

The Song of Moses and God's Mission for His People

by J.K. McKee posted 01 June, 2008 www.tnnonline.net

The emergence of a Messianic community that advocates, or at the very least, is more highly conscious of the promised restoration of all Israel, asks questions that most as of today are not aware of—much less prepared to answer. The Two-House teaching as seen **in the Scriptures**, and the prophecies that will lead to the reunion of Judah, scattered Israel/Ephraim, and all those of the nations who join in—are by no means to cause people to feel “born again again.” They are also not designed to fill a void in people’s hearts that they feel has been missing in their faith. *Those things are to **only** be provided by the redeeming work of Yeshua the Messiah!* The prophecies of Israel’s restoration, rather, are to give the maturing Messianic movement a vision and focus for the future as we determine the mission that God has for us as His people as **originally given to Ancient Israel**.

As Messianic Believers have been made aware of the fact that they are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), too many do not know the full ramifications of this reality in their lives. What does it mean to actually be “Israel”? For many, this answer is found in a life of diligent Torah obedience. But is Torah obedience to be an end to itself? The Torah is *more* than just a listing of commandments and principles by which to live; the Torah contains key stories and foundational accounts that are to mold God’s people for His service. I would submit that only when we *know* what that service is to be, that we can be those who are fully aware of what it means to be “Israel.”

Many Messianics believe that we are living in the end-times. Some think Yeshua will return very soon, and others not so soon. Some think that they can actually calculate the time of the end, while others prefer to look at various signs and events in the world. Not enough consider a wider array of Biblical prophecies and phenomena which define what *God’s people* are to be doing in the end-times—versus those of the world. Surely, as the major theme of the Last Days is, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6), our Heavenly Father will be more concerned about *His people* during this time, than the rise of the beast or the false prophet. Few in the emerging Messianic community today are aware of the full ramifications of the following prophecy:

“And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!’” (Revelation 15:3).

The Book of Revelation says that in the end-times, the saints will be those who “sing¹ the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (RSV). Certainly, we should all agree that the Song of the Lamb represents the proclamation of the gospel, and the salvation that is available in Yeshua. This is fairly obvious, as the saints are also those “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Yeshua” (Revelation 12:17; 14:12). To “sing” the Song of the Lamb is simply a poetic way of saying “proclaim the good news.”

What it means for the end-time saints to sing the Song of Moses is actually much more complicated. By no means is it a popular praise song sung in today’s Messianic world! “Singing” the Song of Moses means that we **are to embody the mission and purpose as seen in the Song of Moses**. In order to do this, we must identify what the Song of Moses actually is, interpret it properly against its ancient context, and then consider some of the specific things that are involved with the restoration of all Israel. We may find that the Song of Moses is much more complicated than we originally thought, and that it is going to challenge us both in our approach to theology *and* in how we interact with the world at large. We may not actually be “singing” this song today in our approach to Biblical faith.

¹ Grk. *adousin* (ᾄδουσιν), present active indicative or “sing,” not necessarily “sang.”

The Message of the Exodus

When a person thinks of the Song of Moses, immediately the Ancient Israelites' Exodus from Egypt should come to mind. Not only should the Exodus come to mind because it is the event that the Biblical authors most often associate with Moses, but also because the Song of the Lamb—the gospel—is typified by the Exodus.

Our mission as the people of God is easily embodied in the picture of the Exodus. The Lord miraculously intervenes for the sake of those in harsh bondage to slavery, and then delivers them through the Red Sea (picturing salvation from sin). As Paul can confidently tell the Corinthians,

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Messiah” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

But God's salvation obviously did not stop on the opposite shores of the Red Sea. The Lord took the Ancient Israelites to His mountain to enter into covenant relationship with them, and gave them His Instruction to train them to fulfill His mission (picturing sanctification). Being redeemed *and* then being instructed and empowered for the Lord's service—are all a part of the salvation experience.

God Himself in the Person of His Son has had to directly intervene in the lives of each of us who were in harsh bondage to sin, delivering us on an exodus out of slavery to new life and redemption in Him. Yet, our salvation today does not end with a proclamation of faith in Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus), but in fact *begins* there. Our salvation continues as we learn more about the Lord, our relationship with Him grows and becomes more intimate, and as we mature spiritually we accomplish the tasks He has given us.

The Exodus of Ancient Israel was surely about much more than just deliverance from Egyptian servitude.²

The Song of the Sea

The Book of Exodus can be easily divided into two principal sections: Israel in bondage (Exodus 1-14) and Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 15:19-40:38). The first section records how Ancient Israel was in slavery to Egypt, the calling of Moses as God's deliverer, the plagues upon Egypt, and the departure from Egypt itself. The second section covers some of the early journeys of Ancient Israel, the awesome scene of Mount Sinai and giving of the Ten Commandments, the worship of the golden calf, and the regulations regarding the Tabernacle. All of Exodus has extremely important things to teach God's people today,³ but the two large divisions of Exodus hinge on one critical section as seen in Exodus 15:1-18 or the Song of the Sea. In Jewish theology the Song of the Sea is often referred to by the Hebrew designation *shirat ha'yam* (שִׁירַת הַיָּם). All of us should be familiar with the Song of the Sea:

“Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, ‘I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him. The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; and the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deeps cover them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You; You send forth Your burning

² For a further discussion, consult the editor's article “The Message of Exodus.”

³ Indeed, I would strongly agree with John I. Durham, who opens his commentary with the statement “The Book of Exodus is the first book of the Bible” (*Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus*, Vol. 3 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], xix). This is because without an Exodus of Israel from Egypt, there is no people to preserve and testify to the traditions regarding Creation, Noah, Abraham and the Patriarchs, and the faithfulness of God toward these individuals. In other words, without the Book of Exodus you have no Book of Genesis.

anger, *and* it consumes them as chaff. At the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up, the flowing waters stood up like a heap; the deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand will destroy them.' You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders? You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them. In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; in Your strength You have guided *them* to Your holy habitation. The peoples have heard, they tremble; anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; by the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; until Your people pass over, O LORD, until the people pass over whom You have purchased. You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:1-18).

Most of you are familiar with what the *shirat ha'yam* is, and whether you realized it or not—the Song of the Sea is the Song of Moses.⁴ The sections, of course, that draw your immediate attention are the proclamations of the mighty acts of God in leading the Israelites and in destroying the Egyptian armies. Although most of you are familiar with the Song of the Sea, you are probably only that familiar with vs. 1-5:

"I will sing to ADONAI, for he is highly exalted: the horse and its rider he threw in the sea. *Yah* is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. This is my God: I will glorify him; my father's God: I will exalt him. ADONAI is a warrior; ADONAI is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army he hurled into the sea. His elite commanders were drowned in the Sea of Suf. The deep waters covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone" (Exodus 15:1b-5, CJB).

The references to the LORD being the salvation of Israel and delivering Israel by His right hand fit very nicely with knowing that Yeshua is our Ultimate Salvation and that He sits at the Father's right hand. It is also important for us to know that just as Pharaoh's army was defeated by God in the Red Sea, so will Yeshua return victoriously and defeat the armies of the antimessiah/antichrist (Revelation 19:15-19). Yet, if we stop at v. 5 we miss the remainder of the Song of the Sea and we miss the greater focus of what it means to truly "sing" the Song of Moses.

Just consider what God actually does to the Egyptian armies:

"With a blast from your nostrils the waters piled up—the waters stood up like a wall, the depths of the sea became firm ground. The enemy said, 'I will pursue and overtake, divide the spoil and gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword; my hand will destroy them.' You blew with your wind, the sea covered them, they sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like you, ADONAI, among the mighty? Who is like you, sublime in holiness, awesome in praises, working

⁴ While one might be tempted to identify the Song of Moses not with the *shirat ha'yam* of Exodus 15, but instead Moses' closing words in Deuteronomy chs. 32 & 33, the opinion of most commentators identifies the Revelation 15:1-4 Song of Moses with Exodus 15:1-18. Alan Johnson indicates, "The Song of Moses is in Exodus 15:1-18. It celebrates the victory of the Lord in the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. In the ancient synagogue it was sung in the afternoon service each Sabbath to celebrate God's sovereign rule over the universe" (Alan Johnson, "Revelation," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 12:546). Loren T. Stuckenbruck further says in regard to Revelation 15:1-4, "the song of Moses'...chant alludes to the song of deliverance sung by Moses and the Israelites at the Red Sea (Exod 15:1-18)" (in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 1559).

The reference to the Song of Moses as Exodus 15:1-18 can be found in the Jewish *siddur* as a part of the *shacharit* prayers: "To the Israelite, the Redemption from Egypt is the great evidence of the rule of God in the universe" (Joseph H. Hertz, ed., *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, revised [New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1960], pp 100-105; cf. Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Complete ArtScroll Siddur, Nusach Ashkenaz* [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984], pp 78-81). This indicates that the *shirat ha'yam* or Song of Moses is indeed something that is recited every day in the Jewish tradition, thus making it imperative for today's Messianics to understand its theological significance, living it out properly.

wonders? You reached out with your right hand: the earth swallowed them. In your love, you led the people you redeemed; in your strength, you guided them to your holy abode" (Exodus 15:8-12, CJB).

Furthermore, consider what this event is going to mean for further things involving Israel:

"In your love, you led the people you redeemed; in your strength, you guided them to your holy abode. The peoples have heard, and they tremble; anguish takes hold of those living in P'leshet; then the chiefs of Edom are dismayed; trepidation seizes the heads of Mo'av; all those living in Kena'an are melted away. Terror and dread fall on them; by the might of your arm they are still as stone until your people pass over, *ADONAI*, till the people you purchased pass over. You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain which is your heritage, the place, *ADONAI*, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, *Adonai*, which your hands established. *ADONAI* will reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:13-15, CJB).

What makes the Song of the Sea so significant is that it has a profound Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) background that often goes overlooked, and is underappreciated by most of our average Bible readers. Both Jewish and Christians scholars have recognized the ANE background behind the *shirat ha'yam*, however, and it is affecting some views of what it means for God's people to "sing" the Song of Moses. Nahum M. Sarna rightly recognizes that "The Song of the Sea assumed a special place in the Jewish liturgy quite early,"⁵ yet he also does not hesitate to inform us, "The language of the poem is thoroughly archaic, employing several features commonly found in Canaanite poetry."⁶ The *New Oxford Study Bible* also indicates that the reference to HaShem as "a man of war" (Exodus 15:3, RSV)⁷ is reminiscent of "Canaanite mythical motifs [which] are used to confess the Lord's saving action in behalf of Israel."⁸

Today's Messianic community—either Messianic Judaism or the independent Messianic movement—largely fails with viewing the Tanach in its Ancient Near Eastern context. (In fact, in most Messianic exegesis it is just summarily disregarded and the Rabbinic tradition is *exclusively* what is consulted.)⁹ This is unfortunate, because there is much to gain in what the Tanach says when placed against the other societies and cultures of Ancient Israel.¹⁰ Evangelical Christian scholarship is further ahead in considering the ANE in its Old Testament scholarship, but is having to catch up to critical scholarship. Liberal scholars have been much more affluent in considering the parallels between ANE literature and the Tanach, largely attributing such continuity to Ancient Israel "copying" off the religion of their neighbors.¹¹

Some parallels between ANE mythology and various Biblical accounts seen in the Tanach are undeniable.¹² But did the Ancient Israelites merely borrow the religious ideas of their neighbors, as liberals commonly suggest? Or, did the accounts that the Ancient Israelites carry with them of their God—while paralleling some of the beliefs of their neighbors—still starkly contrast in the substance of the message? Conservative scholarship today is much more honest in recognizing the parallels between ANE religion and the Ancient Israelites, but is also much more forthright in demonstrating how the Bible *has the edge* over paganism.

With this all said, we cannot overlook the fact that the Song of the Sea has a message that parallels, yet directly confronts, some of the Canaanite religious views of the Thirteenth Century

⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Heb. *ADONAI ish milchamah* (יְהוָה אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה).

⁸ Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha*, RSV (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 86.

⁹ Please note that I am not at all against giving a place to the Rabbinic tradition in Messianic examination of the Tanach; I am only against it having the *only* place.

¹⁰ Of course, I must sadly also observe that as of right now (2008), the Messianic community does not deal very well with the role of Greco-Roman classicism in the broad Mediterranean background of the Apostolic Scriptures.

Consult the editor's article "The Role of History in Messianic Biblical Interpretation" for a further discussion.

¹¹ Consult the editor's workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* (forthcoming 2008) for specific examples of how this has affected much of Old Testament Biblical scholarship on a book-by-book basis.

¹² Consult the editor's article "Encountering Mythology: A Case Study from the Flood Narratives," for comparisons and contrasts between the Flood of Genesis 6-8 and the Epic of Gilgamesh.

B.C.E. The Baal Cycle or the Epic of Baal,¹³ is an Ugaritic religious story dating from 1400-1350 B.C.E., the same time period with Israel still in bondage to Egypt, yet being prepared to be delivered by Moses.¹⁴ A major part of the Baal Cycle is “the conflict between Baal, the storm god, whose name means ‘Lord,’ and his enemy, Yamm, whose name means ‘Sea.’”¹⁵ It is not unlikely at all that the Israelites knew of the Baal Cycle, especially as Egypt was the superpower of the time and certainly had relations with the Canaanites.

Ugaritic is a Semitic language possessing many cognates with Biblical Hebrew, and “the knowledge of Ugaritic texts has...provided clarification for interpretation of the OT” (*ISBE*).¹⁶ Many nouns common to the Hebrew language, are pronounced exactly the same and mean exactly the same among its Semitic relatives—yet are also the proper names of Canaanite deities.¹⁷ Terms such as *ba'al* (בַּעַל) and *yam* (יָם) and *el* (אֵל) as seen in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle (and many more), are used as common vocabulary words throughout the Hebrew Tanach, meaning: “husband,” “sea,” and “G/god.” Many scholars are now agreed that the *shirat ha'yam* or the Song of the Sea employs various terms as seen in the Baal Cycle, as the defeat of Egypt sends a message from the God of Israel to the Canaanite peoples occupying the Promised Land.¹⁸

The message of the Song of the Sea takes themes as narrated in the conflict between Baal and Yamm, the sea god. The scene opens up with the god El trying to moderate their dispute:

The Messengers Deliver Yamm's Message

Then Yamm's messengers arrive, the legation of Judge River. At El's feet they [do not] bow down, they do not prostrate themselves before the Assembled Council. Standing, they speak a speech, [reci]te their instructions. A flame, two flames they appear, their [ton]gue a sharp sword. They tell Bull El, his Father: “Word of Yamm, your Lord, Your [Master], Judge River: ‘Give up, O Gods, the One you obey, the One you obey, O Multitude; give up Baal that I may humble him, the Son of Dagon, that I may possess his gold.’”

¹³ The complete text of the Baal Cycle is available for access online at: <baal.com/baal/about/BaalEpic.shtml> or <piney.com/BaalEpic.html>.

¹⁴ Please note that while most Messianics hold to a Fifteenth Century B.C.E. Exodus, thus making the Torah approximately 3,500 years old, I hold to a Thirteenth Century B.C.E. Exodus, making the Torah approximately 3,300 years old. For a summation of the different views, consult the articles: “Exodus, The,” by K.A. Kitchen, in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:700-708, and “Exodus, Date of,” by J.H. Walton, in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), pp 258-272.

Also the editor's entries for Exodus and Numbers in the forthcoming work *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

¹⁵ Mark S. Smith, trans., “The Baal Cycle,” in Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 82.

¹⁶ M. Liverani, “Ugarit; Ugaritic,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., et. al., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:939.

¹⁷ The fact that terms used in Biblical Hebrew are also used in its Semitic relatives such as Ugaritic to refer to pagan deities is neither known nor understood by many in today's Messianic movement, who often perceive of Hebrew as a so-called “holy tongue” based on a misunderstanding of Zephaniah 3:9 (where the “purified lips” are actually speaking of a manner of speech [cf. Ephesians 4:29], not a spoken language). Such a misunderstanding can lead to ridiculous conclusions such as,

“The Set-apart Spirit, inspiring all Scripture, would most certainly not have transgressed the Law of Yahuweh by ‘inspiring’ the Messianic Scriptures in a language riddled with the names of Greek deities and freely using the names of these deities in the text, no way!” (C.J. Koster, *Come Out of Her, My People* [Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 1998], vi).

Such assertions fail to consider the relationship of Biblical Hebrew as a Semitic language, and terms common to Hebrew used as the proper names of pagan gods in languages such as Ugaritic—including the terms *El* (אֵל) and *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים)—which are applied to YHWH in the Tanach (cf. Jack B. Scott, “ēl,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980); 1:42). If such a standard as proposed were applied to the whole of Scripture, neither the Hebrew Tanach nor Greek Messianic Writings could be considered inspired of God, as both languages include common vocabulary words used to refer to pagan deities.

¹⁸ Cf. Brian D. Russell, *The Song of the Sea: the Date of Composition and Influence of Exodus 15: 1-21* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

El and Baal Respond

[And] Bull El, his Father, [answers:] “Your slave is Baal, O Yamm, your slave is Baal, [O River,] the Son of Dagon, your captive. He will bring tribute to you, like the Gods, bring [a gift to you,] like the Holy Ones, offerings to you.”

Then Prince Baal is shaken: [He seize]s with his hand a striker, in his right hand a slayer, the land he str[i]kes.¹⁹

The narrative then continues, telling us how Baal prepares to fight Yamm and then defeats him in battle:

Kothar Prepares Two Weapons for Battle Against Yamm

Kothar fashions the weapons, and he proclaims their names: “Your name, yours, is Yagarrish: Yagarrish, drive Yamm, drive Yamm from his throne, [Na]har from the seat of his dominion. May you leap from Baal's hand, like a raptor from his fingers. Strike the torso of Prince Yamm, between the arms of [Jud]ge River.”

The weapon leaps from Baal's hand, like a raptor from his [fin]gers. It strikes the torso of Prince Yamm, between the arms of Judge River....

The weapon leaps from Baal's hand, [like] a raptor from his fingers, it strikes the head of Prince [Yamm,] between the eyes of Judge River. Yamm collapses and falls to the earth, his joints shake, and his form collapses. Baal drags and dismembers Yamm, destroys Judge River.²⁰

Defeating Yamm in battle, Baal is then declared as king²¹ and holds a victory feast.²²

The similarity between the Baal Cycle and the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15, is that Baal is seen fighting Yamm, and that HaShem is actually seen using *yam* (יָם). Water, represented by the deity Yamm, was a major force in the ANE, as John Goldingay attests, “Middle Eastern cultures often used waters as a symbol of overwhelming threatening forces. These waters are indispensable to earthly life, yet they also imperil it from time to time.”²³ In the Canaanite mythology, Baal and Yamm are equal deities separated only by a battle in which Baal defeats Yamm and takes over his holdings. Yet in the Biblical record, it is HaShem the God of Israel who has dominion over *yam* and who actually uses the sea to defeat His enemies:

“The deeps covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the foe! In Your great triumph You break Your opponents; You send forth Your fury, it consumes them like straw. At the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood straight like a wall; the deeps froze in the heart of the sea” (Exodus 15:5-8, NJPS).

Ancient Israel's Subversion of the Baal Cycle

How does the Song of the Sea of Exodus 15 compare to the Baal Cycle? In the Song of the Sea, HaShem is portrayed as a warrior (Exodus 15:3) just as Baal. In the Song of the Sea, HaShem defeats His enemies with His right hand (Exodus 15:6) just as Baal defeated Yamm. **The key contrast between the Song of the Sea and the Baal Cycle is that the God of Israel does not fight the sea!**

Exodus 15:4 says *markevot Par'oh v'chelo yara b'yam* (מַרְכָּבֹת פָּרְעֹה וְחֵילוֹ יָרָה בַיָּם), “Pharaoh's chariots and army He threw in the sea” (ATS). In particular, it is recorded in v. 5 that

¹⁹ Parker, pp 100-101.

²⁰ Ibid., pp 103, 104.

²¹ Ibid., 105.

²² Ibid., 106.

²³ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 88.

“The deeps” or *tehemot* (תְּהוֹמוֹת) “cover them,” which were “the great primordial ocean waters held in restless impotence by [God] save when, as here, he turns them to his purposes.”²⁴ HaShem exercises a complete and total control over *yam*, and uses *yam* for whatever he sees fit. Unlike the gods Baal and Yamm being equals, HaShem the God of Israel has no equals.

The Ancient Israelites declare before Him, “Who is like You, O LORD, among the celestials; who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, working wonders! You put out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them. In Your love You lead the people You redeemed; in Your strength You guide them to Your holy abode” (Exodus 15:9-13, NJPS). They praise HaShem for the mighty acts of deliverance He has demonstrated, and the awesome power that He displays over His Creation. Yet the message of HaShem's complete control was *not only* for the Ancient Egyptians, as the Song of the Sea continues:

“The peoples hear, they tremble; agony grips the dwellers in Philistia. Now are the clans of Edom dismayed; the tribes of Moab—trembling grips them; all the dwellers in Canaan are aghast. Terror and dread descend upon them; through the might of Your arm they are still as stone—till Your people cross over, O LORD, till Your people cross whom You have ransomed” (Exodus 15:14-16, NJPS).

The Ancient Israelites were going to enter into a Promised Land that had, as its then-present occupants: the Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, and Canaanites. All of these people, to some degree or another, recognized Baal as their principal deity, believing him to have defeated Yamm. Sarna is right to assert, “God's mighty deeds on Israel's behalf strike terror in the hearts of Israel's neighbors, their potential enemies.”²⁵ The Ancient Israelites, being prepared to enter into the Promised Land, actually have a subversive message for the Canaanites:

You fear Baal and Yamm, yet our God is superior to them as He controls them!

Baal, being the supreme deity of the Canaanites, set himself upon a mountain so that the peoples would all come to him and be in bondage to him as his slaves. In fact, most deities in the ANE had a mountain by which he/she could rule over the people subjugated as slaves. Yet, it is only HaShem in contrast to those false gods **who actually asks people to come to His mountain to join with Him in communion**. This too is a major feature of the Song of the Sea:

“You will bring them and plant them in Your own mountain, the place You made to dwell in, O LORD, the sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands established. The LORD will reign for ever and ever!” (Exodus 15:17-18, NJPS).

B'har nachalatkha (בְּהַר נַחֲלָתְךָ) or “on your own mountain” (ESV) is where God plans to live and rule and reign over His people. The significance of HaShem having His own mountain is fully realized only against its ANE context. Sarna remarks that this “is a unique phrase in the Bible. It occurs in Ugaritic literature in relation to the sacred mountain *Şapon* on which stood the sanctuary of the Canaanite deity Baal. Here, this standard religious phrase, prevalent in the ancient Near East, is employed by the poet in monotheized form, totally emptied of its pagan content.”²⁶ Apparently, HaShem taking over Baal's mountain was so important, that references to *Tzafon* (צָפוֹן) or the “north” are seen in the Book of Psalms:

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion *in* the far north [*yarkete tzafon*, יַרְכֵתִי צָפוֹן], the city of the great King” (Psalm 48:1-2).

“The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all it contains, You have founded them. The north [*tzafon*] and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Your name. You have a strong arm; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted” (Psalm 89:11-13).²⁷

²⁴ Durham, 206.

²⁵ Sarna, 80.

²⁶ Ibid., 82.

²⁷ Note that just like Mount Zaphon being the mountain of Baal, Mounts Tabor and Hermon were also considered to be the habitations of Canaanite deities. Cf. Rafael Frankel, “Tabor, Mount,” in *ABD*, 6:304-305; Rami Arav, “Hermon, Mount,” in *ABD*, 3:158-160.

The enemy of our souls has never had an original idea of His own; he has always been copying and mimicking God from the beginning, twisting God's truth for his own ends. Yet the Lord has always been there to turn-the-tables on Satan, showing him up. The Song of the Sea is an excellent example of this. The enemy's demonic minions of Baal and Yamm, believed to possess mountains by which they can dominate human beings—are shown to be the frauds that they are by the message of Mount Sinai where HaShem asks the people to join Him in covenant relationship. Christopher J.H. Wright confirms,

“The use of this Canaanite imagery does not mean, of course, that the Old Testament *endorsed* the myths of...Baal. On the contrary, the faith of Israel subordinated any affirmations about these gods to the reign of YHWH. The Old Testament took over the language of Baal's kingship for the purpose of countering it by ascribing all rule in heaven and on earth to YHWH alone.”²⁸

Far from being slaves to the deity, the Lord asks Israel to be His servants in the world by declaring to the world His goodness and righteousness. Unless the Canaanites **would heed the message as declared by the Song of the Sea**, and possibly join with Israel as people like Rahab did,²⁹ then they would be consumed by their own sin:

“Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, ‘Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ **but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you.** It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, **but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you,** in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deuteronomy 9:4-5).

Truly, the Song of the Sea has much to teach us as Messianic Believers, and specifically the mission that the Lord has given us as He is in the process of restoring all Israel.

The Gospel as a Subversive Message

There are many more examples present in the Tanach where the message of the God of Israel directly subverts Ancient Near Eastern mythology: namely in that our Creator desires communion with His creatures, rather than the gods creating us only to make us their slaves. The Song of the Sea, *being the Song of Moses*, gives us an excellent picture of the mission that God's people are to perform. As a tribute to the Song of the Sea, Rahab testified “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt” (Joshua 2:10a), and she was “under the ban” (Joshua 6:17), being saved from the destruction of Jericho.

The need for God's people to communicate effectively to other cultures and societies is seen from the very beginning of Scripture, and is certainly seen in the Apostolic Scriptures. The Lord Himself appointed Paul as “a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15), and his unique training both as a Pharisee and Roman citizen prepared him in advance to communicate the gospel effectively to the Mediterranean world. Paul had the training and the skills to go to the Synagogue and proclaim the gospel to Jews, and debate with Greeks and Romans in the marketplace about the futility of their religion. As he summarizes,

“I became to the Jews as a Jew, that Jews I might gain; to those under law as under law, that those under law I might gain; to those without law, as without law—(not being without law to God, but within law to Christ)—that I might gain those without law; I became to the infirm as infirm, that the infirm I might gain; to all men I have become all things, that by all means I may save some” (1 Corinthians 9:20-22, YLT).

²⁸ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 78.

²⁹ Joshua 2:1, 3; 6:17, 23, 25.

Here, Paul is not saying that he keeps the Torah when around Jews and when around Greeks or Romans he disregards it. What he is saying is that he does his best to identify with his audience. To those Jews who are “under law” or subject to the Torah’s penalties, being without faith in His Messiah, he does his best to consider their circumstances.³⁰ The same is true of pagans without God’s Torah, which he *testifies to still follow* according to the Messiah’s example (cf. Galatians 6:2). Likewise, Paul does his best to understand those with physical ailments. Paul did his best to consider the point of view of others—“With all kinds of people I have become all kinds of things” (CJB)—in order that he may see some come to saving faith.

The best kind of subversion we can see in the Apostolic Scriptures is probably seen in Paul’s encounter with the Epicureans and Stoics at the Aeropagus (Mars Hill) in Athens:

“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present...So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, “For we also are His children.” Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:16-17, 22-31).

In this classic scene from the Scriptures, Paul takes advantage of the situation presented to him in Athens. He is enraged at the idolatry present in the city, yet notices some kind of shrine dedicated to the “Unknown God.” This he recognizes as being dedicated to the God of Creation, the God of Israel. Paul proceeds to say how He has blessed the Athenians in the past with life and sustenance, and is now taking an active interest in their lives. This God has now provided a means of complete satisfaction in One He has sent and resurrected from the dead.

Paul certainly had difficulty communicating the concept of resurrection to these Greeks. But, some of them seeking the “Divine Consciousness” were convinced that Paul had something to offer, testifying “We shall hear you again concerning this” (Acts 17:32). Paul was able to *validly subvert* something dedicated to what the Athenians knew as who-knows-what, and recognize that the God He knew had delivered Israel in the past—and had now sent His Son for the deliverance of sins—could offer them the same salvation that he experienced. That was an experience that the idols of Athens could not offer.

In the millennia since Paul debated in Athens, many Christians have done their best to subvert the native cultures into which they were planted. Some have done this with success, providing answers to pagans and skeptics and atheists, and have introduced them to Yeshua and have brought them redemption. Others have done this at the expense of practicing syncretism,³¹

³⁰ Consult the editor’s article “What Does ‘Under the Law’ Really Mean?”

³¹ The *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* defines syncretism as, “The attempt to assimilate differing or opposite doctrines and practices, especially between philosophical and religious systems, resulting in a new system altogether in which the fundamental structure and tenets of each have been changed. Syncretism of the gospel occurs when its essential character is confused with the elements from the culture. In syncretism the gospel is lost as the

where Biblical concepts do not confront and subvert paganism, offering an alternative to Satan's lies, but instead find themselves fused and melded with native religion.

We have the advantage of history of being able to look back and discern the differences between cultural subversion and cultural syncretism as seen in both the Synagogue and the Church. How we do this as today's emerging Messianic movement, however, is a huge challenge.

"Singing" the Song of Deliverance

When Revelation 15:3 tells us that the end-time saints "sing" the Song of Moses, what it undoubtedly means is that these people will know how to embody the message of the *shirat ha'yam* of Exodus 15. The Song of the Sea contained a message to the inhabitants of the Promised Land that Israel was coming, and that Israel's God provided them something that neither the false gods Baal nor Yamm could.

Moving forward to today, in order to be molded into a people that can "sing" the Song of Moses, the emerging Messianic movement *must learn* to subvert the native cultures in which it finds itself. Unfortunately based on some of the current trends seen in the Messianic community, it may be a very long time before we see this become reality. Whereas the Song of the Sea forces us to engage with the world and directly confront the world, disengagement and isolationism are largely seen in today's Messianic community.³² Whereas the Song of the Sea forces us to recognize that Israel had a Divine mission to fulfill by proclaiming of the goodness of God, declaring our human "goodness" by keeping the Torah is what is commonplace in today's Messianic community.

Until we see a significant shift toward a more evangelistic, engaged, and above all spirituality edifying Messianic movement—that can be all the things that Ancient Israel was to be—we will not be able to "sing" the Song of Moses. And, this is surely complicated by a widescale inability to be well informed by a wider view of Biblical Studies, as demonstrated by comparing the Song of Sea to the Baal Cycle.

Singing the Song of Moses is not sitting in a congregation shouting out some praise song with Revelation 15:3 embedded in the chorus, any more than it is singing the words of Exodus 15. Singing the Song of Moses requires us as God's people to **embody the character and ethos of the Song of the Sea, and to live out its mission in our lives**. We have to demonstrate how our God is superior to all things.

How long will it be before the emerging Messianic movement can be a missional community that will be able to subvert the message of the world's cultures? When will we be able to recognize the needs of others, who are diligently searching for redemption, but will only be able to find it in Yeshua the Messiah? When will we be able to have those among us who can fulfill the prophecy of the hunters and fishermen going to the last remnants of scattered Israel among the nations, those who have accepted complete lies and who worship gods other than the God of Israel?

"Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen,' declares the LORD, 'and they will fish for them; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and every hill and from the clefts of the rocks'...O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of distress, to You the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, 'Our fathers have inherited nothing but falsehood, futility and things of no profit.' Can man make gods for himself? Yet they are not gods! Therefore behold, I am going to make them know—this time I will make them know My power and My might; and they shall know that My name is the LORD" (Jeremiah 16:16, 19-21).

These hunters and fishermen, who I personally believe will be the 144,000 sealed servants from every tribe of Israel (Revelation 4:7-8),³³ will have the ability to respond to the cries of the

church simply confirms what is already present in the culture" (Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999], 111).

³² For a further discussion, consult the editor's article "How Are We to Live As Modern Messianics?"

³³ Consult the editor's commentary in Chapter 12 of his book *When Will the Messiah Return?*, "The Gospel of the Kingdom."

world's masses. They will be able to know the cultural and religious diversity of the audiences to which they proclaim the goodness of the Lord of Creation, and properly present them with the message of salvation. They will be able to provide the answers that are so desperately sought and desired by such people.

The Song of the Sea asks today's Messianic movement some questions about who we are, and what lies ahead for us in the future. How we will be able to live out its message, though, is likely to be determined in the forthcoming years and decades, as we begin to mature both spiritually *and* theologically. Initially, it will not be easy, but in the long run God promises us that we will be able to "sing" His song of deliverance to the entire world! I pray that each of us as individuals would learn to "sing" that song of deliverance *right now*, as we each work toward the restoration of His Kingdom.

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A., Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of TNN Online (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.

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