπιστρέφω) to the elementary principles of the world. **All should be agreed that the Galatians were going back to things they should have left behind in paganism.** But is Paul associating First Century Judaism and paganism as being quantitatively indifferent? Are God's commandments in the Torah no different than a pagan philosophy or superstition? Or, if some sects of First Century Judaism had been errantly affected by aspects of paganism (such as the Hellenistic concept of Fate; cf. Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 13.172)—could those errantly influencing the Galatians similarly be part of a sectarian Judaism that advocated rituals similar to those in paganism?

Consider how Paul previously has asked the Galatians “who has bewitched you...?” (Galatians 3:1). While it is easy for people in today's West to consider such a question to only be a rhetorical device, the fact remains that in ancient times various religious sects really did use witchcraft to cast spells and hexes on people, and parts of Judaism were not immune to this, either. Likewise, Paul says of the Influencers/Judaizers that they “do not even keep the Law themselves” (Galatians 6:13). How could he say this if these people were just misguided legalists, only forcing ritual circumcision and proselyte conversion onto the non-Jews in Galatia? Given how *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* is later used in Colossians to depict errant, syncretistic Jewish practices—is it so impossible that the Influencers in Galatia could have also brought in errant, syncretistic practices? These could be things able to “bewitch” them.

The idea that the Influencers/Judaizers in Galatia could have advocated some kind of proto-Gnostic or mystical Jewish errors is not one often seen in contemporary Galatians interpretation, but it cannot be totally taken off the table. In worrying about the Galatians observing “days and months and seasons and years” (Galatians 4:10), is Paul really up in arms about the Galatians remembering things like the Passover—which he actually instructed the Corinthians to observe (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)? Or would he be more concerned about the rituals and customs associated with the appointed times, brought in and practiced by the Influencers/Judaizers, which were affecting the Galatians? Samuel J. Mikolaski's comments are well taken:

“Are these Jewish or pagan observances? In writing to the Galatians, Paul clearly has Judaizers in mind. Did these worship elemental spirits? Astrological elements were at times infused into Jewish as well as pagan practices.”^c

An alternative to be considered to Paul associating God's commandments with paganism—and that the Galatians should not be following God's Torah—is that in being affected by the Influencers, **the Galatians were following errant religious rituals that saturated the Influencers' style of Torah observance.** The problem would not be the Galatians remembering the Sabbath (especially since Paul met many of them at *Shabbat* services, per his visit to Galatia in Acts 13:13-14:28) or the appointed times, but rather *how the Influencers observed them*, infused with ungodly pagan rituals that the Galatians should have easily recognized as originating from “those who by nature are not gods” (Galatians 4:8, NIV).

If this is to be considered, then it does not seem difficult as to why Paul would say that the Influencers/Judaizers break the very Torah they claim to uphold (Galatians 6:13). They have already merited the Torah's curse upon them for failing to be a blessing to others per God's promise to Abraham (Galatians 3:8, 10), but they deserve it further by encouraging the Galatians to follow ungodly rituals *actually opposed by the Torah* (i.e., Deuteronomy 18:10-14) that negatively affected their sectarian branch of Judaism, and considered by Paul to be classified among the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). (Consult the FAQ entry on **Galatians**, and the editor's commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*, for a further discussion.)

^c Samuel J. Mikolaski, “Galatians,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds. *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1100.

Realizing that there are First Century Judaisms, *plural*, that are depicted within the Apostolic Scriptures is a difficult step for many readers to make, as many prefer to over-simplify the circumstances within the New Testament. Some branches of Ancient Judaism were affected by paganism. Not only are we supposed to realize this, but we are also required to make closer observations in reading the text, and ask ourselves some critical questions like whether Paul does associate God's commandments and paganism as being the same thing. *Messianics today do not believe that the good rabbi from Tarsus associates God's commandments as being synonymous with paganism.* Yet, some Messianics today do not heed the warning given by Paul against *ta stoicheia tou kosmou*, sometimes failing to realize that they may have been affected by various Jewish errors, which in turn have been affected by paganism. Fortunately, though, this does not concern a considerable majority of traditions employed today by the Synagogue, or even by Messianic Judaism, in its remembrance of the appointed times (cf. Philippians 4:8).^d

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^d For a further evaluation of the options available, consult D.G. Reid, "Elements/Elemental Spirits of the World," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp 229-233.

End-Times Revival: Do you believe that there will be a massive end-times revival before the return of the Lord?

All that Yeshua tells us concerning the end-times is that “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). Knowing that the gospel will be preached to all the world does not necessarily equate to there being a massive end-times revival. All it means is that all will somehow hear the message of salvation. On the contrary to there being some kind of an end-times revival, one of the prerequisites that Paul says must happen before the return of the Messiah is that there will be a massive apostasy, or departure from the faith:

“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” (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

It is likely that in the end-times, many people will truly come to faith in the Lord and/or get themselves right with Him. At the same time, this will also be coupled with a massive apostasy of many people away from the Lord.

updated 23 October, 2006

Ephesians 2:14-15: 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 of commandments has been abolished?

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

Pastor: Ephesians 2:14-15: The Law was abolished in the flesh of Christ.

“For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one* and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace.”

Ephesians 2:14-15 are challenging verses for many within the Messianic movement, with few being able to even respond to the pastor’s remark “The Law was abolished in the flesh of Christ.” If in Ephesians 2:14-15 the Apostle Paul is saying that Yeshua the Messiah abolished the Torah of Moses, then this would be in flat contradiction of the Savior’s own words regarding fulfillment of the Torah (Matthew 5:17-19)—yet no one can deny the significance of how in Him a “one new humanity” (NRSV/CJB/TNIV) composed of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers must emerge, a clear testament of His grand salvation for all people. We need to look at Ephesians 2:14-15 a bit more closely, and keep in mind *what* kind of law is being specifically addressed here. Is God’s Torah actually a cause of enmity or hostility for people, or might something *else* be in mind?

Immediately previous in Ephesians 2:11-13, Paul asserts how those of his largely non-Jewish audience in Asia Minor^a had once been separate from the One True God, and

^a Be aware of how “in Ephesus” (*en Ephesō*, ἐν Ἐφέσῳ) does not appear in the oldest manuscripts of Ephesians 1:1 (cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975], 601), and that in all likelihood the Epistle of Ephesians was originally a circular letter written by the Apostle Paul to assemblies within Asia Minor, eventually making its way to Ephesus. The RSV notably rendered Ephesians 1:1 with: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus.”

For a further discussion, consult C.E. Arnold, “Ephesians, Letter to the: Destination,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp 243-245, and the author’s entry for the Epistle of Ephesians in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*.

consequently also separate from Israel. This, however, is a status which has been reversed with the arrival of the Messiah Yeshua into their lives:

“Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ *which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember 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. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah*” (Ephesians 2:11-13).

Speaking of the non-Jewish Believers, Paul says that prior to their faith in Yeshua, they had once been “excluded” (NASU) or “alienated” (RSV) from the Commonwealth of Israel (*tēs politeias tou Israēl*, τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραήλ). They had been without any hope of salvation. Yet, being found in Yeshua they have been “brought near” (cf. Deuteronomy 4:7; Isaiah 56:3; Psalm 148:14) and into Israel as a direct result of salvation. They possess a citizenship which their trespasses and sins once barred them from having, and as Paul further explains in Ephesians 3:6, “the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel.” **All people are to be reckoned as a part of the same community of Israel in Israel’s Messiah.** This is significant to the point that the reconciliation of *once* hostile Jewish and non-Jewish people to one another, composing the Body of Messiah, is to serve as a sign of the further redemption to come to the cosmos (Ephesians 3:10).

Paul’s attestation in Ephesians 2:14 is not too difficult to comprehend: **“For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall.”** There was something that specifically represented the division between the Jewish people and the nations in the First Century, which had to be broken down, in a manner of speaking. Certainly, there is no shortage of quotations to be seen in ancient Jewish literature, as well as various Greek and Roman works, detailing the great amount of ungodly prejudice and negativity present—which the Apostles and early Believers all had to work against in sharing the good news of Yeshua to all who would hear. What needed to be torn down is labeled by Paul to be “the barrier of the dividing wall,” *to mesotoichon* (τὸ μεσότοιχον). Only when such a wall is torn down, in the hearts of people, can the true *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם) or all-encompassing peace of the Lord be manifest.^b *What* this dividing wall is specifically supposed to be is a cause of much dispute among interpreters, especially given the following word:

“[B]y abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances...” (Ephesians 2:15a).

By His sacrifice on the tree, Yeshua the Messiah has specifically abolished *tēn echthran* (τὴν ἔχθραν) or “the hostility” (NRSV). Christopher J.H. Wright reminds us what the actual issue in view is: “*to remove the barrier of enmity and alienation between Jew and Gentile, and by implication all forms of enmity and alienation...The cross is the place of reconciliation, to God and one another.*”^c In rendering this negative condition inoperative, many readers automatically conclude that the regulations of the Law of Moses are what stood in the way of the Jewish people and the nations, causing great problems, and so the Torah needed to be abolished. Before we jump to the immediate conclusion that all Christian interpreters everywhere have viewed Ephesians 2:15a speaking of *all* of the Torah, there are in fact several distinct options put forward:

1. This “law” is the totality of the Torah of Moses.
2. This “law” composes the ceremonial commandments of the Torah, particularly in relation to the regulations of clean and unclean. Or, it composes the death penalty for high crimes in the Torah (cf. Colossians 2:14).

^b While the Apostolic Scriptures employ *eirēnē* (εἰρήνη) for “peace,” this classical term largely only concerns an absence of war. *Eirēnē* notably translates *shalom* in the Septuagint, and as such would include total harmony between God, humankind, and ultimately all of Creation. This is a peace that includes “unimpaired relationships with others and fulfillment in one’s undertakings” (G. Lloyd Carr, “shālôm,” in *TWOT*, 1:931).

^c Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 313.

This “law” does not compose the moral or ethical commandments of the Torah.

3. This “law” is a reference to what caused the dividing wall seen in the Jerusalem Temple (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.417; *Wars of the Jews* 5.194), derived from various inappropriate interpretations of Torah commandments. This would constitute “law,” but not law of Mosaic origin (cf. Mark 7:6-7).

While the first view is one which looks unfavorably upon the Torah, the second and third views tend to look favorably upon the Torah to an extent.

The second view is generally adhered to among Christian Old Testament theologians, who still have a highly favorable view of the Torah’s moral and ethical commandments, and the Ten Commandments especially, which are to *always* be followed by God’s people in any generation. In his book *The Message of the Cross*, Derek Tidball specifies that the so-called “moral law” of God could not be abolished or intended here, per the words of the Messiah Himself:

“The ‘barrier’ or ‘dividing wall’ might allude to the wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts of the temple, which were to be entered only by Jews. It prevented Gentiles from going further and warned them that they took their lives into their own hands if they did...Christ did not abolish the moral law by rendering it no longer relevant. If Paul were claiming that, he would be contradicting Christ’s own teaching. But on the cross Christ did nullify the condemnation this law brings us under when we break it, by removing the penalty of our disobedience from us and bearing it himself. He nullified the ceremonial law, abolishing its regulations through fulfilling it in himself, thus making them an anachronism. Because he did so, these laws can no longer exercise their divisive powers.”^d

There are many interpreters who continue to hold to the view that only the “ceremonial law” was rendered inoperative via Yeshua’s sacrifice. Kaiser is one who holds to this view, and he does validly note, “Had the law in its entirety been intended in this ‘abolishment,’ Ephesians 6:2 would be somewhat of an embarrassment: ‘Honor your father and mother.’”^e It would be absolutely ridiculous for Paul to consider that the Torah as a whole has been abolished, especially if he later must appeal to its instruction in the same letter! Christian interpreters who have a high view of the Torah do rightly point out that Ephesians 2:15 has to be balanced in view of Matthew 5:17 and Romans 3:31. They are also keen to point out that removing the Tanach or Old Testament from a modern Christian’s regimen of discipleship has had disastrous moral consequences, being right to assert that things like the Ten Commandments were to keep Ancient Israel rightfully separated from the pagan nations around them.

The third view concurs with the imagery of the Temple of God, “a holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:21), that Paul considers the Body of Messiah to be, with the Jerusalem Temple made as an obvious point of comparison. And, there was definitely a barricade that was present in the Jerusalem Temple which separated the Court of the Gentiles from the inner court, the latter only being accessible to Jews and proselytes. The First Century historian Josephus testified to this:

“Thus was the first enclosure. In the midst of which, and not far from it, was the second, to be gone up to by a few steps; this was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription, which forbade any foreigner to go in, under pain of death” (*Antiquities of the Jews* 15.417).^f

“[T]here was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits: its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that ‘no foreigner should go within that sanctuary’” (*Wars of the Jews* 5.194).^g

^d Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 228.

^e Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 310.

^f *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 425.

^g *Ibid.*, 706.

Here, we see that this dividing wall which was erected between the Court of the Gentiles and the inner court included signs that any unauthorized person passing through would be executed, presumably on sight. S. Westerholm explains, “at regular intervals were placed slabs with inscriptions in Greek and Latin forbidding Gentiles, on pain of death, to go further...It has often been suggested that Eph. 2:14 (the ‘dividing wall of hostility’) contains an allusion to this barrier” (*ISBE*).^h This was a barrier that separated Jews from both non-Jews *and* women. Francis Foulkes attests, “Christ had now *broken down* the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, of which that dividing wall in the temple was a symbol.”ⁱ Bruce further observes,

“This was indeed a material barrier keeping Jews and Gentiles apart...Whatever the readers may or may not have recognized...it should be remembered that the temple barrier in Jerusalem played an important part in the chain of events which led to Paul’s [imprisonment]...That literal ‘middle wall of partition,’ the outward and visible sign of the ancient cleavage between Jew and Gentile, could have come very readily to mind in this situation.”^j

If the dividing wall in the Jerusalem Temple is what Paul has in mind as being torn down in the Messiah, it certainly begs the question whether the erection of such a wall was God’s original intention. Some say that it was a natural application of the Torah,^k keeping Israel separated from the nations. Yet, does the erection of *to mesotoichon* in Ephesians 2:14-15 fit well with the missional imperatives upon God’s people seen in the Tanach (Old Testament)? When the Lord called Israel as a nation of priests unto Him (Exodus 19:6)—intermediaries between Him and the world—would erecting barriers to keep outsiders *out* be a part of that call? It was, after all, to be Israel’s obedience to God’s Torah that would make them wise in the eyes of the other nations (Deuteronomy 4:6), and by seeing Israel blessed then other nations would flock *to inquire about Him!*

At the dedication of the First Temple, the prayer of King Solomon is that the nations would hear of the fame of Israel’s God, and stream toward the Temple and come to know Him:

“Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name’s sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as *do* Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name” (1 Kings 8:41-43).

The eschatological vision of the Temple is that all nations would stream toward it, joining themselves to the Lord and serving Him:

“Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath and holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples” (Isaiah 56:6-7).^l

Did the Torah truly bring about a hostility between Paul’s Jewish people and the nations? Did the construction of the Temple purposefully create a division between Israel and the nations? You will note that there is ***no Torah commandment*** regarding the construction of a dividing wall in God’s sanctuary, nor would such an ideology be supported anywhere in the Tanach. The

^h S. Westerholm, “Temple,” in *ISBE*, 4:772; cf. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), pp 22-24.

ⁱ Francis Foulkes, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963), 82.

^j Bruce, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, pp 297-298; cf. Ephesians 6:20 where Paul says he is “an ambassador in chains.”

N.T. Wright further states, “The image of the dividing wall is, pretty certainly, taken from the Jerusalem temple, with its sign warning Gentiles to come no further” (*Justification*, 172).

^k Cf. D.G. Reid, “Triumph,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 951.

^l Cf. Mark 11:17; Matthew 21:13; Luke 19:46.

purpose of constructing the Temple was *l'ma'an yeid'un kol-amei ha'erezt et-shemkha l'yir'ah otkha* (לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּן כָּל-עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ אֶת-שֵׁמֶךָ לְיִרְאָה אֹתְךָ), “Thus all the peoples of the earth will know Your name and revere You” (1 Kings 8:43, NJPS). The Temple was built to be a place for God’s glory to be manifest, and for the fame of the Creator to reach beyond the people of Israel! As Isaiah says, it was to be *beit-tefilah yiqarei l'kol-ha'amim* (בֵּית-תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא לְכָל-הָעַמִּים), “[a] house of prayer called for all the peoples” (Isaiah 56:6, my translation).

The debate over the dividing wall to be torn down in Yeshua, ultimately regards how one chooses to view the clause:

ton nomon tōn entolōn en dogmasin (τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν)

This clause is invariably rendered as something along the lines of “the law with its commandments and regulations” (NIV), “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” (ESV), or “the law with its rules and regulations” (REB).^m *Ton nomon tōn entolōn en dogmasin* is literally “the law of commandments in decrees” (Witherington),ⁿ with the NASU rendering of “the Law of commandments contained in ordinances,” being probably the most literal that you will be able to find among mainline versions.

The singular *entolē* (ἐντολή) means “a mandate or ordinance, *command*,” and can be used “of commandments of OT law” (BDAG),^o even though this is not a strict necessity. In a secular sense *entolē* was used “as the command of a king or official” or “as the instruction of a teacher” (TDNT).^p

What *dogma* (δόγμα) pertains to is slightly more complex, as it can be both “a formal statement concerning rules or regulations that are to be observed” and “something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief, *doctrine, dogma*” (BDAG).^q *Dogma* is not used at all in the Septuagint translation of the Pentateuchal books to describe any category of Torah commandments. It principally appears in the Book of Daniel to describe the decrees of the Babylonians and the Persians (Daniel 2:13; 3:10, 12; 4:6; 6:9ff, 13f, 16, 27; cf. Acts 17:7), as it can certainly be referring to “an imperial declaration” (BDAG).^r Wayne E. Ward further indicates, in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*:

“[T]he word designates a tenet of doctrine authoritatively pronounced. In the LXX *dogma* appears in Esth. 3:9; Dan. 2:13 and 6:8 for a decree issued by the king. In Luke 2:1 it is the decree of Caesar Augustus, in Acts 16:4 the decrees laid down by the apostles, in Col. 2:14 and Eph. 2:15 the judgments of the law against sinners, which Jesus triumphed over in the cross.”^s

In the Apocrypha an apostate Jew is said to leave all of *tōn patriōn dogmatōn* (τῶν πατριῶν δογματῶν) or “the ancestral traditions” (3 Maccabees 1:3), and a brother who is martyred testifies to have been raised on *dogmasin* or various “teachings” (4 Maccabees 10:2), neither of which has to be the Torah/Pentateuch proper. Given these examples, you should see some interpretational possibilities open to us as Messianic Believers, especially per Yeshua’s word that He came to *not* abolish the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 16:17).

I would propose that a more correct translation of Ephesians 2:15b, *ton nomon tōn entolōn en dogmasin* (τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν), especially per the context of the *dogmas* of the dividing wall, would be: “the *religious* Law of commandments in dogmas.”^t *Nomos* (νομός) is

^m The NLT has the highly paraphrased, and also quite problematic: “By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles.”

ⁿ Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 251.

^o BDAG, 340.

^p G. Schrenk, “to command, commission,” in TDNT, 235.

^q BDAG, 254.

^r Ibid.

^s Wayne E. Ward, “dogma,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 171.

^t The 1993 German Elberfelder Bibel has “das Gesetz der Gebote in Satzungen.” The singular term *Satzung* can notably mean “regulations, statutes and articles of a club” (*Langenscheidts New College German Dictionary*, 516).

rendered as “law,” but clarified with an italic “*religious*,” as it would be more akin to man-made religious law than Biblical law, definitions afforded by the classical meaning of *nomos* and varied usage throughout the Pauline Epistles where it does not need to mean the Mosaic Torah.^u This law would be more akin to what is described in the opening words of Mishnah tractate *Pirkei Avot*: “make a fence around the Torah”^v (m.*Avot* 1:1).^w

“The *religious* Law of commandments in dogmas” of Ephesians 2:15b is the cause of the enmity between Jew and non-Jew witnessed in Paul’s day. It is not the cause of enmity or hostility because God’s Torah demands that His people be holy unto Him and separated from paganism, valuing human life and following a righteous code of conduct. This *man-made* law set forth in religious decrees causes enmity because it deliberately skews the work of God as originally laid forth in the Torah mandate for Israel to be a blessing to all! In the First Century, it would primarily include things like proselytic circumcision (cf. Ephesians 2:11), something not required by the Torah as an entryway into God’s covenant people, yet often set ahead of belief or faith in God and certainly required by the establishment of the time. Paul spoke against non-Jewish Believers going through such a ritual circumcision, because it would devalue one’s own native culture and the unique things that it could bring to the Kingdom of God (Galatians 3:28).^x

There are, in fact, several kinds of Rabbinical injunctions making up Jewish religious law that would have placed a kind of dividing wall between the Jewish people and the nations, which would have undoubtedly caused problems for the mission upon which Paul had embarked among the nations. Examples of this are replete in the Gospels, where Yeshua directly confronted many of the *halachic* practices in His day, that directly interfered with the work of His Father. While Yeshua instructed His Disciples to follow the lead of the Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-2), there were clearly matters where they were hypocritical and were not to be followed (Matthew 23:3). In Yeshua’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7), our Lord uses the statement “You have heard that it was said” (Matthew 5:27, 38, 43), and proceeds not to deny the continuance of the Mosaic Torah, but correct (gross) misunderstandings of it.^y One of the most significant areas where Yeshua’s teaching directly confronted the understanding of His day appears in Matthew 5:43-44:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR [Leviticus 19:18] and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

It is absolutely imperative to keep in mind that nowhere in the Tanach can any reference be found to “hate your enemy.” Kaiser asserts, “For some years now, I have offered my students a monetary prize if anyone can find the second part of that quote anywhere in the Old Testament. So far no one has claimed the prize.”^z Stern also remarks on Matthew 5:43, “nowhere does the *Tanakh* teach that you should **hate your enemy**.”^{aa} Those in the Qumran community, however, specifically commanded love only for the members of one’s covenant community and that hatred could be shown for the outsider:

^u Worthwhile to consider here is “*nomos*,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 457, which indicates, “Although *nomos* overlaps *torah* and the English word ‘law’ in meaning, it also has other connotations. An important additional concept was the idea of ‘custom’ in a particular sense: the Greeks often considered their customs to be ‘natural law.’ Thus, obedience to the law meant more than honoring certain written regulations; it included an entire way of life. In Jewish writings in Greek, the term ‘the law’ (*to nomos*) came to mean ‘Jewish religion.’”

^v Heb. *ha'r'beih v'asu seyag l'Torah* (הַרְבֵּה וְעָשׂוּ סִיג לַתּוֹרָה).

^w Kravitz and Olitzky, 1.

^x Consult the Excursus “Should Non-Jewish Messianic Believers ‘Convert’ to (Messianic) Judaism?” in the author’s commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

^y Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God*, 313 explains, “Jesus was correcting the *oral* traditions that had accumulated around the law (‘You have heard it said’). He did not say, as all too many presume, something like ‘It is written, but I now correct that by saying...’”

^z *Ibid.*

^{aa} Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 30.

“He is to teach them both to love all the Children of Light—each commensurate with his rightful place in the council of God—and to hate all the Children of Darkness, each commensurate with his guilt and the vengeance due him from God” (1QS 1.9-11).^{bb}

The kind of dogma which would demand that one hate others outside of the accepted community of Israel was one which undeniably had to be abolished via the work of Yeshua, as our Lord emphasized love for all people as the first of the commandments (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). While it can be demonstrated that both Yeshua and Paul (cf. Acts 25:8) kept many of the extra-Biblical traditions of their day—they certainly clashed in the area of equality for all. (In fact, such equality put the gospel at odds with the Greco-Roman establishment every bit as much as with the Jewish establishment!) Hating other human beings, even sinners outside of the Jewish community, would have come into direct conflict with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Any kind of extra-Biblical decree that would give justification, for hating other people, was to be jettisoned via the teachings and sacrificial work of Yeshua.

If we understand the fact that the Temple was to be a testimony to the God of Israel among the nations (1 Kings 8:41-43)—and indeed a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:6-7)—then the placement of a physical barrier prohibiting the nations from entering into the inner sanctuary was obviously something that He had *never intended!* Such a barrier, at least in the hearts and minds of the First Century Jewish Believers, **had to have been removed by the work of Yeshua within them.** This was something that was justified by much of “the *religious* Law of commandments in dogmas” within Second Temple Judaism, but was something that ran quite contrary to the missional intention of Moses’ Teaching—with Israel being a blessing to all nations!^{cc}

To a strong degree, the barrier wall in the Second Temple was a manifestation of Jewish hatred for the nations—not at all a manifestation of love and of spiritual concern. By His sacrifice, Yeshua tore down this wall and with it whatever human regulations placed unnecessary barriers between people and the Father. In so doing, Yeshua would be able to bring Jewish people and those from the nations together as *kainon anthrōpon* (καίνον ἄνθρωπον)^{dd} or “**one new humanity**” (Ephesians 2:15c, NRSV/CJB/TNIV) in Him.

It is only at the foot of Yeshua’s cross where redemption for all people can be found, and reconciliation between all people can be enacted (Ephesians 2:16). Paul asserts, “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18), as the true unity that God desires among the redeemed can only be found in the work of His Son. A significant effect of this, which Paul explains to the non-Jewish Believers of Asia Minor, is “you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens^{ee} with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:19). **They are a part of Israel the same as any natural born Jew,** as a direct result of their faith in

^{bb} Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 127.

^{cc} Hegg’s thoughts are well taken:

“[W]e may conclude that Yeshua abolished those Rabbinic laws which, when practiced, set aside the Law of God by separating Jew and Gentile which God intended to make one in Mashiach. This was the ‘dividing wall, the (Rabbinic) law contained in the ordinances (of the oral Torah)’. Those parts of the oral Torah which affirm the written Torah or are in harmony with it remain viable for the Messianic believer as the traditions of the fathers” (Tim Hegg, [1996]. *The “Dividing Wall” in Ephesians 2:14. Torah Resource*. Retrieved 05 August, 2008, from <<http://torahresource.com>>).

Daniel C. Juster, *Jewish Roots* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1995), 113 offers a similar view:

“The commands and ordinances are not necessarily intrinsically Torah, but the oral extensions of these laws made Gentiles unclean and contact with Gentiles something to avoid. As well, it would abolish commands precluding a Jew worshipping in the most intimate way with a Gentile since the Gentile, in Yeshua, is no longer an idolatrous sinner.”

See also the observations of Daniel C. Juster, *Jewish Roots* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1995), 113.

^{dd} Note how the term *anēr* (άνήρ) or “male” is not employed here, but the more general term for humankind. An inclusive language rendering here is to be preferred.

^{ee} Grk. *ouketi este xenoi kai paroikoi alla este sumpolitai* (οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται).

Israel's Messiah. The assembly that the Messiah has established has been built up by the faithful work of both apostles and prophets, made to be like the Jerusalem Temple—but one composed of people filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Yeshua the Messiah never came and eliminated the Torah, as per His crucial admonition in Matthew 5:17-19. Rather, the wall that He broke down was that of Rabbinical addition and/or manipulation to the commandments that had separated the non-Jews coming to faith from inclusion in Israel. It was never the Torah or Pentateuch *itself* that caused a wall of division to be erected not permitting the outsider from becoming a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Certain Rabbinical ordinances or dogmas not found in the Torah ultimately led to a barrier wall being constructed on the Temple Mount, and caused this separation to take place.^{ff}

updated 20 February, 2011

^{ff} For a further discussion of these and the relevant surrounding passages, consult the author's article "The Message of Ephesians" and his commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

Ephesians 6:11-17: I heard a Messianic teacher say that the armor of God is not the armor of a Roman soldier, but really the garments of a Levitical priest serving in the Temple. Do you have an opinion about this? Is this a valid understanding?

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

As significant as the armor of God is for us being effective in our service to Him, a few teachers out in the Messianic community today have doubted that the armor represented by Paul in Ephesians is that of a soldier fighting in battle (cf. Romans 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:8). They have instead advocated that Paul was making reference to “priestly elements” or “priestly garments” of service, but sadly for them there is no sound basis for these conclusions. The first and most obvious problem with this view is that it fails to engage with the Tanach passages quoted by the Apostle Paul, which make direct reference to God’s wearing armor as a warrior (Isaiah 11:1-5; 59:14-18; cf. Wisdom 5:17-20).^a Is the armor of God really speaking of the garments of a Levitical priest, and not the elements of warfare? While we are surely to serve as though we are priests in God’s service (Exodus 19:6; Revelation 1:6, etc.), **that is not what is in view here in vs. 11-17.**

Advocates of this view, clouded by negative ideas against the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome, make the unfortunate conclusion that the armor elements of a breastplate, shield, helmet, and sword were things that were only Greco-Roman. Historical observations of ancient weapons of warfare are undoubtedly lacking as these basic elements of warfare were common *not only* among the classical civilizations, but also Ancient Near Eastern civilizations contemporary to and pre-existent of Ancient Israel. “ANE civilizations developed [these] weapons long before the nation of Israel was formed; these were utilized in battles with enemies, never in isolation from other people” (*ABD*).^b While there was variance between the warfare elements of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians—and likewise the Ancient Israelites—there was also a great degree of commonality:

“Little is known of Hebrew armor. Saul and Jonathan both had armor, which must at least have consisted of a HELMET; a breastplate or coat of mail; GREAVES; and a shield. Probably a girdle belt... was used for tying down the breastplate” (*IDB*).^c

The commonality among both ANE and classical weapons of war would have remained true up until the First Century C.E. Paul’s references to a breastplate, shield, helmet, and sword could just as well have referred to a soldier in the army of King David than a soldier in Caesar’s legions. While it might tickle some ears that Paul is really talking about the garments of a priest in Ephesians 6:11-17, neither the vocabulary of the passage nor an examination of history confirms this view. It trivializes the reality that we are presently engaged in a war against Satan for human beings and their redemption.

Messianic interpreters who claim that the armor of God is really the garments of a Levitical priest have handled the text in a very irresponsible way, especially when there are specific quotations offered from the Tanach used by Paul to substantiate his view. The view that the armor of God is really priestly garments, and not the armor of a soldier, has only come about because of an inappropriate prejudice against ancient classicism that has been allowed to pass in the Messianic community, with few challenging it. It is not based in an objective examination of the Biblical text.^d

^a Cf. Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 670; Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), 514.

^b Mark J. Fretz, “Weapons and Implements of Warfare,” in *ABD*, 6:893.

^c J.W. Wevers, “Weapons,” in *IDB*, 4:825.

^d It may also be observed that one of the major reasons why a theologically significant epistle such as Paul’s letter to the Philippians is seldom examined in today’s Messianic movement is because it specifically forces an interpreter to engage with Ancient Greco-Roman classicism. It addresses those in a colony of Rome who have recognized Yeshua the Messiah as LORD (Philippians 2:5-11), and *not* Caesar.

Consult the editor’s commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*.

posted 30 May, 2011

Ephraimite Error (white paper): What is your response to “The Ephraimite Error” white paper produced by Messianic Jews about the Two-House teaching?

“[The Ephraimite Error](#)” white paper (EEWP) was produced in 1999 as a combined effort of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) and the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC). Surveying a steadily-growing sector of the independent Messianic community in the late 1990s, labeling itself as “Two-House” and advocating a greater restoration of Israel that involved not only the Jewish people, but also the exiled Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim, the white paper refutes the teachings of the early proponents of the message. The white paper does have some valid criticisms of the Two-House teaching as it was first promoted, and how it continues to be promoted by many people. What the EEWP rightly goes after is an unbalanced emphasis on scattered “Israelite identity” and the sensationalism that has been commonly attached to the message, as seen from its populist proponents. Yet, the EEWP is lacking in any quantitative examination of the issue of whether a scope of Tanach prophecies, which include the exiled Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim as a participant (i.e., Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 31:6-10; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 10:6-10), are still to be fulfilled in future history. The EEWP’s main intention is to refute the positions of the people it disagrees with.

Since 1999, while originally intending to address the teachings and perspective of some problematic voices, the EEWP has been largely used by Messianic Jewish teachers and congregational leaders to castigate *anyone* who raises questions about the Two Houses of Israel in Bible prophecy, as believing something aberrant. For a ministry like Outreach Israel and TNN Online, which has tried to promote a rather moderate, text- and eschatology-focused version of the Two-House teaching—guided by interpreting the prophecies of Israel’s restoration and not by hype—the presence of the EEWP in Messianic Jewish congregations and reposted throughout the Internet, has significantly complicated things. A wide number who read “The Ephraimite Error,” or more likely its Short Summary version, are content to *never* examine what is actually said about Judah, scattered Israel/Ephraim, and the nations from the Bible.

Our ministry has produced a response to the EEWP in “**The Ephraimite Error: Critical Errors**” (2002, expanded 2011), which analyzes some of our principal problems with this position statement produced by some of today’s Messianic Jewish leaders. While our ministry does have a standing policy of preferring to deal with *teachings* and not *teachers*, the way that the EEWP has been employed in the past decade has set a very bad precedent for Messianics addressing theological controversies. The only reason why we have thought it necessary to specifically point out our problems with the EEWP, is because of how widespread it has become throughout much of the Messianic Jewish community, and how frequently some people will refer to it. It is a steadfast problem, though, of any religious movement, to think that controversial issues can be addressed by only issuing a position statement—with very little attention given to classifying and carefully exegeting the relevant Scripture passages. By addressing an issue by going after people you disagree with, rather than interpreting the Bible verses that surround it with a fair level of engagement, true progress cannot be made.

Only time and patience are the ultimate answers to the dilemma we face regarding the Two-House teaching, and some other controversial issues present in the Messianic movement. Since 2001, going a step farther, the major Messianic Jewish organizations have widely denounced any ministry which claims that non-Jewish Believers (Two-House advocates or not) should keep God’s Torah. And, this has not been helped by some of the negative trends that have been witnessed in the independent Messianic community from 2002 to the present, which often serve to reinforce Messianic Jewish criticism. Those of us who will remain faithful to what the Bible says about all of this, will just have to wait out the polarization until reasonable people are willing

to come together, being a bit more honest and objective with the prophecies of Israel's restoration, and wanting to constructively discuss the issues.

In the long term, God's promises to restore all of Israel are going to come to pass. No matter how many white papers are produced, or disapproval by meddling mortals is expressed toward the subject matter—the will of our Sovereign and Eternal Creator and the prophecies of His Word stand true. While there are many finer details regarding the eschatological restoration of Judah, Ephraim, and their associated companions from the nations—today's Messianic movement has the awesome mission before it of welcoming all people as valued members of the Commonwealth of Israel, *or* being something off to the side, and a bit parochial.

For a further discussion, we recommend you consult a number of articles on the TNN Online website, including: “What is the Two-House Teaching?”, “Revisiting the Two-House Teaching,” and “What About ‘the Gentiles?’”

updated 07 July, 2011

Eternal life, physically alive forever: Is it not true that possessing eternal life means being physically alive forever?

When we see “life” (Heb. *chayim*, חַיִּים; Grk. *zōē*, ζωή) or “death” (Heb. *mavet*, מָוֶת; Grk. *thanatos*, θάνατος) referred to in the Holy Scriptures, are we to assume that the Bible *only* regards life and death in terms of a medical definition? *A heart is beating and a brain is thinking?* Only if the Biblical definition of life and death *and* the medical definition of life and death are the same, can we conclude that possessing eternal life only means being physically alive forever. When a number of important Scriptural passages are reviewed about life and death, we quickly find is that a one-dimensional vantage point of life and death only being physical concepts, is completely inadequate. There are multiple dimensions of life and death presented to us in the Bible, especially as they concern one's relationship to the Creator through His Son Yeshua the Messiah.

The quintessential word about death, originally given to the first man and woman, appears when they are prohibited from eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The penalty as issued from God for doing so is, “for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17). The implication of *b'yom akol'kha* (בַּיּוֹם אֲכַלְתָּהּ), “on the day you eat,” is that as soon as Adam and Eve did eat the fruit they would drop dead (Genesis 3:7). This did not happen, and in an interesting turn of events what instead occurs is that Adam and Eve are turned out of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve will physically die, but it will not be on the day of them eating the forbidden fruit:

“Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat from it”; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return”’ (Genesis 3:17-19).

Instead of being able to frolic in the intimate presence of God in the Garden of Eden, where tending to the various plants and animals was no doubt something that brought a great deal of pleasure and enjoyment—Adam and Eve are instead cast out into the wider world where things will not be so leisurely. They will have to work hard for their food, and tend with various weeds and thorns. At a distant time in the future, they will be reminded of their mortality and their bodies will return to the base elements at their time of death. Thankfully, the hope of resurrection seen later in the Biblical narrative nullifies the claim that Genesis 3:19 is a permanent condition.

When we can recognize the immediate result of Adam and Eve's sin, we can appropriately realize how their “death” is not at all something which is primarily physical. The death that Adam and Eve principally experienced, and which all human beings since have experienced, has been a condition of exile from the Creator. N.T. Wright explains, “In Genesis,

and indeed much of the Old Testament, the controlling image for death is exile. Adam and Eve were told that they would die on the day they ate the fruit; what actually happened was that they were expelled from the garden.”^a

For those who most especially know that the Messiah has come and has been executed in atonement of human sin, what has been fully realized in His work for us? **The death condition of separation from the Father can be completely reversed!** When one reviews the Gospels and other Apostolic works, it is easily detected that eternal life is to be viewed as far more than just a future reanimation of deceased human remains; eternal life very much concerns the condition lost in Eden being restored to men and women who desire reconciliation with the Father via His Son. D.H. Johnson offers us the summary:

“[E]ternal life involves a personal relationship God and all its attendant blessings. In Genesis 2-3 the tree of life was in the midst of the garden which was in Eden (Gk. *paradeisos* [παράδεισος]). It was in the garden that God had fellowship with man and woman (Gen 3:8). And if man had eaten from the tree of life he would have lived forever (Gen 3:22). But because of their sin, God banished them from the garden and made it impossible to return to the tree of life (Gen 3:24). The life God intended for humanity was one of ideal service in an ideal location (Gen 2:15). It was a life of knowing and walking with God. It was an everlasting Sabbath... This notion of life as a relationship with God carried over into the teachings of Jesus and into the Gospels.”^b

One of the main thrusts of Yeshua’s ministry was to nullify the work of the Devil, as He emphasizes, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly” (John 10:10). Here, the life that Yeshua came to give people is one of bountiful communion and fellowship with God, something that the Adversary surely wants to rob from people, frequently by putting various sinful barriers in their path (Matthew 8:8-9). While most who have read the Bible are familiar with John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life,” Yeshua further states how those who believe the message already possess eternal life:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, **has eternal life** [*echei zōēn aiōnion*, ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον], and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).

Those who have acknowledged Yeshua as Lord and have received forgiveness for their sins, already have eternal life. They have been redeemed from damnation, and can experience the fellowship that God desires with His human creations. Membership in the Messiah’s flock is granted because His followers have eternal life:

“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” (John 10:27-28).

In His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord exclaims what eternal life truly is, knowing the Father and Son:

“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Yeshua the Messiah whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

While it is absolutely imperative for born again Believers to recognize that they already possess eternal life, membership among the redeemed, and a restored fellowship with God—no one can deny the futuristic aspects of what possessing eternal life involves. Johnson informs us of how “Eternal life can be experienced in the present, but it also has a future dimension... It seems best to describe eternal life as a relationship with God... One can begin to know God now, but will only know him fully in the eschaton.”^c The consummation of our salvation, as detailed by the Apostle Paul, is the “the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). It is only at the Second Coming of the Lord, when the resurrection will occur, that the righteous will receive bodies that will

^a N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 95.

^b D.H. Johnson, “Life,” in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 470.

^c *Ibid.*, 471.

never die, being able to experience the joys of the world to come *including* being revealed the many mysteries about His Creation and history (cf. Ephesians 2:7).

Frequently, those who tend to look at eternal life only from the perspective of being physically alive make their case from the basis that God “alone possesses immortality” (1 Timothy 6:10; 1:17). What this means, at least for them, is that it is impossible for humans to possess any component of themselves that can survive after death and before resurrection in a disembodied condition, because God is the only One who can never die. Yet the premise “God alone is immortal” should not be held so rigidly. The very nature of God means that He totally transcends the power of death, and His immortality also involves His eternity as a Being without beginning or end—as the One who made the universe. The post-mortem survival of the human consciousness, held in another dimension until the resurrection, is at best what one might call a *reflection* of immortality. The kind of immortality that God has by virtue of Him being God, is one that no angel or human will or can ever have—even in the Eternal State.

While eternal life can be experienced how in the vibrant relationship we are to have with the Lord, accessible via the power of the gospel—the fullness of eternal life *and* immortality impressed upon a resurrected body, will only be experienced at the *parousia* or coming of the Messiah. Death is to be regarded as an already-defeated foe, but more is surely to come (2 Timothy 1:10). The Apostle Paul so excellently puts it in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54:

“For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP [Isaiah 25:8] in victory.’”

posted 29 March, 2011

Exodus, date of: Can you summarize for me the debate over when the Exodus took place? Did it occur in the Fifteenth or Thirteenth Century B.C.E?

There is a long standing debate among conservative Biblical scholars—those who believe that a legitimate Exodus did take place in real history—as to whether or not the Israelites left Egypt in the Fifteenth Century or Thirteenth Century B.C.E. This is notably not a debate among those of the critical tradition, where the Exodus is often viewed as being some kind of historical fiction for a group of nomadic Semites (who became the Israelites) that steadily made their way into Canaan. As J.H. Walton is quite keen to note,

“In this day and age of biblical scholarship the debate no longer rages whether or not there was any exodus of biblical proportions. In fact, the consensus that there was not has become firmly entrenched in critical circles. In such a climate, the question concerning the date of the exodus might be lightly dismissed in some quarters as naive, presumptuous or quaint. Nevertheless, for those who take the biblical record seriously, debate continues concerning the most appropriate historical setting for this pivotal event in Israel’s theology and self-understanding.”^a

Even though not all conservatives are agreed on the timing of the Exodus, **all are agreed that a large group of Israelites was freed from Egyptian servitude at some point in real live history.**

Both Fifteenth and Thirteenth Century B.C.E. advocates of the Exodus have to recognize that by 1209 B.C.E., the Egyptian Pharaoh Merneptah, successor to Ramses II, was responsible for subduing “four entities...in Canaan: Ascalon, Gezer, Yenoam, and Israel” (*ABD*).^b The Merneptah Stela includes a victory poem, remarking how “Israel is laid waste; its seed is not.”^c So, sometime by the late Thirteenth Century B.C.E., the Israelites had established themselves to some decree or

^a J.H. Walton, “Exodus, Date of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, 258.

^b K.A. Kitchen, “Exodus, the,” in *ABD*, 2:702.

^c Walton, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, 262.

another in the Promised Land—numerous enough to have been attacked and defeated in battle by an invading Egyptian force.

The **Fifteenth Century B.C.E.** timing of the Exodus comes from a straightforward reading of the Biblical text. 1 Kings 6:1 states, “Now it came about in the four hundred and eightieth year after the sons of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.” The Exodus is placed 480 years before Solomon's fourth year as king, which was 967 B.C.E. Counting 480 years back, then, yields a date of 1447 B.C.E. Even if some rounding off of numbers is considered, it is still thought that the Exodus occurred in the mid-to-early Fifteenth Century B.C.E.^d This would mean that among the candidates of the Pharaoh for the Exodus would include either Thutmose III or Amenhotep I.^e Around two centuries would have transpired to allow the Israelites time to settle in the Promised Land and establish themselves to a considerable degree, so much so that the later Pharaoh Merneptah would be able to attack an entrenched resident of Canaan.

Advocates of the **Thirteenth Century B.C.E.** timing of the Exodus consider it a bit lackadaisical to just take the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 at face value (K.A. Kitchen actually considers it the “lazy man's solution”),^f and that it instead needs to be interpreted as a representative number, such as a holder for 12 generations of 40 years or something. Looking at events within Ancient Egypt, Exodus 1:11 records how the Israelites “built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses.” It is noted how the city of Pi-Ramesse (presumably named for the Pharaoh) was an east-delta city built by Ramses II (1272-1213 B.C.E.), and as Kitchen concludes, “the end of the oppression and the start of the Exodus could not precede the accession of this king at the earliest, i.e., not before 1279 B.C...That is only a little more than 300 years before Solomon” (*ABD*).^g He also details how the Book of Judges probably also includes overlapping terms of various judges, which are not to be viewed in strict sequence.^h From a theological perspective, Kitchen also thinks, “it must be emphasized that the formation of the Sinai/Moab covenant (Exodus-Leviticus; Deuteronomy) in its basic framework belongs squarely within the period 1380-1200 B.C.” (*ABD*).ⁱ

In response to the Thirteenth Century B.C.E. Exodus view, Fifteenth Century Exodus B.C.E. advocates like to present a series of archaeological sites from Canaan, conquered by Joshua, that they feel date to a much earlier period than the 1200s B.C.E.^j Of particular note is what city of Jericho was destroyed by Joshua during the Conquest, as there are various Jerichos to choose from. Walton indicates, “If Jericho city IV is the city conquered by Joshua...the exodus must have been in the fifteenth century,” but then goes on to point out, “There is still much to be done before this perennial controversy can begin to find resolution.”^k Fifteenth Century B.C.E. advocates point to the presumed dates of archaeological locations in Israel, and move backward to the Exodus. Contrary to this, Thirteenth Century B.C.E. advocates try to place the Exodus within the history of Ancient Egypt, and then they move forward. There is no doubting that one's starting point is what determines what date of the Exodus is favored.

Even if conservative interpreters are not entirely agreed on the timing of the Exodus, this does not mean that they treat the Book of Exodus as an historical fiction. Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III note in their work *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, “it appears that the archaeological evidence may be harmonized with the most natural reading of biblical texts that describe a fifteenth-century Exodus and conquest. The text, however, does not permit certainty on the subject. There are arguments for a late date for the Exodus...that treat the text with

^d Cf. Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 59.

^e Cf. Walton, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, 267.

^f Kitchen, in *ABD*, 2:702.

^g *Ibid.*

^h *Ibid.*

ⁱ *Ibid.*, 2:703.

^j Cf. Walton, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, pp 264-266.

^k *Ibid.*, 270.

integrity.”^l One will encounter conservative resources on Exodus, and the whole of the Pentateuch today, that include edifying and relevant commentary for Believers in Messiah compiled from both a Fifteenth and Thirteenth B.C.E. Exodus viewpoint.

Most of today’s Messianics probably hold to a Fifteenth Century B.C.E. Exodus, thus making the Torah approximately 3,500 years old. There are various Messianic teachers, including TNN Online editor J.K. McKee, who lean toward a Thirteenth Century B.C.E. Exodus, making the Torah approximately 3,300 years old. He feels that it is best that we consider the role of the Ancient Israelites living under Egyptian servitude *first*, and that it is probably best for us to recognize that the later chronology of the Judges and Israelite monarchs is not at clear-cut as some may want it to be. However, the most important point is that we treat the Book of Exodus with integrity, affirming how God acted miraculously in delivering Ancient Israel out of bondage and into freedom, humiliating the Egyptian Empire. No Messianic teacher today, even those with some liberal theological leanings quite thankfully, has ever promoted that the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt was total fiction.^m

posted 22 February, 2010

^l Dillard and Longman, 62.

^m For further consideration, consult Kitchen’s full article, in *ABD*, 2:700-708, and Walton’s full article, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, pp 258-272.

Exodus, numbers of: What can you tell me about the controversy surrounding the numbers of the Exodus?

Whether one is aware of it or not, there has been considerable discussion over the past century regarding the numbers of the Exodus, and hence the population of Ancient Israel in the wilderness. This is not a liberal discussion or a conservative discussion, exclusively. Both liberals and conservatives, Jewish and Christian scholars, have expressed various opinions about the meanings of the population of Israel as seen in both Exodus 12 in Numbers 1. *NIDB* offers a summation of the traditional view:

“The Bible states that 600,000 men took part in the Exodus (Exod 12:37). A year later the number of male Israelites over the age of twenty was 603,550 (Num 1:46).”^a

The Rabbinic tradition as seen in the Talmud likewise seems to confirm this:

“R. Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Akko says in the name of R. Simeon, ‘You have nothing whatsoever in the Torah for which six hundred three thousand five hundred and fifty covenants were not made, equivalent to the number of people who went forth from Egypt.’ Said Rabbi, ‘If matters are in accord with the view of R. Simeon of Judah of Kefar Akko which he said in the name of R. Simeon, then you have nothing whatsoever in the Torah on account of which sixteen covenants were not made, and there is with each one of them six hundred three thousand five hundred and fifty’” (b.*Sotah* 37b).^b

This discusses the opinion that 603,550 individual “covenants” were made at Mount Sinai.

Exodus 12:37 in most English versions appears: “the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children.” This number is then often extrapolated as meaning that plus women, children, and others of the “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38), the total number of the Ancient Israelites must have been in the range of 2-3 million. Numbers 1:46 will later say, “all the numbered men were 603,550.” Many in Orthodox Judaism and evangelical Christianity accept this without any further engagement, and almost no Messianics as of today (at least to our ministry’s knowledge) have really engaged this subject further.

Doubts over the total numbers of the Exodus reaching 2-3 million have always existed in both liberal *and* conservative circles. As K.A. Kitchen summarizes, “For the last century or more, commentators have fought shy of the statement that ‘about 600,000 went on foot, plus women and children’ (Exod. 12:37), with its seeming implication of an exodus of two million people or so.”^c Far from this being only an academic discussion, untenable to your average layperson, the venerable *NIV Study Bible* notes (commenting on Numbers 1), “[V]arious speculations have arisen regarding the meaning of the Hebrew word for ‘thousand.’”^d The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* goes a step further, indicating:

“The census total of 603,550...is extremely high...It has been suggested that the Hebrew word translated ‘thousand’...is an old term for a subsection of a tribe..., based on the procedures for military muster employed by other ancient peoples, and that the original number follows ‘thousand’ in each case, e.g. Reuben had forty-six tribal subsections with a total of five hundred men (v. 21). This reduces the total [of Reuben] to 5,550.”^e

Bible translations, whether produced by conservatives or liberals, generally do sit on the overly conservative side (often for market reasons). Thus, no Bible translation to date has really broken out of rendering “thousand” as something otherwise, even though there are plenty of commentaries on the Pentateuch that will discuss this issue.

^a Charles F. Pfeiffer, “Exodus,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 334.

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

^c K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 264.

^d Kenneth L. Barker, ed., et. al., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 189.

^e Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha*, RSV (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 161.

There are good textual reasons to suggest that the total numbers of the Exodus were less than 2-3 million, and even less than 600,000. When one thinks that 2-3 million people were leaving Egypt, heading toward the Red Sea, he or she should be somewhat perplexed at how easily the Israelites were disturbed when only 600 Egyptian chariots chase them down (Exodus 14:7). As the people cry to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt?” (Exodus 14:11). More than a few people wonder if 2-3 million people could have been severely threatened by a mere 600 chariots. (These were not armored tanks!) Either the Ancient Israelites were even more foolish than we commonly give them credit, or there is something that we might have missed.

The issue in question in both Exodus 12 and Numbers 1 concerns the Hebrew term *elef* (אֶלֶף), and what it might mean against its Semitic cognates. Nahum M. Sarna comments, “the logistics involved in moving two million people together with their cattle and herds across the Sea of Reeds with the Egyptian chariots in hot pursuit” begs many questions. “In response to these problems, it has been suggested that the Hebrew ‘*elef*, usually rendered ‘thousand,’ here means a ‘clan’ or that it signifies a small military unit—the number of fighting men levied from each tribe.”^f Kitchen goes on to explain,

“In the Biblical texts, the actual words for ‘ten(s)’ and ‘hundred(s)’ are not ambiguous, and present no problem on that score; the only question (usually) is whether they have been correctly recopied down the centuries. With ‘*eleph*, ‘thousand,’ the matter is very different, as is universally accepted. In Hebrew, as in English (and elsewhere), words that look alike can be confused when found without a clear context. On its own, ‘bark’ in English can mean the skin of a tree, the sound of a dog, and an early ship or an ancient ceremonial boat. Only the content tells us which meaning is intended. The same applies to the word(s) ‘*lp* in Hebrew. (1) We have ‘*eleph*, ‘thousand,’ which has clear contexts like Gen. 20:16 (price) or Num. 3:50 (amount). But (2) there is ‘*eleph* for a group—be it a clan/family, a (military) squad, a rota of Levites or priests, etc...It is plain that in other passages of the Hebrew Bible there are clear examples where ‘*eleph* makes no sense if translated ‘thousand’ but good sense if rendered otherwise, e.g., as ‘leader’ or the like.”^g

When this information is all considered, one is presented with a number of possibilities concerning the total numbers of the Exodus, which does reduce it from 603,500. Scholars have proposed various sums, ranging anywhere from 20,000-22,000 to often as high as 140,000.^h When offering any alternatives to the traditional view of 2-3 million in both Exodus and Numbers, one has to ask whether 603 *elef* 550 are the total numbers of fighting men, or the total numbers of men. What about the priests, shepherds, and other men in Israel who formed the infrastructure of the camp? What about the women and children, and the average size of families? What about the men under twenty who could not fight? What about any others? When these factors are considered, one can certainly say *in general terms*, that several hundred thousand could very well have been involved in the Exodus.

In the future as Messianic Biblical scholarship becomes more engaged with contemporary opinion, there are likely to be more discussions regarding this issue. Many will still hold to the traditional view of 2-3 million in the Exodus. But many others are likely to just say that several hundred thousand were involved. Either way, both positions rightly advocate that there were scores of people involved, and to hold to only several hundred thousand being in the Exodus is by no means a liberal position. A liberal position would be suggesting that the Exodus and God’s judgments on Egypt are only important *myths* that formed the basis of a group of nomads called “Israel,” and at the very most, 600 people were involved in some kind of wandering with the numbers exaggerated.

updated 21 February, 2010

^f Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 62.

^g Kitchen, 264.

^h Cf. *Ibid.*, 265.

Exodus, Pharaoh who did not know Joseph: Exodus 1:8 says that a Pharaoh came to power in Egypt who did not know Joseph. How is this possible when the final part of Genesis says that Joseph was made second only to Pharaoh? How did the Israelites find themselves enslaved by Egypt?

Genesis 41:40-43 neatly summarizes the position that the Pharaoh of Egypt gave to Joseph: “You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you.’ Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, ‘Bow the knee!’ And he set him over all the land of Egypt.”

With Joseph being made viceroy of Egypt and saving Egypt from the terrible famine, one would expect that some kind of record would have been made about him. We would assume that successive Pharaohs would have at least known about Joseph, but this does not seem to be the case in the opening verses of Exodus, where a new Pharaoh comes to power and the Israelites in Egypt are enslaved:

“Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, ‘Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land’” (Exodus 1:8-10).

There are a variety of views as to why a Pharaoh came to power “who did not know about Joseph” (NIV). A proper view of this can allude many interpreters who are not equipped with an historical understanding of the Scriptures, which can generally be nursed by employing good commentaries. The *ArtScroll Chumash*, commonly used in today’s Messianic community, indicates that “Either it was literally a new king, or an existing monarch with ‘new’ policies, who found it convenient to ‘ignore’ Joseph’s monumental contributions to the country (*Sotah* 11a).”^a While this gives us an important clue, and is indeed very possible, there are some more specific things that we need to consider.

Nahum Sarna indicates that “The most reasonable explanation for the change in fortune lies in the policies adopted by the pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty (ca. 1306-1200 B.C.E.), and especially by Ramses II (ca. 1290-1224 B.C.E.), who shifted Egypt’s administrative and strategic center of gravity to the eastern Delta of the Nile.”^b He gives a further clue on his commentary for vs. 9-10 as to why the Egyptians may have been fearful of the Ancient Hebrews:

“The eastern Delta of the Nile was vulnerable to penetration from Asia. In the middle of the eighteenth century B.C.E. it had been infiltrated by the Hyksos, an Egyptian term meaning ‘rulers of foreign lands.’ The Hyksos were a conglomeration of ethnic tribes among whom Semites predominated. They gradually took over Lower Egypt and ruled it until their expulsion in the second half of the sixteenth century B.C.E.”^c

When we consider some of these factors in our reading of Exodus 1, what is most likely to have happened is that the Ancient Israelites found themselves embroiled in a political conflict beyond their control. This would have been the general time that Jacob and his family migrated into Egypt to avoid the famine, if we accept the prophecy that Israel would be in Egypt four hundred years (Genesis 15:13). This would have occurred at about the same time of the Hyksos invasion of Egypt, who later took over Northern Egypt where the Israelites lived. The Egyptians, not making any distinctions between the Hyksos and the Hebrews—both being Semitic peoples, coupled with the possibility of a new dynasty coming to power, would have easily enslaved them as they took back control of their land.

^a Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 293.

^b Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 4.

^c *Ibid.*, 5.

A new Pharaoh of Egypt from a new dynasty could have easily not known of Joseph because the Israelites settled in Goshen, in the Nile Delta region of Lower Egypt, and as Pharaoh he would have been from Upper Egypt or Southern Egypt, moving back into previously conquered territories. Wanting to rebuild an empire that had been lost, the Israelites having multiplied would make a convenient workforce. Politically it would have been easy to enslave them, because as Semites they would remind many Egyptians of the Hyksos invasion.

updated 19 February, 2010

Exodus, route of: What do you think is the correct route of the Exodus taken by the Ancient Israelites?

The challenge that Biblical scholars have had regarding the route of the Exodus has varied facets to it. While there are certainly some specific details given to us in the Torah of Ancient Israel's trek from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Exodus chs. 14-19; Numbers 33), too frequently this is more of a list of obscure place names that no longer exist than anything else. While everyone can be agreed that the Israelites moved in territory that today composes the countries of Egypt, Israel, and possibly also Jordan and Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to tell for certain what the exact route was that the Israelites took. Sadly, modern day politics and the volatility of the region, frequently prevent archaeologists from examining the different sites relevant to the Ancient Israelites' journeys.

There are three main views of the route of the Exodus, which Biblical scholars and students, do have available to them to consider, in their evaluations of the Israelites' journeys:

1. The **Northern Route Theory** argues that the Israelites crossed Lake Sirbonis, adjacent to the Mediterranean, and that Mount Sinai was located in the northern Sinai Peninsula. This view does not have a wide amount of support today. Notably against it is how God prohibited the Israelites from traveling via a route that would take them into Philistia (Exodus 13:17).
2. The **Southern Route Theory** is the most widely espoused today. It advocates that the Israelites probably crossed between the many marshy, water boundaries (now dry) in the isthmus between Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula, which moved northward from the Gulf of Suez. The Israelites headed south to a site in the Sinai Peninsula, the traditional location of Mount Sinai being Jebel Musa. While there are variations of this viewpoint, one of the main criticisms of it is that the Sinai Peninsula (or at least some of it) was controlled by the Egyptian Empire, and an escape from Egypt would surely have to constitute being completely removed from Pharaoh's jurisdiction.
3. The **Arabian Route Theory** is something that has only been recently suggested. It postulates that the traditional location of Mount Sinai is wrong, and that the Red Sea that the Israelites crossed is today's Gulf of Aqaba, sitting to the east of the modern-day Sinai Peninsula. Since the Sinai Peninsula was still controlled by Egypt, the Israelites could have escaped via the Darb el-Hajj, or a trade route connecting Egypt to Arabia. The volcanic Mount Bedr is proposed as a possible site for Mount Sinai. While there are compelling reasons in favor of this theory, not enough work or investigation has been undertaken at present to confirm it.

Given the three options proposed for the route of the Exodus, there are some good reasons for us to consider the suggestions made by the Arabian Route Theory. It does advocate that the Israelites would be completely out of Egyptian territory before arriving at Mount Sinai. What it lacks is enough scholarly research and support at present. But, given the great appreciation

that evangelical Christians have for the Exodus, as well as the interests of Jewish academia, we can be guaranteed that more investigation into this third proposal will be available in the future.^a

posted 21 February, 2010

^a The information summarized here has been largely adapted from Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp 108-109, 112.

Extra-Biblical Literature: Could you summarize what the major bodies of extra-Biblical literature are for me? How much credence do you give them in your teachings?

Our article “**The Role of History in Messianic Biblical Interpretation**” addresses the issue of extra-Biblical literature in our theology in great detail. These are secondary and tertiary sources that can be employed in one’s examination of Scripture that will often give light to the historical background of a passage, or how it has been interpreted among ancient communities. The key in knowing what to give credence to and not give credence to rests in one’s critical reasoning of a Biblical text and employing spiritual discernment.

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