

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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Image of God, Human Beings: I heard a Messianic teaching that advocated human beings were not made in the image of God? Can you explain this?

There has been some confusion in a few sectors of the Messianic community as to whether or not man has been made in God's image. Genesis 1:26-27 tells us, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Man was created in the *tzelem Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים תְּצַלֵּם) and was given abilities that all other creatures were not. The modern Hebrew word *matzlemah* (מַצְלֵמָה) or "camera" is derived from this Biblical word. TWOT remarks, "Man was made in God's image...and likeness (*d'mût*) which is then explained as his having dominion over God's creation as vice-regent...God's image obviously does not consist in man's body which was formed from earthly matter, but in his spiritual, intellectual, moral likeness to God from whom is animating breath came."^a Rabbis, theologians, and ministers over the centuries have all struggled with what it means to be created in the image of God.

There are some who believe that only Adam, the first human being, was created in God's image. Because of Adam and Eve's fall from grace, it is said, human beings are no longer made in God's image. This is based on Genesis 5:3, "When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of *a son* in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth." This Hebrew text says *v'yoled b'demuto k'tzalemo* (וַיֹּלֵד בְּדְמוּתוֹ כְּצַלְמוֹ), "and begetteth *a son* in his likeness, according to his image" (YLT). According to this, Seth was made after the image and likeness of Adam, as opposed to the image and likeness of God. Those who advocate that human beings are not made in God's image stop there.

But the Book of Genesis itself does not stop there. Genesis 9:6 further says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." Men who are killed by sinful men are still considered by God to be made in His image. The difference is, of course, unlike Adam who was originally created without a sin nature, every human born since Adam has inherited that sin nature. In that context alone are we made "in Adam's image."

James' message in James 3:9 is that the tongue can curse other people, all of whom "have been made in the likeness of God." He uses the Greek word *homoiōsis* (ὁμοίωσις), "a making like" (*Vine*).^b This is the same word used in the LXX to translate *tzelem* in Genesis 1:26, and UBSHNT renders *homoiōsin Theou* (ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ) as *tzelem Elohim*, indeed indicating that man, even after the Fall in the Garden of Eden, has been made in "the image of God." James expects his audience to show due respect for other human beings through what they say, regardless of whether or not they are saved and of the community of faith. John Wesley comments, "Indeed we have now lost this likeness; yet there remains from thence an indelible nobleness, which we ought to reverence both in ourselves and others." While we are not as perfect as Adam was prior to the Fall, we still have enough of God's image within us as fallen humans to show others proper respect and character. We have enough of God's image within us that we should be drawn to things of God rather than things of Satan.

Claiming that human beings are no longer made in God's image, when the Book of Genesis and James' epistle say otherwise, is damaging to every single one of us and is insulting to our Creator. While we do have a fallen sin nature inherited from Adam, we are not worthless creatures and we have the responsibility to respect one another. We do have to receive salvation to have God's image fully restored in us. God sent us His only Son, Yeshua, because He loves us

^a John E. Hartley, "צֶלֶם," in TWOT, 2:768.

^b *Vine*, 372.

and wants mankind to succeed and wants that relationship to be completely restored. In the words of Nahum Sarna,

“A human being is the pinnacle of Creation. This unique status is communicated in a variety of ways, not least by the simple fact that humankind is last in a manifestly ascending, gradual order. The creation of human life is an exception to the rule of creation by divine fiat...Human beings are to enjoy a unique relationship to God, who communicates with them alone and who shares with them the custody and administration of the world.”^c

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^c Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 11.

Image of God, Rulership: Is it not true that the image of God placed upon humans is just the capacity to rule Planet Earth?

No Bible reader can deny that the human race, different from all other creatures on Earth, bears a unique imprint from its Creator. In Genesis 1:26 we see, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26). Humankind made *b'tzelem Elohim* (בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים) undeniably involves a special and unique imprint on men and women from another dimension, which the animals most especially lack.

There been a great deal of discussion, debate, and speculation over the millennia by Judaism and Christianity as to what the “image of God” or *imago Dei* actually is. Because of the image of God granted to humans, men and women have extreme value. James the Just notes how with the tongue, “we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9). Cursing the beings who have been created special by God, is something that will surely bring with it penalties if not repented of before Him. It should be most understandable that almost all of today’s discussions in religious philosophy over the value and uniqueness of human life, are to some extent centered around what the image of God is and involves. For the Ancient Israelites hearing Moses’ Teaching, men and women made in God’s image would run entirely contrary to much of the contemporary Ancient Near Eastern thought that only a king and the royalty/aristocracy were given a divine imprint. Victor P. Hamilton observes,

“It is well known that in both Egyptian and Mesopotamian society the king, or some high-ranking official, might be called ‘the image of God.’ Such a designation, however, was not applied to the canal digger or to the mason who worked on a ziggurat...In God’s eyes all of mankind is royal. All of humanity is related to God, not just the king.”^a

Within the Genesis 1 narrative, a major reason as to why humankind has been imprinted with the Divine image is stated: “God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Genesis 1:28). Adam and Eve, in particular, were instructed by the Lord to take dominion over the Earth—at least beginning with the Garden of Eden—to tend to it properly, treat it with respect, and serve as the Creator’s designated representatives. Everything God had made was good (Genesis 1:31), and as the man and woman took ownership of what He had made for them, they were to surely enjoy all of what the physical Creation had to offer!

It is not difficult to see how the *imago Dei* is not only a controlling or ancillary theme of much of Scripture—as God’s people try to understand who they are in relation to their Creator—but why discussion about the image of God has to be included as we evaluate the uniqueness of the human race. If human beings were created by God to take dominion over the Earth and tend to it properly, then it is most reasonable to conclude that if they squander such responsibility, they will have to answer before His justice. This not only includes how people treat the animals or the environment, **but most especially** how they treat other people. Concurrent with this, the image of God placed onto human beings concerns a great deal of our character makeup and morality, as we reflect much of the essential reality of who our Creator is (cf. Romans 2:14-15). The animals, while surely a part of His good Creation, are not among those who will have to one day answer before Him for either the good deeds or bad deeds that they have performed. *Animals operate entirely on instinct*; human beings do not. Murdering a person made in God’s image (Genesis 9:6) not only

^a Victor P. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis*, Chapters 1-17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 135.

robs someone of all of the good and worthwhile experiences that he or she can partake of *only* on Earth,^b but shows complete disregard for the Creator Himself.

Every part of the human being is valuable in the estimation of the Creator. The Psalmist exclaims how “You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb” (Psalm 139:13). Yet, given how the Psalmist declares “What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty!” (Psalm 8:4-5), it would seem most inappropriate and even degrading, for anyone to suggest that human beings are simply animals with advanced neuroprocesses—namely the ability to speak language, be creative and artistic, and be able to reason through complex ideas. In fact, if there is anything that human history has consistently borne witness to, it is that **we each have questions about death and life after death**. Being made in the image of God, is it at all unreasonable to conclude that each person has a distinct “spark” of life, which not only makes us different than the animals, but assures us that our memories and personality will survive the death process?

Solely looking at the issue of rulership, where does the dominion of human beings begin and end? In Genesis 1, Adam and Eve were to rightfully tend to the Garden. Following the Fall, they were to tend to the ground and grow their own food (Genesis 3:17-19). Beyond this and recognizing that people have been made at a level just below that of their Creator, it is most imperative that we be aware of how the rule of the redeemed indeed does involve a wider scope than just Planet Earth. In Ephesians 2:6, for example, Paul details how God “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Messiah Yeshua.” The Creation that God intends for human beings to rule **involves much more** than just Planet Earth. However, if people—even those who have been saved from their sins via the gospel—squander their responsibilities in tending to the Earth, it would seem most unlikely that they would be able to rule whatever lies beyond this planet in any great capacity. *God will not grant such individuals much responsibility.*

If the rulership of human beings at all concerns another dimension, then it is quite safe to conclude that the image of God placed upon us involves the survival of our consciousness after death, present in Heaven, prior to the resurrection. The known universe as it stands composes over 100 billion galaxies, and to this we can add at least one other dimension: that of God and His angels (or “Heaven”). Do we honestly think that having been made as His image bearers, to a degree lower than God **and not** higher than the animals, that our existence is really just confined to this universe? There are surely important instances we see of the deceased redeemed existing in Heaven with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:14; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 6:9; cf. Acts 7:55-60), as eager as they might be to see the resurrection occur and the Messianic Kingdom on Earth fully commence.

To assert that the image of God placed upon human beings means that when we die, we should expect our consciousness to go to another dimension until the resurrection—in no way implies that we should shrink at the fact that He has given us dominion over Planet Earth and our immediate reality. Although a temporary disembodied afterlife for Believers in Heaven with the Lord will bring joy to us, we are to still take care of our bodies, this planet, and be concerned with not only proper environmentalism and conservation, **but also** social justice *on Earth*. If God's people are at all derelict in their Earthly responsibilities now, then any future responsibilities that await us may be few.

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^b This would include, among other things, the joys of marriage and pleasures of sexuality as God has intended between a faithful husband and wife.

Isaac, Sacrificed: I once heard a Messianic teacher say that Isaac was actually sacrificed by Abraham, and then resurrected. Do you have any opinion about this?

Hebrews 11:17-19 details the faith of Abraham, who believed in God so strongly that he was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac without hesitation:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; *it was he* to whom it was said, ‘IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED’ [Genesis 21:12]. He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.”

All should be in agreement that Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:1-19) does represent and foreshadow the much greater sacrifice that Yeshua the Messiah would endure for us. But is it necessary for Isaac himself to have actually died, and then be resurrected, to fulfill a valid typology?

There are a few out there in the Messianic community who have gone a little too far, interpreting v. 19 as though Abraham actually did sacrifice Isaac. In *The Scriptures* translation by ISR (1998), commonly used among Sacred Name proponents, Hebrews 11:17, 19 reads, “By belief, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Yitshaq, and he who had received the promises offered up his only brought-forth son...reckoning that Elohim was able to raise, even from the dead, from which he received him back, as a type.” One teaching based on this rendering can be quoted as saying, “The text is clear. He was offered, and then raised back to life by Elohim [God].”

There are several problems with this view, two of which are only solved by an examination of Greek verbs. V. 17 includes two usages of the verb *prospherō* (προσφέρω), “to present, offer, give” (LS).^a Its first usage, pertaining to Abraham having “offered up Isaac,” is *prosenēnochen* (προσενήνοχεν), appearing in the perfect active indicative tense, describing an action that has already taken place: “had offered.” Those who are totally unacquainted with the Isaac narrative in Genesis could conclude that Abraham actually offered him up as a sacrifice. However, the second rendering of “offered,” appearing in ISR and KJV/NKJV is unjustified. The Greek verb form *prosepherēn* (προσέφερον) in v. 17b appears in the imperfect active indicative tense. While describing a past action, that past action is not “offered,” but is more accurately “was offering” (LITV/HCSB), being imperfect. This is extrapolated as “was ready to offer up” (RSV/NRSV), “was about to sacrifice” (NIV), or “was in the act of offering” (ESV).

Abraham “offered” up Isaac; but this was an action that took place in his mind—not in the physical world—as Abraham was resolved to sacrifice his son. V. 17b tells us that Abraham was only in the process of killing him. The command from God was, “Do not lay a hand on the boy...Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son” (Genesis 22:12, NIV). While Isaac’s participation in this event prefigures Yeshua’s death and resurrection for us, the connection is typological; Isaac **did not die** as a part of this “rehearsal.” Only “a ram caught in the thicket by his horns” (Genesis 22:13) was killed at this event.

(This entry includes excerpts from the editor’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.)

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^a LS, 699.

Israel, Variant Uses of: I have been told by some Messianic Jews that when I see “Israel,” in the Bible, the Jewish people are all that is being referred to. Does this at all properly align with what we see in Biblical history? Is there not some variance of how the term “Israel” is used?

In the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* or *ISBE*, which is often considered to be a general conservative resource, the entry “Israel, History of the People of” by C.F. Pfeiffer (2:908-924), includes references to ten different periods of time in Biblical history which “Israel,” in some form or another, is featured as a player. These include:

1. Pre-Mosaic Israel
2. Moses and the Exodus
3. Conquest of Canaan
4. Period of the Judges
5. United Kingdom
6. Divided Kingdom
7. Babylonian Exile
8. Return from Exile and Restoration
9. The Jews under Alexander and His Successors
10. The Jews under the Romans^a

The main periods where there is confusion regarding how the term “Israel” appears in Biblical history, occur from the Divided Kingdom period to Second Temple Judaism. The Northern Kingdom that broke off from the Southern Kingdom was known as “Israel,” and this is borne out in prophetic texts like Hosea and Amos, where the “Israel” being referred to is principally a Northern Kingdom audience.^b This can be confusing for many Bible readers, who do may not make enough of an effort to place such prophetic books within their original setting. Further confusion ensues later in a text like Ezekiel, where following the fall of the Northern Kingdom, when “Israel” is used it can be as a reference to the Southern Kingdom, as the legitimate successor state to the title and all of the rights of “Israel.”^c

When it comes to how “Israel” is used in the Apostolic Scriptures, we need to carefully recognize how Yeshua the Messiah’s usage of “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6; 15:24) is a reference not only to the First Century Jewish community, but to the Jewish community in Jerusalem, Judea, and Galilee. Yeshua’s usage of “lost sheep of the house of Israel” does have a temporal quality to it, as it is tied up in the prohibition of going out to the nations or the Samaritans (Matthew 10:5). Such a prohibition of the Disciples going to the nations or the Samaritans was later lifted, subsequent to Yeshua’s ascension (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8).^d In the Apostolic Scriptures, “Israel” does largely represent the Jewish community, but that does not mean that non-Jews were excluded from being a part of such a community, as their Messiah faith certainly gave them citizenship within Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13; 3:6; cf. Galatians 6:16).

There is a significant amount of debate among Romans interpreters, as to how many different variances regarding “Israel” are present in the Apostle Paul’s discussion of Romans chs. 9-11. Generally speaking, at least two different views of “Israel” are believed to be present: the First Century Jewish community that has largely rejected the Messiah, and the eschatological restored

^a The outline in C.F. Pfeiffer, “Israel, History of the People of,” in *ISBE*, 2:908-909.

^b Cf. R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp 860, 869 (Hosea); pp 884-885, 887 (Amos); Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp 354-356 (Hosea); pp 375-376 (Amos).

^c Steven Tuell, *New International Biblical Commentary: Ezekiel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 26 explains how,

“Typically in Ezekiel, ‘Israel’ is used for *all* Israel, or even for Judah alone since, with the loss of the northern tribes, Judah is all of Israel that remains...[W]hen Ezekiel is certainly referring to the northern kingdom, he does not usually use the term Israel (see 23:4, where the wicked sister Oholah is Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom, and 37:16, where the northern kingdom is designated Ephraim).”

^d This is further discussed in the editor’s article “Revisiting the Two-House Teaching,” under the sub-section “Yeshua the Messiah and ‘the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel.’”

Kingdom of Israel. Within Paul's salvation-historical perspective of "Israel" in Romans chs. 9-11—which is intended to direct the reader to the point of "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26)—it may even be that there are as high as six different detectable variances in which "Israel" is used:

- the historical ancient community (Romans 9:4-5; 10:19-21; 11:7-10)
- God's corporate elect, and/or an eschatological restored Kingdom of Israel (Romans 9:6; 11:25-26)
- a people scattered abroad on Earth (Romans 9:27)
- Paul's fellow Jewish countrymen (Romans 9:4; 11:1, 11-15, 28)
- the Jewish people of largely the Second Temple era (Romans 9:31)
- the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Romans 11:2-4; cf. 1 Kings 19:10-14)

One of the key points in this section of Paul's letter to the Romans, is not to exclude the nations from being grafted into the community of Israel (Romans 11:17-21), but instead to speak against non-Jewish arrogance toward the Jewish people who have largely rejected the Messiah. Such people are to still be regarded and treated as "Israel," as God alone is the final arbiter of any person, as He is the One who has broken off natural branches (Romans 11:17). The non-Jewish Believers in Rome were carefully instructed, "because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy" (Romans 11:31). If some Jewish branches have been broken off of Israel's olive tree, non-Jewish Believers who have received Israel's Messiah have the profound responsibility to be vessels of mercy and grace to such people—and **not be arrogant or disrespectful**—so that such Jewish people might be shown Messiah Yeshua.

It might be easier or more convenient for some people in today's Messianic Judaism to simply assume that when "Israel" is spoken of in the Bible, it is *just* the ancestors of today's Jewish people. A more careful survey of the Bible, across multiple centuries, reveals that more is indeed involved. Ultimately, we are reminded that in the post-resurrection era, knowing Israel's Messiah Yeshua is required for one to ultimately be considered a part of the Kingdom (cf. Romans 9:6). There are sadly going to be some Jewish people, who because of their rejection of Yeshua, will be excluded from being considered as "Israel" in the end. Because of arrogance and disrespect of the Jewish people, there will probably also be many non-Jews who thought they were a part of the community of Israel via their faith in Yeshua, but in the end are excluded precisely because they did not have a true heart change and were never moved to be vessels of mercy and grace toward Yeshua's own Jewish brethren.

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Israelite, Salvation (ethnicity guaranteeing salvation): Do you believe that everyone has to be a physical Israelite, and/or a physical descendant of Abraham, to be saved?

While Abraham was certainly promised multitudes of physical descendants (Genesis 15:5; 22:17-18), and this was extended to Jacob/Israel (Genesis 28:4-5)—both of whom were promised great blessings by the Holy One—to assume that eternal salvation was *only* intended for the physical descendants of the Patriarchs is to ignore the very mandate that God gave to both Abraham and Ancient Israel. God intended Ancient Israel to be a testimony to the nations of His goodness (Deuteronomy 4:5-6), and among other things the Temple was to attract outsiders to Him (2 Chronicles 6:32-33) as a house of prayer for *kol-ha'amim* (כָּל-הָעַמִּים) or "all the peoples" (Isaiah 56:7). The Apostle Paul, appropriating the promise given by the Lord to Abraham, confidently asserted,

"The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the [nations] by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, 'ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU' [Genesis 12:3]" (Galatians 3:8).

If anything, the promise of physical multiplication given by God to the Patriarchs was to increase the likelihood of exposure *to the nations* of Him—far from any kind of "salvation by ethnicity." Certainly by the time Yeshua the Messiah arrived in the First Century, He ministered

to the remnant of Israel, the Jewish people, and the greater restoration of all Israel in the eschaton was a major undercurrent of His message (cf. Acts 1:6). Yet, the mission of the Apostles was far more concerned with the redemption of individuals to their Creator, regardless of their ethnic status. Titus 2:11 makes it abundantly clear, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to **all men** [all people, ESV/HCSB; *pasin anthrōpōis*, πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις or ‘all humans’].”

Individual salvation is available to all freely through Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus). Any claim to the contrary is theological heresy. Salvation is available to those who are the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and to those who are a part of the greater human family. Yet, as a consequence of an individual’s salvation, a born again Believer who is not Jewish does get to be considered a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Whatever is applicable to Israel or whatever affects Israel—good or bad—now is applicable and affects such a person.

Today, we see sectors of the independent Messianic community promoting a Two-House teaching, which largely fails to clarify the position of the nations in the schema of Israel’s restoration. There can be such an over-emphasis on “Judah and Ephraim,” and even on the promises of physical multiplication, that not enough (if any) attention is given to the Divine mandate of Israel being a blessing to the entire world.^a *This is wrong.* Many can get the impression that the Two-House teaching is one of “salvation via ethnicity,” rather than the simple affirmation that the eschatological promises to restore Israel involve *more than* today’s Jewish people, with more to be anticipated in salvation history. And of course, there are those who attempt to add to what the Prophets and Apostles have told us about Israel’s Kingdom.

Time and further refinement will be the only answers to counter some of these dilemmas. When people begin to realize that claiming to be a part of Israel—or even a part of Israel following the Torah—*is not enough*, then the missional aspects of being Israel can be considered. When this finally happens in more and more the Messianic community, then we can all fulfill the Divine mandate of being a blessing to the world at large. Then the larger restoration of Israel anticipated by the Scriptures can truly be recognized for what it is—and not for what is too popularly floating around today.

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^a For some worthwhile discussion and observations, consult the editor’s article “The Ephraimite Error: Critical Errors,” under the sub-section “Error #2: The belief that we all teach that physical non-Israelites cannot be saved.”