

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Pagan, Christmas and Easter: I have heard it said that you do not believe that Christmas and Easter are pagan holidays. Could you please explain?

TNN Online is a solution-driven Messianic ministry. In dealing with Messianic apologetics, and the controversial subject matter that it often relates to, we try to deal in fair-minded and scholarly terms, demonstrating the testimony of people who have changed for the better spiritually, and not worse. As it relates to the holidays, for example, all too often during *Chanukah* in the Winter, and Passover in the Spring, we as Messianic Believers can spend too much time focusing on what our Christian brethren are doing in ignorance, and not focusing enough on the holidays that we are celebrating, and uplifting Messiah Yeshua in them.

It has been our observation that “pagan” is a buzzword that is used far too frequently by those in the Messianic community today. “Pagan” can be used by anyone to describe any Christian doctrinal practice, and oftentimes not in any clear Biblical, historical, or even rational context. Much of the usage of the word “pagan” is done emotionally, on the part of self-disenfranchised Messianics who errantly believe that mainstream Christianity has nothing, and/or has had nothing, to offer the Body of Messiah for centuries. Their pursuit is often to expose anything perceived as “pagan,” rather than becoming Scripturally compliant with the Word of God, and demonstrate to our Christian brothers and sisters the example of people who have changed for the better by becoming Messianic and Torah observant. If, however, Christians see that all we do is condemn them because they “do this” or “don’t do that,” they may want nothing to do with us, and perhaps rightfully so. We have to have the appropriate attitude in approaching them and be constructive and spiritually edifying, which sadly is not evident in some sectors of the Messianic community today.

As it relates to the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, we have addressed them in the articles “**The Christmas Challenge**” and “**What is the Problem With Easter?**” Let us state on the record that we do not encourage the celebration of these holidays, and are fully aware of their questionable origins. These are replacements for the *moedim* or appointed times of the Lord in Leviticus 23, that were officially established by the Roman Catholic Church, and many Protestants today thus celebrate them (albeit in ignorance). There are traditions associated with these two holidays that originate from paganism and not the Bible.

Nevertheless, we know that as a Messianic family when we were still Church-going Christians that when we celebrated Christmas and Easter, we **did not** worship Christmas trees and the Easter bunny. We celebrated these two holidays with the understanding that we were commemorating the birth of the Messiah and the resurrection of the Messiah. We did not know of their questionable origins. But the questionable origins we are talking about are *the traditions* of the Christmas tree, evergreen, mistletoe, the Easter bunny, and Easter eggs. All too often, when Christians see many Messianics’ attitudes related to these two holidays, they believe that what is in actuality being criticized and branded as “pagan” are the events of the birth of our Savior and His resurrection—as opposed to the traditions that have been commonly associated with them, whose origins are certainly not in the Bible.

Many Christians in ignorance celebrate Christmas and Easter without knowing how these two holidays came into being. We know as a family that God honored us in our ignorance for what we did, because in our minds we were celebrating the birth and the resurrection of Yeshua. But we also know that when we were shown the truth about the origins of these two holidays, that we were given a choice by Him and we had to change. We have changed, and now celebrate the Biblical holidays of Leviticus 23, emphasizing the Messianic richness that is in these festivals and what they teach us about God’s ongoing plan of salvation history. We have no intention of celebrating Christmas or Easter again. It is our choice, however, that in dealing with Christian friends and family, we show them what we should be doing from the Scriptures, and what they have missed out on by not celebrating the Biblical holidays. Once you commit yourself to

celebrating the Lord's appointed times, we have discovered that you will not want to go back to the human substitutions that are often made.

We believe that Christmas and Easter are holidays of a different variety than holidays such as Halloween. Halloween is a holiday that is obviously totally committed to the glorification of witches, goblins, ghouls, demons, and Satan. It can, in no uncertain terms, be called a pagan holiday. There are no Biblical overtones or undertones to it. Christians who celebrate Halloween need to be reprimanded for it, and there are a host of Christian apologetic ministries that speak against it.^a

Christmas and Easter are of a different variety because they do have Biblical overtones to them. We have to remember that when we speak about the origins of these two holidays, we must put ourselves in the position of those Christians who are celebrating them, thinking that they are religious holidays founded in Scripture, and are celebrating them *not* for the sake of the Christmas tree or Easter bunny—but to remember the birth of Yeshua and His resurrection. These are Biblical events worthy of our remembrance. However, the way that Christianity has chosen to remember them is improper, because we are not to follow the fallen ways of the nations (Deuteronomy 18:9).

In our dealings with Christians, it is our opinion that it is inappropriate to call Christmas and Easter “pagan” because such comments are easy to be misinterpreted as criticizing the events of Messiah's birth and resurrection, as opposed to the participation of traditions that originate in anything but the Bible. We call these holidays non-Biblical because it will force our Christian brothers and sisters into God's Word to see if their celebration is truly justified and based in the Bible. The Messianic community uses the word “pagan” far too frequently, and it is often because we do not feel spiritually and Scripturally sound to defend ourselves. Sadly, the word “pagan” is used as a crutch and a self-defense mechanism because some feel unsure of themselves, and are unable to adequately defend their beliefs from the Bible and history.

We believe that a much better way to answer the question, “Do you celebrate Christmas and Easter?” is to respond with a question: “Are Christmas and Easter listed among the appointed times of Leviticus 23?” This will force our Christian brethren back into the Word of God, as opposed to getting them unnecessarily offended. And if there is anything that the Messianic community desperately needs right now, it is a return to the Scriptures, and letting the Bible answer people, rather than insulting them *ad nauseum* with the term “pagan,” as is the case far too frequently.

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PaRDeS: Can you explain to me the four levels of Hebraic Scripture interpretation?

The following is a description of the PaRDeS hermeneutic from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* on its origins and its development:

“[I]n the Middle Ages the word *pardes* was used as a mnemonic for the four types of biblical exegesis, an acronym of *peshat* (‘the literal meaning’), *remez* (‘hint,’ i.e., veiled allusions such as *gematria*, and *notarikon*), *derash* (‘homiletical interpretation’), and *sod* (‘mystery,’ i.e., the esoteric interpretation), the word being made up of the initial letters of these words. For the meaning of the word in mysticism, see Kabbalah” (“Pardes,” in *EJ*).

The PaRDeS hermeneutic, as a formalized system of Jewish interpretation of Scripture, is Medieval in its origins. While many Messianics have adapted forms of PaRDeS for their examination of the Bible, many are ignorant of the fact that it was not used in Biblical times, specifically the period of Second Temple Judaism, as is easily attested by history. The PaRDeS hermeneutic was birthed out of Medieval Jewish mysticism, with the specific dynamic of trying to have its users attain the *sod* or mystical level. The PaRDeS hermeneutic was widely used by Kaballists as *EJ* attests:

^a Consult the article “A Messianic Perspective on Halloween” by J.K. McKee.

“The *peshat*, therefore, which was taken to include the corpus of talmudic law as well, was only the Torah's outermost aspect, the ‘husk’ that first met the eye of the reader. The other layers revealed themselves only to that more penetrating and latitudinous power of insight which was able to discover in the Torah general truths that were in no way dependent on their immediate literal context. Only on the level of *sod* did the Torah become a body of mystical symbols which unveiled the hidden life-processes of the Godhead and their connections with human life” (Gershom Scholem, “Kabbalah [J. mysticism]” in *EJ*).

Interpreting Scripture from the method of PaRDeS often robs the Bible from its straightforward meaning, because the *sod* or hidden level is considered the ultimate interpretation as it is mystical and enables us to understand the so-called secrets of God. As Walter C. Kaiser validly notes, “The fourth method used in Jewish interpretation was the *sod*—the mystical or Cabalistic sense of a passage” (*An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, p 212), indicating a largely Medieval origin of it. This runs contrary to what is considered to be the *peshat*, or literal, and *remez*, or hidden levels of Scripture, both of which were commonplace in the First Century. Kaiser attests,

“As the Christian era dawned, it was customary for the Jewish rabbis to distinguish between the two senses of the text: the *peshat*, the ‘clear,’ ‘plain,’ or ‘simple’ (hence the literal or historical) meaning of a Bible passage; and the *remaz*, the hidden sense of the Mosaic law and of the Halakah....

“The exegesis dealing with historical and dogmatic subjects was called *haggadic midrash*. This type of interpretation was more illustrative, practical, and mixed with a wealth of allegory, legend, and colorful biblical history. It was mainly a homiletic approach to the study of the Bible.

“In contrast, the exegesis dealing with legal matters was called *halakic midrash*. This form of interpretation attempted to apply the law by analogy and by a combination of texts to those exceptional cases for which there was no special enactment in Moses’ law” (Ibid.).

The *sod* level was not something that commonplace at all in the milieu of Second Temple Judaism.

While “*sod* level interpretations” have been intriguing to the ears of many in the Messianic movement, they often subtract the value of the Biblical text itself, and likewise frequently take no consideration for the historical context of Scripture. No longer do we have people examining the Tanach for what it is as narrative, history, prophecy, and wisdom literature, but people are searching it for hidden meanings. This means that when David struck down Goliath with a sling and five smooth stones, we cannot accept the text as meaning what it says, as there has to be a hidden, esoteric meaning behind it. Even worse, PaRDeS has been applied to parts of the Apostolic Scriptures by some Messianics, for which it has no remote context. Messianics who employ PaRDeS often fail to look at the New Testament for what it is as Gospels, history, and letters. When Yeshua and His Disciples walk down a road together, it can no longer be treated as them walking down a road. What this does to us in the long run is reveal our inadequacy for using standardized hermenutics which examine literary structures in a Biblical text, taking into examination texts as a whole and its source language(s), in addition to required historical background information. Author Tim Hegg makes the following valid remarks in his workbook *Interpreting the Bible*:

“It is therefore a mistake to think that such a hermeneutic was in place in the 1st Century, or somehow that Yeshua and His Apostles would have interpreted the Scriptures from this vantage point. To postulate such a scenario would be entirely anachronistic.

“Further the PaRDeS schema undermines all sound hermenutics, and divests the text of its literary meaning. Such the Pashat is considered to be the ‘surface’ or plain sense, this is considered less than significant for the true *chagam* or Sage. It is only when one arrives at the *sod*, the mysterious and mystical sense found through subjective criteria, that the text gives up its treasures. Such an approach simply combines a full-blown mysticism with a kind of ‘sensus plenior,’ leaving the text entirely manipulated by the interpreter, and thus unable accurately to bear the author’s meaning. **Such a hermeneutic should be avoided at all costs**” (p. 90).

It has been our experience that most Messianics who employ a PaRDeS hermeneutic are unaware of its origins in Jewish mysticism, so they are using it “in ignorance,” per se. However, we must point out that those who believe that a mystical level of interpretation is the pinnacle of Biblical examination are often making the mistake of trying to find hidden meanings in Scripture when the answers we need to be effective servants of God are often right before us.

One of the long-term challenges facing the Messianic community is properly interpreting Scripture using methods that were in existence in the First Century and adhered to by Second Temple Judaism, as well as modern techniques which look at the Bible as literature and history. This may take time as the Messianic movement matures and the Lord raises up Messianic theologians who will focus on teaching sound doctrine, other than things rooted in Jewish mysticism. They will need to have the training and skills to do this.

We recommend the books *Bible Study that Works* by David L. Thompson, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* by Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture* by Jacob Neusner, and *Interpreting the Bible: An Introduction to Hermeneutics* by Tim Hegg if you are having challenges interpreting Scripture and want to understand some formal and constructive ways of doing it.

updated 12 February, 2007

Passover, Eating Lamb: Should we eat lamb as Messianics during Passover? Is it true that the Jews do not eat lamb during Passover?

It is notable that there are divergent practices among the Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewish communities as it relates to Passover and whether or not lamb is allowed to be eaten. Ashkenazic Jewry (Northern, Central, and Eastern European) does not eat lamb at Passover. This is based on the Biblical command, “You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you; but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 16:5-6). Because this is a clear reference to the Temple in Jerusalem, and since the Temple has been destroyed, Ashkenazic Jewish *halachah* prohibits the consumption of lamb at Passover, and instead allows for poultry. Sephardic Jewry (Spain, North Africa, and Arab lands) does permit lamb to be eaten at Passover, as a memorial to the Exodus.

Messianic Jewish practice is often divided as to whether or not someone was raised Ashkenazic or Sephardic. Some Messianic *sedars* have lamb, and others frequently serve chicken. At Messianic congregations that have both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews, sometimes both lamb and chicken are served. A viable *halachah* for Messianic non-Jews is frequently debated, and we would encourage you to find the tradition that you are the most comfortable with.

added 16 April, 2006
Virtual Passover

Passover, Egg on Sedar Plate: Why do Jews have an egg on their *sedar* plates? Does this not come from Easter?

The egg on the *sedar* plate at Passover is a post-Second Temple Rabbinical addition. The roasted egg or *beitzah* in most Jewish traditions symbolizes the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart. We would speculate that after the destruction of the Temple and the Dispersion of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel, new traditions were added to Passover to compensate for the loss of no longer observing it in the appointed place. New debates likely arose as Jews were spread abroad into many places where they had never lived before. As additions to the *sedar* arose, eggs were probably an item that all Jewish communities could agree were “kosher for Passover,” and the custom of having a roasted egg on the *sedar* plate was instituted.

The inclusion of eggs at Easter time is a debated practice in Christianity. No one is entirely certain how they came about, but it is likely that they stem from some kind of Babylonian fertility rite. However, we do not stop eating eggs simply because pagans used them in their

worship. Similarly, because the Jewish community employs an egg on the *sedar* plate during Passover, we cannot all of a sudden make the judgment that they borrowed it “from Easter.” There is always an alternative view that frequently eludes those who are out on an “egg witch hunt.”

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Virtual Passover

Passover, Objections to the Last Supper: Is it true that there are some substantial objections to the Last Supper being a Passover meal? If there are any, how do you respond to these arguments?

There are some objections that are commonly made to the Last Supper being a Passover meal, but very few of them are made in light of Yeshua’s words to His Disciples: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). According to the Messiah, the meal that He *ate* with His Disciples was the Passover, and what may appear to be divergent accounts among the Gospel authors need to be theologically reconciled. The text does not say that He just *celebrated* the Passover, but specifically that He *ate* (Grk. *esthiō*, ἐσθίω) a *sedar* meal. And while we commonly consider “Passover” to just be a holiday, in Scripture the *pesach* (פֶּסַח) is often the “sacrifice” (*CHALOT*, 294).

Some objections to the Last Supper being a Passover *sedar* include the references to it occurring on the Day of Preparation for the Passover (John 19:14), Passover eaten with solely a group of men as opposed to a family, the fact that there is no distinguishing between “bread” or “unleavened bread” in the accounts, and wine being consumed from a common cup. In contrast to this, the meal was eaten at night as the Passover should be, the obligatory drinking of wine was remembered, Yeshua and the Disciples customarily reclined for the meal, and a hymn was sung as was observed for Passover (Matthew 26:30). They do appear to have followed the prescribed protocol for a First Century Judean Jewish *Pesach*.

In total, it does seem that some modifications were made between Yeshua’s *sedar* meal and the main *sedar* that would have been observed during His time. This may account for Yeshua’s Last *Sedar* being a “teaching *sedar*,” which may have been practiced by many Rabbis of His day the day prior to the Passover. Such meals were not uncommon in the days of the Messiah prior to the Passover beginning. Rabbis would usually do this with their students to train them to conduct their own Passover meals, or for those entering Jerusalem from afar to become accustomed to Passover in the Judean tradition. It makes perfect sense for Yeshua, our Rabbi, to do something like this as He was establishing the New Covenant with His own blood, and commissioning His Disciples to continue His work.

For a brief examination of this issue consult the article “The Last Supper and the Passover” in the *Archaeological Study Bible*, p 1611.

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Virtual Passover

Passover, Traditional Sedar Meal: Where did the traditions from the *sedar* meal employed during Passover come from?

Obviously, the Torah itself issues some specific commands concerning the observance of the Passover. There were some specific commandments relating to the first Passover, the deliverance from Egypt, which included slaughtering a lamb and spreading its blood upon the doorposts of the house, and eating the meal in haste, as the Ancient Israelites were preparing to leave (Exodus 12). Passover or *Pesach* (פֶּסַח) is codified as one of the appointed times in Leviticus 23, and regulations on how to observe it in the Promised Land are detailed in Numbers 9.

Between the first Passover in Egypt to the Passovers kept in the Land of Israel, coupled with the division and dispersion of Israel, and later with a vast Diaspora Jewish community by the time of Yeshua, the celebration of Passover developed substantially. By the time of Yeshua, the specific order of service for Passover became codified in the Haggadah of Passover, first referred to in the Mishnah. This was focused around a midrashic interpretation of Deuteronomy 26:5-9,

which allowed for one to recline and remember the mighty deeds God performed before the Egyptians in delivering Israel:

“You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, ‘My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.’”

We see elements of the traditional Jewish Passover of the First Century included in Yeshua's Last Supper, and some slight deviations. The *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* summarizes the central elements of Passover contained in the Haggadah:

“The ritual found in the Haggadah is first referred to in M. Pesahim, chapter 10, which describes a festival meal marked by a set order of foods and a required liturgy (seder). At the heart of the meal is an explanation of the significance of three foods (unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and the passover offering) and the recitation of the Hallel-psalms. In early Amoraic times, this basic ceremony was embellished through the addition of a discussion of Israelite history, leading up to and including captivity in Egypt. In later developments, continuing to the present, liturgical poems and other homilies have been added to the basic format set in talmudic times” (pp 266-267).

Today, we obviously see a wide variation of Passover customs and traditions present in the Jewish community and in Messianic Judaism. There are significant variations between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews, as well as between Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform (or Progressive) Judaism. The Passover *haggadah* (הַגְּדָה) is something that has been adapted and changed by each denomination of Judaism, as some *haggadahs* include an all-night service, where one stays awake and focuses on certain Scriptures, to those that are only focused around a meal at one's home with family and close friends. There are traditions present in Passover today that are unique to the lands where the Jewish people have been scattered. Messianic Judaism has adapted many of these traditions to form its own Passover *haggadahs*, which demonstrate how we are to rejoice in God delivering Israel from Egypt, and Yeshua delivering us from the bondage of sin.

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Virtual Passover

Paul, Name of: Why do you call Rav Shaul the Apostle Paul?

Paul, or *Paulos* (Παῦλος), as it appears in the Greek, is the name that the Apostle most frequently calls himself in his letters. *Shaul* (שאול) or “Saul” was the original name given to this Jew who was born in the city of Tarsus. Like many Jews of the First Century, he was given two names: one Hebrew or Aramaic, and then another Greek or Latin. This is plainly attested by Acts 13:9 which speaks of “Saul, who was also *known as Paul*” (NASU).

It is not incorrect to refer to the Apostle Paul as Shaul, but we refer to him as the Apostle Paul because this is what he calls himself, as the vast majority of his audience was Greek-speaking. There are Messianics, and Messianic Bible translations, which fail to recognize the First Century reality of Shaul or Saul having two names. The first edition of *The Scriptures* (1993), a Sacred Name Only Bible, states, “Who changed the name of Sha'ul to Paul (Paulus)? We find no evidence in Scripture as to why, when, and by whom this change of his name was instigated. All we could find was this: The ancient Romans had a national hero named Paulus. Was this change from 'Sha'ul' to 'Paulus' done in order to appease the Roman people?” (p 1218). This kind of reasoning is without any historical basis at all. The name of Shaul was not “changed” by some sordid, evil conspiracy, as some might try to make the naïve believe.

It is true that some in mainstream Christianity believe and teach that prior to his conversion of faith, this apostle was known as “Saul,” and then after his conversion at the

Damascus Road, he had his name changed to “Paul.” Many of these people are as uninformed as the Messianics who believe that the name “Paul” was a fabrication of the Romans. The *Ryrie Study Bible*, a dispensationalist Christian source, correctly acknowledges in its commentary for Acts 13:9, “Saul was his Jewish name and Paul his Roman or Gentile name. Both were given him at the time of his birth, but he now begins to use his Gentile name in this Gentile environment” (p 1669). This is by no means an indication that Shaul had his name changed to Paulos by “evil scribes,” as some would like to insinuate, but a recognition of the reality that he had two names. Many Jews in the United States today are given a Hebrew name, and then a comparable English name.

The Salkinson-Ginsburg modern Hebrew New Testament translation actually uses the Hebrew form of *Paulos*, *Polos* (פּוֹלוֹס), in its translation of the Greek. Using *Paulos* is appropriate both for recognition of the fact that the Apostle had two names, and be true to the source text of the Apostolic Scriptures.

We refer to the Apostle as Paul because he uses this name more times than his other name of *Shaul* or Saul, even though we have no problems with people calling him this. However, the conspiratorial claims of a few Messianics that his name was never Paul are without any substantial basis.

updated 07 August, 2006

Paul, Tentmaker: I heard a Messianic teacher say that Paul was not a “tentmaker,” but instead fashioned *tallits* or prayer shawls. Is there any proof of this?

It was not uncommon at all for religious Jews in the First Century to have a trade in which they were actively involved, and Paul, in addition to his religious training, was likely trained in some kind of art. Jews who were mobile were often able to practice their trade in whatever community or city they stayed, so they could support themselves. The reference to Paul as a “tentmaker” appears in Acts 18:1-3:

“After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.”

Notice that the text describes Paul *and* the Roman Jews Priscilla and Acquila as “tentmakers by trade” (ESV). This indicates that to some degree the trade they practiced was one that could bring them a reasonable living. Would this living be made by making some kind of prayer shawl for members of the local Jewish community—or in a field that could service a larger clientele?

David Stern’s *Jewish New Testament Commentary* remarks on Acts 18:2, 3 (p 289) are completely mute about “tentmakers” being synonymous to “*tallit* makers.” However, the Power New Testament (Lexington, SC: Author, 2003), translated by William J. Morford, renders Acts 18:3 with “they *all* were prayer shawl makers by trade.” Justifying this translation, a footnote reads:

“Prayer shawl making required rabbinic training that all three had. The word *skēnopoioi*, translated prayer shawl makers or tent makers, is not found anywhere else in Scripture or secular Greek writing. Jewish men referred to the prayer shawl as a tent or prayer closet because it was placed over the head to shield the eyes while praying” (p 192, fn 3).

While this is an interesting conclusion as to what “tentmaker” may be, Hebrew Roots teachers are often left on their own making it. We object to the assumption that a “tentmaker” must be a *tallit* maker because, (1) the *tallit* in its present form is a relatively new application of the command to wear *tzit-tzits* or fringes, coming in the last millennia of Jewish history; and (2) no current scholarship in the New Testament confirms that *skēnopoios* (σκηνοποιός) means “*tallit* maker.” There is some disagreement as to whether “tentmaker” is the best translation, though. *TDNT* notes, “If the trade is that of making tents of goat’s hair, Paul is perhaps weaving fabric. But rabbinic scholars do not favor weaving, and it is thus more likely that Paul is a ‘leather worker,’ and that as such he is a ‘tent maker’” (W. Michaelis, “pitching tents, Tabernacles,” in *TDNT*, 1044).

The question of how Paul, Acquila, and Priscilla were “tentmakers” is ultimately going to be solved in whether or not making prayer shawls, or working with actual tents, brought them a substantial income. We simply do not believe that manufacturing *tallits*, or any kind of religious items for that matter, would have enabled them to incur significant monies to live. Their market for work would have been limited to solely the Jewish community, and Diaspora Jews did not live in the Diaspora solely to do business among themselves—but also with the Gentiles around them. The understanding of Paul, Acquila, and Priscilla as leatherworkers involved with the tent making process seems best.

posted 26 September, 2006

Peter, Epistle of First: What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle of 1 Peter?

Approximate date: 63 or 64 C.E.

Author: the Apostle Peter, assisted by Silvanus

Location of author: Rome

Target audience and their location: Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia (Northern Asia Minor)

The author of the Epistle of 1 Peter identifies himself as the Apostle Peter (1:1). The contents of the letter are Petrine, from the personal character that we see of Peter in the Gospels and Acts. Peter was widely considered to be the most prominent of the original Twelve Disciples, whose influence on the assembly was second only to James the Just. Peter is the first to verbalize to Yeshua that He is the Messiah, and Yeshua in turn tells Peter that He will give His Disciples the authority to bind and loose, prohibit and permit (Matthew 16:17-19). In the lists of the Twelve Disciples in the Apostolic Scriptures, his name always appears first (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). It is Peter who preaches to the masses gathered at *Shavuot* or Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit is poured out, and it is he who goes to the centurion Cornelius, the first non-Jewish person recorded to be saved. Peter was a dominant figure at the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, which recognized that he had a special calling from God to “the circumcised” (Galatians 2:7) or the Jewish people.

Genuine Petrine authorship is accepted by conservative theologians, as it was recognized in the emerging Christianities of the Second and Third Centuries. 2 Peter 3:1 is the first attestation to it, referring to an earlier letter, and there are some parallels with the late First Century letter of 1 *Clement*. Peter’s first letter is quoted extensively in Christian writings of the Second and Third Centuries, attributing its contents and its authorship squarely to the Apostle. The Fourth Century historian Eusebius notes in his *Ecclesiastical History* that “As to the writings of Peter, one of his epistles called the first is acknowledged as genuine. This was anciently used by the ancient fathers in their writings as an undoubted work of the apostle” (3.3.1).

The intended audience of this letter is identified early in its composition: “To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen” (1:1). The intended audience is generally believed by conservative theologians to be a mixed group of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers. The Jewish Believers would have had an easier time grasping Peter’s message for them, but a non-Jewish audience is by no means excluded. These Believers composed congregations in Northern Asia Minor. “The letter was directed to members of the Dispersion located in northern Roman provinces in Asia Minor, which Paul did not visit and which may have been evangelized by Peter between the Council of Jerusalem (A.D. 48) and the Neronian persecution at Rome” (*NIDB*, 774). There is debate among some theologians why Peter would use the term “Dispersion” (RSV) in his letter, as this would presuppose a largely Jewish audience. Does he use it in reference to non-Jewish Believers as well? The text of the letter seems so, as there were many “former pagans [who had] given up their previous way of life and turned to the ‘living God’” (*IDB*, 3:761). The Jewish Believers who had known the God of Israel did not come out of idolatry (Gundry, 440).

As it concerns the restoration of all Israel, Peter quotes numerous Scriptures from the Hebrew Tanach which connect his readership with what the calling of Israel is all about: a people for God's own possession who testify to the world of His greatness. He quotes directly from Hosea 2:23 in 1 Peter 2:10. This is an indication that Peter's audience included members of scattered Israel, and was not exclusively Jewish. Messianic Believers today can be encouraged that the Apostle Peter, who first acknowledged Yeshua as the Messiah, saw the restoration of all Israel, but it must be tempered with the reality that most of his epistle deals with the daily trials and the persecutions that all Believers must face, and that we all must understand our individual roles that we play in the Body of Messiah.

There is a substantial amount of debate as to where Peter was when he wrote this epistle. 1 Peter 5:13 identifies Peter's location as being "Babylon." Was this Babylon in Mesopotamia, or was it a veiled reference to Rome? The traditional composition of 1 Peter, concurrent with the extant traditions that adhere to Peter traveling to Rome with John Mark, is that Peter composed this letter from Rome. In 5:3 he writes concerning "my son Mark," his traveling associate, and according to tradition he was martyred in Rome at the hands of Nero in about 67 or 68 C.E. Rome is the likely place of composition, as there are no traditions from the Eastern Church which substantiate that he ever traveled to Mesopotamian Babylon. Conservative scholars are in general agreement that the letter had to have been written in the early 60s C.E., likely in either 63 or 64 C.E., at the time Nero was in power in Rome and actively began hunting down and persecuting Believers.

Liberal theologians doubt Petrine authorship because of the high Greek composition style that this letter demonstrates to have, and advocate that 1 Peter was composed sometime after Peter's death. It is generally argued that Peter, as a simple fisherman, would have been unable to learn or communicate in Greek. However, "it must be remembered that in Peter's day Galilee was probably bi-lingual: the Greek language would have been familiar to Peter from boyhood (his own brother's name [Andrew] is a Greek one), and being a fisherman and living on one of the great trade routes would have made it necessary for him to speak it regularly" (*NBCR*, 1236). When we couple this with almost thirty years of ministry work by the Apostle Peter, regularly working with a large number of non-Jews, Peter would have had to learn Greek in the Lord's service by His Divine empowerment.

Some would countermand this by saying that Acts 4:13 identifies Peter as being "uneducated and untrained," and that Peter may have had to use an interpreter. Even if this means that Peter was not an expert Greek speaker, was Peter imprisoned when this letter was composed? Note that "Semitisms or 'mistranslations' are absent. It is incredible, some argue, that a Galilean fisherman who used an interpreter and was known as 'uneducated' (Acts 4:13) had such a command of the Greek language that he could produce a document like this" (*IDB*, 3:763). This is the classic liberal argument against genuine Petrine authorship. However, the letter itself indicates "Through Silvanus...I have written to you briefly" (5:12). If Peter were in prison when this letter was composed, possibly even in chains like Paul when 2 Timothy was composed, Silvanus was probably Peter's scribe or secretary who helped him write his letter. As a native Greek speaker, Silvanus would have had the ability to correct any grammatical errors that Peter could have made (Gundry, 438; Guthrie, pp 763-764). Sadly, Messianics who advocate that 1 Peter would have been written in Hebrew or Aramaic fall into the same liberal arguments against Peter writing it. A Hebrew or Aramaic origin simply does not align with the history, extant traditions, and intended audience of the epistle.

Different readers of 1 Peter have found different themes throughout the text. These themes include an emphasis on our duty as Believers, endurance through suffering and persecution, the Earthly sojourn we are on, the grace of God, and general spiritual exhortation. Peter's epistle has some very important admonitions for the Body of Messiah, both in the First Century, and for Believers today. Peter emphasizes the call of all followers of Yeshua to live like Him, having holy lives, to expect to be persecuted like Him and perhaps even die. He talks about the proper place of husbands and wives in marriage, and the proper place that servants in the Body are to have functioning in their spiritual callings. Suffering like the Messiah is an underlying

theme, as when he wrote his letter the assembly was beginning to establish itself as a threat to the Roman authorities. The Apostle Peter is sure to write concerning the love and grace of God, and the sovereignty of the Lord in all matters of life.

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updated 06 February, 2006

Peter, Epistle of Second: What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle of 2 Peter?

Approximate date: 65 to 68 C.E.

Author: the Apostle Peter (possibly with a scribe's assistance)

Location of author: Rome

Target audience and their location: Jewish and non-Jewish Believers confronting Gnosticism in Asia Minor and Egypt

The author of 2 Peter identifies himself in the text as the Apostle Peter (1:1). He makes strong personal claims and references in the opening chapter (1:12-15), and claims to be an eyewitness of the Transfiguration of Yeshua (1:16-18). He also writes that this is his second letter (3:1), and indicates that he has a strong acquaintanceship with Paul (3:15).

Many conservative theologians accept genuine Petrine authorship of this epistle (*NBCR*, 1249), whereas all liberal theologians deny it. Moderates somewhere in the middle of the liberal-conservative paradigm often postulate that it was written in the name of Peter, in his authority (*EXP*, 12:262). Liberals often argue against Petrine authorship because there is no clear tradition regarding its composition. There do exist some possible allusions to 2 Peter in the late First Century letter of *1 Clement*, but the text is not quoted specifically by name until Origen uses it in the mid-Third Century (*ISBE*, 3:815-816; *ABD*, 5:283). It is notable, however, that classical liberals who deny Petrine authorship do not discount the text as being authoritative: "It records the effort of Christianity in a transitional post-apostolic period to communicate effectively in a pluralistic cultural environment while at the same time remaining faithful to its apostolic heritage and underlying worldview" (*ABD*, 5:283).

The emerging Christian Church of the Third Century did finally accept 2 Peter as canonical. Gundry remarks, "The early church exhibited some hesitancy in accepting it into the canon. This hesitancy can be explained by the comparative brevity of the epistle, however; and such brevity may have curtailed its distribution and limited people's acquaintance with it" (p 443). A strong possibility surrounding why 2 Peter was viewed with extreme skepticism by the emerging Church had to do with much of its subject matter, which pertained to Gnosticism, and the use of Peter's name in many pseudopigraphal works by Gnostics. Guthrie explains,

"If Gnostic groups had used Peter's name to drive home their own particular tenets, this fact would cause the orthodox church to take particular care not to use any spurious Petrine epistles. Some of the more nervous probably regarded 2 Peter suspiciously for this reason, but the fact that it ultimately gained acceptance in spite of the pseudo-Petrine literature is an evidence more favourable to its authenticity than against it" (p 809).

It is attested in 1 Peter 5:12 that Silvanus probably helped Peter compose his first epistle. The use of an amanuensis or "second author" is common in some New Testament works (*EXP*, 12:258). "Just as today a high government official uses a speech writer, though the final product is the official's responsibility, so 2 Peter may have been drafted by an amanuensis" (*Ibid.*, 12:259).

Pseudonymity for 2 Peter is not accepted by most conservative theologians, meaning that the author is completely unknown without any speculation (*NBCR*, 1250). If Peter had been in prison chains when 2 Peter was composed, Peter employing someone to compose this letter is likely. Petrine authorship assumes that the letter was written between 65 to 68 C.E., prior to Peter's death (Guthrie, 844). The traditional conservative view is that 2 Peter was composed from Rome.

No one in the conservative academic community has ever suggested that 2 Peter was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic. In fact, 2 Peter is not included in the Aramaic Peshitta and is not considered canonical by the Syrian Orthodox Church. 2 Peter does employ some Greek-specific philosophical terms (*ISBE*, 3:817), and the text demonstrates a familiarity on the author's part with a broad Jewish and Greek audience: "With a diction that was exceptionally Hellenistic in its makeup, the letter formulates a message that was remarkably 'primitive' and Jewish in its moral and apocalyptic orientation" (*ABD*, 5:284; cf. *NBCR*, 1250). The likely audience of 2 Peter is favored to be a group of Believers countering proto-Gnosticism in either Asia Minor or Egypt.

The theology of 2 Peter may be easily divided between its three chapters. The three-fold purpose of Peter's letter is to encourage Believers in their growth (ch. 1), combat heresies (ch. 2), and encourage people to be on guard in relation to Yeshua's return (ch. 3). The text most certainly reflects on Peter's impending death.

Peter directly confronts proto-Gnosticism in ch. 2, and specifically refutes Simonian Gnosticism, which by tradition was founded by Simon Magus who tried to buy the Holy Spirit from Peter and John (*ISBE*, 3:318). There are extreme parallels between the text of 2 Peter and the message of Jude. Those who give a late First Century date to Jude give an even later date to 2 Peter, but those who give an early date for Jude often give a mid-First Century date to 2 Peter. Just as with Jude, 2 Peter is concerned with false teachers creeping into the assembly, and urges his readers not to fall into ungodly behavior. He argues with skillful rhetoric, and speaks with the authority of one of the Hebrew Prophets.

2 Peter does not present any challenges for the Torah observant Messianic community today, but it does include many warnings that we must heed. The background of 2 Peter largely confronts Gnosticism, or proto-Gnosticism, and Peter condemns false teachers as deserving of nothing less than eternal punishment. 2 Peter includes a strong warning for those living in the Last Days, and it reflects the reality that people will fall away from the faith. As we steadily approach the return of Yeshua, Messianic exegesis of 2 Peter must keep this in mind as we try to police ourselves of any false theologies that may enter into the camp.

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updated 06 February, 2006

Philemon, Epistle to: What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle to Philemon?

Approximate date: 60-62 C.E.

Author: the Apostle Paul

Location of author: Rome (majority), Ephesus or Laodicea (minority)

Target audience and location: Philemon, from Colossae or Lycus Valley

The author of the letter to Philemon is identified in the text as the Apostle Paul (vs. 1, 9, 19), and conservative theologians often regard Pauline authorship as genuine. This letter appears in a series that is generally referred to as the "Prison Epistles," along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Pauline authorship of Philemon is challenged by a few liberals, who believe that it "was

written in the second century to instruct the church in handling the slavery question” (*EXP*, 11:453).

The composition of Philemon is closely connected to Colossians, as the same company of people are listed as extending greetings to Philemon, as in Colossians (Colossians 1:1; cf. Philemon 1). This would place Philemon’s composition in approximately 60-62 C.E., and most probably from Rome during Paul’s first imprisonment. Some theologians differ, advocating that Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus, or even possibly that this was the letter “written from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16; cf. *IDB*, 3:783), but the majority conservative position favors a Roman origin for the epistle.

Paul writes this letter to Philemon, who was a Greek Believer in Colossae, but who may have lived in the Lycus Valley adjacent to Colossae. Philemon was a slave owner (Colossians 4:1), but had a congregation of Believers meeting in his home. According to the traditional view of composition, his slave Onesimus had been stolen from him, but later fled his captors and ran to Rome (v. 18; Gundry, 392). Later, Onesimus himself became a Believer in Yeshua, and somehow encountered Paul while in Rome. Paul writes to Philemon, appealing for him to accept Onesimus as a fellow brother (v. 16), encouraging that Onesimus needs to be “profitable” as his name means (*Ibid.*). Paul asks that Philemon treat Onesimus as a “son,” perhaps in reference to Rabbinical opinions of the time which held that if one trains a neighbor’s son in the Torah, that person is as a son to him (*NIDB*, 780). Paul asks Philemon to cancel the debt that is incurred by Onesimus (vs. 18-20).

No scholar or theologian has ever dreamed of proposing a Hebrew or Aramaic origin for the letter to Philemon. This is impossible for any number of important reasons. Both Philemon and Onesimus, the runaway slave, would have been Greek speakers. While Paul’s ability to communicate as an able Jewish rabbi is present in the text, so is his ability to write letters in Greek style. “Only recently...have scholars shown the strong influence of Greek rhetorical conventions on Paul’s masterful argumentation in *Plmn*, in particular the genre of deliberative rhetoric...By use of skillful appeals to the reason, the emotions, and the character of their hearers, rhetoricians sought to establish two motives for action: maintaining honor and gaining advantage” (*ABD*, 5:306). What is intriguing about the composition of Philemon is that Paul, as a Jew from the Diaspora and a Pharisee, is able to communicate very eloquently to a wealthy Asiatic Greek, who came to faith in the Messiah.

The letter to Philemon reveals some very important historical data about the early Messianic community, including the fact that they largely met in homes. This was patterned after the Jewish synagogues, which in many Diaspora cities met in homes, with the exception of where there was a large Jewish community. In fact, no actual “church buildings” are believed to have existed until the Third Century (*NIDB*, 780).

The Epistle to Philemon has presented many challenges for Christians over the centuries, and even more challenges for those living in the modern age. Roman law in the First Century required strict punishment for any runaway slave (*IDB*, 3:783). Many questions have arisen when interpreting what Paul means by his letter. Is Paul urging moderation on the part of Philemon toward Onesimus? Does Paul support slavery? Does Paul write this letter so Onesimus can be freed by Philemon? Is Paul indifferent to slavery? Edward M. Blaiklock offers the perspective, “Slavery is never directly attacked as such, but principles that must prove fatal to the institution are steadily inculcated” (*NIDB*, 780).

Some Reformed theologians of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries actually used Philemon as a support for the institution of slavery, as Paul does not directly address the issue in his letter. Likewise, many other theologians of the same period used Philemon as a support for abolitionism. Perhaps the question of slavery is not easily answered from Philemon as we have no extant information on how Onesimus became a slave. Did he become a slave because of an indebtedness he was trying to pay off, or was he a slave because of some military campaign against an oppressed people? Likewise, we have no extant data on who Philemon was, other than him being a wealthy man, how he accumulated this wealth, or what his occupation was.

Because of the lack of information we have on Philemon's and Onesimus' backgrounds, many take a moderate stance, which is that Paul's opinion relating to Onesimus' state as a new Believer required Philemon to free him (*IDB*, 3:782). In other words, the First Century Messianic community should have freed slaves who came to faith, but not those who did not come to faith. Of course, our exegesis of Philemon must be tempered by the fact that Onesimus was not a slave like the Ancient Israelites were in Egypt. Rather than helping to run the Egyptian Empire, Onesimus was probably a household servant or field laborer, and his master saw that all of his needs were met.

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Philippians, Epistle of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Epistle of Philippians?

Approximate date: 61 C.E.

Author: the Apostle Paul

Location of author: Rome (majority view), Ephesus (minority view)

Target audience and their location: non-Jewish Believers in Philippi

Pauline authorship has not been challenged in regard to the Epistle to the Philippians, as there are many personal references made in this letter. Paul writes this letter from prison (1:13-14), even though it is debated where Paul wrote this letter from. Largely, Philippians is a letter of personal thanks as the Philippian congregation of Believers helped support Paul financially (4:15-20; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:7-9).

The city of Philippi was named after King Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. It was the place of a decisive battle in 42 B.C.E. between the Second Triumvirate of Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus against the Roman Republicans. The victory of Octavian resulted in the city being made a Roman military colony. The people of Philippi were chiefly Roman, and many retired military men resided there. "Philippi had been thoroughly colonized by the Romans after 30 B.C., but the city was still more Greek in culture than Roman" (*NIDB*, 782). Philippi did not have a large enough Jewish presence to warrant a synagogue. "Acts tells us nothing of a Jewish synagogue at Philippi, or of the reactions of Philippian Jews to Paul's preaching" (*IDB*, 3:788). "[E]vidently, because of the strong Roman consciousness of the citizens, the Jews were not allowed to have a synagogue within the city walls, so they had only a place of prayer outside the west gate at a river (Acts 16:13)" (*ISBE*, 3:837), which would have been the first place Paul would have met when evangelizing. Philippi was the first European congregation established by Paul (Acts 16:11-40; cf. *NIDB*, 781).

The traditional view of Philippians is that this letter was written from Rome in about 61 C.E., when Paul was under house arrest. This view went largely unchallenged until the 1900s when some theologians began to suggest that the letter may have been written from Ephesus at a slightly earlier date. The principal reason in support of this view is that Ephesus and Philippi were geographically closer than Ephesus and Rome (Gundry, 403). Philippi, as a Roman colony, would be administered not that much differently than Rome itself. "The terms in 1:13; 4:22; PRAETORIUM and CAESAR'S HOUSEHOLD have no necessary reference to Rome. Members of Caesar's administrative staff (*domus Caesaris*) were, as we know from inscriptions, to be found at Ephesus,

as elsewhere throughout the Empire” (*IDB*, 3:790). Whether or not Rome or Ephesus was the composition locus of the letter does not affect its overall theology (*NBCR*, 1126).

What cannot be explained, of course, is why there would be some in the Messianic community today trying to advocate that Paul wrote his letter in Hebrew or Aramaic. The Jewish community in Philippi at the time seems to be miniscule at best. The largely Roman audience that Paul writes in Philippians would have had no difficulty understanding Greek, the international language of the Eastern Mediterranean.

On the whole, the theology of Philippians is not very complicated, as there is seldom a negative rebuke in his letter. Paul thanks the Philippians for sending him a financial gift (1:5; 4:10-19). He encourages them to rejoice in the face of their circumstances (1:27-30; 4:4). He wants the Philippians to be unified (2:1-11; 4:2-5). Paul writes that he is sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to them to instruct them (2:9-10). Perhaps the only major theme that Messianics need to be aware of is that ch. 3 is spent warning the Philippians against the Judaizers and the antinomians: those who would force the non-Jewish Philippians to convert to Judaism to be saved, and those who have no regard for God’s moral law.

Paul, while writing to an almost entirely non-Jewish audience, strongly affirms his own Jewishness in this epistle. He writes that he was “circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee” (3:5). But he also writes of the superiority of Yeshua over his pedigree: “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah” (3:7). While Paul does not discount his Jewish upbringing, it is inferior to him knowing Yeshua as Lord. Did Paul write this because there were many Roman military men in Philippi who might think that their military careers were superior to knowing the Jewish Messiah? Thankfully, Paul sent Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi to instruct the Philippian Believers in what they needed to know. The Jewish character of Paul is certainly present in Philippians, but he writes very carefully to a distinctly non-Jewish audience.

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Polygamy: Have you ever studied Scripture concerning a Torah observant plural marriage covenant?

Per some current events, some discussion regarding polygamy has arisen in the Messianic community, with some possibly considering that it has validity for today’s Believers. Polygamy as a practice is seen in various parts of the Tanach, but one which the Jewish Synagogue abandoned long before the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah (see “monogamy and polygamy,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 437). Deuteronomy 17:17 specifically warns the future kings of Israel, “He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away.”

With the creation of the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden, the ideal state has been for marriage to be between one man and one woman: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), a principle upheld by Yeshua the Messiah (Mathew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8). This was also a state where men and women were fully equal, as Adam attests that Eve was “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). The Creation of man before woman is a testimony *not* that God prefers

males over females, but indicates that because men cannot reproduce and give birth—the first male requires an outside Creator. (Consult the FAQ entry “God, Depicted as Male.”)

It is only after the Fall that we see forms of polygamy practiced, and to argue that this is to be a normative, even encouraged practice, skews God’s original intent at Creation. Leviticus 18:18 is a clear example of an explicit Torah commandment against polygamy: “While your wife is living, do not marry her sister and have sexual relations with her, for they would be rivals” (NLT). It is true that various Patriarchs and monarchs of Israel did have multiple wives, and seemingly did not incur any significant penalties from the Lord for doing so. Yet this must be balanced with the fact that the whole nation of Israel was commanded to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days each year (Leviticus 23:33-34), and Nehemiah says that “The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day” (Nehemiah 8:17)—which was after the Babylonian exile! The Ancient Israelites did not always follow the commands of God, and because of His love and grace He often overlooked their significant transgressions. Severe chastisement to Israel often did not come until idolatry, gross child sacrifice, and outright rebellion against the Lord were practiced.

From a practical standpoint, while we see polygamy observed by some members of Israelite society, it is far fetched to think that every single Israelite man could economically afford more than one wife. On the contrary, the fact that only Patriarchs, leaders, and monarchs of Israel are portrayed as having multiple wives demonstrates *how little* this practice was actually observed. And was it really worth it for them? When we read that Jacob had both Leah and Rachel as his wives, or David and Solomon had multiple wives—were their households places of genuine love and affection, or riddled with relational problems? Were their children behaved or unruly? 1 Kings 11:4 is not very good evidence in favor of polygamy: “For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God.” A significant reason Ancient Israel was ultimately divided into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms goes back to Solomon’s incessant polygamy, and the state funded idolatry he sponsored.

(Perhaps the only justifiable reason for polygamy to be considered over monogamy would be seen when a population is so devastated by war or famine, that having multiple wives is the only way to repopulate. *But*, that exception would be few and far between.)

The Apostolic Scriptures make it abundantly clear that polygamy is something which is *not* to be practiced by the people of God today. The significant passages in the Gospels where Yeshua addresses marriage affirm Genesis’ teaching on one man and one woman (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18). The Apostle Paul states candidly in 1 Corinthians 7:2, “each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.” He also instructs Timothy that overseers/bishops and deacons only be allowed one wife (1 Timothy 3:2, 12). Furthermore, and perhaps most significant, he asserts in Ephesians 5:21-33 that the institution of marriage is to be a reflection on the Messiah’s service for the *ekklēsia*. This involved the Lord serving a single body of people, *not* multiple bodies of people: “let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33, RSV).

Given the new status for males and females that the arrival of Yeshua has inaugurated (Galatians 3:28), polygamy is a practice that is degrading to the equality of the sexes which He has restored. In many cases, trying to Biblically justify polygamy—as though it is a good thing that God intended from Creation—is **almost always used as a way for men to fulfill sexual urges that cannot be kept under control**. Women are frequently the victims of such inappropriate and ungodly behavior, often because of men who want to treat them as little more than chattel.

The discussion regarding polygamy has been unleashed in a Messianic movement that is largely unsure about how what it means to recapture a Torah foundation for one’s faith in Yeshua. Does it mean that only the Books of Genesis-Deuteronomy are relevant to one’s faith (thus making us Sadducees who deny the resurrection)? Or does it mean that the Pentateuch is one stepping stone—and indeed a largely overlooked stepping stone—of God’s continually progressive salvation history (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2)? If it is the latter, then it is clear that the Torah’s legislation is

intended to be a significant step forward, *but not the only step*, that is to return us to what the first man and woman had in Eden. The ideal state that God wants us to have does not include polygamy, and the Scriptures are clear that those who practiced it did not incur beneficial and lasting relationships as a result.

If anyone in the Messianic movement thinks that polygamy is something to be embraced and encouraged, than such views stand in direct contrast to God's intention at Creation and the teachings of Yeshua the Messiah. They are also degrading to the female gender, which is now to be considered equal to the male gender in Him.

Consult Walter C. Kaiser's remarks on polygamy in his book *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, pp 182-190, which further discusses some of the historical and exegetical issues. Consult the editor's article "Is Polygamy for Today?" for a detailed Messianic examination of this issue.

updated 19 January, 2009

Practical Messianic Commentaries: What kind of writing style do the Practical Messianic commentaries produced by TNN Press follow? What kind of information do these commentaries have?

The Practical Messianic commentary series is a continual and ongoing project that we have been developing since 2004. Today's Messianic community largely lacks book-by-book commentaries on the Bible, most importantly on the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament). While David H. Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary* has been a mainstay in many Messianic homes and congregations, and has certainly been helpful to many people, it does lack much information on historical and compositional issues, and is more of a compilation of select explanatory notes than a serious engagement with the text.

TNN Press' Practical Messianic commentary series attempts to address areas of Biblical theology and composition that have frequently gone unaddressed in today's Messianic movement. The volumes thus far completed have been written at a lay level, somewhere between the writing style of the *Tyndale Old/New Testament Commentaries* and *Preacher's Commentary* series, even though we do consult with more detailed volumes from series such as the *New International Commentary on the Old/New Testament*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, and *New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Technical information is included in the commentary on Scripture, but also has reflections that can be used for teaching and preaching in one's congregation.

The volumes thusfar produced: James, Hebrews, the Apostolic Scriptures Survey, and Philippians (forthcoming), have tried to examine the text as it first meant to its ancient audience and/or recipients, and then apply its meaning in a modern-day Messianic setting. Some conclusions drawn have challenged current trends in Messianic Torah observance, our relationship to society, as well as how we need to mature as a movement in the next ten to twenty years.

As of this posting (2007), our planned focus for the next few years will be on completing commentaries on the smaller Pauline Epistles. These are texts that many Messianics today often have challenges interpreting. It would be our hope that given time we can have Messianic commentaries produced on many more books of the Bible, but this is admittedly a lifetime worth of work. This is one of the reasons why the *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures* was released in 2006, with a planned volume *Survey of the Tanach* (tentatively 2008). We can think of nothing more important as a ministry than getting people focused on the Bible, and we have a great amount to do in the years and decades ahead. Please pray and support our efforts in these endeavors that we feel are greatly needed *and* long overdue.

posted 12 February, 2007

Preterist Theology: What is your opinion of preterist eschatology?

Preterist eschatology, more than anything else, is the belief that the events of the "end-times" occurred in 66-70 C.E. during the period of the Jewish revolt against Rome, the destruction of the Temple, and the rise of Roman persecution against the Believers. Preterist theologians argue

for a very early composition of the Book of Revelation, and believe that Nero Caesar was “the antichrist.” Preterist theologians adhere to the belief that the Abomination of Desolation occurred in 70 C.E. with the destruction of the Second Temple.

The demographics among those who deal with eschatology reveal that a large number of those who adhere to preterism are liberal theologians. These are theologians who generally tend to allegorize the narratives of the Tanach such as the Creation account or Noahadic Flood. Likewise with apocalyptic Scriptures, they also allegorize their meanings. Sometimes this is based in an inability on the part of the expositor to deal with the harsh realities of Divine judgment. Likewise, some of it is reactionary to the more literal schools of prophetic interpretation, and some of the abuse that exists among them. Preterist eschatology, in no uncertain terms, fully adheres to replacement theology where the Church now supercedes Israel. Israel as God’s covenant nation no longer exists in a preterist framework, having experienced its “end-times,” as God’s is now only working through the Church.

TNN Online does not adhere to preterist eschatology in any way, and the vast majority in the Messianic community likewise do not believe in it. Our rejection of preterist eschatology is based in the problems that arise when asserting that “the end-times” have taken place, without the physical return of Yeshua the Messiah. Preterist eschatology asks us to consider the Church existing on Earth being the manifestation of God’s Kingdom in the world. Unfortunately for preterists, the Scriptures do not reflect this, instead presenting us both/and aspects of the Kingdom. While elements of God’s Kingdom can be captured on Earth among His people, we still await the complete manifestation of the Kingdom at the Lord’s appearing.

Perhaps more than anything else, Messianics should reject preterism because many preterists do not see a Scriptural basis for the existence of the State of Israel. In America, many preterists only support Israel because Israel is an ally of the United States, but not for any Biblically-based reason. Preterists would argue that any microchip implant system that could be implemented to identify people could never be “the mark of the beast.” Preterist theology, more than anything else, is a denial of those who cannot handle the judgment of God on today’s sinful world.

The only way the Messianic community can avoid the problems with preterist eschatology is to continue to develop its own post-tribulational, pre-millennial eschatology. This theology should be firmly based in the premise that we still await the completion of the Seventieth Week of Israel, that “the Church” has not replaced Israel, that God’s promises to Israel are still valid, and that all Believers—as a part of the Commonwealth of Israel—will experience what Israel experiences in the Last Days. These are the things that we should be discussing in our distinct Messianic examinations of the end-times.

added 09 January, 2006

Prince Charles of Wales, Antichrist: I have heard a Messianic teaching which says that Prince Charles is the antichrist. Do you believe this?

While the Scriptures are clear that there is going to be someone who in the future will arise as a false messiah, become the leader of the world, and demand worship, we do not claim to know who this person is. There are many prophecy teachers who claim to know who the antimessiah/antichrist is, ranging from King Juan Carlos of Spain, Mikhail Gorbachev, Bill Clinton, and now Prince Charles. This is all speculation. If you are a diligent student of the Word you should know the description that the Scriptures give us about the antimessiah/antichrist. Whenever this man comes, the Scriptures admonish us to not be caught unaware and know what characteristics to look for.

We will not know who the antimessiah is until the Abomination of Desolation occurs. Until then, all we can do is guess.

updated 20 April, 2006

Proverbs, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Proverbs?

Approximate date: 900s B.C.E. (Right); 900s B.C.E. for composition of source material, 715-686 B.C.E. for redactions (conservative-moderate); 500s-300s B.C.E. (Left)

Author: Solomon exclusively (Right); mostly Solomon with later redaction and addition (conservative-moderate); anonymous teachers (Left)

Location of author(s): Land of Israel or Jerusalem (Right, conservative-moderate) Land of Israel, Jerusalem, and/or Babylon (Left)

Target audience and their location: people of Israel, later people of Judah (Right, conservative-moderate); Southern Kingdom returning or returned from Babylon (Left)

The Book of Proverbs makes up the largest collection of wisdom sayings in canonical Scripture. Proverbs is a text that most people turn to when requiring advice so they can be guided in a proper way of living. Proverbs has important lessons to teach anyone, regardless of their age, gender, or social status (*EXP*, 5:897-903). Many of the admonitions that it includes orient the reader as a child being instructed by a teacher, often being parental in tone (*ECB*, 438). Proverbs embodies the essence of practical theology, seen in one of its first major admonitions: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7). Proverbs is intended to guide individuals to perform actions that are right, just, and pious (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1447), and to be productive members of their communities.

The Hebrew title of Proverbs is *Mishlei* (מִשְׁלֵי), derived from the verb *mashal* (מָשַׁל), which in the Hifil stem (casual action, active voice) can mean “to **compare with**” (*HALOT*, 1:647; cf. *NBCR*, 549; *ABD*, 5:513). Many theologians are keen to point out that *mashal* represents a wide variety of types of sayings and admonitions (Harrison, 1010-1011; *EDB*, 1090). The Septuagint title for Proverbs is *Paroimiai* (ΠΑΡΟΙΜΙΑΙ), followed by the Latin Vulgate’s *Liber Proverbiorum*. In the Jewish theological tradition, Proverbs is placed among the Writings between Psalms and Job, but in Christian tradition Proverbs is considered a Wisdom text along with Job and Ecclesiastes.

Traditionally, Proverbs has been the first of three books that are given Solomonic authorship. Songs of Songs is believed to have been composed early in Solomon’s life, Proverbs composed during his midlife, and Ecclesiastes composed in his late life (*Song of Songs Rabbah* §10). It is notable for us to consider today that there is no conservative consensus on Solomonic authorship for all three of these books (not to be confused with Solomonic involvement). “Most scholars who have studied the problem intensely have favored the historical nature of the Solomonic tradition to a greater or lesser degree, though some have been far from certain about it, and others have entertained the presence of legendary accretions” (Harrison, 1013). Rabbinic tradition in the Talmud actually ascribes the composition of Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes to the men of Hezekiah (b.*Bava Batra* 15a).

The general title that is given to this text is “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David” (1:1). Its author is designated by a specific name for at least some of the text, with Proverbs beginning with ascribed Solomonic authorship (chs. 1-24; Dillard and Longman, 239-240). Standing against complete Solomonic authorship is the fact that 22:17 refers to a second author known by the description “the words of the wise,” followed in 24:23 with the same reference (Dillard and Longman, 240-241). The “general view [of exclusive Solomonic authorship]...stands in need of some revision” (*EXP*, 5:886), “As with the question of Davidic authorship of certain psalms, there must always be some uncertainty as to the exact amount of the proverbial literature that may be said to be strictly Solomonic” (Harrison, 1014). Chs. 25-29 are accredited to Solomon being copied by the men of Hezekiah in Judah (25:1). Ch. 30 is attributed to Agur son of Jakeh (30:1). 31:1-9 is attributed to King Lemuel (Dillard and Longman, 241-242).

While most of Proverbs is attributed to Solomon, its words and sayings undoubtedly had to be collected and edited into a composite work. This work included an added prologue (1:1-7) and longer epilogue (31:10-31). Some of the discourses of interchange may have been added by a later redactor as well. As a consequence, Proverbs should be best understood as an anthology

(Dillard and Longman, 236) with seven distinct sections, breaking at: 1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; and 31:1.

The bulk of Proverbs would have been written during the reign of Solomon during the Tenth Century B.C.E. Isaiah 29:14 makes reference to “the wisdom of their wise men,” possibly being some kind of grouping. Conservatives assert that Proverbs was probably edited in its final form in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries B.C.E., although some others believe that Proverbs reached its final form before the end of the Babylonian Exile (*NBCR*, 549; Dillard and Longman, 237).

Liberals deny any Solomonic involvement in the composition of Proverbs and often date Proverbs entirely to after the Babylonian exile (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1447) in a period when a large number of pseudonymous works were circulating (*IDB*, 3:938). While the proverbs attributed to Solomon are considered spurious, those attested to have been written by the men of Hezekiah are considered to be legitimate, pre-exilic sources (*Ibid.*, 3:939), although some liberals concede that a few of the wisdom sayings of Proverbs do possibly originate from the royal court of Jerusalem (*IDBSup*, 703).

A standard liberal position on Proverbs has been, “Attributed (as a courtesy) to King Solomon, it was compiled and for the most part probably also composed during the fifth and fourth pre-Christian centuries by the masters who taught in academies for young men of the ‘better’ families” (*IDB*, 3:936). Liberals widely consider the wisdom of proverbs as being mostly, if not entirely human. Likewise, a large number consider some sayings in Proverbs to be influenced by the latter Hellenistic era (Harrison, 1016). Ironically, the literature and concepts that Proverbs parallels (*Ibid.*, 1016-1017) from ancient times often predates the liberal propositions by over a millennium (*NBCR*, 549).

There are significant parallels between Proverbs and other Ancient Near Eastern works (*IDB*, 3:938; *ISBE*, 3:1015-1016; *EXP*, 5:883-884). One of the major works that is considered in Proverbial scholarship are similarities seen with the Egyptian Wisdom of Amenemope/Amenophis (Harrison, 1014-1015; *ABD*, 5:516) dating from the First Millennium B.C.E. This makes dating Proverbs’ material contemporary to Solomon quite plausible. Some of these parallels when pointed out have led liberals to confirm the veracity of at least some of the text (*NBCR*, 548).

Also important for one to consider are that the words of the wise (22:17-24:22; 24:23-34) and the words of King Lemuel (31:1-9) may not be Israelite in origin (*ABD*, 5:513). This information incorporated into Proverbs could have come into Israel via some kind of royal contact (*EXP*, 5:886). Some modern interpreters have compared Proverbs to being like *Poor Richard's Almanac* (*NIDB*, 830).

The Hebrew Masoretic Text of Proverbs has been relatively well preserved, even though there are about twenty-five difficult readings in the MT (Harrison, 1018; *EXP*, 5:890). These have been difficult to translate, but concurrent studies in Ugaritic have helped significantly with English translation. The most notable difference to consider between the MT and Septuagint is that the LXX version includes 130 more proverbs (*EDB*, 1091). Conservatives have often attributed this to the LXX being based on an older Hebrew text, but liberals claim that this is evidence of Proverbs being composed after the Babylonian exile.

Sayings in Proverbs are not intended to be interpreted so much as “prophecies” as much as they are to be viewed as statements of practical reality. Proverbs is dominated by longwinded instruction sections and short sentence wisdom (*IDB*, 3:937-938; *EXP*, 5:888-889). What one frequently finds in Proverbs is that a problem is given and a solution will be proposed in a pair of statements. Some of the remarks found in Proverbs are clearly figurative, with some others making comparisons and contrasts. The overarching theme of Proverbs is how to understand Earthly life and the human condition. Modern interpreters encourage people to read Proverbs as a whole, and for them to consider the context of certain sayings (both in the text itself and in history).

The personification of Wisdom in Proverbs is a noticeable and important feature (Dillard and Longman, 242-244, 24), especially as the various Judaisms of the Second-First Centuries B.C.E. appropriated concepts of Wisdom and applied them to their Messianism. It is also noticeable to

consider how *torah* (תּוֹרָה) is sometimes applied to human teaching and not just Divine instruction. Some consider Proverbs to be a commentary on the Torah commands of love (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5) and covenant faithfulness to God.

Proverbs was an important text for Yeshua and His Apostles (*EXP*, 5:890), as many allusions and teachings can often find their origin in this book. Many of the sayings of James the Just found in his epistle, in particular, undoubtedly find their root in Proverbs.

“Many Christians use the book of Proverbs as an anthology of ‘mottos’” (Dillard and Longman, 244). It is not that uncommon to find contemporary Christians often read through Proverbs once a month, focusing on one chapter a day. Proverbs has been an important book that has affected Christian attitudes toward contemporary society, and is generally favored among books of the Tanach.

Some of today’s Messianic handling of Proverbs is quite similar to that of evangelical Christians. However, there is certainly room for improvement as more teaching and exposition could certainly focus on this text—with consideration of Proverbs among other Ancient Near Eastern works. Likewise, when examining Proverbs’ composition, do any of us consider Proverbs as *not* being exclusively Israelite, but a product being influenced by the larger world surrounding Ancient Israel? Proverbs definitely asks us the questions of how we relate the Bible’s truths to today’s world and embody its principles in our daily lives.

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Psalms, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Psalms?

Approximate date: 1400s B.C.E. to 500s (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Author: various authors (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Location of author: varied locations due to varied authorship

Target audience and their location: people of Israel, later people of Judah and Southern Kingdom exiles (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, and is frequently one of the most examined. Psalms differs substantially from any other book of Scripture, as some modern theologians have described it as Ancient Israel’s “hymnbook.” This is certainly justified as Psalms is composed of various songs, prayers, laments, cries of thankfulness, and pleas for vindication—all of which were used in the worship of Ancient Israel. Psalms actually consists as a collection of five groupings of material: Book One (Psalms 1-41), Book Two (Psalms 42-72), Book Three (Psalms 73-89), Book Four (Psalms 90-106), and Book Five (107-150), all of which are usually designated in most English Bibles.

The Hebrew title of Psalms is actually *Tehellim* (תְּהִלִּים), meaning “praises.” Our English title is derived from the Greek *Psalmoi* (ΨΑΛΜΟΙ) or “twangings [of harp strings]” (*NIDB*, 832). This is a good indication that many of the psalms were intended to be recited or sung to music. Psalms is placed first among the Writings in the Jewish order of the Tanach, and among the

Wisdom books in the Christian theological tradition. Both Jewish and Christian theology generally give a very high place to the value of the Book of Psalms.

Psalms is an atypical book of Scripture because not all the psalms were composed by a single author. Thirty-four psalms do not have postscripts identifying the composition. Seventy-four psalms in the Hebrew Masoretic tradition are afforded to David (with more attributed to him in the Greek Septuagint; *ISBE*, 3:1031). Other notable composers of psalms that are identified include: Asaph (70; 73-83), the sons of Korah (42-49; 84-85; 87-88), Moses (90), Solomon (127), Heman (88), and Ethan (89). It is suspected by some theologians that a few of these names may have been added later, surely something that is a debate in Biblical scholarship (*IDB*, 3:943-943). Notable for us to consider is that the Apostles ascribe Davidic authorship to Psalm 2 in Acts 4:25, which would otherwise be anonymous. Many commentators and teachers unsure of what to use, and simply designate the default author to be the Psalmist or the Psalter.

The material seen in Psalms likely dates all the way from the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt to the Babylonian Dispersion, a period of 800-1,000 years. Ancient evidence from Babylon, Egypt, and Ugarit all indicate important parallels in literary style and composition between the Psalms and other Ancient Near Eastern hymnody (*IDBSup*, 709; Harrison, 987-990; *NIDB*, 833; *ISBE*, 3:1039-1040). Jewish tradition in the Talmud divided Psalms into only 147 compositions (b.*Shabbat* 16), even though Jewish Bibles today follow the more consistent 150 Psalm division. There is a slight difference among verse divisions between Jewish and Christian Bibles (*IDB*, 3:943), but nothing extremely significant. The material of Psalms in its more final form likely comes from the Third Century B.C.E., even though an Apocryphal Psalm 151 dating from the Second Century B.C.E. was found at Qumran. This psalm is considered canonical by sectors of the Eastern Orthodox Church (*ABD*, 5:524; *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 749; *Jewish Study Bible*, 1280) and can be found in many ecumenical study Bibles.

There is no "one" conservative or liberal position on the Book of Psalms today, as "the book as a whole and the individual psalms...were open to adaptation during the whole Old Testament period" (Dillard and Longman, 213). There are, however, some important things to keep in mind when examining conservative and liberal examinations of Psalms.

Many conservatives feel that Psalms was assembled in its final form after the Babylonian exile, mostly incorporating pre-exilic material (*ISBE*, 3:1030). Many liberals, in contrast, consider Psalms to have been composed entirely after the exile, including the writing of many of the psalms themselves (*EDB*, 1094). Conservatives widely accept the designated authorship of the individual psalms, whereas liberals widely doubt them (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1282), although there can never be complete certainty about the authorship of every single psalm (Dillard and Longman, 214). A great deal of debate on authorship surrounds the meaning of the Hebrew proposition ל' (ל'), as it can mean "by," "of," "about," and "for" (Dillard and Longman, 215). Considering this, was a psalm by a particular person, about that person, or compiled for that person?

Liberals see some psalms dominated by usage of the Divine Name YHWH, and others using Elohim, which they attribute to the so-called J and E sources (*IDB*, 3:943) used in their JEDP documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch (see **Genesis** FAQ entry for a summarization of the JEDP documentary hypothesis), and this decidedly affects their interpretation of certain passages (*Ibid.*, 3:955). Some liberals have assumed that the bulk of the psalms date from the Maccabean era (*NBCR*, 446), perhaps calling Psalms the "hymnbook of the Second Temple" (Harrison, 976) and/or that their ideas represent religious concepts appropriated during the Jewish exile to Babylon (*IDBSup*, 705; Harrison, 995-996; *NIDB*, 835).

The Hebrew Masoretic Text of Psalms generally reflects a strong tradition of preservation. Necessary comparison with the Dead Sea Scrolls on some Messianic passages such as Psalm 22:16 is required from time to time, where the DSS and Greek Septuagint likely reflect a more proper rendering (*IDB*, 3:944). Harrison notes that on the whole "during the process of transmission, the MT is incomparably superior to that of the LXX, which preserved some curious readings" (Harrison, 999). More Greek copies of Psalms in the LXX are available than any other Septuagintal documents (*ABD*, 5:523). In consulting the Septuagint version of Psalms one must also

consider divergent liturgical traditions between the Judean and Diaspora Jewish communities (*EXP*, 5:19), and that the LXX division is slightly different than that found in the MT (*EDB*, 1093).

There are a variety of different types of psalms, and classifying psalms according to a particular genre can frequently help us in proper interpretation. Psalms requires the interpreter to focus careful attention on its literary devices. Close observation and rereading is necessary for adequate exegesis (*NBCR*, 447) and for noticing poetic forms or meter (*IDB*, 3:944-954; *EXP*, 5:9-12; *ABD*, 5:528-530). These aspects of the psalms give us important pictures into the varied social lives of the people of Israel (*ISBE*, 3:1033-1034). Some psalms are set against historical backdrops, while others are just songs of praise, petitions before God, or laments with no specific background to be deduced (Dillard and Longman, 211).

German theologian Hermann Gunkel helped spearhead the idea that it may be futile for interpreters to try to figure out the historical background circumstances of every single psalm, and that it is more important for us to figure out its central idea (Harrison, 991-993; *NIDB*, 834; *ISBE*, 3:1034). “Gunkel perceived that the Psalms did not originate as literary works, but arose in worship” (*IDBSup*, 705), something that can truly be said for a great many of the psalms. He divided Psalms into five distinct *Gattungen* or literary types: hymns, communal laments, royal psalms, individual laments, and individual psalms of thanksgiving. Scholars today will often provide more categories and subcategories for Psalms (*ABD*, 5:531-534). In spite of Gunkel’s being a liberal (Harrison, 983), his categorization of Psalms has been adopted by many conservative theologians (Dillard and Longman, 219-225). More contemporary examination of Psalms is sometimes guided by some kind of rhetorical criticism (*EDB*, 1095).

Some broad themes to be considered when reading through Psalms are God’s majesty, our required relationship with God, a contrasting of the wicked and righteous, and the promise of God to send a Messiah deliverer (*EXP*, 5:15-18). Readers of the psalms can examine themes as being a response to God, an invitation to worship, or simple Scripture to reflect upon. Psalms is definitely concerned with *Heilsgeschichte* or salvation history.

Psalms features quite prominently in the teachings of Yeshua and theology of the Apostles. Psalms 2 and 110, in particular, are some of the most frequently quoted texts in the Apostolic Scriptures (*ISBE*, 3:1038). In addition to these, Psalms 16, 22, and 69 all profoundly affect our view of Yeshua’s Messiahship (Dillard and Longman, 233). Psalms was used to explain the ministry of Yeshua, as well as His crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation, and present rule (*EXP*, 5:8).

Psalms features prominently in the Jewish liturgy of the *siddur* and in ritual Jewish prayer. Not all of the psalms are intended to be song aloud (Harrison, 986). Many of the psalms, or pieces of them, were used in praises and prayers offered to God in the Tabernacle/Temple service (Harrison, 980; *EDB*, 1093) and for other worship traditions. The application of Psalms as a distinct way to commune with God and experience His presence is almost infinite.

More than any other book of the Tanach, Psalms has greatly influenced Christian theology (*NBCR*, 446; *NIDB*, 832). Luke 22:44 attributing Psalms as the most important book among the Writings has no doubt influenced this. Psalms teaches us about the great balance between God’s Law and God’s grace. Many Christian moves focused on intimacy between a person and God are focused around Psalms, and certainly a great number of Christian hymn writers have appropriated words from Psalms for centuries. Christian theologians today are recognizing the strong need to train pastors in the skills they need to properly teach from Psalms, lest we lose the treasure that they truly are (*EXP*, 5:6).

Messianics today are generally sound in their examination of most psalms, even though there is certainly room for some fine tuning and refinement. We can probably make greater consideration for the different types of psalms available, as well as for the wider historical period of a psalm (when an historical period is clearly identifiable or deducible from the text). One of the strides we can make improvement in is removing any theological interjections into Psalms relating to end-time speculation (like thinking that each psalm represents a year on God’s so-called “prophetical calendar.”) Reclaiming some of the worship of Psalms via liturgical prayer is something that should also not be ignored by today’s Messianics. It is also possible that a great

amount of congregational preaching is missed because of an overemphasis on the Torah, and not enough emphasis on texts such as Psalms.

Each psalm represents its own unique little world that is just waiting for us to enter in and uncover it for its wonders.

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Purim: Do you think that Messianic Believers should celebrate Purim?

There are some in the independent Messianic community (as opposed to Messianic Judaism), who do not believe it is necessary to observe Purim. *Purim* is not listed among the appointed times of Leviticus 23, because the events that it commemorates occurred after the giving of the Written Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. *Purim* commemorates the events of the Book of Esther, where the Jews are threatened with annihilation at the hands of the evil Haman. Via the sovereignty of God, Esther is in the right place at the right time to thwart his evil plans.

While not one of the Biblical *moedim* in Leviticus 23, the Book of Esther does record that the commemoration of these events was to be honored by the Jews for centuries to come, and never to be forgotten:

"For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them. But when it came to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur [lot]. And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendants and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they would not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually. **So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants**" (Esther 9:24-28).

As Believers, we have the responsibility to remember these events as well, because if the Jewish people had been eliminated, then there would have been no people of Israel and thus no Messiah. We should always be rejoicing in the triumphs of God's people over evil, and *Purim* is definitely an appropriate time for us to remember the mighty deeds that He has performed. It is also an excellent time for us to stand up to the evils of anti-Semitism, as the spirit of Haman has never left us, embodying itself in anyone who wants to destroy the Jewish people.

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