

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Sabbath, Jewish tradition: To what extent, if any, do you believe that we should follow Jewish tradition in our Sabbath observance?

Biblically, we are told that the Sabbath day is to be a time of rest for our bodies, and that we are to make it holy (Exodus 20:11; Deuteronomy 5:12). The Scriptures tell us that *Shabbat* is to be “a holy convocation” (Leviticus 23:3). How we “fill in the details” of doing this requires us to examine instances in the Scriptures where the Sabbath is being kept and determine with accuracy the *halachah* that was practiced in the First Century community of faith. Jewish studies in the New Testament are revealing more and more that Yeshua and the Apostles indeed kept many of the traditions of their time. We do not believe it is wise for us to simply dismiss tradition, as many do, but once accurately determining what the Apostles would have done in the First Century, we must ask what they would do today. Would they have gone to the synagogue on *Shabbat*? Would they light *Shabbat* candles? Would they flip on a light switch?

The Sabbath is one of the most important elements of Torah observance in the Jewish community today, and there are many wonderful traditions that we can practice as Messianic Believers in making *Shabbat* a holy time. The Sabbath table of the candle lighting, the *challah* bread, the kiddish wine, and the *Shabbat* meal, are all elements that can be partaken of today. Attending *Shabbat* services where Hebrew liturgy is used and the Torah is honored in a service can be partaken of. These are all elements of Jewish practice that are quite commonplace in the Messianic community that we encourage everyone to follow, as they can all trace their origin back to the First Century period of the Messiah, and immediately before and immediately after. Of course, there are many variants among these basic elements of *Shabbat* practice among the Jewish community today, both in Israel and the Diaspora, and we certainly expect that you would adopt them similarly and those things with which you are most comfortable.

The alternative to not following any mainline Jewish custom to make the Sabbath a special time is sitting in the dark and eating cold bread—as was the errant practice of many Karaites during the Medieval period. Some in the Messianic community insist that if something is not explicitly in the Written Torah, then it should not be followed. Unfortunately for those who hold this view, following edifying traditions was commonplace among the First Century world of Yeshua, and in the Apostolic *halachah* we see in the Messianic Scriptures. Yeshua and His Disciples were by no means “Karaites,” and we believe that if they were living today they would adhere to the basic elements of Sabbath tradition, even though probably not to the extent of the Orthodox Jewish community. We believe that they would make allowances for the evolution of technology in their orthopraxy.

For a further discussion of these, and related issues, we highly recommend you consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper*, published by TNN Press.

posted 16 February, 2006

Sabbath Violation, Alleged by Yeshua: How do you respond to the various claims that Yeshua broke the Sabbath?

Some Christians are of the position that our Messiah Yeshua, the sinless Lamb of God and perfect sacrifice for our sin, actually broke the Sabbath. This is a serious claim because if He broke the Sabbath and if He sinned, then perhaps Yeshua could not be the Messiah and His sacrifice could not atone for our sin—which 1 John 3:4 tells us is lawlessness or disobedience to the Torah.

There are two specific instances we will discuss that some Christians believe give reference to the Messiah breaking *Shabbat*.

The first claim given to prove that Messiah “broke the Sabbath” is when His Disciples were plucking grain in the fields (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5):

“At that time Yeshua went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?’” (Matthew 12:1-4).

Those who tell us from these verses that Yeshua broke the Sabbath usually quote the Pharisees who said, “Why are you doing what is not permitted to be done on the Sabbath days?” (Luke 6:2, Amplified Bible). The Complete Jewish Bible translates this as, “Why are you violating *Shabbat*?” While Yeshua is not picking the heads of grain, His Disciples are, and this reflects back on Him as their Teacher and Rabbi.

It is important for us to first note that there is no specific commandment in the Torah that forbids picking heads of grain on the Sabbath. The Greek *exesti* (ἔξεστι) correctly means “*it is allowed, it is in one's power, is possible*” (LS).^a The Mishnah includes two types of work on the Sabbath that were prohibited by Rabbis in Yeshua's day, which He could have been accused of breaking: reaping and threshing (m.*Shabbat* 7:2). Those holding a rigid interpretation of the Oral Law would have immediately accused Yeshua of doing something that was not permitted on the Sabbath. However, Luke 6:2 notably tells us, “But some of the Pharisees said.” The Scripture does not indicate that this was a position held by *all* of the Pharisees. Placing this Scripture in its appropriate historical context is imperative.

Secondly, in His response to these Pharisees, Yeshua gives the example of David and his men eating the consecrated bread that was only reserved for the priests to be eaten. This is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:3-4, 6:

“Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found.’ The priest answered David and said, ‘There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women’...So the priest gave him consecrated *bread*; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* when it was taken away.”

In the example given from the Tanach regarding David and his men, it is important to realize that the priest provided them with food from the Bread of the Presence, which was only permitted for the priests to eat. The Torah says in Leviticus 24:9 that this bread “shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD's offerings by fire, *his portion forever*.” However, because they were hungry and required sustenance, the priest gave them this bread.

Eating something to provide sustenance and thus maintain one's physical life falls into a category that the Rabbis of Judaism call *Pikku'ach Nefesh* or “regard for human life.” It is based on Leviticus 19:16: “neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour” (1917 JPS). The *ArtScroll Chumash* commentary states, “If someone's life is in danger, you must try to save him.”^b It is important that we note that this understanding has also been taken to mean, in regard to the Sabbath, that any work that is required to save a person's life takes precedence over the ritual *Shabbat* commandments of the Torah. This is the reason why in the modern State of Israel today, doctors, police, and the military are permitted to work on *Shabbat*.

Yeshua's example of David being fed by the Bread of the Presence was poignant in that the priest followed Leviticus 19:16 by providing needed sustenance to David and his party. And, His Disciples were likewise only providing for themselves the necessary food for survival. Yeshua's Disciples plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath was well permitted within the larger theological construct of First Century Judaism, but not liked by a few extremists.

^a LS, 273.

^b Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 661.

Another example often used by those who say that Yeshua broke *Shabbat* comes from John 5:6-18 where He heals a sick man on the Sabbath and then commands him to pick up his pallet and walk:

“When Yeshua saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He said to him, ‘Do you wish to get well?’ The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ Yeshua said to him, ‘Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.’ Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day” (John 5:6-9).

In these verses, we can most certainly see application of *Pikku'ach Nefesh*. Yeshua was saving the life of a person by healing him on the Sabbath. In response to this, we see the response of some of the Jews watching this: “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet” (John 5:10). These Pharisees were dismayed that the man would carry his pallet on *Shabbat*, because they believed that it was in violation of Nehemiah 13:19-20:

“It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates *so that* no load would enter on the sabbath day. Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem.”

These verses indicate that it was prohibited for loads to be carried on the Sabbath, but specifically loads relating to business and commerce. These loads were being carried into Jerusalem for buying and selling on *Shabbat*, which is why Jerusalem’s gates were closed. Without a doubt, many Pharisees considered this to be a “burden” or *masa* (מַסָּה), which means “load, burden, lifting, bearing, tribute” (*BDB*),^c which would include pallets. The Septuagint translates *masa* as *bastagma* (βάσταγμα), something specifically meaning “*that which is borne, a burden*” (*LS*),^d but it is not used in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.

What the healed man specifically carried was what the Greek calls a *krabbatos* (κράβατος), or “*a pallet, camp bed*” (*Thayer*).^e UBSHINT renders *krabbatos* as *mishkav* (מִשְׁכָּב), or simply “bed.” While sizes of beds no doubt differed, it is doubtful that this invalid’s pallet was something large and heavy. *AMG* offers us the following valuable description of a *krabbatos*:

“A small couch used by the poor. It denotes a simple kind of bed...[which] usually consisted of a padded quilt or thin mattress to be used according to the season or the condition of the owner with or without covering.”^f

With a proper understanding of *Pikku'ach Nefesh*, Yeshua did not violate the Sabbath at all by telling the healed man to pick up his pallet that was a light bed that only weighed a few pounds. Yeshua did, however, no doubt “violate” the theological opinions of this group of Pharisees. Stern observes in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, “they could not see that the formerly crippled man’s ability to carry his mat attested to God’s glory.”^g

The arguments from those who do not want to keep *Shabbat* will go on and on. Many people will try to present cases that seemingly prove that Messiah Yeshua, the sinless Lamb of God and who is One with the Father, violated the Sabbath and broke His own commandments. Sadly, these arguments are not placed within the framework of First Century Judaism, and often relate to Christians’ ignorance of the historical occurrence of Biblical events. Knowing what these things properly mean and how they relate to us today is only further reason for us to continually study the Gospels from a distinct Messianic viewpoint.

(This includes excerpts from the editor’s article “Is Sunday ‘the Lord’s Day?’”)

^c *BDB*, 672.

^d *LS*, 148.

^e *Thayer*, 358.

^f Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 883.

^g Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 168.

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Sacrifices, Millennium: Do you believe that there will be animal sacrifices during the Millennial Kingdom? If so, would these sacrifices be an affront to the final sacrifice of the Messiah?

Ezekiel chapters 40-44, speaking of the Millennial Temple, tell us that there will be animal sacrifices during the Messianic Age. Ezekiel 44:10-11 describes the Levites in the Millennial Temple performing animal sacrifices:

“But the Levites who went far from Me when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, shall bear the punishment for their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them.”

Many Christian prophecy teachers, who we would describe as being against the validity of the Torah for Believers today, even recognize the reality of animal sacrifices being performed by Levites during the Millennium. Tim LaHaye states in his *Prophecy Study Bible*, commenting on Ezekiel 43:15-27, that “The offerings will be memorial and retrospective, looking back to Christ’s finished work on the cross, instead of looking forward to Christ.”^a These same sentiments are repeated by John F. Walvoord, former chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, in his book *Israel in Prophecy*:

“A number of Scriptures also describe the temple worship which will characterize the millennial kingdom. According to Ezekiel, a magnificent temple will be built, and a system of priesthood and memorial sacrifices will be set up...Some have felt it impossible to have a system of animal sacrifices subsequent to the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross in light of New Testament passages stating that the sacrifice of Christ makes other sacrifices unnecessary. Though varied explanations have been given for Ezekiel 40-48 which unfolds these details, no satisfactory explanation has been made other than that it is a description of millennial worship. In any case, it is clear that the sacrifices are not expiatory, but merely memorials of the one complete sacrifice of Christ. If in the wisdom and sovereign pleasure of God the detailed system of sacrifices in the Old Testament were a suitable foreshadowing of that which would be accomplished by the death of His Son, and if a memorial of Christ’s death is to be enacted, it would not seem unfitting that some sort of a sacrificial system would be used.”^b

Any animal sacrifices restored to the Temple in Jerusalem during the Millennium will be a memorial of Yeshua’s final sacrifice for us. As pre-millennialists, we all believe the Lord will be there in person to explain to us the exact significance of what these sacrifices mean.

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^a Tim LaHaye, ed., *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, KJV (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2000), 885.

^b John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), pp 125-126.

Scripture Interpretation: Can you give me some basic guidelines for interpreting Scripture?

1. Always let Scripture interpret Scripture. Many things in the Bible can often be understood by looking at a variety of verses. If we consider God to be the ultimate author, then there are no (significant) contradictions in the text, and if something looks like it contradicts something else, it must be reconciled in some way. In all things, **Yeshua the Messiah's words stand as the final revelation.**

2. Make regular use of Hebrew and Greek lexicons and dictionaries. Remember that there are limitations with English Bible translations. This is true of both Christian and Jewish Bibles. Always be sure to consult the meanings of original language words, which you will find often have a wide array of meanings.

3. Never forget the historical context of the writing of Scripture. Know what was going on in the world or in the region of a Scriptural event. It is important, for example, to understand about Ancient Egypt to understand the Exodus. Know something about Ancient Assyria, Babylon, and Persia to understand the division and dispersion of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms and Judah's return to the Land of Israel. Be especially familiar with Israel at the time of Yeshua and the divisions that existed between the Pharisees and Sadducees. Knowing about Ancient Greece and Rome is imperative to understand what Paul encountered on his missionary journeys and the letters he wrote to specific congregations.

4. Take into account various idioms or expressions, especially in the Gospel accounts. In many cases, misinterpretations of Scripture have occurred because people have failed to understand a specific expression or saying that has been translated literally into English, and because a knowledge of the times has not been emphasized, people have often misinterpreted it. A modern day example would be like saying "Bob Smith is a cool guy" and in Spanish saying that "Bob Smith es un hombre frío," and Spanish-speakers assuming that his body has a temperature control problem, not that he is a good person. The same can often be said of various expressions in the Gospels. We must know the history behind them.

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Sensationalism, Messianic: It seems to me as though many Messianic Bible teachers rely on sensationalism. Can you explain why this might be the case?

In all candor, we cannot be responsible for other Messianic Bible teachers. Simply because one might call himself or herself "Messianic," does not automatically mean that all Messianic Bible teachers are in agreement on various doctrinal issues, or for that same matter have the same kind of attitude or teaching style.

It is very true that there is sensationalism employed by various teachers in the Messianic community today. Such teachers often rely on "one-liners" or incomplete statements that are designed to manipulate a crowd, as opposed to delving into the Scriptures in a fair-minded and scholarly way. Sadly, there are those whose ministries are focused more on what "sounds good," than on what helps people grow spiritually. These ministries focus too much on the ills of mainstream Christianity and use insulting and degrading techniques to get their points across, rather than being constructive and spiritually edifying with a firm Biblical foundation.

TNN Online abhors sensationalism and the techniques employed by a few. The message of Torah observance and one being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel is controversial enough, and fuel does not need to be added to an already hot fire. We purposefully choose to distance ourselves from sensationalistic methods, and instead rely on the Scriptures for our answers and let appropriate Biblical scholarship persuade others of our positions. Insulting people or trying to come across as so-called "prophets" or "men of insight" is not something we believe is appropriate for the growth and development of the Messianic community.

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Septuagint (LXX): Why do you consult the Septuagint frequently?

The Septuagint (LXX) is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, dating at least two centuries before the First Coming of Yeshua. It was originally compiled for the Jewish community in Alexandria, and quickly became the authorized Scriptures of Diaspora Judaism. The Septuagint largely represents a Pharisaic style of theology, *halachah*, and messianic expectation, and clarifies many things in the Tanach where the Hebrew may be imprecise or vague. As should be expected, there are some distinct theological interjections into the text, as it is not a “word-for-word” translation of the Hebrew. The LXX would read more like today’s New International Version, when compared to the more literal New American Standard. The LXX gives us an excellent “bridge” of vocabulary words between the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, enables us to see how Jews translated the Tanach Hebrew into Greek, and allows us to see how they used the Greek language.

In the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), there has been misunderstanding among some Christians when it comes to words that are often only examined in the context of the Greek New Testament, and perhaps even classical Greek philosophy. The Septuagint, as it is known today, was well-circulated throughout the Mediterranean, and was the canonical Scripture of the Greek-Speaking Jewish synagogues of the Diaspora. The majority of quotations or allusions in the New Testament from the Old Testament come from the Septuagint. The author of Hebrews, for example, makes all of his unique arguments about Yeshua from the distinct renderings we see in the LXX. Keeping this in mind, we gain valuable insight in understanding the Greek vocabulary that is used in the New Testament, as the same would have been used in the Septuagint. Seeing these Greek words in the Septuagint, we can often see Hebraic concepts behind them via the Tanach, thus gaining a fuller theological picture of what a Biblical author may be trying to communicate.

The Apostles’ usage of the Septuagint in the Gospels and Epistles is a strong indication that they gave it a great deal of authority—otherwise they would not have used it. Unfortunately, much of today’s emerging Messianic movement does not consider the historical importance of the Septuagint, and the LXX gets frequently put aside in our exegesis. This will have to change in the coming years if we intend to have a better and more complete picture of the First Century world in which the Apostles lived. While our exegesis of the Tanach should come first from the Hebrew text, we should certainly give the Greek Septuagint strong consideration as it is its oldest textual witness, and was validated by the Apostles.

For a further examination on the importance of the Septuagint, consult the book *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* by R. Timothy McLay (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

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Smoking, Tobacco: Does the Bible say anything about smoking tobacco?

As it relates to the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, many Christian pastors declare from the pulpit that God has made all animals acceptable for eating, while at the same time strongly condemning the consumption of alcoholic beverages and smoking tobacco. We believe that this is a double standard used to judge others because there is *more* spoken of in the Scriptures about food and eating than about drinking or smoking. Alfred J. Kolatch astutely observes in his *Jewish Book of Why*, “The smoking of tobacco is not mentioned in the Bible.”^a

We do not encourage people to regularly smoke tobacco, as there are health risks associated with it. However, there is no specific reference to smoking tobacco at all in the

^a Alfred J. Kolatch, *The Jewish Book of Why* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1981), 295.

Scriptures, so technically the Word of God does not directly condemn it as “sin.” Smoking is not a healthy habit.

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Software, Bible: Is there any Bible software that you can recommend that I use for my studies?

There are some excellent software programs on the market, each of which includes a good balance of Bible versions, original language texts, Hebrew and Greek lexicons, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, and commentaries. Depending on how much money you want to spend, “the sky’s the limit,” so to speak.

By far, the best software program available on the market for MS Windows users is BibleWorks (www.bibleworks.com). This application is used by most seminaries and includes a wide array of English translations and original language texts, and includes the ability to search the original language texts.

Logos (www.logos.com) and QuickVerse (www.quickverse.com) both offer users with a wide array of packages ranging from tools for the standard user to the Biblical scholar. They range in price with the amount of resources you purchase from them.

An excellent free software program that many people have started using is E-Sword (www.e-sword.net) which has a variety of translations, lexicons, dictionaries, and commentaries. One downside to using E-Sword is that you must install it module by module, as opposed to all at once.

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Soul, term: If the Bible most often depicts human beings as “souls,” then what term do you think should be used to describe the core person?

It can frequently go without noticing that the main terms translated into English as “soul” in most Bibles, *nefesh* (נֶפֶשׁ) and *psuchē* (ψυχή), have a rather wide array of meanings.^a One of the main meanings of the term “soul” is to simply represent the person as a whole, and not an immaterial consciousness. When Jeremiah 6:16 says “you will find rest for your souls” (cf. Matthew 11:29), or Acts 2:41 records “that day there were added about three thousand souls,” people and not just an immaterial consciousness are in view. Still, in a passage like Revelation 6:9, where John testifies “I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God,” this is an indication that “soul” can be used, albeit infrequently, to speak of an immaterial or non-corporeal part of one’s being. Likewise when Rachel died, it is said that “her soul was departing” (Genesis 35:18). Most often, though, when the term “soul” is witnessed in Scripture, a person is what is in view.

The challenge that one finds when entering into the human composition debate, is that there is enough flexibility in the terms *nefesh* and *psuchē* to allow for it to speak of a disembodied person. In popular speech, even that which one may find in (too much of) today’s evangelical Christianity, “the soul” is believed to be the essential core person. Among those who hold to a monistic anthropology, “the soul” is the whole person *only*, and it is to be considered entirely synonymous with the body. While it is true that we are to largely view ourselves as *being* souls and not *having* souls, the human person or “soul” *only* being a physical entity is frequently a theological overreaction to how the term “soul” is popularly associated with total disembodiment being the final condition for the redeemed. A third way definitely needs to be veered between the materialism of monism, and the incorrect assessment of a total disembodiment schema.

The main issue is what we should call the core person after death, if the term “soul” is not frequently used in this manner. J.A. Motyer describes how “when people die they change from a

^a *BDB*, pp 659-661; *LS*, 903.

body-soul state; they leave earth...a change of place; but the person continues.”^b Within the Tanach, one term that is witnessed to describe those who are deceased, but who are to some degree conscious, is *rephaim* (רפאים) or “shades.” In Isaiah 14:9 it is witnessed, “Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come, it rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations” (RSV), as the king of Babylon is cast out of his grave into the netherworld (Isaiah 14:20). Another term witnessed to describe the deceased is “spirits,” as the author of Hebrews details how Believers are a part of “the general assembly and [congregation] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous [*pneumasi dikaiōn*, πνεύμασι δικαίων] made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23).

What is perhaps the most useful of all the terms used to describe the deceased, is simply witnessed in Paul’s writings as he refers to the “I” self or *egō* (ἐγώ). In two the most commonly referred to passages on the intermediate state, there is no reference made to the “soul” or “spirit,” but simply to the “I” or “we” personality (witnessed by the verbs):

- “[W]e are of good courage [*tharroumen*, θαρροῦμεν]^c, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).
- “But I am hard-pressed [*sunechomai*, συνέχομαι]^d from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Messiah, for that is very much better” (Philippians 1:23).

That Paul prefers the language of *egō* to describe a duality in human composition is witnessed in 2 Corinthians 4:16, where he mentions the inner self and outer self: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (ESV). A literal rendering of *ho exō hēmōn anthrōpos* (ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος) is “the outer I-our person,” contrasted to *ho esō hēmōn [anthrōpos]* (ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν [ἄνθρωπος]), “the inner I-our [person].” The “outer self” is the body that is subject to old age and deterioration, but the “inner self” is the core person of memory, emotions, creative abilities, artistic talent, and comprehensive thought and reason. In his discussion about the intermediate state between death and resurrection, John W. Cooper prefers to speak in terms of the “I” personality that needs to survive in some way, in order to be later resurrected:

“[I]f I am with Christ, then I—my essential selfhood or core personhood—must survive physical death. The being or entity who I am must continue to exist...I must somehow be aware of myself as the same person who formerly lived on earth, for that is essential to my self-identification as one of the redeemed. All of this must be possible without my bodily organism.”^e

Cooper goes on to conclude, “When we die, there is a dichotomy of ego and the earthly organism. We are constituted in such a way that we can survive ‘coming apart’ at death, unnatural as this may be.”^f Remember that Yeshua’s own defense of the doctrine of resurrection to the Sadducees was that the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob may be regarded as “living” (Mark 12:26-27; Matthew 22:32; Luke 20:37-38). If these three main figures of the Torah continue to exist and are “living” somewhere, even in a bodiless condition, it seems logical that if there is a resurrection of the dead, a prerequisite for it would be for the essential self or person—the “I” or *egō*—to continue to exist after death in another dimension.

Because of the way that the term “soul” has sometimes been overly used to describe the essential personhood of someone, various materials written by TNN Online editor J.K. McKee have instead widely employed the term **consciousness**. By using the term consciousness, “the

^b J.A. Motyer, *After Death: What Happens When You Die?* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1996), 46.

^c First person, present active indicative plural of *tharseō* (θαρσέω).

^d First person, present passive indicative singular of *sunechō* (συνέχω).

^e John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 177.

^f *Ibid*, 178.

totality of one's thoughts and feelings" clearly implying "awareness,"⁸ we describe that part of the human being which has to be held in another dimension until the time of the resurrection, the consciousness including: the brain patterns, memory, and personality. The difference between the human consciousness and an animal's consciousness is quite clear: human beings have complex memories, emotions, experiences, and creative abilities which define not only who they are, but who they are *in relationship* to their Creator as either redeemed or unredeemed. In stark contrast all animals act entirely on instincts such as: survival, eating, sleeping, mating, and having some exercise. God can recreate the animals in the eschaton without any problem; He cannot recreate human beings in the resurrection without their essential selves being preserved somewhere in the meantime. The Holy Scriptures give us ample evidence in support of a conscious intermediate state before the resurrection in another dimension, Heaven or Hell, solving such a problem.

If you are used to using the term "soul," it might be a good idea for you to start thinking about it in terms of either soul-consciousness or spirit-consciousness.

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⁸ *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus*, second edition (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc, 2002), 132.

Strong's Concordance: Why do you seem to discourage Believers from using Strong's Concordance?

We discourage Believers from using Strong's Concordance because Strong's Concordance is an incomplete resource. First of all, the Strong's Concordance Hebrew and Greek dictionary is an abbreviated dictionary, and does not include detailed usages of words in various Biblical contexts. Secondly, its English concordance is limited to the King James Version of the Bible (or other versions depending on the edition), and can be easily replaced by employing Bible software that will do extensive text searches in any version. Thirdly, for a Messianic movement that desperately needs to improve its scholastic abilities, it must be emphasized that Strong's Concordance is **not used in academic circles**. Strong's Concordance was compiled to be a lay resource, for those with little or no knowledge of Biblical languages or how to search the Scriptures. It was put together to give the layperson a "taste" of these things, but by no means be the "final" source.

One of the extreme problems that exist among Bible students who are "stuck" using Strong's Concordance is thinking that it is the "end-all" place for answers. It is not. Simply looking up the definition of a Hebrew or Greek word in Strong's Concordance will often not help with one's theology or understanding of a Biblical text. The definition of Hebrew verbs, for example, is affected by what verb stem is being used. The only way to identify the proper verb stem is to know Hebrew, and either have the verb stems memorized, or be able to use an analytical lexicon or parsing tool to know what it is. Likewise, the proper translation of Greek verbs is often affected by the mood, aspect, and time of the verb, and these can only be identified by knowing Greek, and either having them memorized, or employing an analytical lexicon or parsing tool. Furthermore, Strong's Concordance will not tell you the basic details of either Hebrew or Greek grammar, which affects our theology every bit as much as the definitions of a word. Being able to make a theological point from Hebrew or Greek grammar requires one to have a working knowledge of these two languages, and this is not a skill possessed by most Messianic Bible teachers.

In addition to this, our theology is also substantially affected by the history and culture in the times in which a Scripture text was composed. Strong's Concordance does not go into the details of describing how Hebrew or Greek words were used in their ancient setting, notably how they may have been used in extra-Biblical contexts.

What we encourage Believers to do is to go beyond the incomplete resource that Strong's Concordance is, and take advantage of many of the inexpensive, and more user-friendly tools that are on the market. There are some excellent, more thorough resources available for the layperson that will help immensely, and answer many questions that Strong's Concordance is simply incapable of answering. Two resources that we highly recommend, for those of you who are unfamiliar with either Hebrew or Greek, are the *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* and *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, both produced by AMG Publishers.

For a further examination of this subject, consult the editor's article "**Getting Beyond Strong's Concordance.**"

posted 29 January, 2006

Sukkot: How do I celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles? My Messianic fellowship is going away to a large gathering of thousands of people and I cannot get off work.

One of the instructions regarding *Sukkot* or the Feast of Tabernacles is, "Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses" (Deuteronomy 16:15a). Few would disagree that this place or *maqom* (מקום) is Jerusalem. (It is not some rural campground in North America or elsewhere.) The Feast of Tabernacles is a holiday where it was originally commanded, "Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your

God in the place which He chooses” (Deuteronomy 16:16a), as *Sukkot* was originally one of the three pilgrimage festivals along with Passover and *Shavuot*.

The purpose of commemorating the Feast of Tabernacles was so that the Israelites could remember the journeys of their ancestors in the wilderness—delivered by God from Egypt. Leviticus 23:43 specifies that it was codified, “so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt.” But far be it from the Feast of Tabernacles being some kind of rural festival; being brought to Jerusalem to celebrate *Sukkot* makes it a very cosmopolitan festival. It is a picture of the ultimate tabernacling or dwelling in eternity between God and the redeemed, specified in Revelation 21:3: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.” This will occur in the city of New Jerusalem. The cosmopolitan aspect of *Sukkot* is emphasized in the mainline Jewish observance and traditions of the festival.

While many observant Jews, and even Messianics, make the effort to go to Jerusalem during the festival of *Sukkot*, most are not able to do so because of economic constraints. Instead, the local synagogue and one’s home become the focal points of one’s remembrance. Jewish synagogues often erect some kind of *sukkah* (סֻכָּה) on the congregation’s property, often with an event or series of events throughout the week where the synagogue members can fellowship and commemorate. Congregational members will likewise be encouraged to erect a three-sided *sukkah* in their backyards, or if they have an apartment, on their outer patio or terrace. The *sukkah* will be a place where many people eat their meals, and even where a few people will sleep. For the most part, Messianic Jewish observance of *Sukkot* is not that unlike the Synagogue, with the congregation and one’s home being the main places of remembrance.

Since the mid-to-late 1990s, though, it has become quite en vogue—at least in some sectors of the independent Messianic community—to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles at a rural campground, often with thousands of other people. Families will often put aside money and actually spend the week of *Sukkot* as their yearly vacation. At these various *Sukkot* functions, there will often be a variety of teachings and Messianic workshops on Torah observance, Messianic lifestyle issues, a marketplace for sales, etc. People with minutely small congregations and fellowships find these functions as the only time that they can really interact with Messianics on any kind of large scale. Being present in the company of hundreds of other Messianics for a week of *Sukkot* commemoration and teaching is perceived to be the yearly highlight of their Messianic faith experience.

This latter style of observing the Feast of Tabernacles, while perhaps fulfilling a need for some people, has actually developed a few issues that congregational leaders and teachers need to be aware of for their local ministry. Many congregational leaders who have larger fellowships may witness a small “exodus” of various families and people to these large *Sukkot* gatherings—away from the focus of their local congregational body and plans. Likewise, the sheer size of many of these large *Sukkot* gatherings at rural campgrounds, means that properly monitoring things becomes impossible, and there can inevitably be some kind of an incident among the attendees. As a ministry which has monitored this over the past decade, we do know of several large Feast of Tabernacles gatherings where the testimony to the local Christian community is not that people are being changed by the Lord and receiving a greater portion of His Holy Spirit. Attendees often return to their home congregations from these functions having heard various sensationalistic teachings (usually about end-time predictions), complicating what the local leader must teach on with a new Torah cycle preparing to begin.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a wonderful time for us to consider our Heavenly Father’s desire to commune with us in a very real way. None of us should forget the Apostle John’s teaching about Yeshua’s Incarnation: “the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us” (John 1:14a, YLT). As a ministry, we encourage *Sukkot* to be a time of both family and congregational bonding. It is a time where Messianic fellowships can minister to the local community by having a *sukkah* on their congregational property, and where families can have a *sukkah* in their backyards.

Just as the Lord invites us to dwell with Him, so can we invite our friends, neighbors, and colleagues to dwell with us during the week. *Sukkot* is a time when we remember the rural conditions of the Ancient Israelites in a very cosmopolitan way.

posted 13 October, 2008

Synagogue of Satan: I have been told by some Messianic Jews that anyone who believes in the prophesied restoration of the Two Houses of Israel, is actually a part of the “synagogue of Satan” in Revelation. Is there any basis to this? What is the Synagogue of Satan?

Any interpretation over what “the synagogue of Satan” is, as it appears in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, is going to be controversial. In order to fairly evaluate what “the synagogue of Satan” actually is, one needs to carefully recognize some of the ancient historical issues, which did involve some conflicts the Believers had with some parts of the local Jewish community. At the same time, any conclusion about what “the synagogue of Satan” is, also needs to steadfastly recognize that there is nothing that requires the Greek term *sunagōgē* (συναγωγή) or “synagogue” to always represent an assembly of Jews.

There is nothing particularly special about the Greek word *sunagōgē* (συναγωγή), often translated “synagogue.” The term *sunagōgē* is derived from the verb *sunageirō* (συναγείρω), meaning “to gather together, come together, assemble” (LS).^a Although *sunagōgē* is the root word for our modern term “synagogue,” usually associated with a Jewish place of worship, it could just as well mean an assemblage or a gathering of something. There is a pre-Jewish usage of the term *sunagōgē*, attested by the *Liddell-Scott* lexicon, which is primarily interested in classical Greek meanings. For its entry on the term *sunagōgē*, it lists the possible meanings:

- a gathering in of harvest, Polyb.
- a drawing together, contracting, ζ. στρατιᾶς a forming an army in column, Plat.; ζ. τοῦ προσώπου a pursing up or wrinkling of the face, Isocr.
- a collection of writings, Arist.
- a conclusion, inference, Id.^b

A general meaning of the Greek term *sunagōgē* (συναγωγή) is simply “gathering,” as *BDAG* notes, “Orig. in act. sense ‘a bringing together, assembling.’”^c With this in mind, if we can call “the synagogue of Satan” the more neutral “the gathering of Satan,” then it should be clear to anyone that such a gathering or group of people is composed of *all of those* who are accomplishing Satan’s tasks and assignments—the foremost of which is keeping people away from the truth of the gospel and the saving power of Yeshua (Jesus). “The gathering of Satan” engulfs all of Satan’s forces. Such people are a part of what we might call a “macro-synagogue of Satan,” involving members of false religions who actively blaspheme the Lord, and atheists who want people to deny the existence of God. At the same time, there is also what we might call a “micro-synagogue of Satan,” composing some Jewish people, who are actually out there accomplishing the enemy’s tasks. It should be hard for any good Messianic Believer to not classify Jewish anti-missionaries, for example—those who are actively out there trying to get people to deny Yeshua as the Messiah—as being among the Adversary’s forces.

The terminology *sunagōgē tou Satana* (συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ) appears twice in the Book of Revelation:

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan [*sunagōgē tou Satana*, συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ]” (Revelation 2:9).

^a LS, 766.

^b Ibid.

^c *BDAG*, 963.

“Behold, I will cause *those* of the synagogue of Satan [*tēs sunagōgēs tou Satana*, τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ], who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you” (Revelation 3:9).

Approaching the term *sunagōgē* (συναγωγή) more as “**gathering**” is appropriate, because Revelation 2:9 notably lacks the definite article. Those who are criticized are labeled as “a synagogue of Satan,” and as previously described, are only one part of *all* of the Adversary’s forces.

Various interpretations of what “the synagogue of Satan” is, or was, throughout history, have been used at times to defame Judaism and all Jewish people. In extreme cases it has been used as theological justification by anti-Semites to persecute Jews.^d A widespread evangelical Christian interpretation of the “synagogue of Satan” is that it represents the First Century Judaizers, possibly being non-Jews who converted to Judaism and then received the gospel message. It is thought that these Judaizers held a hard disdain toward non-Jewish Believers who did not have to “convert” as they did, and they demanded a legalistic Torah observance from them.

Some of the challenges to this view, is that in early Christian history, in Smyrna at least (Revelation 2:8-11), there was a sector of the Jewish community that had a serious problem with the Believers. “The Martyrdom of Polycarp...records that Jews brought wood for his pyre even though it was a sabbath” (*ISBE*).^e G.R. Beasley-Murray is right to indicate, though, “Naturally this is not to be generalized, as though John believed that the whole Jewish nation had become the people of Satan. His description applies to a synagogue which implacably opposed the people of Christ.”^f

It is true that there are some “who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars” (Revelation 3:9, NIV). One needs to properly weigh the words of the Apostle Paul, who when directing specific instruction to the Jews among the assembly at Rome, wrote some very stringent words on what it means to truly be a “Jew”:

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God” (Romans 2:28-29).

Here, writing some specific words to the Jewish Believers in Rome, he says that being a “Jew” is ultimately something that is determined by the heart. This indicates that from the Apostle’s perspective, even though some people could be born Jewish, in the end because of rejecting the good news of Messiah Yeshua, they may not be considered as such by God. In the case of Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, it would seem that the work of the Believers in Smyrna and Philadelphia is opposed by a sector of Jews who are determined to stop them. As far as Yeshua the Messiah is concerned, they will not be considered Jews in the end, if they remain unrepentant. They are to be counted as “**the gathering of the Adversary.**”

To say that all Jews in history since have been part of such a “gathering of the Adversary” goes too far, and is unjustifiable. The terminology “the synagogue of Satan” concerns a certain sector of Jewish people who opposed the Messiah as associated with the congregations at Smyrna and Philadelphia, and by extension whatever those two congregations might represent for various sectors of the Body of Messiah subsequent to Yeshua’s return.

From what angle is it claimed that those who affirm the prophecies of a larger restoration of Israel, involving the descendants of the exiled Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim, are actually “the synagogue of Satan”? This point of view has found some ancillary support in David H. Stern’s remarks on Revelation 2:9, in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*:

“Should it nevertheless be though improbable that Gentiles would call themselves Jews, Hebrews or Israelites, consider the following modern examples. The ‘British Israelites’ regard the British as the Ten Lost Tribes. The Mormons not only consider themselves to be the Ten Lost

^d Cf. Craig S. Keener, *NIV Application Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 118.

^e R. North, “Smyrna,” in *ISBE*, 4:556.

^f G.R. Beasley-Murray, *New Century Bible Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 82.

Tribes but regard themselves as Jews and everyone else (real Jews included) as Gentiles! A sect of mostly American-born blacks consider themselves the true Hebrews; several thousand of them are living in Israel. All of these are outside the pale of Christianity. In addition, scattered about are well-meaning Gentile Christians whose strong identification with and love for the Jewish people has made them believe—with a shred of evidence—that they are actually Jewish themselves.”^g

Stern is right to direct our attention to how there have always been those groups who have always claimed that they are the “true Israel” or “new Israel,” be it through replacement theology or phenomena such as British-Israelism. These groups often disclude the historical Jewish people, those who are legitimate descendants of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (and Judah), claiming that only they are the “true Jews.” Such groups are, without a doubt, accomplishing the Adversary’s tasks and purposes.

However, a wide number of today’s Two-House adherents do not think they are the “true Jews”; at the very least they feel themselves to be citizens of the Commonwealth of Israel *alongside* of their fellow Jewish Believers (cf. Ephesians 2:11-13). As it concerns whoever the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim turns out to be, such people (whoever they are) would necessarily not be “Jews,” as the term “Jew” was not really used in force until after the Southern Kingdom’s exile to Babylon was over.^h Such people would instead be the descendants of the exiled Northern Kingdom.

Can it be concluded with any degree of accuracy that those who affirm—from a series of prophecies in the Tanach (Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 31:6-10; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 10:6-10)—that a greater restoration of Israel is to be anticipated, that they are “the synagogue of Satan”? Given the possibility that some Messianic Jews might rebukingly say that those who believe in any form of Two-House teaching are of “the synagogue of Satan,” a greater reunion of all Israel needs to be placed within the Jewish eschatological expectationⁱ (as well as in line with a basic pre-millennial model), and any non-Jewish adherents of a Two-House teaching need to encourage great respect for the Jewish people, Judaism, and Jewish tradition and culture. In too many cases, though, some adherents being classified as being a part of “the gathering of Satan,” is not that off the mark, when a wide amount disrespect for Judaism (as well as Christianity) is found in some parts of the Two-House sub-movement.^j

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^g David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 796.

^h J.A. Sanders, “Jew,” in *IDB*, 2:897; W.W. Gasque, “Jew,” in *ISBE*, 2:1056.

ⁱ As is observed in the Conservative Jewish Torah commentary *Eitz Hayim* for Haftarah *Va-Yiggash* (Genesis 44:18-47:27; Ezekiel 37:15-28),

“[This text] focuses on settlement in the Land, and the new sanctuary. The elements of ingathering, monarchy, repurification, and Temple building constitute the main configuration of messianic hope for ancient Israel and for subsequent Jewish generations...[A] recurrent theme is ‘permanence,’ expressed as a permanent change from the past and as a vision of a permanent future” (David L. Lieber, ed. [New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2001], 290).

Also consult the editor’s article “Revisiting the Two-House Teaching,” under the sub-section “Some Ancient Views on the Lost Tribes from Extra-Biblical Jewish Sources.”

^j Consult the editor’s article, “Anti-Semitism in the Two-House Movement,” for a further review.