

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

N

www.tnnonline.net

Nazarenes, Nazarene Israel: What do you think about the movement known as “Nazarene Israel” or “Nazarene Yisrael”?

While the groups invariably known as “Nazarene Israel” or “Nazarene Yisrael” or even “Nazarene Judaism” claim to have a Biblical basis for their beliefs, we believe that most of what they claim is poorly founded. The only Biblical reference to the “Nazarenes” (Heb. *Netzarim* or *Natzarim*, נְצָרִים UBSHNT) is found in Acts 24:5, where it is attested that Paul is a member of a sect of those believing in the Messiah Yeshua. The problem with attesting that the “Nazarene belief” is the original First Century faith expression is the same problem with attesting that this belief is the same as “the Way” (Acts 9:2). There is no one designation for Biblical faith in Scripture, as Biblical faith is a practice and outworking of one’s belief in the Messiah—not a name like “Nazarene Israel,” or even “Christianity.”

One of the most serious problems with calling oneself a “Nazarene” in a Messianic context is the fact that there is a Christian denomination called the Church of the Nazarene (an offshoot of the varied Wesleyan and holiness traditions), so if one calls himself a “Nazarene” in the context of being a Torah observant follower of Yeshua, one runs the risk of being associated with the Nazarene Church.

The groups known as “Nazarene Israel” often base their beliefs on quotations from various figures from Church history who criticized Jewish Believers who continued to follow the Torah. While it is true that there was a group of Jewish Believers that called themselves the “Nazarenes,” it is also true that they had varied beliefs over Yeshua’s Divinity and Messiahship and the canon of Scripture, just as the Second and Third Century Church did. The groups known as “Nazarene Israel” often fail to recognize this, and build a mythos around the fact that the “Nazarene belief” is the one true faith. We believe this goes beyond the scope of what we should be aiming for as the modern Messianic movement which has a shared spiritual heritage in both Judaism *and* Christianity.

updated 14 November, 2006

Nazarene, Yeshua Called: What specific verse in the Tanach says that Yeshua will be called a “Nazarene”? I could not find any.

Matthew 2:23 records that Yeshua the Messiah “came and lived in a city called Nazareth. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’” The challenge for some interpreters is the fact that no specific text is being quoted. This is not unusual to see in the Apostolic Scriptures by any means. Yeshua Himself says in Matthew 26:54, “How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, *which say* that it must happen this way?” Here, the Messiah is speaking of the general sense or meaning of the Tanach, not necessarily a specific verse. James 4:5 also says, for example, “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?’” Here, James appeals to the general sense of Scripture from the Tanach, rather than a specific verse or prophecy.

We see the same thing in Matthew’s Gospel in Matthew 2:23, as it is important for us to keep in mind that Matthew references the “prophets,” indicating that he is appealing to a theological concept evidenced in several places in the Tanach. What is actually being communicated by the statement, “He will be called a Nazorean” (NRSV) has been a cause of great discussion and some debate among Bible interpreters and commentators.

What is likely being communicated by Matthew is some kind of word play on the terms *nazir* (נָזִיר), primarily meaning “(s.one) dedicated, consecrated” (*CHALOT*),^a by extension “a nazirite,” and the word “Nazarene” (Grk. *Nazōraios*, Ναζωραῖος), meaning someone from the city of Nazareth. An adequate description of a nazirite is given to us in Judges 13:7, where Samson’s mother is told how her son is to live:

“But he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’”

The Hebrew *ki-nezir Elohim yihyeh* (כִּי־נָזִיר אֱלֹהִים יִהְיֶה) was rendered two different ways in the Greek Septuagint, both of which would have been extant in the First Century. The LXX(a) version has *naziraion Theou* (ναζιραῖον θεοῦ) or “nazirite of God,” whereas the LXX(b) version has *hagion Theou* (ἅγιον θεοῦ), “holy to God” (LXE). As Tim Hegg notes, “This tells us that from a very early period, well before the 1st Century, the idea of ‘holy one of God’ and ‘Nazirite of God’ were linked through the concurrent translations of Judges into Greek.”^b One did not necessarily have to take a “nazirite vow” to be considered a holy person, which there is no record of Yeshua ever doing. In Mark 1:23-24 we see Yeshua being *Nazarēne* (Ναζαρηνέ, adjective) or “of Nazareth” connected to His holiness:

“Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, ‘What business do we have with each other, Yeshua of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’”

Matthew, seeing this concept referred to in Mark’s Gospel, whose audience was largely Roman and would have overlooked any connection between “Nazareth” and “Holy One,” is likely expounding upon this for his Jewish audience, possibly using additional source material (probably from what most scholars call “Q”). His Jewish audience would have been familiar with the terms *nazir*, or the Septuagint renderings of *naziraion Theou* or *hagion Theou*. Matthew’s emphasis, more than anything else, is to connect the concept of Yeshua being a Nazarene to His holiness. Notably, one does not necessarily have to take a “nazirite vow” to be considered holy, though as Hegg notes, “Yeshua’s words at the last Pesach [Passover], that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He came into His kingdom, are reminiscent of the Nazirite prohibition against eating or drinking anything from the vine. The same may be said of Yeshua’s refusal to accept the wine while on the cross.”^c

A second, and more commonly proposed view espoused by many Messianics is that Matthew is making some kind of word play on *netzer* (נֶזֶר), meaning “**sprout, shoot** (of plant)” (*CHALOT*),^d or by extension “branch.” This would have probably been a commonly known Hebrew word in the First Century among both Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, and *does not* require that Matthew would have had to compose his Gospel in Hebrew. It is commonly connected to prophecies such as Isaiah 11:1:

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch [*netzer*] from his roots will bear fruit.”

This prophecy was viewed in a Messianic context by the Jewish Sages, and is appealed to various times by the Apostles (Romans 15:12; 1 Peter 4:14; Revelation 5:5). One of the challenges with holding *exclusively* to this view, though, is the fact that other Messianic prophecies applying to Yeshua employ the Hebrew term *tzemach* (צֶמַח) for “branch”:

“Behold, *the* days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch [*tzemach*]; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land” (Jeremiah 23:5).

^a *CHALOT*, 232.

^b Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: Chapters 1-7* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007), pp 69-70.

^c *Ibid.*, 70.

^d *CHALOT*, 244.

“In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch [*tzemach*] of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth” (Jeremiah 33:15).

“Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch [*tzemach*]” (Zechariah 3:8).

“Then say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Behold, a man whose name is Branch [*tzemach*], for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD” (Zechariah 6:12).

We can certainly consider the words *netzer* and *tzemach* to be synonyms, as the latter likewise means “**growth, what sprouts,**” “**shoot, bud**” (*CHALOT*).^e This would account for Matthew’s reference to “the prophets,” as opposed to a singular prophet (cf. Isaiah 11:1). Matthew, more than anything else, relies on his audience’s knowledge of knowing that the terms *nazir*, *naziraion*, and “holy one” are all connected with Yeshua being a “Nazarene.” The major point that Matthew is emphasizing is that Yeshua has been separated out as the Father’s appointed servant and is the ideal of holiness. Hegg validly states, “Yeshua, in all of His life lived out the quintessential meaning of the Nazirite vow, for He was the Holy One of God in every way.”^f One need not go very far to understand this connection and how it makes Yeshua a “Nazarene.”

For a further discussion of this issue, we recommend you consult Tim Hegg’s Bible study on the Gospel of Matthew, available at www.torahresource.com. Also consult TNN Online’s FAQ entry on composition data of the Gospel of Matthew.

posted 18 May, 2006

^e *Ibid.*, 307.

^f Hegg, *Matthew*, 71.

Nephilim: Who do you believe that the Nephilim of Genesis 6 were? Do you believe that these were fallen angels who had sexual relations with human females?

There is a wide variety of interpretations of Genesis 6:4, “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore *children* to them. Those were the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown.” Both Jewish and Christian theologians have struggled over what the phrase “sons of God” means, debating over whether it means righteous men joining ungodly women, or “divine beings” (NJPS), meaning angels, having sexual relations with human females. If the latter is the case, then this sin would have been one of the reasons why God destroyed the inhabited Earth with the Flood. This interpretation is actually reflected in the writings of the First Century historian Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.73:

“[F]or many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence that they had in their own strength; for the tradition is, That these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants.”^a

There are some allusions in the Apostolic Scriptures to these fallen angels and what God has done with them. Jude 6 says speaks of “angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode,” telling us that “He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” If this can be applied to the Nephilim, it would mean that God has reserved them in a special place until the final judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 parallels this, indicating, that God “cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.” The Greek source text actually says “Tartarus” (YLT), which would be a specific part of Hell for judgment.

It is unlikely that there will be a definite position established in the Messianic community pertaining to who the Nephilim actually were. Some, adhering to the belief that the Nephilim of Genesis 6 were fallen angels cohabitating with human women, and coupling this with Yeshua’s words of Matthew 24 that the Last Days will be like the “days of Noah,” believe that so-called alien and UFO sightings are modern-day manifestations of the appearance of Nephilim, making them demonic. There is no specific reference of the appearance of “aliens” in any of the prophetic texts which relate to the Last Days, but certainly if so-called extra-terrestrials appear as a part of the end-time scenario, we can certainly consider them to be “Nephilim” and demonic in origin.

updated 14 November, 2006

^a *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 32.

New Moon, *Rosh Chodesh*: Do you believe that Messianic Believers should keep the New Moon?

The New Moon or *Rosh Chodesh* is not listed as one of the Lord's appointed times of Leviticus 23. However, because the Hebrew *rosh chodesh* (רֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ) means the same as "new month," determining the *rosh chodesh* is important as it relates to the timing of the Biblical festivals. Prophetically, in the Millennial Reign of Yeshua, *Rosh Chodesh* is to be a time of great rejoicing and festivity: "And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the LORD" (Isaiah 66:23).

The problem with "keeping" the New Moon is that the Bible itself is by-and-large mute on how we are to keep it. Numbers 29:6 describes "the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering." Psalm 81:3 says, "Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day." And the New Moon is mentioned in Colossians 2:16, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day." Because of the lack of information in the written Scriptures themselves about what do about the New Moon, we are forced to turn to Jewish custom and tradition. *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* states the following concerning *Rosh Chodesh*:

"Rosh Hodesh (lit., 'head of the month') is the first day of the month, which correlates with the sighting crescent of the new moon. In a lunar calendar, each month has a little more than 29 days...Originally it was the Sanhedrin's task to determine whether a particular month had 29 or 30 days, based on the visual observation of witnesses. The members of the Sanhedrin gathered on the 30th of each month and awaited testimony. If witnesses appeared, Rosh Hodesh was celebrated, and that day was counted as the first day of the next month. If no witnesses appeared, the next day was celebrated as Rosh Hodesh. To spread word that the new month had begun, fires were lit on the Mount of Olives and then successively throughout Israel. Jews living far from Jerusalem always celebrated Rosh Hodesh on the 30th day of the month. When informed that it had been postponed to the next day, they also celebrated that day.

"In ancient times, Rosh Hodesh was considered an important holiday, observed with great seriousness. Work was suspended, special sacrifices were offered in the Temple, the shofar was blown, and it was customary to visit the prophet....

"After the destruction of the Temple, the power to declare the day of the New Moon passed to the head of the court at Yavneh. During the fourth century C.E., however, the Christian authorities in the Land of Israel prohibited the dissemination of information regarding the day of the New Moon. Consequently, in about 360, Hillel II published a fixed calendar based on astronomical calculations...thus freeing Jewish communities from having to rely on the declaration by the high court in the Land of Israel.

"...Although the importance of Rosh Hodesh as a religious festival has declined and it retains only a shadow of its former prominence, the Rosh Hodesh service contains three liturgic elements that raise it to the level of the intermediate days of the major festivals. *Ya'aleh v'Yavo*...is included in the morning *Amidah*..., the half *Hallel* is recited..., and there is a *Musaf* service that recounts the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple on that day. As a joyous, though minor, festival, *Tachanun*...is not recited, fasting is forbidden, any funeral service is abbreviated, and it is tradition to partake in a festive meal."^a

Many of those in the independent Messianic community who attempt to observe *Rosh Chodesh* do not tend to observe it as described above. While the New Moon is to be observed to determine when a New Month begins, in Biblical times it was to be validated by the Sanhedrin. Today, the closest thing we have to the Sanhedrin are the Rabbinical Jewish authorities who publish the Jewish calendars that are used today. If we are to observe *Rosh Chodesh*, it must be with this in mind, as Yeshua did validate us taking the lead of the Pharisees, recognizing that they

^a Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 166-167.

sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:1-3). The Pharisees today would be represented in the Jewish authorities, and any future Sanhedrin that may be established to determine when the New Moon is and when the dates are for us to celebrate the appointed times or *moedim*. We should observe *Rosh Chodesh* the same way as the Jewish community.

updated 06 February, 2006

New Testament, Written in Hebrew: Do you believe that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew? It seems that many within today's Messianic movement believe the New Testament was written in Hebrew, but they lack substantial proof for this.

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

There has been a great deal of misinformation circulating throughout the broad Messianic movement that relates to the composition of the Bible, particularly the Apostolic Scriptures or the New Testament. Asserting that the Apostolic Scriptures were written in Hebrew, when no extant documents in Hebrew of these texts exist from the ancient period, has caused the credibility of the Messianic movement as a whole to suffer with evangelical Christianity—even if a congregation or ministry does not espouse this viewpoint. In extreme cases, it has also caused various people to doubt or even deny the Divinity and Messiahship or Yeshua, when no original "Hebrew New Testament" can be found.

Many people who contact our ministry have been exposed to this opinion in some form or another by a Messianic teacher, and/or someone talking loudly in their local congregation or fellowship. Some of these people want to know why our ministry *does not* believe that the New Testament was written in Hebrew, and others want to know where they can find material from a Messianic perspective that upholds the validity of the Scriptures as we have them.

There are some serious historical factors working against advocates of a so-called "Hebrew New Testament" that many either do not take into consideration, choose to ignore, or choose not to report to those hearing their teachings. One of the major misunderstandings circulating is thinking that all Jews in the First Century lived in the Land of Israel and spoke Hebrew. *This is absolutely not true.* While it is true that many Jews did indeed live in Israel, and spoke either Hebrew or Aramaic as their primary language, the latter being a Semitic relative of Hebrew, we cannot separate the province of Judea from the Roman Empire it was part of. Likewise, we cannot forget the fact that many more Jews were living in the Diaspora and were Greek-speaking. These Jews are often identified in the Apostolic Scriptures as being "Hellenists" (Grk. sing *Hellenistēs*, Ἑλληνιστής). F.F. Bruce describes them in greater detail in his book *New Testament History*, and how many of them became followers of Yeshua:

"This division between Hebrews and Hellenists was primarily linguistic and cultural, but probably it had theological implications too. The Hebrews were evidently Jews who habitually spoke Aramaic, whose homeland was [Israel] (or any other area where Aramaic-speaking Jews lived). The Hellenists, on the other hand, were Jews who spoke Greek...Many of them would belong to the Greek-speaking Diaspora, even if they resided in [Israel] for longer or shorter periods; but [Israel] had its native Greek-speaking Jews. If we ask when and how so many of these Hellenists were enrolled as disciples of Jesus, we may find the answer in Luke's narrative of the day of Pentecost, according to which Jews of the Diaspora formed a large, if not the main, part of Peter's audience."^a

No honest theologian is going to argue against the fact that Yeshua the Messiah spoke Hebrew and Aramaic in His daily affairs. No honest theologian is going to argue against the fact that He primarily spoke these languages when He gave His teachings recorded in the Gospels.

^a F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp 217-218.

However, we cannot automatically make broad assumptions such as Yeshua *only speaking Hebrew* when addressing individuals, or even groups of people. This idea simply does not align with history and what we know about First Century Judea or Galilee. There are instances in the Gospels, such as when He encounters the Roman centurion, the Syro-Phoenician woman, and especially Pontius Pilate, when the Lord would have spoken in Greek. S.E. Porter summarizes the widely encountered position in Biblical Studies regarding the spoken language of the Messiah:

“The vast majority of scholars rightly contend that Jesus’ primary and first language was probably Aramaic...Many scholars also entertain the possibility that, at least in a religious context...Jesus may have spoken Hebrew as well...Jesus was also involved in a trade where it is reasonable to assume that he would have had contact with others than his townspeople, possibly including Romans or others who spoke Greek. In the course of his itinerant ministry, Jesus also traveled to various parts of [Israel] where he may have had contact with Greek speakers.”^b

Many in the Messianic community, perhaps because much of the dialogue one encounters in the Gospels was originally spoken in Hebrew or Aramaic, conclude that the written Greek of the Gospels does not accurately reflect the “true sayings” of Yeshua. But before making hasty judgments, there are several factors that are not often considered. First of all, the Gospels were not composed during the ministry time of Yeshua. The events were not “written down” as they occurred. Secondly, the target audiences of the Gospels were in the Greek-speaking Diaspora. And third, we have to remember that a thoroughly Jewish style of Greek existed with the production of the Septuagint. The same kind of grammar and sentence construction that we see in the Gospels, mirrors much of that of the LXX. Furthermore, to assume that Yeshua *exclusively spoke Hebrew or Aramaic* in His recorded interactions is simply not historically viable.

One of the major claims that Hebrew New Testament advocates make is that the Apostolic Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, are full of First Century Hebrew idioms. It is claimed that these idioms cannot be accurately translated, and thus they reflect that the Gospels were originally written in Hebrew. **Many Christian scholars agree that there are colloquial expressions or Hebraisms (also called Semitisms) unique to the First Century present in the Gospels.** These include terms like “good eye” or “bad eye” and what they meant to their Jewish audience. However, many Hebrew New Testament advocates will say that these terms and expressions are unknown to the world of Christian scholasticism, and that God has perhaps only now revealed these things *to them*. This is likewise false. One almost universally recognized Hebraism among theologians appears in Matthew 16:19, where Yeshua speaks about “binding” and “loosing”:

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, **and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.**”

This expression actually has its own entry under “Binding and Loosing” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (or *ABD*). Raymond F. Collins states the following, reflecting a strong grasp on the unique Jewish character of this phrase:

“Matthew introduces ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ in his gospel without further explanation, thereby suggesting that the practice to which these expression refer was known to his community. Since Josephus writes of the Pharisees’ power to loose and bind (*luein kai desmein*; *JW* 1 § 111), it is likely that the primary interpretive analogue is to be sought within contemporary rabbinic practice. Within Matthew’s community the Scriptures were midrashically interpreted (e.g., Matt 1:22) and appropriate *halakah* was established (e.g., Matt 5:21-48). Thus it is probable that the practice to which the Matthean ‘binding and loosing’ refers is the interpretation of the Scriptures and the determination of an appropriate Christian way of life.”^c

Of course, in order to properly understand what is written in Matthew’s Gospel as “bind” (Grk. *deō*, δέω) and “loose” (Grk. *luō*, λύω), one must be familiar with First Century Jewish

^b S.E. Porter, “Greek of the New Testament,” in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 433.

^c Raymond F. Collins, “Binding and Loosing,” in David Noel Freedman, ed. et. al., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:744.

history. Josephus, specifically referenced here, writes about the reign of Alexandra, a queen who ruled over the Jewish people several generations before Yeshua, and her involvement with the Pharisees:

“Now, Alexandra hearkened to them to an extraordinary degree, as being herself a woman of great piety towards God. But these Pharisees artfully insinuated themselves into her favor little by little, and became themselves the real administrators of the public affairs; they banished and reduced whom they pleased; they bound and loosed [men] at their pleasure” (*Wars of the Jews* 1.111).^d

Interestingly enough, William Whiston, translator of this edition of Josephus’ works, indicates in a footnote that “Here we have the oldest and most authentic Jewish exposition of binding and loosing, for punishing or absolving men; not for declaring actions lawful or unlawful, as some more modern Jews and Christians vainly pretend,”^e referencing Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. More might be in play in terms of what “binding and loosing” meant in an ancient context, beyond how Yeshua applied it. What is important for our purposes here that Whiston identifies it as an Hebraism that is used in later works, namely the Gospel of Matthew.

In the Greek text of Matthew, this phrase was obviously written literally as “binding and loosing,” and should have been understood by Matthew’s target audience as relating to determining the *halachah* or religious orthopraxy of a community. The only way that this phrase can be possibly understood—that is if one is unfamiliar with the terminology “binding and loosing”—is knowing the history behind it. Translation *into any language* will not help too much.

There are many more widely recognized Hebraisms in the Gospels by Christian scholars today, and they are discussed in many technical commentaries of Biblical books. However, simply because there are Hebraisms in the Gospels or the Apostolic Scriptures does not prove that they were written in Hebrew. **It proves that they have an Hebraic background, and that one must be familiar with the history of Biblical times in examining the text.** Likewise, some things that appear to be Hebraisms may not be. R. Timothy McLay explains, “what might be explained as a *Semitism* in the NT, whether an *Aramaism* or a *Hebraism*, might just as easily be due to the prior influence of the Greek Jewish Scriptures on the style and language of the writer (*Septuagintism*).”^f He further states, “An appreciation for the ways in which the LXX translators rendered the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language is also necessary for our exegesis of the NT because of the NT writers’ use of the Scriptures.”^g This only intensifies the need for Messianic Bible teachers and students to be familiar with the Septuagint.

David Allan Black adds to this, “it is possible that the New Testament writers incorporated oral or written sources that were translations of Aramaic or Hebrew into Greek that contained Semitisms in proportion to the literalness of the translation. Thus, it would be surprising if speakers whose linguistic background was Semitic did not betray some Semitic influence in their use of Greek.”^h Of course, the principal Hebrew and Aramaic resources employed by the Apostolic writers were the Tanach Scriptures.

In examining the origin of the Apostolic Scriptures, there are many factors that have to be taken into consideration that are often *never discussed* by proponents of an original “Hebrew New Testament.” Can we prove on a book-by-book basis that the whole of the Apostolic Scriptures were written in Hebrew? While there may be a substantial amount of rhetoric that brazenly assumes “The *B’rit Chadahsah* was written in Hebrew!” floating around the Messianic community, is it borne out in the historical record? One advocate of an original “Hebrew New Testament” confidently states,

^d Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 551.

^e *Ibid.*, pp 551-552.

^f R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 32.

^g *Ibid.*, 44.

^h David Allan Black, *It’s Still Greek to Me* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 151.

“Many Biblical scholars now agree that many of the New Testament books were originally written in Hebrew and later translated into Greek. This means that our English copies of the New Testament are really translations of translations...”ⁱ

Of course, any critical thinker has to ask: *What books?* and *Which scholars?* This advocate of an original “Hebrew New Testament” provides no such evidence, and has likely not done any book-by-book analysis of the Apostolic Scriptures to see if such an assessment is truly valid. On the contrary to what anyone advocating a Hebrew New Testament might believe, the majority of the scholastic community—especially those involved in Jewish New Testament studies—does not believe that the Apostolic Scriptures were written in Hebrew. At the very most, what is advocated is that the Apostolic writers incorporated Hebrew and Aramaic sources into their Greek compositions. The foremost of these sources was the Hebrew Tanach. Another possible source was Q, an abbreviation for the German word *Quelle* or “source.” This is a theoretical Hebrew or Aramaic document that was believed to have existed and had a basic compilation of some of the original sayings of Yeshua the Messiah, and/or notes of what went on during His ministry with the Disciples.

As a conservative Messianic ministry, Outreach Israel and TNN Online have had to field the question “Do you believe the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew?” many, many times. Each time we have been asked this question we have answered a resounding: “No!” The principal reason we believe this has not necessarily been because we believe that God can inspire His Word in languages other than Hebrew—even though that is an important reason—but because it is not historically valid. **We primarily believe this because we have examined the composition data of each book of the Apostolic Scriptures to determine whether or not an individual text could have been written in Hebrew.** Every time we have examined a text, a written Greek origin seems inevitable. This is not to say that Hebrew sources or Hebraic understandings are not employed in a text, but the written language of a text cannot be Hebrew.

There are four critical factors that must be considered when examining the origin of the Apostolic Scriptures, to determine in what language a text was originally composed:

- **Date:** When was the text written?
- **Author:** Who was the author of the text?
- **Author’s location:** Where was the author when composing the text?
- **Audience and audience’s location:** Who was the target or recipient audience of a text? Where were they geographically located?

We have never been able to find anyone in the Messianic movement advocating an original “Hebrew New Testament,” who examines texts of the Apostolic Scriptures on these ever-critical, historical factors. The reason we have likely never seen this is that these factors will prove time and time again that the written language of the Apostolic Scriptures was Greek.^j If you have any questions about the composition of the New Testament, we would urge you to consult our publications *Scripture Under Scrutiny: Was the New Testament Really Written in Hebrew?* and *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*. This is one urban myth that is going to seriously cripple the growth and maturation of the Messianic movement if it is not discarded in the forthcoming future.

updated 23 August, 2011

ⁱ Dean and Susan Wheelock, *The Quiet Revival* (Hebrew Roots Press: Lakewood, WI, 2001), 12.

^j This entry includes embedded quotations from the book *Scripture Under Scrutiny: Was the New Testament Really Written in Hebrew?* edited by Margaret McKee Huey.

New Wine, Old Wineskins: I really do not get the “Messianic movement.” Jesus said that He came to bring us all new wine, and told us that you can’t put new wine in old wineskins. The old way of Judaism has been replaced by the new way of Christianity.

There should be absolutely no doubting the fact that the terminology “new wine in new wineskins,” while derived from specific places in the Gospels, has taken on a life of its own in contemporary Christianity—particularly, charismatic Christianity. It is not uncommon to hear statements made by charismatic Believers, to the effect that we need to “drink the new wine of the Holy Spirit,” even though such a remark is not to be found anywhere in Scripture. On the contrary, Ephesians 5:18 communicates, “do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” Recognizing that “new wine in new wineskins” is definitely taken from Yeshua’s teachings, it is important for us as Bible readers to evaluate the context where this appears, so we can derive an appropriate interpretation and application.

Statements made by Yeshua about “new wine in new wineskins,” to be necessarily contrasted to “old wine in old wineskins,” appears in all three Synoptic Gospels:

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins *as well*; but *one puts* new wine into fresh wineskins” (Mark 2:21-22).

“But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. Nor do *people* put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved” (Matthew 9:16-17).

“And He was also telling them a parable: ‘No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, “The old is good *enough*”’” (Luke 5:36-39).

All readers of Mark 2:21-22; Matthew 9:16-17; and Luke 5:36-39 should be agreed that the analogy is made about something old being unable to be repaired. It does not do any good to try to patch up an old garment that has been torn, with a new patch, as a greater tear will take place. More importantly, if new wine is placed into an old wineskin, and the new wine begins to ferment, because the old wineskin has already been stretched to capacity, the old wineskin will break. The point to be taken from both examples is that something will be lost, and that something else has to be done.

There have been quite a few interpreters of Mark 2:21-22; Matthew 9:16-17; and Luke 5:36-39, who have drawn the conclusion that the Messiah says that a new Christianity cannot be placed into an old Judaism. This new Christianity has hence replaced Judaism, the Law of Moses, and the rigidity of keeping commandments and various external rituals. To a wide extent, this view is very difficult to hold to, precisely because when we read a greater selection of Scripture passages, we can see that the Messiah’s purpose was not to abolish Moses’ Teaching, but rather to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 16:17). Still, it is fair to draw the conclusion that the new wine needing to be placed into new wineskins, does represent how Yeshua has brought something new onto the scene.

What is different about Yeshua the Messiah, which is to be associated with the new wine? This will principally be seen by evaluating what is given to us in the surrounding context, where the analogy of “new wine in new wineskins” has been given.

Mark 2:21-22; Matthew 9:16-17; and Luke 5:36-39 are preceded with Yeshua being questioned as to why He chose to associate Himself with tax collectors and sinners, and then being questioned why He and His Disciples do not fast, when some others do fast:

“And it happened that He was reclining *at the table* in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Yeshua and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, ‘Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?’ And hearing *this*, Yeshua said to them, ‘*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’ John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, ‘Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’ And Yeshua said to them, ‘While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day’” (Mark 2:15-20).

“As Yeshua went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector’s booth; and He said to him, ‘Follow Me!’ And he got up and followed Him. Then it happened that as Yeshua was reclining *at the table* in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Yeshua and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to His disciples, ‘Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?’ But when Yeshua heard *this*, He said, ‘*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: “I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE [Hosea 6:6],” for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’ Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’ And Yeshua said to them, ‘The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast’” (Matthew 9:9-15).

“After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him. And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other *people* who were reclining *at the table* with them. The Pharisees and their scribes *began* grumbling at His disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?’ And Yeshua answered and said to them, ‘*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’ And they said to Him, ‘The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink.’ And Yeshua said to them, ‘You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? But *the* days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days’” (Luke 5:27-35).

Mark 2:21-22 and Luke 5:36-39 are then followed with Yeshua being asked about why He presumably “breaks” the Sabbath:

“And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads *of grain*. The Pharisees were saying to Him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ And He said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar *the* high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for *anyone* to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?’ Yeshua said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:23-28).

“Now it happened that He was passing through *some* grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating *the grain*. But some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ And Yeshua answering them said, ‘Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?’ And He was saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath’” (Luke 6:1-5).

Those readers of what is witnessed in Mark 2:21-22; Matthew 9:16-17; and Luke 5:36-39, and what appears in its wider context—perhaps only armed with a cursory or basic knowledge of Second Temple Judaism—should be able to easily deduce what “new wine in new wineskins” communicated to those who originally heard, or later read it. This has absolutely nothing to do with a new Christianity replacing an old Judaism. Rather, Yeshua referenced “new wine in new wineskins” in relationship to His own teachings, ministry methods, orthopraxy, and *halachah*. The way Yeshua did things, as He associated Himself with tax collectors and sinners, as He reached out to those disenfranchised persons others would dismiss, why He and His Disciples did not fast as did some others, and what He permitted His Disciples to do on the Sabbath—were different than some of His other contemporaries.

The analogy of the new wine not being contained by the old wineskins, should be taken to mean that Yeshua’s new teachings/orthopraxy/*halachah*—a definite feature of His fulfillment of the Torah and mission given to Him by the Father—cannot be contained by older methods of teaching/orthopraxy/*halachah*. If replacement of the Torah of Moses and Judaism were truly something in view, then Yeshua would have surely asked something like: “Why drink wine when you can have strong liquor?”^a We do not see such a replacement mentioned here. How wine ferments still stands as a common frame of reference. **Methods of doing things and conducting oneself as a servant of the Lord**, representative of the new wine that needs to be placed into a new wineskin, to ferment and mature *and* not be lost, **are specifically what is in view**—not the fact that the Lord expects His people to obey His commandments.^b

When Yeshua’s reference to “new wine in new wineskins” is properly read with the wider context in mind, replacement of an old Judaism for a new Christianity is not what is witnessed. Rather, what are witnessed are old, outdated and unuseful ways of conducting oneself as a religious person, which need to naturally give way to the Messiah’s methods and example of service and action. While debates over the right way of *how to do things* are affluent throughout the Jewish theological tradition, they are surely not devoid from the many centuries of Christian theological reflection and debate, either. Older ways of doing things can become stale and ineffective, needing a reforming, or even prophetic voice, to come on the scene and offer a new approach that can meet the concerns of others who need to be touched by the gospel. In all likelihood, the observation of Yeshua in Luke 5:39, “no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, ‘The old is good *enough*,’” is a statement **on the resistance to change** by people when it is necessary. When old methods of service to God and ministry need to give way to new methods, there is frequently a high degree of disregard for it.

If it were encouraged in more sectors of the contemporary Christian Church, to read “new wine in new wineskins” *in context* with what is stated in the surrounding Gospel text, then perhaps more people would be tuned in to how the issues regard Yeshua’s style of ministry service. If replacement of God’s Law or His commandments were really the issue, then wine and

^a Luke 1:15 does make a reference to *sikera* (σίκερα) or “strong liquor,” indicating that something stronger than just fermented wine was present in the First Century world.

^b This is where it needs to be recognized how the Greek term *exesti* (εἰς ἐξέστι), “defined as either “it is allowed, it is in one’s power, is possible” (LS, 273), or “perhaps also “it is proper, permitted” (CGEDNT, 64), is better rendered as either “permitted” or “permissible” in places such as Mark 2:24, 26 and Luke 6:2, 4. As it regards Sabbath keeping, the issue would be over disagreements of Sabbath practice, not the general relevance of the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12).

wineskins would have been contrasted to some other beverage or food product. This is not what we see, and it is most unfortunate how “new wine in new wineskins” has been able to get out of control as a sound byte, used by those who should be reading their Bibles a little more intelligibly.

posted 26 October, 2011

***Niddah, laws of:* Can you tell me anything about the laws of *niddah*?**

The laws of *niddah* (נִדְּהָ) in the Torah relate to a person's sexual purity and proper cleanness, and among the commandments relating to sexuality, the bulk of them relate to women. This is an area that for obvious reasons, can be embarrassing to many, and as such often goes unaddressed in the Messianic community. But, if there is anything that is absolutely imperative for Believers to understand in today's world, it is proper sexuality according to the Bible, as Satan has done his best to pervert something that God gave to a husband and wife.

One of the commandments related to *niddah* is in Leviticus 12:2-4: “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: ‘When a woman gives birth and bears a male *child*, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall remain in the blood of *her* purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed.’”

During a period of uncleanness for a woman, which specified here would include the time after a woman has given birth, or during her menstrual cycle, no sexual contact with a man is to take place. When a woman is not pregnant, after her menstrual cycle she must wait seven days before she can have sexual contact with her husband.

One thing we should note about the laws of ritual purity, relating to both men and women, is that they pertain to one entering the Sanctuary or Temple. There is no Temple presently to go to in Jerusalem, so there should be no worry about being unclean in this regard. However, simply because those who were ritually unclean were not permitted to go into the Temple complex, does not all of a sudden mean that a ritually unclean person cannot go anywhere, contrary to what some in Orthodox Judaism may teach. It is notable that there many other things given in the Scriptures that can make a person unclean. If a man and a woman have sex in the confines of marriage, they are considered unclean (Leviticus 15:18). All this means is that until they bathe in water they are not permitted to go to the Tabernacle or Temple. There is no Temple to go to today, so there is nothing we can do about entering it. We do the best that we can to stay clean and proper in regard to our sexuality. This includes unmarried people as well, as they can also make themselves ritually unclean (Leviticus 15:16-18).

Many of the commandments relating to sexual purity and uncleanness have to do with proper bathing. During the Middle Ages in Europe, bathing was considering something to be looked down upon and unnecessary. It is said that Queen Elizabeth I of England only took three baths in her entire lifetime. It is no surprise why disease was rampant in many parts of Europe. The Jews of Europe, in contrast, maintained basic cleanliness and did not have many of the diseases of their non-Jewish neighbors.

In traditional Judaism, the belief is that because there is no Temple, and that no one can be fully cleansed, has resulted in the premise that by default all are unclean. Just by touching something that was touched by a ritually unclean person you are unclean. This means that if a person boards an airplane and a woman going through her menstrual cycle had previously sat down in your seat, you become unclean by sitting there. Orthodox Judaism has made the laws of *niddah* very complicated when you read the Mishnah and the Talmud, which adds many things to the basic Scriptural instructions, and then among those extra-Biblical regulations there are differing and contradicting opinions. One thing that we need to understand as Believers is that Yeshua's sacrifice indeed covers us from any ritual uncleanness, which prior to His sacrifice could have limited individuals' contacts with God in the Temple. Most of the basic instructions on ritual

uncleanness that can be followed in the Diaspora pertain to married men and women, appropriate sexuality, and bathing.

Obviously, as the Messianic movement grows and refines its *halachic* orthopraxy, so will our knowledge, understanding, and application of these commandments (and the whole subject of sexuality) be improved.

updated 14 November, 2006

Noahide Laws: I have been told by some Messianics that the only commandments that Gentiles are supposed to follow are the seven Noahide laws. I have then been told by other Messianics that the seven Noahide laws are an invention of later Judaism, and were not from the Biblical period. Can you please help me with this?

The following entry has been adapted from the commentary appearing in *TorahScope, Volume I* by Mark Huey, on *Shelakh-Lekha* (Numbers 13:1-15:41), entitled “Scriptural Equality”

The following is a brief description of “Noahides” as provided by the *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*:

“non-Jews who observe the seven laws that apply to the descendants of Noah (namely, all peoples). According to rabbinic authorities, these include the following prohibitions: idolatry, adultery and incest, bloodshed, blasphemy, robbery, social injustice, and eating the flesh of a limb cut from a living animal (T. Abodah Zarah 8:4-8).”^a

The conviction of many of today’s non-Jewish Messianic Believers is that they are a part of the community of Israel via their faith in Messiah Yeshua (cf. Ephesians 2:11-13; Galatians 6:16; et. al.). As the Torah itself communicates, “One law and one standard applies for you and for the alien residing with you” (Numbers 15:15, Keter Crown Bible). This would seem to mean that non-Jewish Believers should be following the Torah no differently than Jewish Believers.^b They should consider the Law of Moses to have relevance and blessing for their lives, informing them how the Lord wants all of His people to be holy and set-apart unto Him. In fact, while the Torah originally communicated to Ancient Israel that there was to only be one standard for the native or sojourner, in the post-resurrection era non-Jewish Believers are to be regarded “no longer [as] strangers and aliens, but...fellow citizens with the saints, and...of God’s household” (Ephesians 3:6). Such a classification of native, sojourner, or even “God-fearer”—is to be largely regarded as a part of the pre-resurrection era.^c If anything, all Believers in Messiah Yeshua are sojourners and aliens *in the world*, their citizenship in Heaven (1 Peter 2:11; Philippians 3:20).

Many of today’s Messianic Jews eagerly embrace non-Jewish Believers as their fellow brothers and sisters, and are more than happy for them to be considering God’s Torah as relevant instruction. They want the Messianic movement to be the “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV/CJB). They know that the enemy wants to keep Jewish Believers and non-Jewish Believers divided as much as he can. They know that a Messianic Judaism off to itself, with an evangelical Christianity still often disregarding the Law of Moses, is not at all a good thing. Even if there are some obstacles and difficulties along the way, many Messianic Jews we know recognize that we all have to work together to see a restoration of Israel come forth that is more all-encompassing than just involving the Jewish people; it is something that involves the entire world.

^a “Noahides,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 456.

^b This does not, however, mean that such non-Jewish Believers need to live as *culturally “Jewish”* in all aspects of their lives. While Jewish tradition should have a role in one’s Torah observance, there are many aspects of Jewish culture that do not have to be followed by non-Jewish Believers, mostly regarding non-congregational related issues.

^c Consult the editor’s article “One Law for All,” for a discussion of the related passages that somehow speak of “one law,” “one statute,” etc., and the controversy present over in today’s broad Messianic movement.

Contrary to the thought that the Torah is relevant for all of God's people is the Jewish theological construct that the Torah is only to be followed by the Jews. The nations at large are thought to only have to really follow seven precepts affecting the *b'nai Noach* or children of Noah, derived from Genesis 9. Much of this concept has made its way into parts of Messianic Judaism as well, which has thought that non-Jewish Believers can become "righteous Gentiles" by only following the seven Noahide laws. By extension, some even think that the Apostolic decree of Acts 15:19-21 is based in these Noahide laws, which include:

1. a prohibition against idolatry
2. a prohibition against blasphemy
3. a prohibition against bloodshed/murder
4. prohibitions against incest and adultery
5. a prohibition against robbery
6. the need to establish courts of law
7. a prohibition against eating flesh cut from a living animal^d

While these seven prohibitions are surely righteous injunctions to be observed by all Messiah followers, suggesting that these are the *only* "commandments" that non-Jewish Believers are to follow today is a bit of a hasty conclusion. The Apostolic Scriptures include clear instruction to mixed assemblies of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers that goes well beyond these seven issues—as important as they are.^e But more problematic for those Messianic Jews who might want to view non-Jewish Believers only being some kind of "Noahides," is the fact that these so-called Noahide laws were likely not formulated until after the destruction of the Second Temple. There are two lists of these different regulations found in Jewish literature (*Jubilees* 7:20-21;^f *t. Avodah Zarah* 8:4^g), and as David Instone-Brewer points out, "The two versions of the list in *Jubilees* and in later rabbinic texts have so little in common that we cannot know what this list contained in the first century or even if such a list existed."^h

posted 13 September, 2011

^d Cf. Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp 376-377.

^e The prohibitions of the Apostolic decree of Acts 15:19-21 are best thought of as being those areas where the First Century Jewish community was unwilling to compromise or be lenient toward outsiders. The prohibitions issued by James the Just would require the new, non-Jewish Believers to effectively cut themselves off from their old, pagan spheres of social interaction, making their new spheres of social interaction those who followed Israel's Messiah (Jewish Believers) or at least Israel's One God (the Jewish community).

Consult the editor's commentary *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic* for more information.

^f "And in the twenty-eighth jubilee Noah began to command his grandsons with ordinances and commandments and all of the judgments which he knew. And he bore witness to his sons so that they might do justice and cover the shame of their flesh and bless the one who created them and honor father and mother, and each one love his neighbor and preserve themselves from fornication and pollution and from all injustice. For on account of these three the Flood came upon the earth. For (it was) because of fornication which the Watchers, apart from the mandate of their authority, fornicated with the daughters of men and took for themselves wives from all whom they chose and made a beginning of impurity" (O.S. Wintermute, "Jubilees," in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2 [New York: Doubleday, 1985], pp 69-70).

^g "Concerning seven religious requirements were the children of Noah admonished: setting up courts of justice, idolatry, blasphemy [cursing the Name of God], fornication, bloodshed, and thievery" (Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew With a New Introduction*, 2 vols. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002], 2:1291-1292).

^h David Instone-Brewer, "Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 52 No. 2 (2009):308.

Non-profit organizations: What can you tell me about what a non-profit organization is?

A non-profit organization in the United States is some kind of an institution, group, or society that is legally registered as being a “business” that is not incorporated for making profit. The most common forms of non-profit organizations that we see are churches or synagogues, charities, orphanages, social missions, and various schools and educational groups. Being made a registered non-profit organization means that an institution is exempted from various forms of taxes and can allow contributions to be tax-deductible, as the organization is presumably offering a “social service” for human betterment. Most, if not all of what the non-profit organization offers must be provided without charge. This is unlike a for-profit business which will often never offer its clients any kind of special benefits or free services.

Contrary to popular opinion, non-profit organizations do have to file tax returns, report their earnings, and their financial records are available for public scrutiny. This does not mean that there are not abuses among non-profit organizations that function as though they are for-profit businesses. One watchdog organization, www.guidestar.org, provides access to the filed tax returns of various non-profit organizations for you to consider how they use funds and contributions they are given.

posted 30 April, 2007