

OIM UPDATE

September 2013

After fourteen years of walking by faith, following the “proverbial cloud”—from Dallas to McKinney, Texas, to Honduras, to Oklahoma, to Florida, and finally returning to Dallas, Texas—the Lord has brought our family “full circle” back to a community of Believers, where we were first introduced to the Messianic lifestyle in 1995. Needless to say along the circuitous journey, we have been led by the Holy Spirit to principally share our Biblical understanding in writing, in what has become a Messianic educational ministry. This relatively radical migration, as non-Jewish Believers from evangelical Christianity—pursuing the Lord with the entire counsel of the Holy Scriptures lighting our path—has been a joy to experience. But as many others led by the Holy Spirit into the Messianic perspective have witnessed and can attest (in what we believe is an end-time, global move of the Holy Spirit over the past few decades), numerous personal and corporate challenges have erupted.

But rather than dwell upon the negative aspects of what the Father has allowed the enemy of our souls to do to disrupt the unity which the Lord desires among His people, let us remember the words of Yeshua at the Last Supper, when He pleaded with the Father for unity in love among those who would believe in Him through the Disciples’ testimonies:

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (John 17:20-23).

With this in mind, given the season of *teshuvah* or return which occurs prior to and throughout the Fall Feasts of the Lord (cf. Leviticus 23), I have been led to write a testimonial article, entitled “**Teshuvah: A Season to Return,**” which should hopefully encourage its readers to become even more serious about their walk with Yeshua the Messiah. After all, if followers of the Messiah are truly born from above and filled with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, then there should be evidence of maturation in their walks, as each season comes and goes.

Additionally, we continue to need and appreciate your support for our **Theological Defense Trust** and the **OIM Prison Ministry Free Book Fund**. The requests from prisoners, their families, and those who are ministering to them keep piling up. Your generosity to help those in need is a blessing to them and to us!

In closing, “May the Lord bless you and keep you, and may He make His face to shine on you, and be gracious to you, and may He lift up His countenance to you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

Advancing His Kingdom, until the restoration of all things...
Mark Huey

TESHUVAH

a season to return

by Mark Huey

One of the profound blessings, of being a Messianic Believer in Yeshua the Messiah, is the opportunity to appreciate many of the systematic approaches to the Holy One which have been developed down through the centuries by both Judaism and Christianity. This includes, but is not limited to, various methods to read, study, and/or memorize the Holy Scriptures, especially involving the different cyclical Torah studies, or reading through the Bible in a year. Additionally, both religious systems have developed a variety of liturgical and/or confessional prayers and recommended approaches to meditate upon the Lord, and even seasonal traditions based on their respective interpretations and conclusions about events and/or Biblical calendars.

As a family which has been serious about its walk of faith, and has been “Messianic” for almost twenty years, perhaps the most significant confessional and meditational practice from Judaism we have wholeheartedly embraced is what is known as the annual season of *teshuvah* (תְּשׁוּבָה) or return to the Lord. This unique, heart-searching period of self-reflection and rededication begins in the Biblical month of *Elul*, and continues through the Fall Feasts commemorated during the month of *Tishri*. If nothing else, every year we are individually challenged to humbly come before the Lord through prayer and various readings to draw closer to Him. If the Holy Spirit reveals any area of our lives which is not pleasing to Him, then through confession and repentance, we turn back to Him, knowing that “He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

I would like to share a personal testimony about returning to the Lord, which began during a congregational setting at the advent of this year’s *teshuvah*, and has continued throughout this season to return. One *Shabbat* as the month of *Elul* was commencing, a sermon I heard contained a general reference about a Believer’s individual love for the Messiah Yeshua. For whatever reason, as I contemplated what was being said about genuine love for Him, a chord struck in my heart, which resulted in some immediate self analysis and intimate soul searching. As the speaker continued on with his message, my mind drowned out his additional words, and instead, riveted on assessing my own personal love for the Messiah. In a sincere attempt to be completely honest with my innermost thoughts, after some moments of deep conviction, analysis about my degree of love for the Messiah, and confession of failings, the following verse came to mind, even though it was not uttered by the speaker:

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

For the next minute or two while the sermon continued, all I could think about was the if/then proposition declared by Yeshua to His Disciples, during what is commonly referred to as the “Lord’s Supper” found in John chs. 13-17.

In a few moments the words “passionate privilege” came to my mind. So after a brief pause to refocus on the message which was being preached, I made a mental note to review this verse at a later time in order to better understand what Yeshua was stating in the context of preparing His followers for His crucifixion, resurrection, and departure from them.

At the time, I did not know that this prompting of the Holy Spirit was going to make this verse and frequent meditation upon my “passionate privilege” to keep His commandments, a virtual theme for this season to return. After all, the intensity of searching my heart for any areas of compromise and lack of love for the Father and the Son—and considering many of the “commandments” revealed in the Holy Scriptures—was unlike any other *teshuvah* I have ever experienced over the years of being involved in a Messianic lifestyle and approach to the Holy One of Israel. Therefore, as a child of God, desiring to please my Heavenly Father, I continued to ask Him for understanding about what the Holy Spirit was trying to communicate, specifically to me, through this verse. Of course, knowing that His sheep hear His voice (John 10:27), and that faith comes by hearing the word of the Messiah (Romans 10:17), I turned to John 14:15 and its context to seek understanding.

In very concise terms, Yeshua declared to His followers that if you unconditionally love Him (verb *agapaō*, ἀγαπάω), you will keep or guard (verb *tēreō*, τηρέω) His commandments (sing. noun *entolē*, ἐντολή). If a follower of Yeshua the Messiah has a true and passionate love for the Savior because of the eternal life he or she has received, then it should not be considered an obligation or requirement to keep His commands—but rather a joyful, Divine privilege to watch over and/or guard the instructions. Do you see the distinction between willfully “wanting” to do something, as compared to “having” to do something? *True unconditional love makes all the difference!*

Of course, when you go to the context of where Yeshua made this declaration, one finds the answer to how a new creature in the Messiah (2 Corinthians 5:17) is going to be supernaturally empowered to actually “unconditionally love” Him through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit or Helper manifesting that very *agapē* love:

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.* I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. **In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:15-21).**

Here, Yeshua categorically stated that after He would leave and return to Heaven, that He would ask the Father to give the Helper or the Spirit of truth, who would literally abide with and be inside of the Believer. Additionally, Ye-

shua stated that because He lives and gives eternal life to those who believe in Him, Yeshua is also in the Father, with Believers in Him and Yeshua in Believers. *How awesome is it to believe and contemplate these truths!*

However, despite the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and all that is promised to Believers in the Messiah Yeshua, the Holy One does not eliminate the free will of His children, and the moment-by-moment choices they have, to either keep His commandments or disregard them. Obviously in this season of return when the Fall Feasts of the Lord are being commemorated, followers of Yeshua, who have been convicted about the opportunity to participate in any number of activities and services designed to fulfill the commands of Leviticus 23, are encouraged to participate. But loving the Lord and keeping His commandments are so much more than just attending a few services!

Perhaps that is why followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are to be constantly reminding themselves about what loving the Lord and keeping His commandments really requires, by reciting the *Shema*:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Yeshua Himself referenced the importance of the *Shema*, when being questioned by an inquiring Torah scholar about what was the greatest command of the Torah:

“One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND’ [Deuteronomy 6:5]. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF’ [Leviticus 19:18]. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:35-40).

In Yeshua’s response, He added the command to love your neighbor as yourself, from Leviticus 19:18. He then summarized that upon these two commands depend or hang all that is communicated in the Torah and the Prophets. So, while there might be a profession of faith or mental ascent about loving the Lord with all of one’s heart, soul, and mind, there is to be tangible evidence when a person loves his neighbor as himself, by actually adhering to the applicable commandments found in the Torah. But in this season to return, as one reflects on his or her relationship with the Messiah, and how and if they are loving the Lord and evidencing that love by loving our neighbors as ourselves, there is even more personal introspection and confession of sin required to get our hearts right before the Lord.

Recall that at the onset of Yeshua’s ministry, as recorded in His Sermon on

the Mount, the Messiah elevated “keeping the commandments” from the mere physical acts to actual words spoken, or even more severe, to the very thought life of a person:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. **You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ [Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17] and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. **You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’ [Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18]; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.** If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matthew 5:17-30).**

In the context of discussing the permanence of the commandments of the Law that will remain until Heaven and Earth pass away, Yeshua referenced two of the Ten Commandments that when broken, required capital punishment. These are committing murder and committing adultery.

In the case of calling a brother a fool, Yeshua indicated that this level of anger is the same as physically committing the act of murder, with the same penalty to be administered, unless the offense is reconciled. This elevation

from the actual act of murder, to thoughts in the heart coming forth from the mouth is best understood when one considers the following passage:

“But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matthew 15:18-19).

Yeshua was most concerned about the intentions of the heart, which was also a warning that the Prophet Jeremiah declared:

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds” (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

Yeshua stated that a man merely looking upon a woman, with lust in his heart, is the same as committing the act of adultery itself. This is yet another capital offense that according to the Torah required stoning (Leviticus 20:10). It is not simply the physical act of adultery, but even the impure thought of committing adultery, which needs to be dealt with by radical means in order to be holy and righteous before the Lord.

In order to love the Messiah Yeshua and keep His commandments—which extend beyond the physical realm to the very thought life of a Believer—the annual season to return to the Lord is a blessing. It gives His people a special time of the year to spend considerable time in self-examination, coupled with confession and repentance for not only transgressions of commission or omission, but even derogatory words spoken or unwholesome thoughts had.

After all, one command issued by Moses, to the Ancient Israelites (Leviticus 19:2), was repeated by the Apostle Peter to the First Century Believers, in a way that summarizes what this season of return allows each of us to consider, as we seek holiness before the Lord:

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY [Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7]’” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

If followers of the Messiah Yeshua are truly going to exhibit unconditional love for Him and keep His commandments, returning to Him during this time of *teshuvah*, then there will be a sincere desire to seek holiness before Him. May this be our goal as we keep our eyes fixed upon Him (Hebrews 12:2), and learn to daily offer up ourselves as a living sacrifice before Him:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2).

May this exhortation be our passionate privilege to pursue!

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

J.K. McKee

I have been *extremely eager* to conduct a Messianic examination of Paul's letter to the Romans, especially since finishing my M.A. coursework in Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (2008). While in seminary, I took not one, but two, exegesis classes on Romans. There are many valuable proposals being made in contemporary Romans scholarship, which today's Messianic people are not likely to have heard about. More than anything else, though, I think that each person in today's Messianic movement—Jewish or non-Jewish—is likely to be aware of the fact that much of what Paul's letter to the Romans communicated to its ancient audience, is quite relevant for the changing contours and unique dynamics of our own faith community. *Unlike your typical Christian reader of Romans, this letter bears some rather timely importance for a Messianic reader*, as it actually parallels many of the on-the-ground circumstances and issues that we are presently facing and wrestling through.

This study of Romans represents a significant rite of passage for the ministry of Outreach Israel and TNN Online. First of all, this study has the distinction of being the first full TNN Wednesday Night Bible Study being entirely conducted in North Texas, following our family and ministry move in December 2012. Secondly, and I think more importantly, is that *Romans for the Practical Messianic* represents the first of three studies which will complete my examination of the Pauline Epistles as commentaries, as *Practical Messianic* commentaries on Galatians through 1&2 Timothy and Titus have already been completed. The amount of work leading up to this point has certainly been rather massive—between previous commentaries and other publications—as previous projects have given me the ability to already work through many of the difficult-to-understand vignettes of Paul's letter to the Romans, as well as collect my thoughts and notes on other Romans passages.

The Epistle to the Romans widely represents the Apostle Paul's presentation of the good news of salvation, to his own Jewish people and those of the nations, set against a backdrop of the circumstances that many in the early Body of Messiah were facing. Romans 1:16 is undeniably a major theme of not only his letter, but also the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Messianic movement: "For I am not ashamed of the Good News, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who trusts—to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (TLV). While Romans explains the many dynamics of this good news, in theological terms for Paul's ancient audience to understand—the venerable Apostle was not averse to issuing some corrective instruction to these people. Salvation history has a definite trajectory built into it—that "all Israel will be saved" (11:26)—something which involves a massive sal-

vation of Paul's own Jewish people and the consummation of the Messianic Kingdom, and which we are still obviously waiting for today. Yet, getting to this point decisively means that each one of God's people must learn how to "love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor" (12:10, NRSV). Paul does have to sort out many ancient prejudices that Jews, Greeks, and Romans had for one another—even in the Body of Messiah. We have prejudices today, even as Messianic Believers, which the Lord needs us to remove from ourselves.

Today's Messianic people, in my experience as a teacher and a writer, tend to have a great appreciation for Romans—but frequently because of the classic "salvation verses" which are quite quotable. "[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23); "having now been justified by His blood" (5:9); "...grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Yeshua the Messiah our Lord" (5:21)—are among the many spiritually uplifting statements which we have all heard and have been encouraged by. However, today's Messianic people do struggle with a number of Romans passages. We need a better handle on Romans 10:4, which in most Bibles reads, "For Christ is the end of the law..." (NASU). Romans 7:4 is commonly skipped over, "you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Messiah." There are details in Romans chs. 9-11 which need to be probed a bit more deeply, and no longer skipped over. We tend to just not know what to do with the whole scene of Romans ch. 14, per the issue of sacred days and eating. Paul's letter to the Romans has various passages which have been traditionally interpreted as anti-Torah, and which require further attention on the part of Messianic Believers.

While there have been many good studies conducted on Paul's letter to the Romans by Messianic congregational and fellowship leaders, and even a few commentaries released, this study is one which has been decisively produced for the 2010s. Much has happened in the broad Messianic movement, in just the past five years or so (2009-2014), both theologically and spiritually, which an examination of Romans will provide many answers and solutions for—even if we might be at some pains to implement them! Many of you who have already had some answers on Paul's perspective of "works of law," "circumcision," "justification," and Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Body of Messiah from my preceding volume *Galatians for the Practical Messianic* (which some of you may need to read first), will doubtlessly appreciate this study on Romans. Just like Galatians, there are various places in Romans where we will need to reorient our approach from thinking that the Apostle Paul is writing directly to modern people, as we place ourselves back into considering his perspective in composing this letter, understanding what its original recipients were being told, and then proceeding to deduce a proper application for our own circumstances in the Twenty-First Century.

This study is being conducted for far more reasons than just to “plug up” a few holes in our Messianic boat, providing some more detailed analyses of the common places where Messianic Believers struggle (i.e., chs. 7, 9-11, 14). This study is being conducted to provide some more information on various passages and issues, which others in our faith community have not addressed in sufficient detail, have avoided, or have glossed over without realizing it. Most especially, though, this study is being conducted to issue some key admonitions about our attitudes and spirituality, as Paul’s letter to the Romans has some unique instructions and corrections to be received by Twenty-First Century Messianic Believers. As I said in the closing sentence to the entry for Romans in my workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, **“In the future, Messianic understanding and application of Paul’s letter to the Romans will surely blossom, and bring with it some much needed clarity and insight to our emerging faith community”** (p 101). This study is being conducted with this intention in mind!

A major focus of this study will doubtlessly be, “that the requirement of the *Torah* might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:4, TLV). May we each learn important lessons from Romans, which many have rightly thought is the most influential letter ever written in human history.

TNN ONLINE EDITOR'S UPDATE

September 2013

Dear Friends:

I write this update during the middle of the Fall High Holidays. So, during this significant time, I cannot help but look back on what has transpired in my own personal life, but also our ministry developments, over the past three years. It was during the final week of August 2010 that our family decided to return to the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex. Much of the work we conducted, for just over two years, was very preparatory for us arriving here, and then getting acclimated. During this period, all our publications were able to be released in both paperback and eBook. We have been able to set a course for the future—both theologically and spiritually—which we believe is going to help many people in the broad Messianic movement. It is not difficult to discern how there is a significant need for many of us to *calm down, act a bit more serene, and be more contemplative when it comes to our future*. Over the past several years, religious politics and maneuvering have gotten the better of too many people, and reason has too widely not prevailed.



In spite of some of these things, I have great confidence that the 2010s are going to be a season of some significant resolution on a wide number of issues. This month, we have begun what will probably be a year-long (or slightly more) study of the Epistle to the Romans. This is taking some time to produce, but I am pleased with some of the things which will be discussed, brought out into the open, and evaluated. Along with this, we have two publications in the final stages of editing for release, ***Confronting Critical Issues*** and the ***Messianic Torah Helper***. While I do not know, at present, how long it will take to see these publications released—during the next year I will be coordinating the production of our long-anticipated ***Messianic Kosher Helper*** and ***Messianic Sabbath Helper*** publications. Most of the issues and sub-issues surrounding these topics our family has already worked through internally, but the need to address them externally, in detail, engaged with an appropriate amount of material, is going to take some time.

Our ministry and family enters into this Fall with a renewed sense of optimism and focus. I am innately reminded of a word given by Paul to his disciple Timothy, which has especially guided me the past several years:

“No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything” (2 Timothy 2:4-7).

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Until next month...

J.K. McKee