

# The Effect of Technology on the Messianic Movement

by J.K. McKee posted 01 April, 2004 www.tnnonline.net

“But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase” (Daniel 12:4).

Daniel 12:4 has been one of the most intriguing end-time prophecies of the Bible. It tells us that in the Last Days “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (RSV). There have been many varied and interesting interpretations of this prophecy, but a wide consensus of opinion reveals that it basically tells us there will be an increase in global travel and the knowledge of mankind will be exponentially expanded. While during the centuries since the Renaissance and discovery of the Americas, global travel and human knowledge have greatly increased, this has become most evident in the past century, with the invention of the airplane, and even more importantly, the computer.

The computer, perhaps more than any other invention, has been greatly responsible for the increase of general human knowledge, and most importantly has been responsible for advances in science, engineering, and mass communication. We are now living in what has been referred to as the “Information Age,” because of the usage of technological devices that previous generations did not have to use. The access to information has made many people more productive in business, and has enabled businesses and educators alike to be more efficient and communicate with one another across long distances with ease, sharing critical data and ideas. As a consequence, not only does technology and mass communication help science and industry, but technology itself grows and improves at the same time. It is, for example, recommended that one upgrade his or her personal computer approximately every two and a half years.

While I could go on for pages and pages as to how modern technology is in a constant state of change and the effect that it has had on secular society, it is important for us as Messianic Believers to diagnose how technology has affected the rise and expanse of the Messianic movement, those who are part of the Messianic community, and our perception by others. How has modern technology and mass communication helped the Messianic movement, and what are some concerns that we need to be aware of? Certainly, if we are getting closer each day to Messiah Yeshua’s return, then modern technology can be used to further the goals of the Kingdom, but even so, we have to be cautious of some things.

## The Computer as a Tool for Bible Study and Research

Many years ago, perhaps the only way for the average layman to examine a Hebrew or Greek word in the Scriptures was to access a concordance. While a concordance is a valuable resource to have, a concordance is often limited to one English translation of the Bible. In the “old days,” prior to the invention of the computer, a person or group of people putting together a concordance had to sit down with a Bible and manually count how many times a word such as “bread” was used in Scripture. How inefficient was this? How many mistakes can be made when doing this? While we are certainly indebted to the research and tenacity of those who did these things centuries ago, the day of the concordance is ending, as all one really needs to do today is access a Bible software program with a search feature and do a word search which will quickly search through text for words or phrases. And, these types of searches are available in multiple English translations.

The ability to rapidly and efficiently search text is a rather simplistic example of what has made the computer a valuable tool in Biblical study and research. What would have happened if the Protestant Reformers had computers with which they could have searched and examined the Scriptures? I believe it is possible that they could have restored more to the faith than they did, but it has really only been in the past 15 or so years that we have been able to directly examine how the computer has affected Scriptural research. Not only are most Bible computer programs able to perform text searches on multiple English translations, but they often come cross referenced with various Hebrew and Greek dictionaries, Biblical background tools, encyclopedias,

commentaries, and other resources that in days past would not have only taken up scores of bookshelf space, but also would have been quite costly. Now, there are computer software programs available with entire libraries of Biblical knowledge at a minimal cost to the user.

For those of us in the Messianic community, the ability to use Bible software for our studies has come as a Godsend. Many people who enter into the Messianic movement as leaders and teachers often do not have the intense theological training or have been to seminary. Certainly while it is not required that one have a theological degree to teach and expound upon Scripture, when one is dealing with controversial issues such as the validity of *Shabbat*, the Biblical festivals, or the dietary laws, the need to present a viable and scholarly case still is. The computer, with the ability to examine texts and cross reference with well-respected dictionaries and other resources, is a tool that has helped many to present the truths that the Lord is restoring to His people in a manner that has to be taken seriously by others.

The ability to access critical information for Biblical research is not only limited to Bible software programs, but has also increased with the popularization of the Internet in the past 10 years. Many of the same reference sources and books that are available in your standard software program are now available on the Internet, and even more importantly access to out-of-print or difficult to find resources is available on the Internet. The Internet as a portal for information and Biblical reference sources has enabled many to access lexicons, dictionaries, encyclopedias, scholarly articles, specialty materials, and also a variety of secular media, that have helped many of us in the pursuit of the things God is restoring in this hour.

## **The Ability to Communicate with Others of Like Mind**

Beyond the ability to examine the Bible in ways that those of previous centuries could not have imagined, modern technology has enabled something even more profound: the ability for us to communicate with each other. At first, the invention of the telephone and later fax machines led to many being able to easily communicate across long distances. But now, with the addition of e-mail, Internet chat and Instant Messenger, people are able to communicate over long distances much easier and quite inexpensively.

On the one hand the ability to communicate with others is important for Bible teachers to exchange ideas, discuss issues with one another, and exchange large portions of text and materials with ease. But perhaps even more importantly, e-mail and the other communication tools available through the Internet have enabled Believers to talk and to fellowship with others all over the world.

The ability to communicate with others for us as Messianic Believers is extremely important. The example delivered to us in the Scriptures is that we are to always be accountable to others, we are to be in fellowship with one another, and most importantly we are to build one another up and confide in one another spiritually. The challenge for us as Messianics is that we are all spread out over the United States and the world, and the average size of a Messianic congregation is anywhere from 30 to 70 people. Many Messianic fellowships are only two or three families. This is substantially smaller than your average church. While a small group of people can be good as it can be closely knit and indeed a "family," it can also lead some to having an "isolationist" mentality, when in reality there are Messianics worldwide.

E-mail, e-mail chat groups, Instant Messenger, and other available tools have helped Messianics of all ages to communicate with each other. While certainly this has helped people examine and study the Scriptures with others, it has also enabled many to develop friendships that would not have been possible without this commutative ability. In some ways, communicating with others via e-mail or Instant Messenger have helped people get to know others in a way that is not possible in regular face-to-face talk. Many people are more comfortable typing what they think and expressing their thoughts in written form, as opposed to spoken form. In some ways it is easier to get to know a person via e-mail, because a person is more comfortable talking about himself or herself without necessarily having to be around others. Of course, this has some

drawbacks because oftentimes you will encounter negative people and you will quickly find that some people are proverbial “bad eggs.”

One group of people in the Messianic community, and I can say this as being one of them (as of 2004), that Internet communications have helped immensely, is the youth of ages 12-25. Oftentimes, the youth at a Messianic congregation or fellowship is in the single digits, and sometimes there are no youth at all. Fortunately, the Internet has enabled many Messianic youth to communicate with one another and for Messianic youth to realize that they are not “alone,” and there are others just like them. The need for our young people to have friends of similar ages and like mind is absolutely imperative, if indeed the Lord is raising up a future generation that will see the Torah restored to His people and ultimately be there to see Messiah Yeshua return.

## **The Pros and Cons of the Internet**

The advantage to the Internet is that it has made global communication across vast distances for Messianics quite easy. Messianic Believers, who because of geographical location would not normally be able to find others to talk to and develop friendships with, have now been able to do so. Messianic Believers also have access to a wide array of online Biblical references and resource material. There are many Messianic teaching websites which offer sound teaching and instruction for us. But even though there are many good features that modern technology has offered us, there are some things we need to be aware of.

There are many people who are new to Messianic things who are very naïve. Some are of the mistaken impression that just because you call yourself “Messianic,” or for example believe in the Two-House teaching of Judah and Ephraim, that you believe exactly the same things as everyone else who advocates these same understandings. **This is not true in the least.** While the Internet has helped Messianics get quite a bit of exposure, it has also allowed the enemy to discredit the message through individuals using the “Two-House” label for their own self-serving agendas. Because setting up a website is relatively inexpensive, all one needs to do is go to a search engine and type in “Messianic” or “Two-House” and he or she will find websites that are sensationalistic, unscholarly, insulting toward our fellow Believers in the Christian Church, and that bring disrepute to the Messianic community at large. Many of these sites advocate teachings that are non-Biblical, and the naïve person reading without any spiritual discernment, will often accept what is being said or presented without questioning or confirming it. To this we say: **do not believe everything you read online.**

One of the things that keeps TNN Online on the Internet is the need to present credible, fair, scholarly, and above all loving Messianic teachings online. We recognize that the Internet is a two-way street, and while there are many good things available, so are there many bad things as well. In this time of growth and maturation, I believe that the Lord is going to use the Internet to connect many Believers of like mind, develop friendships with them, and exchange valuable information. But at the same time, the enemy is going to try to discredit the restoration message, and various individuals will arise with Internet presences that will lead people astray. As you examine various websites and online teachings, examine them with a critical eye. Ask yourself if what is being presented is Biblically based, well supported by believable and credible outside references, and what the motives of the Bible teacher are.

Modern technology has been responsible for both good things and bad things. We have the ability as the Body of Messiah to use it for the furthering of His Kingdom, and connecting with brethren of like mind. We also must be critical with what is online, and recognize that wolves have been sent out among the sheep. May our Heavenly Father give us the discernment that we need, and may He guide our steps with the tools that He has made available to us.

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

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