

# OIM UPDATE

April 2018

For those Israel lovers and students of history who are paying attention, the 5th of Iyyar on the Jewish calendar, which coincides with the 18th of April on the Gregorian calendar in 2018, is *Yom HaAtzma'ut* or Israeli Independence Day. As expected, a number of Israeli national celebrations will take place at this time, but because today's world more widely follows the western Gregorian calendar, May 14, 2018 will be more prominently recognized as the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Hence in this season of remembrance, *Yom HaZikaron* (Israeli Memorial Day) on the 17th of April and *Yom Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem liberation day) on the 13th of May, there are about four weeks of coincidental anniversaries and commemorations, which should remind followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that He alone is the God of history and current human affairs. However, notable "coincidences" are not overlooked by the discerning Bible student.

Correspondingly, Believers who utilize the Holy Scriptures as one critical grid for observing world events keep a keen eye on what happens to the Promised Land (Israel), the Jewish people, and Jerusalem, in particular. After all, the inheritors of Zion will always be the "apple of God's eye" (Zechariah 2:8), as each critical clock-like pendulum tick, directs the world toward the End of the Age. In addition, the Holy One of Israel, the Creator God, has directly stated that He has placed His Name on Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 6:5-6; Exodus 20:24; Zechariah 2:12). Thus, when anticipated significant events—such as moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in conjunction with the seventieth anniversary on May 14, 2018—the Body of Messiah should be in intercessory prayer, thankful jubilation, and praise that the promised blessings of Genesis 12:3 will be bestowed upon America for its stalwart support of the modern State of Israel.

Historically speaking, God raises up different individuals or nations at various times to advance His will on Earth, to bless or to curse, depending on how they act toward the Jewish people. Thankfully for most of American history, most governmental leaders have stood by the Jewish people. President Truman was the first national leader to recognize Israel when it declared statehood seventy years ago. As a result, God has blessed the United States, today the only remaining superpower on the planet. But such blessing should never be taken for granted, because God's thoughts and ways are much higher than human genius or comprehension (Isaiah 55:8-9).

With God's higher ways in mind, while studying the relatively modern history of the reconstitution of the State of Israel, and the return of the Jewish people to the Promised Land—one comes upon the prophetic conclusions of Anglican clergyman William Hechler, one person who God used to help Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl promote his vision for a Jewish State in the late 1890s. Ironically, most students of the Holy Scriptures have been exposed to a considerable number of interpretations of Bible prophecies, which are nothing more than educated guesses on when the end-times are coming or when the Messiah is going to return. Inaccuracies and false predictions are commonplace, but God still uses incorrect eschatology to accomplish His purposes.

Hechler loved the Jewish people and was an ardent student of the Bible, when his path crossed with Herzl, who had written *Der Judenstaat* or The Jewish State, detailing a vision for a homeland for the persecuted Jews of Europe. Coincidentally by the time they

became acquainted, Hechler had surmised from his study of the Scriptures that God had promised to restore the Jews to the Holy Land, as seen in these conclusions about the forty-two month period referenced in the Books of Daniel and Revelation:

excerpted from *The Prince and The Prophet* by Claude Duvernoy

#### **THE BIBLICAL FORTY-TWO MONTHS**

*But how to interpret the forty-two months? Most scholars of that time agreed that one prophetic month was not thirty days but thirty years—which comes out to 1260 years. It is a number that appears both in Daniel and Revelation. So, the Temple was destroyed and taken from the Jews in 70 A.D. Add 1260 years and the year is 1330—a dead end as nothing happened in 1330.*

*But Daniel 12:11 also states that the 1,290 days [or years] will start after the abomination of desolation is set up in the holy place (where the Temple was.) So what is this abomination?*

*In 627-628, Jerusalem fell into the hands of a pagan power: Islam, under its third Caliph—Omar, Mohammed's brother-in-law. He not only took possession of Jerusalem; he razed the medieval Christian church built on the "Holy Place," and built the Mosque of Omer to the glory of the prophet. Hechler surely knew that in this mosque there is written the Koranic verses including "God has no Son."*

***If one adds 1260 years to the year 627-628, he comes to 1897-1898. Hechler was convinced that 1897-1898 would mark the dawn of the final restoration of Israel in the Promise Land!***

*No, he was not announcing either the End of the Age, or the Second Coming. But what he did announce was the starting point of the ultimate restoration of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel.*

Note in Hechler's conclusions that around the time he was helping Herzl (mid 1890s), he was convinced that the final restoration of Israel was beginning. So regardless of whether Hechler was one-hundred percent accurate with his deductions, God used him to help encourage Herzl to organize the First Zionist Congress convened in Basel, Switzerland from August 29-31, 1897. In addition, through Hechler's strategic relationships, he was able to introduce Herzl to key royalty and government officials in Germany, Turkey, and Great Britain. As a result, the prophetic statement of Herzl written in his journal on September 3, 1897, has an amazing amount of accuracy about the timing of the formation of the State of Israel:

***Were I to sum up the Basel Congress in a word—which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly—it would be this: At Basel I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it.***

Now without getting into all of the suppositions about the “jubilee” years, and the fact that from 1897-1898 to 1947-1948 is fifty or so years, or from 1917 (Balfour Declaration) to 1967 (liberation of Jerusalem after Six Day War) is fifty years, and from 1967 to 2017-2018 is another fifty years—theories and suppositions can go any of several directions, just like they did in Hechler’s studies. But the point is that God is active in the minute affairs of humanity, and He absolutely accomplishes His will for the created order, regardless of who He uses. God can use an obscure journalist (Herzl), an eccentric clergyman (Hechler), a member of the British Parliament (Balfour), or members of the Jewish Agency, when led by David Ben-Gurion declared independence on May 14, 1948 after the British Mandate expired.

Personally, having been to the unimpressive room in a converted home in Tel Aviv where the Israeli Declaration of Independence was declared on May 14, 1948, the humble irony of the leaders of modern day Israel claiming their rightful place among the nations of the world is awesome to contemplate. In fact, those inauspicious and humble beginnings are somewhat reminiscent of an ancient prophecy from Zechariah about Israel’s king entering Jerusalem humbly on a donkey:

“Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! **Behold, your king is coming to you, a righteous one bringing salvation. He is lowly, riding on a donkey—on a colt, the foal of a donkey**” (Zechariah 9:9, TLV).

Of course this prophecy was fulfilled by the Messiah, as He entered into Jerusalem prior to His trial, humiliation, beating, and execution:

“The next day, the huge crowd that had come up for the feast heard that Yeshua was coming to Jerusalem. So they took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, “Hoshia-na! Baruch ha-ba b’shem Adonai! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” The King of Israel!’ Finding a young donkey, Yeshua sat on it, **as it is written, ‘Fear not, Daughter of Zion! Look! Your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.’ His disciples did not understand these things at first. But when Yeshua was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that the crowd had done these things for Him**” (John 12:12-16, TLV).

As we consider these things, both God’s people and people of the world at large, are going to one day more fully understand what is transpiring in this current “season of coincidences” regarding the timing of Israeli anniversaries, Biblical jubilees, or whatever other measure one uses to try and comprehend the mind and thoughts of the Sovereign Maker. While seventy years of existence is a remarkable achievement for the State of Israel and should be celebrated, Moses’ only recognized Psalm adds yet another “time” component to speculation about the unknowable timeline regarding the End of the Age known only by our Heavenly Father (Matthew 24:3, 36):

“For all our days have passed away under Your wrath. We spent our years like a sigh. **The span of our years is seventy—or with strength, eighty**—yet at best they are trouble and sorrow. For they are soon gone, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? Your fury leads to awe of you. **So teach us to number our days, so that we may get a heart of wisdom**” (Psalm 90:9-12, TLV).

Yes Lord, let us present you a heart of wisdom, as we praise, worship, and glorify your Holy Name—no matter what our individually roles and assignments are to help advance your Kingdom here on Earth! Make us available vessels, because You alone are able to work through us. . .

*Chag Samaech Yom HaAtzma'ut* Mark Huey

# CONTROVERSIES INVOLVING TORAH-BASED “MEANS OF GRACE”

by J.K. McKee

While it is unfortunate to have to say this, some of the biggest controversies which face the contemporary Messianic movement today, involve misunderstandings of various outward actions and activities—which are intended to bless, and **not divide**—the people of God. Whether we want to admit it or not, as an emerging faith community, today’s Messianic movement has areas of its theology and practice which are under-developed, or which involve applications limited to a local congregation or assembly, dependent on a group’s circumstances. People can inappropriately assume, at times, that “one size fits all,” when in fact, some things might instead need to be examined on a case-by-case basis.

In my own life, I have been personally involved in planning the funeral of my father (1992) and the wedding of my sister (2015). It is fairly easy to recognize that in planning a funeral or a wedding, that the needs of the immediate family, the larger extended family, and the friends involved, need to be taken into consideration. While the basic rituals of remembering the deceased and burying the remains, *and* the recitation of marriage vows and a celebration of a new couple joining together, remain consistent for a funeral or for a wedding—every funeral and every wedding have things requested by the family, which the spiritual leader officiating has to take into consideration. Consequently, a number of the divisive issues involving Torah-based means of grace, are those which precisely concern a consultation between families and their local Messianic congregational leader. And if necessary, we should be honest enough as people who compose a still-developing Messianic movement, to recognize those areas where further study and investigation are required.

## Bar/Bat Mitzvah

How many people really know what the discipline of going through *bar mitzvah* (בַּר מִצְוָה) or *bat mitzvah* (בַּת מִצְוָה), truly is? Many have the impression, based on portrayals in popular culture, that a *bar mitzvah* is just an opportunity to have a party, showering a thirteen year old boy or girl with endless gifts, somehow intended for their future. While various festivities may be involved with the commemoration of a *bar mitzvah*, the discipline

and procedures of going through a *bar mitzvah*—especially within today’s Jewish community—are quite serious and even rigorous.

The term *bar mitzvah* means “son of the commandments,” with *bat mitzvah* meaning “daughter of the commandments.” The exact origins of the more modern process of a Jewish youth going through *bar mitzvah* are unclear. The workbook *Messianic Judaism Class*, in answering the question “Is this custom a Biblical command?”, answers, “It’s a part of Jewish tradition since the 13th century. It’s an extra-Biblical tradition that is not forbidden by Biblical teaching.”<sup>1</sup> Among the different reasons it lists for the significance of *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, include: a rite of passage, boyhood to manhood and girlhood to womanhood, acceptance of personal responsibility of oneself before God, learning Hebrew, learning to be a leader, identification with Judaism and the faith community. The *bar/bat mitzvah* process typically involves a recognition, for a young man or woman (usually 13 for boys, 12 for girls), that he or she is about to enter into adulthood.

Within the Jewish community, the process of going through *bar/bat mitzvah* involves Hebrew education, study of Jewish history and culture, and a review of the responsibilities that a Jewish man or woman will have as he or she enters into adulthood, and takes up some place within congregational life. At the *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony, the young person who has completed his or her required classes, will often cant from the Hebrew Torah portion, and give a short teaching. As the young man or young woman is formally recognized as an adult before the assembly, he or she not only is to be committed to a life of service to God and the Jewish people, but the corporate body too has a responsibility of being there to support these young people. While it is traditional for those going through *bar/bat mitzvah* to be teenagers, adults well into their seventies and eighties have gone through *bar/bat mitzvah*.

While many of the traditions and procedures associated with *bar/bat mitzvah* originate from post-Second Temple times, Jewish history does record the need for young people to be trained in the Scriptures, and be recognized as members of the spiritual community. The First Century historian Josephus recorded, “when I was a child, and about fourteen years of age, I was commended by all for the love I had to learning; on which account the high priests and principal men of the city came then frequently to me together, in order to know my opinion about the accurate understanding of points of the law” (*Life* 1.9).<sup>2</sup> The authors of *Messianic Judaism Class*, referencing Yeshua’s encounter at the Temple in Luke 2:41-43, 46-49, con-

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<sup>1</sup> *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book, 56.

<sup>2</sup> *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 1.

clude, "Yeshua is doing what we do at a Bar Mitzvah. The boy or girl reads that week's passage and then they do a little teaching from it."<sup>3</sup> As it was recorded of the young Yeshua:

"Now His parents were going every year to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. When He became twelve years old, they were going up according to festival custom. As they headed home after completing the days, the boy Yeshua remained in Jerusalem, but His parents didn't know...After three days they found Him in the Temple, sitting in the center of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all those hearing Him were astonished at His understanding and His answers. When His parents saw Yeshua, they were overwhelmed. And His mother said to Him, 'Child, why did you do this to us? Look! Your father and I were searching for You frantically!' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for Me? Didn't you know that I must be about the things of My Father?'" (Luke 2:41-43, 46-49, TLV).

Each Messianic congregation will have some kind of *bar/bat mitzvah* education regimen, involving Hebrew study, Bible study, a review of Jewish history and culture, some likely review of Christian history, a review of the modern Messianic movement, and likely also discipleship instruction for young adults experiencing puberty. In Messianic *bar/bat mitzvah*, the young adult is honored before the congregation, as the corporate Body of Messiah does have to recognize its responsibility in seeing young people welcomed and mentored. (As it is noted in *Messianic Judaism Class*, "It has been copied by the church in confirmation."<sup>4</sup> Protestant denominations which offer confirmation classes to young adults, usually offer classes on what it means for young people to be responsible Christians, church members, Bible readers, and they address the challenges facing teenagers going through many life changes, as they face adulthood.)

The *bar/bat mitzvah* process does bear spiritual importance for young people not only being recognized as adults, but for evaluating their present standing before God. Galatians 3:24 communicates how "the Torah became our guardian to lead us to Messiah, so that we might be made right based on trusting" (TLV), meaning that our common human violation of the Torah's instruction is to show us our need for a Redeemer. An ideal time to confirm that this has indeed happened, is when a young man or young woman is going through the process of *bar* or *bat mitzvah*.

Certainly Messianic Jewish children, and the children of intermarried couples in the Messianic movement, would be naturally anticipated to be those who go through *bar/bat mitzvah*. But what about non-Jewish children in the Messianic movement? This is where it has to be recognized that there is variance of approach in the Messianic community. More often than not,

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<sup>3</sup> *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book, 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

though, your local Messianic congregation will have its *bar/bat mitzvah* classes open to the children of both its Jewish and non-Jewish members. In fact, it is likely that there might be grown adults in attendance at its *bar/bat mitzvah* classes! If you are a non-Jewish parent, your local Messianic congregational leadership might recommend some modifications of the different blessings which are offered in the *bar/bat mitzvah* service, for your son or daughter. And, whether you are Jewish or non-Jewish, if your son or daughter is going through *bar/bat mitzvah*, you might want to suggest that some things be incorporated into their service, in order to honor their lives thus far. Much of this is dependent on the venue of your local Messianic congregation, and for an accounting of the needs of one's family, extended family, and guests in attendance.

## **Circumcision**

At the close of the 2010s, our faith community does not have a coherent theology of circumcision, even though its physical and spiritual components do make up a critical part of the Biblical narrative. The Ancient Israelites were admonished in Deuteronomy 10:16, "circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer" (NASU; cf. Colossians 2:11), speaking to the important lesson of circumcision: removing an outer barrier placed between a human being and God. Yet, the physical rite of male circumcision, is something we seldom address—mainly because it is a sexual issue. However, anyone knowing about the standard basics of the Jewish life cycle, should be familiar enough with how by ancient convention, male Jews are circumcised on the eighth day. Furthermore, anyone with a cursory understanding of some of the controversies which arose in the First Century *ekklēsia*, should be aware of how circumcision was a huge debate involving the inclusion of Greek and Roman Believers into the Body of Messiah.

Male circumcision, as a medical practice, was something which predated the Patriarch Abraham, even though it is correctly recognized that male circumcision is the memorial sign of the Abrahamic covenant:

"God also said to Abraham, 'As for you, My covenant you must keep, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant that you must keep between Me and you and your seed after you: all your males must be circumcised. You must be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and this will become a sign of the covenant between Me and you. Also your eight-day-olds must be circumcised, every male, throughout your generations, including a house-born slave or a slave bought with money from any foreigner who is not of your seed. Your house-born slave and your purchased slave must surely be circumcised. So My covenant will be in your

flesh for an everlasting covenant' (Genesis 17:9-13, TLV).

So severe was male circumcision, it was said, "But the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin—that person will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (Genesis 17:14, TLV). Leviticus 12:3 would further codify for native born males, born into Ancient Israel, "In the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin is to be circumcised" (TLV). Sojourners, entering into Ancient Israel, would have to be circumcised in order to eat of the Passover sacrifice, but as a result would be considered as natives: "But if an outsider dwells with you, who would keep the Passover for *ADONAI*, all his males must be circumcised. Then let him draw near and keep it. He will be like one who is native to the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat from it" (Exodus 12:48, TLV). Israel's enemies in the Tanach, in particular the Philistines, were often taunted for being "uncircumcised" (i.e., 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; 2 Samuel 1:20)

During the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., the Seleucid Greeks made it illegal for Jewish mothers to circumcise their infant sons, on the threat of death (1 Maccabees 1:48). The right for Jews to circumcise, was something that the Maccabees properly fought and gave their lives for. So, it should not be surprising that by the First Century C.E., as the good news or gospel was going out into the Mediterranean, that it was definitely believed, that in order for non-Jews to be fully admitted into the people of God, that they needed to be circumcised as Jewish proselytes. While there were ancient Jewish discussions involving what it meant for a non-Jew to become a proselyte, circumcision was widely agreed to be necessary. Debates are witnessed throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians whether circumcision was necessary of Greek and Roman Believers for them to be fully received into the Body of Messiah, and the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 met to decisively address the issue: "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5, ESV). Circumcision was not deemed necessary for non-Jewish Believers to be fully welcomed in as equal brothers and sisters of the Jewish Believers (Galatians 3:28).

There is little doubting the importance that male circumcision continues to have for Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah. Yeshua the Messiah Himself, was circumcised (Luke 1:57-66). The Apostle Paul was circumcised (Philippians 3:5), and he definitely says, "Then what is the advantage of being Jewish? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Much in every way. First of all, they were entrusted with the sayings of God" (Romans 3:1-2, TLV). Paul had his disciple Timothy, who was born of a Jewish mother but had a Greek father, circumcised (Acts 16:1-3). Yet, Paul also warns against any over-inflated self-opinions about circumcision that First Century Jews might

have had, as he also says, "Circumcision is indeed worthwhile if you keep the Torah; but if you break the Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if the uncircumcised keeps the righteous decrees of the Torah, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?" (Romans 2:25-26, TLV).

Most of us are not fully informed as to all the details regarding the circumcision of infant males in our various Messianic congregations and assemblies. At most, we are probably aware how a Messianic Jewish couple or intermarried couple, will make sure that a newborn male is circumcised on the eighth day. Sometimes, a Jewish *mohel* (מזייל), who has been specially trained in circumcision, will circumcise a Messianic Jewish male infant. Involved with this will be various traditions and customs involving the naming of the male child (cf. Luke 1:59), and blessings issued upon him. When a Jewish *mohel* is not available, then if there is a doctor in your local congregation, he or she will usually be consulted for the options that are available, which may then result in the infant male being circumcised in a hospital setting. At a later time, some kind of infant dedication, perhaps involving Jewish circumcision blessings, will take place.

Beyond the Jewish community, male circumcision has been a widescale medical practice in much of the West, for well over a century. Although its medical benefits have been debated in recent times, the authors of *Messianic Judaism Class* address the question "Are there any physical benefits to circumcision?" with, "There might be. They have discovered in Africa that the tribes that circumcise their males have a lower rate of HIV/AIDS infection."<sup>5</sup> Because male circumcision is a common medical practice, questions inevitably arise regarding what non-Jewish families in the Messianic movement should do, when having a male child. **All agree that physical circumcision is not required for salvation.** There are those in the Messianic movement, approaching a passage like 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 as it addressing a vocational calling, who think that non-Jewish infant males should not be circumcised.<sup>6</sup> There are others, who think that physical circumcision as a medical practice, is hardly prohibited, but that some of the traditional Jewish ceremonies and blessings involving the naming of a male child, should be

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<sup>5</sup> *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book, 56.

<sup>6</sup> There is no agreement among examiners whether 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, and its reference to "Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called" (1 Corinthians 7:20, American Standard Version), relates to a vocational calling or a calling into salvation and sanctification.

The latter position is what the author ascribes to, based on the Greek source text and related statements in the Pauline letters. Consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, "1 Corinthians 7:17-24."

reserved for infant males of Messianic Jewish and intermarried couples. Another sort of ceremony or child dedication should be practiced to bless a non-Jewish infant male. Significant questions are posed for the future, given how in the Millennial Kingdom, no one uncircumcised of heart or flesh can enter into the Lord's sanctuary (Ezekiel 44:9).<sup>7</sup>

## Water Immersion

Within the broad Christian tradition, to be sure, some significance is placed on what is customarily called "baptism." Baptism as an English term is widely derived from the Greek verb *baptizō* (βαπτίζω) and Greek noun *baptisma* (βάπτισμα). The verb *baptizō* appears in not just the Greek New Testament or Apostolic Scriptures, but also the Septuagint, or ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanach. As is noted by the *Thayer* lexicon, *baptizō* can mean "to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water."<sup>8</sup> Due to much of the socio-religious associations that can go along with the English term "baptism," the Messianic community tends to employ the more neutral term "immersion." It is also quite common to hear the term *mikveh* (מִקְוֵה) employed, representative of a "gathering of water, esp. the ritual bath of purification" (*Jastrow*).<sup>9</sup> Many of the debates that take place in Protestantism, to be sure, involving "baptism," do not need to be repeated in today's Messianic congregations.

While Believers in Israel's Messiah can often conclude that water immersion is something which is only witnessed in the Messianic Scriptures (New Testament), water immersion for Believers is rooted in the purification rituals of the Tanach (cf. Exodus 29:1, 4; Leviticus 17:15-16; Psalm 51:2). Individuals, and certainly members of the Levitical priesthood, had to typically go through a ritual purification in water, before approaching God in the Tabernacle or Temple. In Second Temple times, water immersion was required of new proselytes to Judaism, who would often be regarded as "born again" (b. *Yevamot* 48b). Yet, Jewish persons would often go through ritual immersion in water for other reasons in life, namely to denote a significant status change. When John, the precursor of Yeshua of Nazareth, arrived on the scene immersing people in water, it was precisely so that they could be called to repentance and be readied to recognize the coming Messiah (Matthew 3:4-6; John 1:24-25; cf. Matthew 3:13-17).

Water immersion following salvation (cf. Matthew 28:19-20), was

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<sup>7</sup> For a further review, consult the author's article "Is Circumcision for Everyone?", appearing in *Torah in the Balance, Volume II*.

<sup>8</sup> *Thayer*, 94.

<sup>9</sup> *Jastrow*, 829.

deemed quite critical for new Believers in the First Century C.E. Those who were saved on the day of *Shavuot*/Pentecost were immersed in water (Acts 2:38), as were Cornelius and his companions when the good news was declared to them by Peter (Acts 10:45-48). The total immersion of a human person into water following a declaration of faith in Israel's Messiah, is to not only signify a status change (Romans 6:6-7), but also for one to be identified with His death, burial, and resurrection: "Or do you not know that all of us who were immersed into Messiah Yeshua were immersed into His death? Therefore we were buried together with Him through immersion into death—in order that just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become joined together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also will be joined together in His resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5, TLV).

Messianic Jewish Believers can, at times, have some initial difficulty with water immersion as a part of coming to faith, because of *forced baptisms* enacted during the Middle Ages by Roman Catholicism. Frequently, European Jews were forced to convert and be baptized, or they could face seizure of property, deportation, or even death.<sup>10</sup> Non-Jewish Believers from evangelical Protestant backgrounds—particularly where "Believer's baptism" was practiced—can have difficulty with not necessarily seeing how water immersion is rooted within Tanach purification rituals, but how the Jewish *mikveh* is something which has a wider range of applications. While the most important status change for a man or woman, is when he or she receives the salvation of Yeshua—there are likely other times when going through water immersion may be something useful. In Orthodox Judaism, women are immersed in water following their menstrual cycle. People in today's Messianic community, may decide to go through a *mikveh* when a significant status change in their life is about to take place. Your congregational leadership should be consulted, before you go through any water immersion. As obvious as it might be, while Messianic congregations frequently do not require one to be re-immersed for congregational membership—going through a *mikveh* might be something you find useful, should you enter into a new community of Messiah followers.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book, 63.

<sup>11</sup> For a further review, consult the article "The Waters of Immersion," appearing in *Torah in the Balance, Volume II*.

## Communion

Significant questions can be raised by various people entering into the Messianic movement, from evangelical backgrounds, particularly regarding what is done regarding the common practice of communion. In diverse Christian traditions, remembering the Last Supper of Yeshua can take place any number of ways and any number of times. Sometimes communion is weekly, sometimes it is monthly; sometimes communion is offered to all in church attendance, and sometimes it is only offered to members of a particular denomination or assembly. Sometimes Christian communion uses leavened bread and grape juice, and sometimes Christian communion uses an unleavened wafer and wine.<sup>12</sup>

Messianic people are of the broad conviction that what is commonly called the Last Supper, held between Yeshua and His Disciples before His execution, was actually a Passover *seder* meal. Yeshua's establishment of the New Covenant, by referencing the elements of bread and wine, were conducted in association with the unleavened bread and wine of the traditional *seder* meal (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). While many Christians remember the Lord's Supper via a weekly or annual communion, Messianic practice tends to be far more infrequent.

How do Messianic people approach "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup" (1 Corinthians 11:26, TLV)? As indicated by the workbook *Messianic Judaism Class*, "Some interpret this to mean, 'as often as you celebrate Pesakh, once per year. Some interpret this as every time you gather together. Some interpret this as one per week, month, quarter. Some interpret this as whenever you are guided by the Spirit.'"<sup>13</sup> On the whole, within the broad Messianic community, the Lord's Supper will be remembered within the context of the Passover *seder*, making it an annual **serious** occurrence. If the Lord's Supper is at all honored a bit more regularly, it will likely be observed at some kind of a private prayer meeting, employing unleavened bread and grape juice.

## Consult Your Rabbi

The four areas we have just covered: *bar/bat mitzvah*, circumcision, water immersion, and communion, are areas where today's Messianic movement is admittedly still developing and exploring. The way that these practices are observed and applied in one congregation, is not likely to be the same as they are observed in another congregation. In the customary

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<sup>12</sup> For a further review, consult Paul E. Engle, ed., *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book, 67.