

The Epistle of Ephesians is a letter that contains a very important message for the people of God, who are to be encouraged in accomplishing His mission for the world. Yeshua the Messiah is portrayed as exalted above the cosmos, with His resurrection power being accessible to all Believers. God’s people have been selected by Him to be holy, corporately composing a Temple in which His presence can dwell. By the sacrificial work of the cross, Jewish and non-Jewish followers of the Messiah are to be united together as a “one new humanity”—the mystery of the gospel! All are to serve one another in the Body of Messiah in mutual submission, as Yeshua’s thoughts and mindset nourish the whole *ekklesia*. People are encouraged to emulate God in their behavior, living distinctively different lives from those around them.

In varying degrees, Ephesians has often been highly valued by today’s Messianic movement because of its emphasis of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. It does speak of the unity that we are to all have in the Lord, as a testament to the grander redemption of Creation that will come in the eschaton. But while Ephesians is a text that we often turn to, Messianics are often not aware of the more detailed issues surrounding this letter present in contemporary scholarship. Were the “Ephesians” the only audience who received the letter, or was this a general epistle written to Believers in Asia Minor? Did the Apostle Paul really write Ephesians, or was it written by a second generation Believer in his name? What is the specific debate surrounding the dividing wall that has been abolished by the cross—is the wall abolished really the Torah of Moses in its entirety OR could it be something else? Are husbands the head/authority of their wives OR the head/source of their wives? How interconnected is the composition of Ephesians with the composition of Colossians?

In the commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*, Messianic Apologetics editor J.K. McKee addresses the known and unknown questions that this important letter asks us as Messianic Believers. A large Jewish and Greco-Roman Mediterranean background is considered of the issues. Careful and detailed attention has been given to the opinions present today surrounding the dividing wall, and complementarian and egalitarian views of the household codes. References to Tanach (Old Testament) concepts in the author’s words are considered, along with careful consideration for how Ephesians challenges us as a faith community trying to achieve our Father’s objectives. Poignant questions as to how we can be molded into a mature people are asked for today’s season of Messianic uncertainty.

EPHESIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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J.K. MCKEE

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

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ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	Heb: Hebrew
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
Ara: Aramaic	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	KJV: King James Version
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament</i> by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	LXX: Septuagint
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	m. Mishnah
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	MT: Masoretic Text
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
GNT: Greek New Testament	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
Grk: Greek	
halachah: lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	

NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
NT: New Testament
orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
OT: Old Testament
PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament

Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
Yid: Yiddish
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

PROLOGUE

Each of Paul's letters seems to have a specific message to the person who reads it. We have encountered this in our previous two studies (2007-2008). In Philippians, we have seen that for Paul, the center of his life is Yeshua the Messiah. In Galatians, we have seen that he considers Jewish and non-Jewish Believers to be one in Him, with faith in Israel's Messiah being the determining factor of one's membership among God's people.¹ As we prepare to turn to Ephesians, we are presented with yet another of one of the most important texts for today's emerging Messianic movement. An undeniable theme for today's Messianic community is the Apostle Paul's emphasis on Believers in Yeshua being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (2:11-12). This is a call that has certainly gone forth from many Messianic pulpits since the 1990s, as scores of non-Jewish Believers have embraced their Hebraic Roots and have desired a oneness with their fellow Jewish Believers. But what does it mean for any of us to be a part of the Commonwealth of Israel?

I would submit that one of the most difficult things for today's Messianic community to consider is what it means to be a people empowered by God and able to accomplish His mission for the Earth. This was certainly something demanded of the Ancient Israelites in the Torah, who were called by God to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), with the intention of recognizing that "all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). Being a testimony to the nations involved declaring His goodness, and being obedient to God via proper conduct (cf. Deuteronomy 4:5-6). When one examines Ephesians, these qualities are explained in a very eloquent and appropriate manner, especially for a group of non-Jewish Believers redeemed by the blood of the Messiah. The premise of one demonstrating himself or herself as a part of the people of God (Israel) via holy living has not changed between the Tanach or the Apostolic Scriptures, or even up until today!

The letter of Ephesians among the Pauline corpus also addresses First Century issues from which today's Believers can gain much insight. As Christopher J.H. Wright reminds us,

"Most of Paul's letters were written in the heat of missionary efforts: wrestling with the theological basis of the inclusion of the Gentiles, affirming the need for Jew and Gentile to accept one another in Christ and in the [assembly], tackling the baffling range of new problems that assailed young [assemblies] as the gospel took root in the world of Greek

¹ Consult the author's commentaries *Philippians for the Practical Messianic* (2007) and *Galatians for the Practical Messianic* (2007). Also consult his article "Congregations Among Us" (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

polytheism, confronting incipient heresies with clear affirmations of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and so on.”ⁱⁱ

Preparing myself to comment extensively on Paul’s letter of Ephesians, I find myself in a similar predicament. I am a teacher in a Messianic community today that struggles with the issues of non-Jewish inclusion and oneness, the questions posed by what it means to be Messianic in the Twenty-First Century, various personal and congregational struggles common to us as Believers, and even some false teachings that have entered in which deride who the Messiah is to us as our salvation. How relevant is Ephesians to us, and why is it one of those texts of Scripture that commonly gets overlooked by our community? Should we not be concerned with “the unfathomable riches of Messiah” (3:8)? How might Ephesians mean *even more to us* when we place it against its ancient Jewish and Mediterranean background?

Paul speaks of the work of Yeshua in Believers, “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (1:18). The Holy Spirit is sent to Believers, as “the guarantee of our inheritance” (1:14, RSV). Ephesians largely speaks to non-Jewish Believers in the First Century who were once “dead in...trespasses and sins” (2:1), yet who were made alive via the work of the gospel. These people, being made a part of God’s Kingdom, now have some roles and responsibilities they must perform. While they have been saved by God’s grace (2:8-9), He nonetheless requires good works of His children (2:10). And by inference, the Jewish members of Paul’s audience must treat the non-Jewish Believers as equal members of the Messiah’s Body, or their “fellow citizens” (2:19). *All* who have come to know the God of Israel via His Son have suffered, to one degree or another, from the consequences of sin unleashed upon humanity (2:2-3)—yet they have *all* been redeemed and *all* can enter into God’s marvelous purpose!

While Ephesians undoubtedly inspires us to never take our salvation for granted, what does it teach us about God’s Torah? Does Paul take a negative view of God’s Law in this letter (2:14-15; cf. 6:13)? Is there any Torah background behind the behavior that he asks his audience to demonstrate? What might Ephesians teach us about the person of Paul, and the unique work that God assigned to him among the nations (3:8-10)? How are we as the *ekklesia* to be a united people focused on Yeshua the Messiah as our central hope (4:3)? What does it mean for each of us to wear the full armor of God (6:11-19)? What does Ephesians teach us today about spiritual warfare and the challenges that life presents us? These are all important questions that need to be answered.

I believe today’s Messianic movement is one that possesses great potential to enact a positive difference in today’s world, when we will learn to take God’s mission for His people seriously. While Paul undoubtedly emphasizes that the gospel is to be proclaimed “to the Jew first,”ⁱⁱⁱ Ancient Israel was given a mandate to proclaim the goodness of its God to the

ⁱⁱ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 49.

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 1:16; 2:9-10.

world around it. It is my personal opinion that while today's Messianics should be commended for evangelizing and seeing that a generation of Jewish people came to a saving knowledge of Yeshua, it has not done that well with the other side of evangelism and discipleship: "also to the Greek" or "all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). Many in today's Messianic Judaism avoid the letter of Ephesians, because of Paul's emphasis on a oneness and unity between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers that either they do not want, or want to act as though it does not exist in the Bible.

For those Messianics who do believe in equality between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers as part of the "one new humanity" (2:15, NRSV/CJB), I wonder why they do not often read Ephesians—because it gives us the clues on how we are to conduct ourselves, demonstrating the transforming power of God within us (4:23-24). **The audience of Ephesians is one which we should all truly strive to emulate and see replicated, as new Messianic congregations and fellowships are birthed.** How do we all learn to respect one another as human beings who have been redeemed by the Lord? How do we learn to function as one Body of Messiah? How does personal holiness extend to familial holiness and manifest itself into corporate holiness? Perhaps most avoided, how are we preparing ourselves for people—Jews, Christians, and others—who will one day come to us wanting unique *Messianic* answers? Ephesians has much to say that we need not overlook any more.

In order for today's Messianic community to enter into the great things that the Lord has in store for it, we need to go through a season of intense spiritual and theological refinement. I can think of no better text to consider for this than Ephesians. I consider the primary thrust of this letter to be, as Paul so aptly puts it, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (5:1). As the sons and daughters of the Most High, men and women who have come to know Him via His Son Yeshua, we should be following after the instructions of God. We are those who should be reaching forward "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Messiah" (4:13b, RSV). Ephesians teaches us important life lessons about what it means to live not only as born again Believers—but as *adults* accomplishing the tasks of God! It tells us things about congregations and fellowships made up of both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, and how we must "attain to the unity of the faith" (4:13a).

So as we prepare to begin, what life lessons do you believe Ephesians will teach you, and aid you with, concerning the tasks the Lord has in store (5:3-33)? It is my sincere hope and prayer that our study of Ephesians will once again be helpful, as we all desire to see that mature, transformed, and impactful Messianic movement emerge that can be more than a movement—but a force for the power of God in the Earth! *Amein v'amein.*

J.K. McKee, Editor
Messianic Apologetics

For the 2012 printing, areas where some further analysis has been conducted include 2:11-13 with some new developments in Messianic ecclesiology and what the “Commonwealth of Israel” (*politeia*) actually is, and 5:21-33 including consultation with the rather brilliant and thorough book *Man and Woman, One in Christ* by Philip B. Payne (2009). A new addition to this commentary is the summary article “The Message of Ephesians.” With this release, it will now be much easier to use both this resource and *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* (2010) together, given the overlap in content among these epistles.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter of Ephesians¹ (Grk. *Pros Ephesious*) is a very rich, full, and spiritual text of the Bible, having brought great inspiration to many Believers. Throughout history, this has been one of the favorite books of many, particularly as it regards the nature of God's people and Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) ruling and reigning over them. Yeshua the Messiah is uplifted over the cosmos, as the One from whom great blessings originate. It places an emphasis on proper living, and how God's people are to be empowered for His service. Ephesians is also a rather broad and general epistle; it includes both doctrine as well as an emphasis on the corporate election of God's people. Many have considered Ephesians to be a masterful work of ecumenicism, emphasizing the unity that God desires to have among all of His people. Ephesians certainly asks important questions of any generation or group of people that desires to be used by the Lord in the world, and place Him at the center of their mission.

Among many who read Ephesians is certainly the question of what kind of a text it actually is. While it is easy to call Ephesians a letter or an epistle, "Despite its epistolary opening and closing, it is a 'letter' only in a highly qualified sense. Ephesians has been characterized by many as a theological 'tractate' or 'manifesto'" (ABD).² Others consider Ephesians to be a homily. Harold W. Hoehner indicates, "this book is regarded by many as the crown of all Paul's writings,"³ followed by I. Howard Marshall who concludes, "it resembles the so-called 'catholic' epistles."⁴ From this point of view, Ephesians would more closely match the genre of the General Epistles (James, 1&2 Peter, 1-3 John), and would almost serve as a capstone or summation to all of Paul's teachings. Some commentators have considered Ephesians second only to Romans in its significance among the Pauline corpus,

¹ Please note that in spite of the common reference to Ephesians as "the Book of Ephesians," I am going to purposefully not refer to this text by this designation. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

Per the debate of Ephesians' actual audience, I will simply be referring to its recipients as "the audience," "Paul's listeners," "those who received the letter," etc.

² Victor Paul Furnish, "Ephesians, Epistle to the," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:536.

³ Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 613.

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, "Ephesians," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1385.