

# Blogging and Clogging: Information Overload and the Mass Market

by J.K. McKee posted 01 February, 2007 www.tnnonline.net

When many Believers today examine Daniel 12:4, “conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase,” it is not difficult to connect the concepts of mass transportation and mass communication and see some fulfillment. We live in a time where the way we live is changing, and we are definitely being forced to see the world from a different perspective. In earlier times, the ability to travel and have access to mass information was only available to a small few or the extremely rich. Now, you can go online and bid for that dream vacation, go shopping and earn airline miles to cash in later, or type a few keystrokes and be burdened (or burned) with having to wade through pages and pages of material on an endless array of topics.

We live in an age when it is very easy for one to hop on a plane and travel places that even twenty years ago were difficult to go to. Airports are getting bigger and consumers want more options. People are no longer content with having to make three, two, or even one stop to change planes to fly international. The upcoming Boeing 737-700ER is a narrow bodied aircraft that can carry 126 passengers as much as 5,510 nautical miles. It can fly across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans from either the East or West Coast. While travelers flying to London may previously have only had the option of flying from a major Eastern gateway such as New York, Washington, Atlanta, or Miami, we may begin to see smaller and more rural markets open up to such choice destinations. The possibilities are definitely changing, and they will certainly change how we live and interact with global society.

But not everyone has a dream of sitting on a Southwest Airlines flight from Nashville to London’s Stansted Airport eating peanuts for eleven hours. Some can barely stand sitting on a SWA flight for two hours eating peanuts! The consumer that wants to travel in more style will inevitably go online and try to find a better and more comfortable option so he or she can fly on a widebody aircraft with more legroom and cabin space. But then, if the price is right, some will choose the discount carrier and think nothing of the potential discomfort.

Traveling is ultimately a matter of getting from point A to point B, with the necessity of sometimes going through A’ or B’ to get to one’s destination. Whether you get there eating peanuts, pretzels, or a gourmet meal in first class is ultimately of no consequence. Daniel was only told that “Many will range far and wide” (NJPS), and was not necessarily told the details of how they will do it. And, this is by no means only limited to air travel.

The second part of Daniel’s prophecy is by far more complicated: “knowledge will increase.” The NRSV actually renders this as “evil will increase,” clearly an interpretation from its translators, but one that cannot be easily disregarded. HALOT defines the term *da’at* (דַּעַת) as “**knowledge in general,**” specifically “**technical knowledge, ability,**” as well as “of good and evil.” In certain contexts *da’at* can also mean “**discernment, understanding.**” “Knowledge” as a general term can mean a variety of things in Scripture, each contingent on context. But when it comes to prophecy, rendering or understanding it as something other than “information” is a serious value judgment, and should cause all of us to think for a moment.

This year, TNN Online will be celebrating its tenth anniversary as a website on the Internet. TNN Online originally began in 1997 as a hobby for me wanting to discuss my views of various end-time issues. I had no idea the website would have lasted as long as it has. Today, while discussing prophecy issues still remains a theme of our ministry outreach, Messianic theology is undoubtedly *the* major theme. As I have interacted with website visitors and ministry supporters over the years, the array of information needed to be addressed has ballooned—and shows no sign of slowing down. We have started to go places and address theological issues that few in today’s Messianic community have been willing to address. Or, if anyone has addressed these issues, it has often not been in a fair or reasonable way.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:228-229.

One of the major reasons why we have had to remain on the theological forefront has been because of the great explosion of information in the past ten years with the advent of the Internet. Ten years ago in 1997, most consumers did not have access to high speed cable or DSL web access. If they did, it was certainly not something affordable. But, by 2000 and 2001 the market slowly began to open up to offering it at reasonable prices. The ability to download something fast did not change the average person's usage of e-mail or reading news articles—but did enable convenient access to large downloads, namely audio and visual media.

Of course, if one is going to have a faster access to the Internet and be downloading a great deal of “stuff,” you need a larger hard drive. The price of computers has been reduced considerably over the past five years. The desktop computer that I purchased in 2001 for \$1,500 was replaced with one in 2004 that I purchased for just over \$400—and it can perform far, far more operations. When I replace this computer, what will the price difference be? When I get a computer catalog in the mail, my mouth drops when I look at the prices and how “cheap” they are sometimes. This is not because the computers advertised are necessarily “substandard”; the computer market is able to easily sustain more for less, and that more for less can often be of very high quality. And certainly, three years ago if you were to tell me that I would have a 19” flatscreen LCD monitor, I would say that you were joking. But, I was able to take advantage of a sale and purchase a name brand flatscreen for \$175. Plus on top of this, I got 450 frequent flier miles for it. And don't even get me started on my MP3 player...

Over twenty years ago my mother bought the original Macintosh computer for just a little over \$3,500. It could only run a handful of applications, and those operations needed to run on floppy disk. That old Mac ended up being sold at a garage sale to someone who wanted to turn the case into a fishbowl. Where will my LCD screen be in ten years? Will it be obsolete, or just a hand-me-down to another user as I look into my 36” transparent flatscreen that I purchased for a mere \$50?

I say all of this to demonstrate that the means to access information—and access it quite easily and affordably—has severely changed. These phenomena certainly affect the way that we live and function as members of society, and it would be naïve of us to say that they do not affect the way that we conduct ourselves as Messianic Believers. A sizeable part of the growth of today's Messianic movement can be attributed to the Internet. Messianic websites and online venues are popping up every day. Much of this is good, as it indicates that people are talking about the Hebraic Roots of their faith and want to learn more. But much of this is not good, as the Internet is a place where anyone can do anything and there are no “police” to stop bad things from happening. Each individual must learn to police what he or she reads.

Very few know this, but when the TNN Online website started in 1997, it originally began with me tinkering around on Geocities, which at the time offered free web pages. As the website got larger it became more and more apparent that a permanent location would need to be found. After being at several “/tribnews” locations in 1998, the domain “tribnews.net” was founded in 1999, with “tnnonline.net” secured in 2000. This has remained our permanent location for the past seven years. But within this time span, many more free web page services have arisen, along with a number of tools and resources that have changed the scope and feel of the Internet. Some of these have been good, and some of these have come with problems.

Anyone with the ability to produce a website can essentially write down and post *anything* that he or she wants. **It is up to the person producing that information to make sure that it is accurate, factual, and true.** It is up to the person reading that information to make sure that it is credible. This remains a fact whether someone reads the online edition of the Washington Post or community events from Billy Bob's Home Page. The price of setting up a website for the average person has become quite affordable along with the price of a computer.

**The responsibility of a website owner to use his or her website space properly is also much higher.** This is one of the reasons why TNN Online is *continually adding* new things, and why we are so meticulous in explaining things with outside resources—particularly printed books. Thankfully, we are certainly not the only Messianic website that does this—but there are those

who just post or say things without providing any documentation or support for their theological conclusions. For several years we have warned many website readers to be careful about what they examine online, and to exhibit caution and discernment. Simply because something has a label of being “Messianic” does not automatically mean that it is credible or factual. There are many “Messianic” websites that are sensationalistic and have damaged the credibility of what the Lord is trying to do in this hour.

But things have gotten even more complicated in the past few years, as having the ability to have an expensive or free website has expanded into other venues. For some individuals, it is not enough to simply be able to setup a small website and post pictures of the family vacation or list favorite recipes. For many, going to the Internet is no longer a place where one can read a newspaper that is difficult to find in print in the U.S. like the London Times or the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung; it is the *sole place* that one goes to find information *on anything*. Half the time, one runs into a relatively reliable source of reference material from respected media or university libraries—and then the other half, one often runs into information from who-knows-where.

In the past two years (2005-2007), Wikipedia has quickly arisen as an easy, quick reference source for encyclopedic information. When I first saw Wikipedia, I was rather impressed. Here was a free, online encyclopedia with information on a wide variety of subjects on just about anything that I could think of. But it was not until I started examining Wikipedia in greater detail that I realized **it was not as wonderful** as it might have initially seemed to be. For free, I could setup a profile with Wikipedia, and with a point of the mouse I could click “edit” and then actually change *any* of the encyclopedic entries that I wanted to. Certainly, other Wikipedia members could come along and add or change any information that they wanted to what I had done—but how reliable would my information, or their information, actually be? Would you really want me adding information to Wikipedia’s entry on quantum mechanics or invertebrate paleontology or Medieval Chinese phonetics?

Wikipedia itself actually has a large number of entries on world religion, including Judaism, Christianity, and even Messianic Judaism. On the whole, most of these entries are relatively credible, and only change infrequently. One has to be an approved member of the various groups in order to edit or add entries to them. But even so, looking up a Wikipedia entry on the history of Jewish people in America would not be preferred to actually reading a book on Jewish people in America from recognized figures in the Jewish community. Perhaps a place like Wikipedia could point you to such a book, but using Wikipedia as the “end all” resource could be extremely problematic—*especially if it is constantly changing*. But thankfully, there are probably enough people who monitor Wikipedia to make it a generally reliable resource—even though it should not be preferable to what universities generally offer Internet users. Wikipedia has gained enough of a public profile that it will be subjected to a great deal of scrutiny if it becomes a haven of inaccuracy.

But Wikipedia is not the only major phenomenon that has hit in the past year or so. The practice of blogging has really overwhelmed the information spectrum. The idea of blogging is not something that is new in the history of the Internet, as it could have been easily done ten years ago. Basically, someone with a blog web page writes something, and then visitors can post their comments. On the surface this is not a problem. If I want to tell you what I had for lunch, and how it tasted really good, as my blog page visitor you can tell me that it sounded disgusting when you ate it and how it gave you indigestion. We all get a nice laugh out of it. Three days later, I write about where I will be going on my Summer vacation. You then post how you would love to come with me, but don’t have the money. I then post a comment to your comment that I’ll bring you a souvenir. Again, we’re interacting with one another and having a nice, positive exchange. Old friends can catch up and reminisce about forgotten times.

The challenge with blogs in the past year is that they have quickly become an easy way for individuals to establish themselves as a “web presence.” It is not difficult to go find a free blog service (like MySpace) that allows you to easily setup a web page with your own colors, fonts, and

graphical style. You do not need to buy any editing software to use it. You just start posting, and people quickly find you and they start reading. If they want, they can post comments and links to other places. If you want, you can delete their posts—but why would you want to do that when the more comments on your page indicates that more people are reading what you have to say?

Today, setting up blogs has led to an exponential rise in Messianic individuals wanting to express themselves. On one side, this can be a good thing as people can interact with others and make new friends that they might not otherwise meet. But on another side, it means that once again anyone can say anything he wants to—and you as the blog reader have to police what you read. You have to take into consideration not only what is being said by the person blogging his or her opinion on a subject or issue (or possibly even posting a teaching), but you also have to keep in mind the comments being made. A person commenting on something may have a link to a spurious source or something that may degrade the authority of the Bible, or possibly even the existence of God. Internet links have a way of linking to other things that can lead people down a dangerous path.

The Internet, and the different venues that it offers, is a tool no different than money. Money can be used for *both* good and evil. It can be used to provide food and clothing for people in dire need, but can also be used to promote Godless behavior. The Internet can be an excellent place to find hard-to-access information, vast libraries of literature, and current news. It can also be an excellent place to find misinformation, receptacles of waste literature, and pure fantasy. The responsibility upon each person who uses it is immense—especially for today's emerging Messianic movement. I am admittedly very skeptical of the new "blogging" phenomenon, because it will easily clog the already-overwhelmed market of ideas. And when I think of something being clogged, I see myself crouched over a certain "something" with a plunger...

The answer to these issues is not to throw away our computers, televisions, and disconnect from society. Yeshua Himself prayed, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Cutting ourselves off from society around us is not going to help change it for the better, as the Lord should be empowering us to spread His light to a darkened world. The Internet can be used as a tool to promote the gospel, interact with Believers all across the world, and provide venues for good, sound information that can equip people for the work of the Kingdom. This is something that we have striven to do with TNN Online the past ten years, and I sincerely hope that it continues. But you still have the responsibility to police the Internet with what you read—and not find that you are too overloaded in its wide *and* wild world of ideas. Is the "knowledge" (Daniel 12:4) or information you seek something that will bring true spiritual enlightenment to others, or will it help proliferate evil?

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A. Student, Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of TNN Online ([www.tnnonline.net](http://www.tnnonline.net)) and is a Messianic apologist. He is author of several books, including: *The New Testament Validates Torah*, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, and *When Will the Messiah Return?* He has also written many articles on the Two Houses of Israel and Biblical theology, and is presently focusing on Messianic commentaries on various books of the Bible.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.