

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 naseum* with the term “pagan,” as is the case far too frequently.

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

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

While it is quite commonplace in many sectors of the broad Messianic community, to hear about PaRDeS—also referred to as something like the “four levels of Hebraic Scripture interpretation”—few Messianic people are likely to know what the origins of the PaRDeS hermeneutic actually are. The term *pardes* (פֶּרְדֵּס) itself, is a loan word from Persian, meaning “enclosure, park, pleasure garden” (Jastrow).^a When one encounters the term PaRDeS used as a method for interpreting the Tanach Scriptures, it represents an acronym for: *p'shat*, *drash*, *remez*, and *sod*.

Within many sectors of today's Messianic movement, it is frequently thought that PaRDeS hermeneutic of interpreting the Tanach Scriptures, is something which was present in the Jewish world of the First Century, making it something that was probably used by Yeshua and the Apostles. When a minimum amount of investigation is conducted, one finds that the PaRDeS method of interpreting and applying the Tanach Scriptures, is actually something that does not at all date from the broad Biblical period, and from its secondary, tertiary, and quartary literature. The PaRDeS hermeneutic, in fact, originated directly out of Medieval Jewish mysticism, from the Thirteenth Century C.E.

The following is a selection of scholastic Jewish attestations on the origins of the PaRDeS method of interpreting the Tanach Scriptures:

Essential Judaism: “The medieval commentators recognized and practiced four principal methods of interpretation: *peshat*, the ‘plain sense’ meaning of a passage; *derash*, the homiletical meaning (from which the word *midrash*) is derived; *remez*, the allusive meaning; and *sod*, the hidden, mystical meaning. Taken together, they form the acronym *PaRDeS*, actually a word of Persian origin meaning an area surrounded by a fence, used in the Talmud to mean an orchard or garden...”^b

Jewish Study Bible: “*pardes* a Late Biblical Hebrew word borrowed from Persian, meaning ‘park, garden, orchard.’ It was later employed as an acronym for the four levels of meaning in Scripture according to the *Zohar*: *peshat* (contextual sense), *remez* (allegorical sense), *derash* (homiletical sense), and *sod* (mystical sense).”^c

JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions: “At the end of the 13th century, the Bible scholar Bahya ben Asher noted that there are four ways of interpreting Scripture, which came to be known by the acronym ‘*pardes*’ (פֶּרְדֵּס; *prds*, a Hebrew word meaning ‘orchard’ or ‘Paradise’). This is a mnemonic for the initial letters of the following words:

“*Peshat* (plain, literal meaning of the verse in context).

“*Remez* (allegorical or symbolic meaning only hinted at in the text).

“*Derash* (homiletic interpretation to uncover an ethical or moral lesson thought to be implicit in the text).

“*Sod* (secret, esoteric, or mystical interpretation, emphasized by the kabbalists).”^d

Encyclopaedia Judaica: “[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

^a Jastrow, 1216.

^b George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 303.

^c Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, NJPS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2136.

^d Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 495; cf. *JPS Guide: The Jewish Bible* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008), 108.

up of the initial letters of these words. For the meaning of the word in mysticism, see Kabbalah.^e

The PaRDeS hermeneutic, as a formalized system of Jewish interpretation of the Tanach, dates from the Middle Ages. While many Messianics have made it some kind of a habit to use PaRDeS, and they derive various interpretations and applications of Scripture in an effort to perhaps arrive at the so-called *sod* or “hidden level”—PaRDeS was not only not present as a way of interpreting the Tanach during the time of Yeshua and His Apostles, but it dates from a millennium or so later.

PaRDeS was not present in the world of Second Temple Judaism, as is easily attested by history, and nor was it present in the formative centuries of Rabbinical Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple. Jacob Neusner’s book, *Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture: Introduction to the Rabbinic Midrash* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), summarizes how the midrashic style of Tanach interpretation was present within the Biblical world of Yeshua and in the centuries following, as evidenced in a wide array of Jewish literary sources, especially the Midrashim. Yet, nowhere in Neusner’s analysis is the PaRDeS hermeneutic referenced, and any entry on PaRDeS is also conspicuously absent from the *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002).

The PaRDeS hermeneutic did originate from Medieval Jewish mysticism. The specific dynamic of the PaRDeS hermeneutic is so that its users can reach the *sod* level of interpretation. That PaRDeS was widely used by Kabbalists, and forms a wide basis for the Jewish mystical tradition and its ideology, is summarized by Gershom Scholem:

“The *peshat*...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” (*EJ*).^f

The central role of the PaRDeS hermeneutic is for readers of the Tanach (and apparently also the Mishnah and Talmud) to arrive at the *sod* level, as the *sod* level serves as the centrifuge for Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalah. The 1898 work *Derekh Emunah Umaaseh Rav*, by Jacob Shalom Hakohen, testifies to how important PaRDeS and reaching the *sod* level is for the Kabballah:

“There are four levels of interpretation of the Torah: the simple literal level [*peshat*], hints [*remez*], Midrashic interpretation [*derash*] and mystical secrets [*sod*]. The ‘simple literal level’ relates to the vital-soul [*nefesh*]; ‘hints’ relate to the spirit [*ruach*]; ‘Midrashic interpretation’ relates to the higher soul [*neshamah*]; and ‘mystical secrets’ relate to the soul of the soul [*neshamah* of the *neshamah*]. A person first of all needs to become involved with the simple literal level of the Torah, to keep and to establish this, so that he purifies his vital-soul and merits reaching the level of the spirit. The principal part and the foundation is the simple literal level of the Torah, for as long as a person has not purified his vital-soul in a fitting manner through the simple literal level of interpretation of the Torah, he is not able to become involved with the inner meaning of the Torah. For this would be dangerous for him.”^g

It has to be recognized that the main issue of contention regarding the PaRDeS hermeneutic, is not so much being aware that there are different vantage points of interpreting Scripture. Literal, allegorical, and homeletical methods of interpreting the Tanach Scriptures, are actually present within the Bible itself. In Galatians 4:21-31, the Apostle Paul uses the example of Hagar and Isaac, and says, “This is allegorically speaking” (Galatians 4:24) or “These things may be

^e Editorial Staff Encyclopaedia Judaica, “Pardes,” in *EJ*.

^f Gershom Scholem, “Kabbalah [J. mysticism],” in *EJ*.

^g Alan Unterman, ed. and trans., *The Kabbalistic Tradition: An Anthology of Jewish Mysticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 39.

taken figuratively” (NIV).^h The main problem with PaRDeS, aside from the fact that it originated in a much later time period—outside that of Yeshua and the Apostles—is its insistence that one must get to the so-called *sod* level to be “really spiritual.” Such a *sod* level, though, forms the basis of the Jewish Kabbalah.

It has been our experience as a ministry that a great many of the Messianics who employ a PaRDeS hermeneutic, are completely unaware of its origins in and significance for Jewish mysticism. To an extent, they are using it “in ignorance.” However, we also must point out that those who believe that a hidden level of interpretation is the pinnacle of Biblical examination, do tend to make the serious mistake of trying to find hidden meanings in Scripture—when the answers men and women need to be effective servants of God are often right before them. A search for the so-called *sod* level, most often turns out to be an exercise in eisegesis: **reading messages into the Scriptures which are really not there.**

While Jewish users of PaRDeS will employ it to derive unique, and in many cases (extremely) eclectic, interpretations of the Tanach—Messianic users of PaRDeS will employ it for interpreting the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament as well. Why is it sometimes thought such a method of interpreting the Tanach **from the Middle Ages** is needed for properly understanding the Apostolic Scriptures? Most of the time when Messianics use PaRDeS for interpreting the New Testament, it is because there has not been a sufficient amount of exegetical analysis or historical background work conducted. PaRDeS is most frequently employed by people solely working from an English translation, unaware of potential textual or interpretational issues from the Greek source text, or background issues present for an ancient audience.

Employing PaRDeS for interpreting the Tanach, and arriving at the so-called “*sod* level,” can be a problem—because it frequently separates its users from understanding the Tanach within the context of the Ancient Near East. Employing PaRDeS for the Apostolic Scriptures can be just as big of a problem—because it causes Messianics to sidestep having to view passages within the context of the First Century Mediterranean.

While “*sod* level interpretations” have been able to tickle the ears of many in the broad Messianic movement, they often subtract from the value of the Biblical text itself, and likewise take no real consideration for the historical setting of a passage. By using PaRDeS, readers do not have to examine the Tanach for what it is as narrative, history, prophecy, wisdom literature, and law—but can instead search it for hidden meanings (of their own design). This means that when David struck down Goliath with a sling and five smooth stones, there has to be a hidden, esoteric meaning behind it—such as the five stones representing the five books of the Torah, and thus David’s Torah observance is what really killed Goliath. Such an esoteric meaning is not something that can be deduced from the evidence of the event that took place, but has to be *read into the text*. In factuality, though, David’s dedication to the Torah is something that does not need to be investigated from his killing Goliath, but is rather seen in what is testified of him in the Books of Samuel-Kings, and his own compositions present in the Book of Psalms.

What PaRDeS has the capacity to do Messianics in the long run, could be to encourage an inadequacy in teachers and leaders to use standardized hermeneutics that examine literary structures in a Biblical text, taking into examination texts as a whole and their source language(s), and incorporating the relevant secondary and tertiary background material. Tim Hegg makes the following useful observations in his workbook *Interpreting the Bible*:

“It is...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 hermeneutics, and divests the text of its literary meaning. Since 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

^h The Greek verb *allēgoreō* (ἀλληγορέω) is employed in Galatians 4:24. The CJB renders this with, “to make a *midrash* on these things.”

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.”ⁱ

One of the long-term challenges facing the Messianic community, is properly interpreting the Hebrew Tanach using methods that were in existence in the First Century C.E., and hence what were actually options present for Yeshua and the Apostles. A criticism against the PaRDeS hermeneutic, which dates from the Middle Ages and bears great significance for Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalah, should not be taken as a criticism against recognizing that there are multiple dynamics present for interpreting Scripture beyond the literal level. PaRDeS, however, has built within it the intention of reaching the *sod* or mystical level, which we need to stay away from.

The majority of the difficulties that today’s Messianic Believers have for interpreting the Bible, actually tend to regard transmission of various terms from Hebrew or Greek into English, and/or not fully understanding their ancient audience and setting. This is something that requires teachers and leaders to be engaged with scholastic and academic resources and commentaries, and putting more time and effort into researching the issues and controversies that face our emerging Messianic movement.

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ⁱ Tim Hegg, *Interpreting the Bible: An Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Tacoma: TorahResource, 2000), 90.

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 at the community’s *sedar* meal. 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) can be the “sacrifice.”^a

Some objections to the Last Supper being a Passover *sedar* include the references to it occurring on the Day of Preparation (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. There have been various proposals made for this, including the thought that Yeshua’s Last Sedar was a “teaching *sedar*” held between a Rabbi and students, or quite simply that the Lord held His Last Sedar a day early as He was preparing to be sacrificed.^b

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^a *CHALOT*, 294.

^b For a brief examination of this issue, consult the article “The Last Supper and the Passover” in Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1611. Also consult the editor’s article “The Last Sedar and Yeshua’s Passover Chronology.”

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. Pesachim, 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.”^a

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.

updated 23 February, 2010

^a “Haggadah of Passover,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, pp 266-267.

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?”^a 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.”^b This is by no means an indication that Shaul had his name changed to Paulus 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

^a *The Scriptures*, first edition. (Randburg, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 1993), 1218.

^b Charles C. Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible*, New American Standard (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1669.

Paul, Opposed or Not Opposed to the Torah (Law): I am having difficulty understanding the writings of the Apostle Paul. In my spirit, I believe his letters to be inspired of the Holy One, but in reading them I sense that they might be opposed to Torah. Can you help me with this?

There are a variety of important things that any reader of Paul's letters needs to keep in mind, the foremost being that Paul's letters were written to ancient groups of Believers in the First Century. When Twenty-First Century readers encounter the Pauline Epistles, we are definitely reading *someone else's mail*. Our responsibility, as with any text of Scripture, is to do our best to place ourselves into the original circumstances and setting of a letter's audience, interpret the letter for what it meant to the audience, and then seek a reasonable application for modern times. Unfortunately, the vast majority of those who have difficulty with Paul's letters, either Messianic or Christian, do not keep this in mind. They think that Paul writes directly to them in the Twenty-First Century, almost ignoring how every one of his letters bears the title of its *specific recipients*.

A wide number of today's Messianic Believers tend to have a love-hate relationship with the Apostle Paul. On the one hand, the many passages in Paul's letters that laud the love of God demonstrated via the Messiah Yeshua, and the service that Believers should have one for another, are greatly appreciated. On the other hand, passages in Paul's letters that appear to be negative toward the Torah or Law of Moses are either ignored, or they tend to be interpreted along some traditional Christian (typically dispensationalist) lines.

Few of today's Messianic Believers have really expelled significant efforts to dig beyond an English translation of Paul's letters, much less into their background and joining into conversations in contemporary Biblical Studies. The widely-known controversy over Romans 10:4, which is commonly rendered with "Christ is the end of the law" (NASU), although *telos* (τέλος) can also mean "aim," "purpose," or "goal" (Common English Bible), or at least "culmination" (TNIV), is something that can be overlooked.^a If something like this can be overlooked, then more complicated issues like how to render *dogma* (δόγμα) in Ephesians 2:15,^b or *exesti* (ἔξῃστι) in 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23,^c can catch people off completely guard. Issues like what "under the law" means, as either having to obey the Mosaic Torah or born again Believers not standing under the condemnation of the Torah upon Law-breakers, are often not even probed or considered.^d

There are some commonly encountered approaches seen to the letters of the Apostle Paul in the broad Messianic movement. Some of these are a bit disturbing, whereas others of these are representative of a particular theological vantage point:

- *"Paul is a false apostle!"* Paul's writings are against Torah and they should not be considered Scripture.
- *"I don't know what to do with Paul."* Paul's writings are somehow inspired Scripture of the Holy One, but they are just too difficult to interpret or handle. Paul's approach to the Torah is too complicated for us to really understand.
- *"Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles."* Paul's words about the Torah represent a bilateral ecclesiology of Israel and the Church. His letters about Torah speak of Gentiles in the Christian Church not having to follow it, and were not written to Jews who are to keep it. While appearing to be negative, Paul does not think that Gentiles have to follow Torah, as that would erase or negate Jewish and Gentile distinction.
- *"Paul's letters have transmission and background issues to be carefully considered."* The issue of Paul and the Law is a complicated debate in theological studies. In the Lutheran tradition, Paul is believed to place God's

^a Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, "Romans 10:4."

^b Consult the FAQ on the TNN website, "Ephesians 2:14-15."

^c Consult the FAQ entries on the TNN website, "1 Corinthians 6:12" and "1 Corinthians 10:23."

^d Consult the editor's articles "What Does 'Under the Law' Really Mean?" and "What Does 'Under the Law' Really Mean?—A Further Study."

Law and God's grace at odds with one another. In the Calvinist and Wesleyan traditions, though, Paul is believed to always uphold God's moral Law as a standard of Christian holiness, to be followed by all. Messianic Believers need to appreciate approaches like that of Calvinism and Wesleyanism, and further investigate the text of the Pauline corpus for its transmission from Greek into English, and potential First Century background issues.

The fourth approach, "*Paul's letters have transmission and background issues to be carefully considered,*" is definitely how a ministry like Outreach Israel and TNN Online has chosen to handle and interpret Paul's letters. We do not consider the Apostle Paul to be anti-Torah by any means, but there should also be no question that Paul, as well as other figures like James, Peter, and John—all believe that faith in Yeshua and what He has accomplished by His sacrifice for sinful humanity, are more important than the Torah of Moses. The Apostolic Scriptures are absolutely opposed to a principle of Torah-keeping for salvation and a legalistic misuse of the Torah. Consistent with the cries of Ancient Israel's Prophets, the Apostolic Scriptures also tend to be stridently focused on the moral and ethical issues addressed by Moses' Teaching, as Yeshua Himself directed His followers to focus on "the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23). This does not mean that things like Sabbath-keeping or kosher eating were unimportant,^e just that the focus of teaching we see in the Apostolic Scriptures seems to be more targeted toward basic human behavioral issues. In terms of the early non-Jewish Believers, who often came from the lower classes, it should not be difficult to understand why the Apostles stridently focused on them repenting from gross sins such as idolatry or sexual immorality.^f

Like all texts of the Apostolic Scriptures, it would go too far for one to think that the issue of Torah-keeping is the only issue addressed by the Pauline Epistles. Each one of Paul's letters is addressed to a particular ancient audience or person, and likely to issue specific instruction or admonitions for circumstances faced by such audiences or persons. In much of today's Messianic movement, there tends to not be a wide enough comprehension for the actual identity of the audience of Paul's letters, and the basic situation(s) being addressed. If this is done, then readers will see that Paul is not at all anti-Torah.

The following is a brief summary of each of the Pauline letters, listed in their canonical order. This should be useful for providing you with some basic guidelines when approaching Paul's letters as a Messianic Believer:

Romans: This letter was largely written to tell the Roman Believers that Paul was coming their way, as he intended to travel all the way to Spain. Not having encountered these Believers before, Paul lays out much of his teaching style and approach in the form of various vignettes. As he does this, he must address the circumstances which have arisen from the Roman Jews having been expelled from Rome by the edict of Claudius, but were now returning. This created a power struggle between the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, the latter not being forced to leave. Romans emphasizes how the non-Jewish Believers rely more on the Jewish Believers than they realize, and how all are to respect one another given the universal realities of human sin. Paul lays out in salvation historical terms how all Israel is to be restored, and the place of the nations in such a restoration.

1 Corinthians: This letter was composed to address an intensely complicated series of circumstances, for one of the most dysfunctional groups of First Century Messiah followers. The Corinthian Believers had been booted out of the local synagogue, they were factionalized, and they were known by various slogans (i.e., "everything is permissible for me"). Paul had to address an entire series of problems faced by the Corinthians, including fornication, eating meat sacrificed to idols, and disorderly conduct in the assembly. It is detectable within Paul's letter that he quotes various Corinthian

^e Consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* and *Messianic Kosher Helper* (forthcoming) by TNN Press.

^f Consult the editor's commentary *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic*.

slogans, and refutes them or shows them to be significantly problematic. The doctrine of resurrection is significantly expounded upon as a core tenet of Messianic faith.

2 Corinthians: This letter was a follow up to various reports that Paul had received about the spiritual progress of the Corinthians. While the Corinthians still had problems yet to be resolved, they had taken much of the Apostle's admonishment to them seriously, and were improving in their behavior.

Galatians: This letter was written to address how the non-Jewish Believers in Galatia had been led astray by outside Influencers (or "Judaizers") who were forcing them to go through ritual proselyte circumcision to Judaism, to really be members of God's people. The "works of law" spoken against in this letter likely had to do less with general obedience to God's Torah, and more to do with ancient *halachah* or how the Torah was followed by an ancient Jewish sect. In Galatians, Paul places the emphasis of membership in God's covenant people on faith in Yeshua and what He has achieved via His sacrifice, not how human works associated with the Torah are to achieve redemption and such membership.

Ephesians: This letter was a general epistle written to various assemblies of Messiah followers in Asia Minor. Paul expresses how the great work of Yeshua the Messiah has reconciled Jewish and non-Jewish Believers together as "one new humanity" in the Commonwealth of Israel. Their unity is to be a reflection of the greater work to come in salvation history, and is to be modeled by Believers' good conduct and service to one another, via employment of their unique spiritual gifts in the Lord. This letter was likely written at the same time as Colossians, perhaps expanding various themes seen in Colossians.

Philippians: This letter was written to a group of Paul's dear friends in Philippi, as he languished in a Roman prison, not quite knowing what was yet to happen. Unlike some of Paul's other letters, there are no major negative rebukes issued to this audience, as the words are largely those of great appreciation to fellow Believers. Paul undoubtedly has lived a life with Yeshua the Messiah at its very center, as who He is and what He has accomplished make all human achievements—Jewish, Greek, or Roman—utterly meaningless.

Colossians: This letter was written to address a congregation that Paul had never before seen in person, but had grown up in Colossae as a result of his preaching in Ephesus. The people were largely influenced by a false teaching that was rooted within a local Judaism that itself had been infected by the local paganism and mystery cults (perhaps to be described as proto-Gnostic). This false teaching had advocated that Yeshua the Messiah was only one of various intermediary forces, and not really that Divine, and also pushed various ascetic rituals and practices like intense fasting. The false teaching had an emphasis on various Torah practices, but such Torah practices were misused as they were associated with various ungodly emphases.

1 Thessalonians: This letter was largely written to provide some reassurances to the Thessalonians, whom Paul had to abruptly leave because of pressure enforced upon him by the local Jewish leaders because of his preaching the gospel. The Thessalonians were experiencing persecution, and Paul gave them some important instruction about the return of the Messiah and future resurrection of the dead.

2 Thessalonians: This second letter was written to the Thessalonians shortly after the first letter, because of a misunderstanding of various remarks made about the end-times. The Thessalonians thought the Messiah was imminently coming, probably due to some agitators who had entered in among them, and so Paul must assure them how various events must precede the return of Yeshua.

1 Timothy: This first letter to Timothy was composed as Timothy was given the task by Paul of overseeing various assemblies in the vicinity of Ephesus. A false teaching had arisen in Ephesus with inappropriate emphases from the Torah, which had widely overlooked the many key teachings of the Law on proper and upstanding living. Timothy also had to see that proper leaders were raised up among the Ephesians, and see that the women in Ephesus were correctly trained and dignified in their activities.

2 Timothy: This second letter to Timothy includes more details about the false teaching that had arisen in Ephesus, which apparently advocated that the general resurrection had already taken place. More than anything else, 2 Timothy represents a kind of “last will and testament” of the Apostle Paul, in Roman imprisonment once again, as he knows he is soon to die and meet the Lord Yeshua.

Titus: This letter was written to address the unique service that Titus performed for Paul, helping to get the Messiah followers on the island of Crete established in the Lord. There are some overlaps between the Cretan false teaching, and the Ephesian false teaching faced by Timothy, likely detectable. Titus seemingly had to face a group of opportunistic Jewish people who were misusing the Torah, and negatively influencing the Cretan Believers.

Philemon: This letter was written to address the circumstances by which the runaway slave Onesimus encountered Paul in Rome, and how he came to faith in Yeshua as a result. Paul writes this letter to Philemon, a Believer in either Colossae or the Lycus Valley of Asia Minor, entreating him to be kind and generous to Onesimus. Philemon was written at the same time as Colossians.

The Apostle Paul is not anti-Torah, in that he is opposed to the Law of Moses as a standard to be followed by all of God's people. He makes it clear in Romans 8:4, for example, “that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit,” a certain reference to the New Covenant promise to supernaturally transcribe the Torah onto the hearts and minds of the redeemed (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27).^g Torah-keeping is to definitely come via the supernatural compulsion of God's Spirit on those who are in Messiah.^h Yet, Paul is also clear that who Yeshua is as the Savior is superior to the Torah, as he says in Philippians 3:9 that “[I] may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Messiah [or, *the* faithfulness of Messiah]ⁱ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith.”

It is irresponsible for any of today's Messianics to claim that the Apostle Paul is anti-Torah, when most frequently those who make such a conclusion have not conducted a targeted examination of the passages they struggle with, including the Greek source text and potential historical and background issues.

Our ministry has released a wide array of materials that can aid you in your understanding of the Pauline Epistles, including the general book *The New Testament Validates Torah*, various “Message of...” articles, the relevant entries in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, and specific volumes of the *Practical Messianic* commentary series (as of 2011: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians-Philemon, and the Pastoral Epistles of 1&2 Timothy and Titus).

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^g Consult the editor's article “What is the New Covenant?”

^h It may be useful for you to review the FAQ entry on the TNN website, “Galatians 5:2-3,” which examines the issue of whether or not Jewish people are “obligated” to keep the Torah, and non-Jewish people are not “obligated.”

ⁱ Grk. *dia pisteōs Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ).

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.”^a

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.’”^b

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.

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^a William J. Morford, trans., *Power New Testament* (Lexington, SC: Author, 2003), 192 fn #3.

^b W. Michaelis, “pitching tents, Tabernacles,” in *TDNT*, 1044.

Philippians 1:23: What do those who believe in psychopannychy/soul sleep do about Philippians 1:23, and with Paul desiring to depart and be with the Messiah?

Philippians 1:23 is the second most commonly quoted passage about the afterlife (after 2 Corinthians 5:8) that one will probably encounter. Many Believers throughout history when presented with a likely death, have been able to identify with the same series of choices that the Apostle Paul had to make when he wrote his letter to the Philippians from prison in Rome. Paul asserts that death for him would be “gain” (Philippians 1:21), but that to continue living will mean “fruitful labor” (Philippians 1:22) and that continuing to live is necessary for the Philippians’ sake (Philippians 1:24). Yet if given the choice, Paul expresses how “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Philippians 1:23, RSV).

People instinctively do not want to have to go through the process and the pain of death. People generally want to keep on living, and they want to remain with their families and friends. They want to watch their children and grandchildren grow up, and they want to take advantage of the wonderful opportunities and beauty God has provided us on Planet Earth. Our mortality, though, will always catch up with us. Given Paul’s remarks in Philippians 1:23, does he at all see an unconscious blackness to be anticipated after his departing? Or, does Paul envision being welcomed into the presence of the Messiah Yeshua in Heaven?

Most Bible readers have rightly concluded that aside from the Second Coming taking place in their lifetimes, death is the means by which a born again Believer is ushered into the realm of the Lord. It is to be recognized how in ancient times the verb *analuō* (ἀναλύω), rendered as “depart,” regarded either a ship weighing anchor or of an army being transported from one location to another (2 Maccabees 9:1).^a Peter T. O’Brien also notes how “ἀναλύω was used in the Greek world as a euphemistic metaphor for death.”^b It would be quite appropriate to view Philippians 1:23 as Paul saying, “I desire to depart/die and [as a result I will] be {immediately} with Messiah.”^d

The Apostle Paul recognizes that whether he lives or dies—regardless of what happens to his body—“Messiah will even now, as always, be exalted...” (Philippians 1:20). If he should die, then such a death would represent “gain” (Philippians 1:21). While Paul would certainly leave behind a martyr’s testimony that others could gain encouragement from, going to be with the Lord Yeshua he loved so deeply makes death that much more “gain” for him.

Paul’s choices of location (Philippians 1:22, 24 and 23) are two-fold: “to live *on* in the flesh” (*zēn en sarki*, ζῆν ἐν σαρκί) or “to remain on in the flesh” (*epimenein [en] tē sarki*, ἐπιμένειν [ἐν] τῇ σαρκί)—in contrast “to depart and be with Messiah” (*anulusai kai sun Christō einai*, ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι). Paul can continue to live in the body, performing critical ministry work on the Philippians’ behalf, or he can die and be with the Lord. Of significant notice should be Paul’s usage of *tēn epithumian* (τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν) or “I desire” (Philippians 1:23, NIV), pointing to an individual longing.^e Philippians 1:23 represents an individual eschatology; Paul will get to see the Lord *before* those reading his letter. A corporate eschatology of all the saints is reflected elsewhere

^a Gerald F. Hawthorne *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, Vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 48; F.F. Bruce, *New International Biblical Commentary: Philippians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 54; Peter T. O’Brien, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 130.

^b O’Brien, 130.

^c This conclusion is allowed by the conjunction *kai* (καὶ) functioning as a resultative: “to introduce a result that comes fr. what precedes” (BDAG, 495).

^d “I am torn in two directions on the one hand I long to leave this world and live with Christ, and that is obviously the best thing for me” (Phillips New Testament).

The related noun *anulusis* (ἀνάλυσις) is employed in 2 Timothy 4:6, where Paul later observes, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [*anulusis*] has come.”

^e “Here ἐπιθυμία has a positive connotation, signifying a particularly strong desire on the part of the apostle...a longing for that which he earnestly and continuously (if the present tense of ἔχων, ‘having’, is pressed) desired” (O’Brien, 129).

in his writings, in how both deceased and living Believers will together “always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17) at the resurrection and Second Coming.

Paul prefers the choice of departure/death to be with the Messiah; contrary to this the Philippians would not depart/die, but instead would continue on with their lives. In the estimation of R.P. Martin, “Any idea of an unconscious state following death...is denied by the sheer simplicity of Paul’s expectation.”^f Paul would die, and he would be departing to the realm of the Messiah in Heaven. J.A. Motyer describes how, “Scripture leaves so much about life after death undescribed, but on this central fact there is no hesitation: the Christian dead are ‘with Christ.’”^g A personal departure to going to be “with Messiah” should correctly be understood as dying and going to Heaven—where Yeshua presently is—and there should be no surprise why Believers facing death **have taken so much comfort and encouragement** from Philippians 1:23! Gordon D. Fee observes that for Paul,

“His present existence ‘in Christ’ makes it unthinkable that he would ever—even at death—be in a ‘place’ where he was not ‘with Christ.’ Hence death means ‘heaven now.’ At the same time, a person’s death did not usher him or her into ‘timeless’ existence. Hence the bodily resurrection still awaits.”^h

It is thought among various interpreters that Paul’s desire to depart and be with the Messiah in Philippians 1:23 causes a potential conflict of views: death ushers a Believer into the presence of the Lord, yet Paul eagerly anticipates the resurrection of the dead. There is, actually, no tension within the Pauline letters as long as it is emphasized that dying and going to Heaven is not the permanent condition of deceased saints. Gerald F. Hawthorne is proper to remind us, “the intermediate state is not in itself a separate ground for comfort...; it has no independent existence apart from the resurrection.”ⁱ Fee further states, “this is a tension of our making, not of Paul’s...These two ideas rest easily side by side in Paul because ‘being with Christ’ at death is not the final goal; resurrection is. But the former is nonetheless ‘gain’ to Paul, precisely because Christ is the beginning and end of all for Paul.”^j

We have problems when verses like Philippians 1:23 are read and expounded upon isolated by themselves, as the goal of a person’s existence is thought by some to mean to die and go to Heaven—where elsewhere in Paul’s letter there is most certainly an emphasis on the resurrection of the dead (i.e., Philippians 3:20-21). The resurrection of the dead is the consummation of our salvation (Romans 8:23), and it is only at the time of the Second Coming when the company of *all Believers*—both those who have died and those still living—can be *with the Lord*. A disembodied state for those who have died must always be emphasized as being **temporary** (although it does assure us without any doubt that the same person who had once lived on Earth, is the same authentic person who will be resurrected).

Death, as opposed to the resurrection, is the means by which an *individual* Believer can enter into the presence of the Messiah. A reading of the Epistle to the Philippians, though, demonstrates that the Apostle Paul clearly **never** expected to depart/die and be ushered into endless disembodiment. He firmly anticipated that at the resurrection the Lord “will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:21).

The psychopannychist is familiar with Philippians 1:23, and with Paul’s expectation to depart/die and be with the Messiah. He will argue against a conscious intermediate afterlife for Believers in Heaven, saying something like, “Their relation with Christ is one of immediacy,

^f Ralph P. Martin, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, Vol 11 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 79.

^g J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 89.

^h Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 149.

ⁱ Hawthorne, 51.

^j Fee, *Philippians*, 149 fn#48.

because they have no awareness of the passing of time between their death and resurrection.”^k It is recognized that Paul surely expected to depart and be with the Messiah, but is claimed that it would only take place after a long unconscious period, and then be a reality at the resurrection. If Paul had written “I desire to depart and rest/sleep in Messiah,” then there would be fewer problems with his “departure” via death involving a long, unconscious period prior to the resurrection. **But Paul did not say this.** Paul did not say “I desire to depart and be raised in Messiah,” either. Paul said that his desire was to depart/die and as a result go somewhere: the presence of the Lord Messiah.

If Paul had ever written “I desire to depart and be with Timothy” or “I desire to depart and be with Priscilla and Aquila,” from his setting, no one would ever question the fact that he would be transported somewhere. All Paul would have to go do was pack his bags and make his way to the nearest port and hop on a ship, or just start walking, to go see his dear friends. But since Philippians 1:23 is talking about a departure to be with Yeshua the Messiah, who resides in the dimension of Heaven, psychopannychists want us to think that humans (made in God’s image with a unique supernatural imprint, no less) cannot cross over into that dimension. They would actually ask us to look at this verse as meaning, “I desire to depart and *eventually* be with Messiah,” which would occur sometime after Paul’s death and confinement in the grave, now being a period of almost two millennia.

The psychopannychist may ask us to look at Philippians 1:23 as a statement of relationship: Paul only desires a closer communion with the Lord Yeshua, and he is not making any kind of claim as to the post-mortem condition. No one can deny how Paul in Philippians is motivated by his relationship with the Messiah, so much so that he wants to emulate His sufferings, death, and resurrection as closely as he can in his ministry service (Philippians 3:10-12). Yet, if one’s relationship with Yeshua is everything for a person—**why would one not expect to be with the Lord immediately upon time of death?** A cursory reading of various psychopannychists’ writings will demonstrate how many of them do not seem to be motivated by that close a walk with the Lord, but rather proving anyone who holds to an intermediate afterlife in Heaven prior to the resurrection as being dreadfully wrong.^l

While psychopannychists think they are doing us all a service, by drawing our attention to overlooked and underemphasized Biblical passages on the resurrection of the body—they go too far in arguing against an intermediate afterlife in Heaven. *They actually argue against born again Believers who love the Lord going to be with Him at the earliest possible moment.* What might this say about their relationship with the Lord, and of their wanting to “depart” and be with Him? Thankfully, the psychopannychist’s personal relationship with the Messiah is something that only he or she can work out with Him.

While Paul was released from his confinement in Rome and was able to conduct more ministry work, he would find himself imprisoned again. Communicating to his dear friend Timothy in his final days, he said, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [*analysis, ἀνάλυσις*] has come” (2 Timothy 4:6). According to Church tradition, Paul was executed by Nero in Rome (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.5). One of Paul’s immediate successors in Rome, Clement, communicated how he was a man of faith worthy of emulation by all, and who died an appropriate death:

“He was in bonds seven times, he was exiled, he was stoned, He preached in the East and in the West, winning a noble reputation for his faith. He taught righteousness to all the world; and after reaching the furthest limits of the West, and bearing his testimony before kings and rulers, **he passed out of this world and was received into the holy places.** In him we have one of the greatest of all examples of endurance” (*1 Clement* 5).^m

^k Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998), 179; cf. Morna D. Hooker, “The Letter to the Philippians,” in *NIB*, 11:491.

^l *Ibid.*, 189, and his actual usage of the description “deadly heresy.”

^m Maxwell Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1968), pp 25-26.

When the Apostle Paul was executed, he was finally able to depart and be with the Lord Yeshua in Heaven who he had served with such steadfastness and vigilance. Yet nowhere did the good Apostle ever expect to remain in Heaven forever (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:13). While being with the Lord was extremely important to him, it is only at the resurrection of the dead *when all the saints* get to be with Him and we will get to *all* enter into His Kingdom! Then, the world system that murdered Paul will finally have to be subdued by the Master of Heaven.

posted 29 March, 2011

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.^a 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.

^a Cf. "monogamy and polygamy," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 437.

(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 in 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

Psychopannychy, Growing in Adherence: Why does it seem that a concept like psychopannychy is growing in adherence in today’s Christian and Messianic world?

In today’s evangelical Christianity, belief in psychopannychy is growing because of a steady influence of liberal theological streams, and with some Bible teachers wanting a naturalistic explanation for almost everything they read in Scripture. There are Left-leaning evangelical teachers who want to keep open a dialogue with their Leftist liberal counterparts—and are highly influenced by them—sometimes with an affirmation of the literal resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), or salvation only/principally coming from Him, as what makes them really different.

One such psychopannychist, Joel B. Green, states very clearly what the two sources of inspiration for his belief are. He cites the Twentieth Century German theologian Ruldolf Bultmann, who once said, “Man does not *have* a *soma*; he *is soma*.”^a This means that a person is just a body, and nothing more. He also references “Darwin and evolutionary biology, which has located *Homo sapiens* within the animal kingdom with a genetic make-up that strongly resembles the creatures around us.”^b Having referenced a liberal theologian whose main claim to fame was “de-mythologizing” the New Testament, and the father of evolutionary science via his *Origin of the Species*, it should be no surprise to see conclusions more rooted in looking at people as advanced

^a Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 4.

^b *Ibid.*, 3.

animals largely subject to divergences of diverse biochemical reactions, rather than those who possess a unique, immaterial and multi-dimensional supernatural component.^c

The growth of psychopannychy or “soul sleep” in the Messianic world has less to do with liberal theological influences or Charles Darwin. A majority of those who believe that there is no conscious, disembodied intermediate state are those who simply hate any kind of “Christian doctrine.” There are a variety of Messianic teachers who have been allowed into different Messianic pseudo-denominations and alliances (that just want to swell their numbers and will take almost anybody), and have been given a free hand at promoting virtually whatever they want with no threat of being disciplined. Because a large number of people in these groups often receive their spiritual “nourishment” via controversy, a strong-willed teacher insisting that there is no going to Heaven at death will get a hearing and a following, among other false ideas promoted.

From both angles it is to be observed that there is a general weakening and erosion of orthodox Biblical doctrines in both the Synagogue and Church. Psychopannychy is only one of a selection of false teachings that has had a steady influence in the past half-century. If anyone claims that this is some concept that the Father is somehow “restoring” to His people, then they have not taken a good, sober look at where its ideological support is to be found.

Many of those who promote psychopannychy think that they are restoring a forgotten emphasis on the resurrection of the body. They are right to point out how for many Believers, salvation is exclusively about “going to Heaven,” and the resurrection is some distant afterthought. This does need to be corrected, and not all of the intentions of today’s psychopannychists are dishonorable. They go too far, though, in responding to those who think that endless disembodiment in the clouds is the final condition of the redeemed. Psychopannychists reduce the human person to being an entirely material creature: flesh, blood, bones, tissue, and chemicals. Such an exclusively materialistic or naturalistic perspective on the composition of man **causes many people to then seriously doubt that we possess a unique supernatural component** imprinted upon us by our Creator.

In the end, the problem with psychopannychy—whether taught by liberal leaning theologians, or those who hate any form of Christian doctrine—is that it frequently causes people to steadily question and doubt supernatural things altogether. *Are miracles real? Is God real? Or is there a materialistic explanation for all this?* People start to wonder whether or not the Bible is just the collective writings or rantings of some mentally disturbed individuals, who may have just hallucinated some crazy things because they drank too much wine or failed to eat properly. It is undeniable that psychopannychy lays the first stepping stones for people to ultimately apostasize and deny God, because human beings are, after all, thought to just be advanced animals—with no afterlife or future existence to be anticipated.

posted 29 March, 2011

^c Cf. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), “The Scientific Challenge to Dualism,” pp 22-24.

Psychopannychy, Motivation for Belief: What does your ministry think is the main reason(s) why some people are motivated to believe or advocate a doctrine of psychopannychy/soul sleep?

It is undeniable that a main influence guiding the adoption of psychopannychy/soul sleep is the effect that Darwinian evolution and materialism has had on Biblical Studies, which is steadily being adopted by some notable parts of evangelical Christianity. Once a human being is thought to just be an advanced form of animal, then individuals quickly tend to forget that they have a unique supernatural imprint upon themselves—and think they will die a death the same way as any cat, dog, or ape.

This is problematic because Believers are certainly to have a spiritual connection to a God who resides in a dimension outside of the time and space of this universe (cf. Ephesians 1:20; 2:6). Even though theistic evolution advocates that God directed the process of natural selection, many who go from believing that humans were created *ex nihilo* and that there is a disembodied afterlife between death and resurrection, to believing in evolution and psychopannychy, are prime targets for atheism. In this case, denying an intermediate afterlife can be only one stage on the road to apostasy.

In the case of a group like the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which is well known for advocating psychopannychy, the adoption of this view may have been in response to the growth of spiritism and séances in the Nineteenth Century. Overreacting to the trend practiced by some Christians who attempted to contact their deceased relatives, but most of all how popular Christian preaching often fails to emphasize the future resurrection of the body and just talks about “going to Heaven”—it would instead be taught that the deceased is simply unconsciousness in the grave. The SDA doctrine of “soul sleep” would later influence groups like Hebert W. Armstrong’s Worldwide Church of God, and the Sacred Name movement.

It would seem doubtful that the common SDA emphasis on monism, meaning that the human person is entirely a physical being—closely associated with “soul sleep”—has anything to do with their Sabbatarianism. The First Century Jewish Pharisees were far more stringent in their observance of *Shabbat* and the Torah than the Adventists, and they believed in an intermediate disembodied afterlife attended by future resurrection. Instead, the adoption of “soul sleep” by the SDA Church, WWCOG, and other offshoots is probably more guided by wanting to reject what is thought to be a mainline Protestant Christian doctrine. Messianic groups which tend to advocate complete unconsciousness between death and resurrection are guided by a similar impetus, but they often irresponsibly connect it with a disembodied afterlife being some form of “paganism.” Quite contrary to this, liberals and those various conservatives in contemporary theology, who believe in psychopannychy, do so on the basis of their position that the human being is an entirely physical creature, something that they believe modern science and Darwinian evolution have proven.

Those who believe in psychopannychy ultimately are confronted with a great deal of discomfort and dread when a loved one passes away, or when they are facing their own deaths. What does a pastor who is comforting a grieving family—who believes in “soul sleep”—have to offer? *That the deceased will only be steadily decomposing in a gravesite*, until some far off and distant resurrection? Rather than with Believers being with the Messiah in some kind of Paradise after death, that it will only be a matter of time before the casket seal breaks and maggots and parasites get to have their way with their father, mother, or dear friend?

It is easy to see how the traditional view of the deceased saints waiting in Heaven until the future time of resurrection, firmly based within the Scriptures, brings much comfort. A cemetery gravesite is actually an encouraging place of solace to visit—as a grave will one day be reopened with the deceased consciousness returning to a reanimated body at the Second Coming! Decomposition, regardless of how fast or slow it may be, should not frighten us—because the essential person of memory, emotion, and experience has not been buried. The one who placed his or her trust in the Messiah Yeshua is consciously in His presence, yet most is eager to return to Earth as salvation history progresses ahead. We only run into problems when we fail to emphasize the intermediate state as only temporary, and that it will be attended by a future resurrection.

Ultimately, why do some people adopt psychopannychy—a view essentially shared by atheists and agnostics that when a person dies, he or she falls into endless unconsciousness? Is a **fear of what lies beyond**? It is a failure to really contemplate the 100 billion galaxies in our known universe, and consider the multiple dimensions of existence and paralleling universes, and humans' place within the cosmic scheme? It is a phobia of recognizing that outside of all of these spheres sits a great and everlasting God to whom all must give account, and that death is the means by which the mysteries of the cosmos *begin* to be revealed to us? We may never know the final answer; the key is to know Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) as Lord and Savior and in being prepared for eternity at all times.

posted 29 March, 2011

Psychopannychy, Term: What does the term “psychopannychy” mean?

The most common term that one hears to describe the concept of deceased persons experiencing complete unconsciousness before the resurrection is **soul sleep**. A far more technical term that one may hear is **psychopannychy**. John Calvin helped to coin this term in a publication he wrote entitled *Psychopannychia* during the Reformation. The term itself is a combination of the Greek words *psuchē* (ψυχή), most commonly rendered “soul,” and *pannuchios* (παννύχιος), meaning “*lasting all the night*” (LS).^a

The problem with the concept of “soul sleep” is that in theological practice it is not a period of unconsciousness between death and resurrection, but actually one of individual extinction and re-creation—as it is predicated on the notion that the physical human body makes up the entire person. This should cause considerable doubt whether or not the person re-created at the resurrection is actually the same person who had authentically lived on Earth before, or a close facsimile.

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^a LS, 590.

Purim: Do you think that all 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 obviously 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 *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, not only because the account of Esther is a significant part of the Biblical tradition—but most especially because if the Jewish people had been eliminated, then there would have been no people of Israel and thus no Messiah. It is not only the Jewish people who survived Haman's plan that were supposed to remember *Purim*, but it was also for “their descendants and all who joined them” (v. 27, RSV). This is strong Biblical evidence for the necessity for today's Messianics to remember *Purim*.

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 fight 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.

updated 17 February, 2010