

Men and Women: Answering Messianic Questions

Many people in today's broad Messianic community are willing to question just about everything. There are ongoing debates as to whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is genuinely God, or if He is just a supernatural yet ultimately created being. There are people who believe in doctrines such as psychopannychy ("soul sleep") and annihilation. There are discussions about the origin of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), and whether they were originally written in Hebrew or Greek, *and* what texts should be considered canonical or spurious. There are people who think it is acceptable to include Medieval Jewish mysticism as a part of their regimen of Bible study, considering the Kabbalah to be "okay." There are people who try to synthesize every single saying of Yeshua the Messiah with the Jewish Sages of many centuries later—and then there are those who want nothing to do with the Jewish Sages. There are those who have put together their own restored "Biblical calendars." There are even people you will encounter, from time to time, who believe that Planet Earth is a flat disk and not a sphere. And of course, may we never forget all of the ongoing and increasingly diverse series of end-time prognostications we encounter...

Certainly with some of the open-mindedness and variance of opinion "out there"—on a whole host of issues—mainstream discussions and debates taking place in academic Jewish and Christian settings, would seemingly be permitted. It has to be observed, in my family's quarter century of being a part of the Messianic movement (since 1995), that there is one huge issue which Messianic people, congregational leaders, and teachers of note are seldom willing to discuss or evaluate. In fact, this issue is often considered to be off-limits, if not completely *verboten*. In spite of there being a range of issues that Messianic people feel free to discuss—including at times strongly questioning the Divinity of Yeshua—it is odd that contemporary discussions over **men and women in the Body of Messiah**, and

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specifically women in ministry, cannot frequently be brought up. If there are people we may encounter in our midst who think that certain books of the New Testament might not be too inspired of God, then surely we can discuss whether or not husbands and wives should be co-leaders of their families, and whether or not males and females can be co-leaders of the local assembly.

Where does today's Messianic community stand on men and women?

To many people in today's broad Messianic movement, the issues involving the place of husbands and wives in the family, as well as men and women in the local assembly, is a done deal. *Husbands lead the family, and wives abide by their husbands' decisions. Men lead the congregation, and women are there to help facilitate congregational functions.* Any position about men and women in the Body of Messiah which might invoke terms such as co-equal, shared responsibility, and mutual submission are often viewed as compromise with the prevailing culture at best, or capitulation to liberal theology at worst.

The majority of the formal and academic writing you will encounter, which will invoke the label "Messianic" in some way, will with a handful of exceptions, almost always represent a complementarian view of men and women in the Body of Messiah. The 2001 compilation book *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, represented essays in favor of women serving in leadership,¹ and those favoring male exclusive leadership in the assembly.² In 2013, a chapter on "Messianic Judaism and Women"³ appeared in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, and while recognizing that there are younger people in the Messianic Jewish movement, at least, considering egalitarian perspectives, that a more traditional role for women as homemakers and serving in a secondary capacity to men, should probably be preferred. At the beginning of the 2020s, the Messianic Jewish movement will continue to be widely complementarian. However, younger people in Messianic Judaism are very likely to be more open-minded and considerate of

¹ Ruth Fleischer, "Women Can Be in Leadership," in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *Voices of Messianic Judaism* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 2001), pp 151-157.

² Sam Nadler, "Male Leadership and the Role of Women," in *Ibid.*, pp 159-168.

Nadler is also the author of *Developing Healthy Messianic Congregations* (Charlotte: Word of Messiah Ministries, 2016).

³ Rachel Wolf, "Messianic Judaism and Women," in David J. Rudolph and Joel Willitts, eds. *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), pp 98-106.

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egalitarian perspectives regarding men and women, and specifically female leaders, within the Body of Messiah. It is, however, to be witnessed that a recent Messianic Jewish book released on the issue of marriage (2017), was only intended to be read by men and not by women.⁴ This at least demonstrates that facilitating discussions on men and women in the Body of Messiah, where females can expect to be afforded more opportunities, is going to be something long and hard fought in a number of sectors of the Messianic Jewish movement. However, it is not something impossible by any means, as it is witnessed that many from the Millennial generation are very eager to implement egalitarian perspectives.

When moving outside of the Messianic Jewish movement, into other sectors, complementarian to rigid patriarchal perspectives, involving men and women, are what one is most likely to encounter. The perspectives of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, reflect those of male leadership within the Body of Messiah, with females taking a secondary role.⁵ The Two-House sub-movement, at times, has been favorable to females taking on some leadership and teaching roles,⁶ but the Ephraimite movement has also been heavily stigmatized by one of its major leaders endorsing and practicing polygamy⁷—something which both evangelical Christian complementarians today, and all evangelical egalitarians, forthrightly reject as an aberration. On the whole, the perspectives regarding men and women one is likely to encounter in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, go beyond complementarianism, and instead will favor a patriarchal view of gender, with (married-)male privilege strongly emphasized.

As we move forward in time—and particularly as more and more Messianic young people receive a higher level of formal theological training than their predecessors—that the pendulum will be shifting

⁴ First Fruits of Zion, with Grant Luton and Russ Resnik, *Adam Loves Eve: The Bible's Guide for Men Seeking a Better Marriage* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2017).

This book broadly follows the outline provided by Shalom Arush, *The Garden of Peace: A Marital Guide for Men Only*, trans. Lazer Brody (Jerusalem: Chut Shel Chessed Institutions, 2008).

⁵ Tim Hegg (1992). *The Role of Women in the Messianic Assembly*. Torah Resource. Retrieved 27 February, 2010, from <<http://torahresource.com>>; *What God has Joined Together: Biblical Foundations for Marriage* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007).

⁶ Batya Ruth Wootten, *Mama's Torah: The Role of Women* (St. Cloud, FL: Key of David, 2004).

⁷ Moshe Koniuchowsky, *Sex and the Believer: Shocking Freedom of Sexuality in Torah* (Margate, FL: Your Arms to Israel Publishing, 2008).

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toward a more egalitarian position of men and women in the Body of Messiah, is inevitable.

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While in one's local Messianic congregation or fellowship, one is more likely to encounter a complementarian perspective on men and women in the Body of Messiah adhered to, it is hardly as though there is a complementarian monolith within the Messianic movement. When looking slightly below the surface, there is a wider array of opinions detectable. Most of these would be classified as complementarian-lite, with females taking on much more responsibility for leadership and teaching within the assembly, but with the position of senior congregational leader reserved for a male. There are a few, who might be seen to be egalitarian, and be willing to argue, at least in principle, that a female could be a senior leader of a Messianic congregation.

Varied perspectives regarding females in positions of Messianic leadership, is actually not new to the Messianic movement of the Twenty-First Century. In her chapter, "Messianic Judaism and Women," appearing in the 2013 *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, Rachel Wolf discusses how a number of the female Messianic Jewish pioneers were raised in independently-thinking Jewish environments, and were somewhat perplexed when highly conservative Christian perspectives were adopted by much of Messianic Judaism in the 1970s and 1980s:

"Most of the established female leaders in the Messianic Jewish community grew up in Jewish contexts that valued independent thinking. Early Messianic synagogues tended to adopt conservative Christian views, and though some Messianic Jewish women embraced this outlook on women's roles, others looked to Jewish sources as models. There is tension when it comes to identity because Messianic Jewish women come from a variety of backgrounds, and we find ourselves within a developing Messianic Jewish culture that includes many Gentiles."⁸

Some of the factors which have contributed to a mainly complementarian ideology prevailing in current Messianic Judaism, do involve some of the formal training of various leaders and rabbis at highly conservative (and dispensational) evangelical Protestant institutions. Among Messianic Jewish leaders who have been formally

⁸ Rachel Wolf, "Messianic Judaism and Women," in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 101.

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trained in religious studies, not enough have been, or are going to be, theologically exposed to an egalitarian ideology. Many of the Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, raised in either a quasi-progressive Jewish environment or a nominally-religious Jewish environment, as Wolf notes above, are at somewhat of a conundrum as to the limitation of women in today's Messianic Judaism. Many of the non-Jewish Believers attracted to the Messianic movement, come from highly conservative theological (and political) backgrounds.

People who are engaged with some of the theological discussions and debates, particularly in evangelicalism from the past four to five decades, know that one cannot just refer off hand to 1 Timothy 2:12 or 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, regarding the place of women in the assembly. Complementarian interpreters who are negative to women occupying positions of leadership in the *ekklēsia*, recognize that there are situation-specific issues in both of these passages. Conservative egalitarian interpreters, recognize that 1 Timothy 2:12 has translation issues, and that there are textual debates involving the authenticity of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

When looking at the debate between complementarianism and egalitarianism in contemporary evangelicalism—in particular regarding men and women serving as co-leaders in the assembly, and husbands and wives as co-leaders of the family—it should be obvious that today's Messianic movement has some *unique homespun challenges*. Because we do believe in some continuance of the Torah or Law of Moses, some are inclined to want to establish a Twenty-First Century quasi-patriarchy, rather than interpret some Torah instructions contextually for Ancient Israel *first*, before deducing modern applications. Many of the instructions witnessed in the Torah, were actually case laws intended for Ancient Israel because of circumstances that arose for this burgeoning nation in the Ancient Near East. The bodies of Jewish literature and *halachah* from the Second Temple period and immediately afterward, bear significant witness to how Judaism has wrestled with applying ancient instructions, for later time periods.

As we address various Messianic questions surrounding men and women, our purpose is not to evaluate all of the internal family decisions that husbands and wives need to make regarding their different responsibilities, their economic disposition, or their sexual practices. Our purpose is to evaluate whether or not the Messianic movement, as a whole, has misevaluated the Scriptural trajectory regarding what occurred between men and women as a result of the Fall, and the restoration of such equality in the post-resurrection era.

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There have been some inexcusable offenses committed, by a sufficient number of today's Messianic leaders and teachers, by relegating females to a secondary place in the assembly and in the home. In our discussion on men and women in the Body of Messiah, we will also not overlook some of the discrimination which single people in our movement have had to endure. The subject lines that I have prepared for **Messianic Questions**, are things that many of us have heard during our Messianic experience: in congregations, at conferences, and in literature.

“Men and women have equal value and dignity in the eyes of God from Creation, but they have been created to occupy different leadership roles.”

How often, in a Messianic setting, will any of us be prone to hear that males and females are to be regarded as equals—versus hearing that males and females only have equal dignity? The latter concerns the value and worth of males and females, while the former can regard the opportunities afforded to each in the home and in the assembly. Egalitarians hardly believe that men and women are exactly the same, and do affirm various differences—even though they do believe at Creation that Adam and Eve were to tend the Garden of Eden as equal partners, something not affirmed by most complementarians. Still, both complementarians and egalitarians would agree on a number of crucial points:

1. Males and females were both created in the image of God: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27, NRSV).
2. The female originated from the male: “So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:21-22, NASU).

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3. The male, Adam, is astounded at the appearance of the female, Eve: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23, NASU).
4. A Biblical marriage is intended to be between one man and one woman: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, NASU).

It is imperative, in affirming the equal dignity of males and females, to recognize how all human beings are created in the Divine image (Genesis 1:26-27), something which for Ancient Israel would have placed it squarely in conflict with many of the religions of the Ancient Near East—where only monarchs, royal families, and various aristocrats or dignitaries would be considered made in the image of gods or goddesses. In Egypt, the Pharaoh would certainly have been regarded as the son of Ra, whereas the Egyptian population as a whole—and certainly the Israelites—were expendable mortals.

In affirming the equal dignity of males and females, it is also imperative to acknowledge the response of the male Adam to the arrival of the female Eve: "This-time, she-is-it! Bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh! She shall be called Woman/*Isha*, for from Man/*Ish* she was taken" (Genesis 2:23, Fox). The response of Adam to the arrival of Eve was one of recognizing Eve as having originated from himself, and hence to undeniably have the same equal value as himself. Eve was not a deformed male, because of having different reproductive anatomy as a female. Eve was to be treated the same as Adam's bones and flesh. Unfortunately, too much of human history bears witness to the many injustices, abuses, exploitations, and even murders that have taken place by men toward women, because females are not viewed as being of the same bones and flesh as males. Throughout classical Greece and Rome, because females were not believed to have equal dignity along with males, homosexuality was practiced by many, with females believed as only being important for reproduction. Today, however, the significant bulk of pornography that one finds lamentably available, involves the objectification and the de-humanization of females.

While there can be common ground established between complementarians and egalitarians regarding the **equal dignity** of males and females—with a recognition that the former has been seen to demean and abuse the latter throughout far too much of human history—there are theological and ideological differences between complementarians and egalitarians as well. Complementarianism has

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been the principal ideology of Messianic Judaism to date. Referencing Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28, Sam Nadler indicates how “men and women have equal spiritual status before God. They are equally forgiven and equally valued by him.”⁹ Yet his essay in the 2001 compilation book *Voices of Messianic Judaism* was entitled “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” and so one wonders if those who would only affirm “equal spiritual status” for males and females, could ever affirm “equal status” for males and females. There are those in evangelical Protestantism, to be sure, who would hold to a minimalist complementarian or complementarian-lite ideology—although with males occupying the extreme senior positions—who would still easily affirm that males and females are equal, and not just of equal dignity.

Much of what surrounds the equality *or* equal dignity of males and females—and whether males were specifically intended for a senior leadership role and females for a junior leadership role—is affected by how one interprets God’s statement “I will make him a helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18, NASU) or “I will make him a helper as his partner” (NRSV). Many have approached the female being *ezer kenegdo* as a junior partner to the male, whereas others have approached it as an affirmation of the female originally being a co-equal partner and co-leader along with the male. The fact that God is described numerous times as a helper of Israel (Psalm 33:20; 70:5; 115:9-11; 146:5), serves as a sure indication of how a helper hardly is required to be an inferior. In fact, in the case of the Lord, such a helper to Israel would contextually be required to be a superior. So, it is hardly inappropriate when egalitarians have concluded that Eve being the helper of Adam, that Eve was to be his equal, and at least before the Fall, as a co-leader along with him (Genesis 1:26).

In his 2017 *Messiah Journal* article, “The Two Shall Become One Flesh,” Russell Resnik fairly concludes, “The woman...is formed from him, is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, not subject to his dominion but a sustainer beside him.”¹⁰ This is a remark which can be taken as egalitarian-friendly, but some further conclusions drawn are more complementarian. Resnik first appreciably affirms, “Man and woman both share in the divine image and are equally essential to the meaning of humanness so that the humanity of each is completed when they unite,”¹¹ which is what is intended by Genesis 2:24 and a proper

⁹ Nadler, “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 165.

¹⁰ Russell Resnik. “The Two Shall Become One Flesh” *Messiah Journal* Issue 128, Spring 2017/5778:25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

marriage between one man and one woman. He goes on, however, and says, "Within marriage, the inherent equality of male and female as divine image bearers is expressed in tension with differing roles of male and female."¹² Conservative egalitarians hardly believe in the exactness of males and females, as both have different reproductive anatomy, and unique skillsets and attributes innate to gender. It is contextually deduced, however, that what Resnik means by "differing roles" concerns leadership, as he concludes, "These differing roles are accentuated, and to some degree set against each other, as a consequence of exile from the garden. They persist into the Messianic community and are upheld in the Apostolic Writings."¹³ Resnik may be seen to uphold the co-leadership of males and females as was originally intended in Eden, but that was something lost as a result of the Fall, and has yet to be restored to the Body of Messiah.

Egalitarians conclude that Adam and Eve were created as equals, and were originally intended to be the human co-leaders who would tend the Garden of Eden together. This is something that egalitarians conclude was lost as a result of the Fall (Genesis 3:15-16), but is something that was spiritually restored as a result of the resurrection of the Messiah (Galatians 3:28). While complementarians may be witnessed to haphazardly throw around pejorative terms like "feminism," because egalitarians believe in the equality of all human beings, they are in a far better position than complementarians to not only promote the equal worth and value of all in the Body of Messiah—**but most especially oppose the oppression, abuse, and (sexual) exploitation of females that has been seen since ancient times.** In her essay, "Women Can Be in Leadership," appearing in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, Ruth Fleischer summarized a number of inconvenient realities which contemporary complementarians too often try to overlook:

"Until modern times, indeed, until the twentieth century, men largely regarded women as chattel, as possessions that might be traded, bought or sold, or given by parents in return for a consideration. Baby girls were a liability in ancient Greece, and elsewhere, often left to die on mountaintops. Girls were seen as less capable of intellectual activity, of physical prowess, and of self-control. Yet, women have been outstanding scholars, rulers, writers, doctors, scientists, and artists, especially in the last few hundred years as more and more doors are open to them."¹⁴

¹² Ibid., pp 26-27.

¹³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴ Fleischer, "Women Can Be in Leadership," in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, pp 153-154.

“Mankind fell from grace because Adam did not lead, permitting his wife to lead and be deceived by the serpent.”

It is witnessed that complementarian and egalitarian readers of Genesis 3:1-19, which records the Fall of humanity and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, often read it very differently. Complementarians widely consider that because Adam was created first, that he was given the place of leader. Egalitarian interpreters, in stark contrast, do not assume that simply because the male was created first, that all major leadership responsibilities were to rest with him.

Easily overlooked by even the best Bible scholars, is how Adam as the first human was given the instruction to not eat from the forbidden fruit: “The LORD God commanded the human...” (Genesis 2:16, Common English Bible). While we are not told in Genesis 2 how much time transpired between the creation of Adam and the creation of Eve, we can assume that a sufficient amount of time occurred for not only for Adam to be lonely—but also to interact enough with the Creator, His Creation, the animals, and for him to have a good idea about what would be lost if the single command not to eat from the forbidden fruit were violated. Egalitarians will widely stress that Adam being created first, should not be taken an indication of principal male leadership in the *ekklesia* and in the family, but instead as an indication that Adam had more practical knowledge and experience with the Creator and His Creation before the arrival of Eve.

Eve was surely informed by Adam about how God had declared the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil off limits (Genesis 3:1-2). Yet in her dialogue with the serpent, she is witnessed as saying, “God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die’” (Genesis 3:3, NASU). There is nothing in the account of Genesis 1-3 up to this point which specifically states that touching the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and its fruit would cause death. Eve knows that the tree and its fruit are quarantine, so much so that she is seen adding to God’s instruction, so that touching the forbidden fruit will not take place. *Eve is thinking for herself*, but Eve also demonstrates a naïveté likely resultant of Adam not having adequately informed or taught her as to the dynamics of God, His Creation, and the Garden. Eve is witnessed as being deceived by the serpent because of her ignorance (Genesis 3:4-5), she eats the fruit, and then she passes the fruit onto Adam who also eats (Genesis 3:6). The innocence of Adam and Eve was lost (Genesis 3:7a).

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Adam and Eve make themselves coverings due to their nakedness (Genesis 3:7b), and they are confronted by God (Genesis 3:8-9) who asks them about such nakedness (Genesis 3:10). God asks, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:11, NASU). Rather than being honest with his Creator, Adam instead shifts the blame to Eve: "The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12, NASU). When asked what she did, Eve tells God, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13, NASU). The later testimony of 1 Timothy 2:14 is clear that "*it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (NASU). Eve was legitimately deceived by the serpent into eating the forbidden fruit, whereas Adam was not, as he knew exactly what he was consuming.

As a consequence of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, a curse is issued by God upon the serpent (Genesis 3:14-15). A curse is also issued upon the woman, first involving pain in childbirth: "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16a, NASU). The statements which follow, appearing in Genesis 3:16b-17, are especially subjected to very different conclusions from complementarian and egalitarian interpreters:

"'Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat from it"; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:16b-17, NASU).

Fundamentalist patriarchalists will read "Your desire will be toward your husband, yet he must rule over you" (TLV), as meaning that in the Creation order, various females have a strong hormonal desire to have a husband, and when they find one, he will consequently be his wife's leader. Concurrent with this, the Fall of humanity is squarely placed on how Adam listened to and followed his wife, letting Eve be the leader and not him (Genesis 3:17a). In a diverse number of Messianic settings, members of my family have seen Genesis 3:17a, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife" (NKJV), directed to husbands in the assembly, with the explicit direction that they are not to take the advice of their wives too seriously in terms of family matters.

It should hardly be a surprise that egalitarian readers of Genesis 3:16b-17 have a completely different approach to the curse issued upon humanity at the Fall. Genesis 3:16b, employing the Hebrew term

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teshuqah, communicates, “Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (NJPS). Further on in Genesis 4:7, God is seen informing Cain, who later murders his brother, “Sin couches at the door; its urge [*teshuqah*] is toward you, yet you can be its master” (NJPS). The *teshuqah*, “urge” (NJPS) is a forceful action, then resultant in a forceful action. As a part of the curse in Genesis 3:16b, wives will have an urge for their husbands, and the husbands will then be forced to master them. *This is describing a battle of the sexes which ensues as a result of the expulsion from Eden.*

Adam does bear responsibility for eating the forbidden fruit, and readers should be honest enough to recognize that it does involve how he responded to Eve’s activity: “To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat of it,” cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life”’ (Genesis 3:17, NIV). The statement “Since you listened to your wife...” (NLT) is hardly unqualified, as though husbands from this point in history onward should never listen to what their wives have to say. In total, “listened to the voice of your wife,” **is joined with** “and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you.” While nothing is stated specifically in the text as to what Eve said to Adam, to cause him to eat the forbidden fruit, it is said that “the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (Genesis 3:6, NASU). What Eve told Adam had to relate to how the serpent had deceived her, by saying, “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5, NASU).

Adam listening to his wife Eve, is qualified along with Adam eating the forbidden fruit. Adam clearly should have corrected Eve for her error, informing her once again as to how terrible things would happen if they ate the forbidden fruit, and the two of them should have cried out to the Creator for His mercy right then. Eve’s limitation was not that she was created as an inferior person with a lower level of intelligence than Adam; Eve’s limitation was that “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13, RSV), relating to her experiential education. Adam’s advantage was not that he was created as a superior person with a higher level of intelligence; Adam’s advantage was that he had greater knowledge of the Creator, His Creation, and of the dynamics of the Garden.

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Egalitarians do believe that “your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16b, NJPS), is indeed part of the curse resultant of the Fall of humanity. Egalitarians also believe that the work of the Messiah on the tree has inaugurated a post-resurrection era where the curse can be lifted, and the mutual partnership of man and woman intended by Genesis 1:26 can be restored: “Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (TNIV). Among Messianic Jewish teachers, Fleischer recognizes, in *Voices of Messiah Judaism*, the need to return to what has been lost, “[the] harmony of the sexes within God’s plan. Not the elevation of one sex over the other, not the servitude of one sex under the other, but a program that utilizes the gifts and calling of each, individually, as men and women, to advance the kingdom of God.”¹⁵

“Torah only presents males as capable leaders of the community, not females.”

Complementarians of all varieties are going to appeal to the examples of males in leadership, throughout the Scriptures, as being normative for the leadership of the local assembly. This is especially true of many people in the Messianic community, who read the Torah on a weekly basis, they encounter males appointed to leadership positions in the community of Ancient Israel, and it may very well be that when they see any females in positions of spiritual leadership today—they feel that something is significantly off and/or that something needs to be seriously corrected.

It is difficult for any reader of the Torah to avoid how males were appointed to positions of leadership and administration in the community of Ancient Israel:

“Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them *as* leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you” (Exodus 18:21-22, NASU).

¹⁵ Fleischer, “Women Can Be in Leadership,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 151.

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“Choose wise and discerning and experienced men from your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.’ You answered me and said, ‘The thing which you have said to do is good.’ So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes” (Deuteronomy 1:13-15, NASU).

Deuteronomy 1:13 specifies, *havu l'khem anashim chakamim u'nevonim v'idu'im*, “Provide yourselves (with) men, wise, understanding and knowledgeable” (Fox). God says, *v'asimem b'rasheikhem*, “I will set them as heads-over-you” (Fox). The term *rosh* or “head,” contextually here does mean, “chief (place, position)” (BDB) or leader.¹⁶ There is no avoiding how in the wilderness, those who were chosen to be leaders who would help resolve challenges in Israel, were males.

We have probably all witnessed, from time to time, a congregational teaching where the appointment of male leaders in Ancient Israel, was referred to as support for male leaders in the assembly. While he recognizes that within the Tanach, there were females who demonstrated various gifts and talents, notably including prophecy, Nadler concludes in “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” “there is no evidence that there were any female elders in Israel; when there is any description of elders it is always ‘men.’”¹⁷

Let it never be said that egalitarians oppose male leaders in the assembly. At the same time, let it be realized that there are contextual issues present in passages like Exodus 18:21-22 and Deuteronomy 1:13-15. In this scene, Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, sees Moses being overwhelmed with having to issue judgments for every small dispute that erupts in the community, and recognizes that he needs to appoint leaders to whom he can delegate power (Exodus 18:14-20). The intended audience is the newly freed company of former Israelite slaves; the male leaders were likely Israelite elders who had grown up in Egypt, and had probably been slaves themselves at one point. It is not inappropriate to deduce that a number of them may have been used as intermediaries between the Egyptian taskmasters and their Israelite slaves, and as such had been introduced to some basic education in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Females being appointed as leaders in Ancient Israel, at such an early stage of national formation—and in a

¹⁶ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs., *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 910.

¹⁷ Nadler, “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 161.

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staunchly patriarchal Ancient Near East—would have been impossible. It would have been confounding enough to see various former male *slaves* taking on positions of leadership.

Later in the Scriptures, we can deduce that males were those serving as elders in the post-exilic Jewish community (Ezra 10:14) up until the period of the Second Temple (Luke 7:3-5). Egalitarian readers of Scripture do not deny the place of male leadership in the community up to this point, nor do they deny the continuing importance of males in leadership. Where egalitarians and complementarians diverge, is in evaluating the trajectory of Scripture leading to the post-resurrection period. Egalitarians widely affirm that up until this point, there has been a steady progression back to the equality of male and female lost in Eden—such as seeing former male Israelite slaves given positions of leadership in the community, something that would have surely been eschewed by their former Egyptian masters. But resultant of the sacrifice and resurrection of Yeshua, something has shifted (cf. Galatians 3:28), and a new status for people has been inaugurated, that needs to be accounted for. Many complementarians would agree that females in the post-resurrection era are afforded far more honor and respect than in any other time period in the Bible, but would often stop short in seeing females appointed to senior positions of leadership in the assembly.

While he recognizes male leadership in pre-resurrection era contexts, Nadler believes that only males can occupy senior positions in the assembly due to passages such as 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9, obviously delivered in the post-resurrection era:

“[T]he Levites did not earn their role as priests among the twelve tribes of Israel, but had it ascribed to them by God. The role ascribed to men pertains to the leadership of the congregation as a whole. This includes setting the overall direction of the congregation, keeping the congregation in line with biblical principles, and seeing that the congregation is spiritually nurtured. These are the functions of the *z'keynim* in our congregation. Not all men are suited for the role of elder. In selecting elders from among the men, we seek to follow the biblical criteria set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 as well as the demonstration of leadership in the congregation.”¹⁸

All those of who encounter Exodus 18:21, “You shall also seek out from among all the people capable men who fear God, trustworthy men

¹⁸ Ibid., pp 165-166.

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who spurn ill-gotten gain” (NJPS), would recognize that the virtues of competence, trustworthiness, honesty, and rejecting inappropriate monies **are required of all spiritual leaders for all time periods**. But whether all leaders at all time periods have to be of the male gender, is another question all together. The instructions of Exodus 18:21-22 and Deuteronomy 1:13-15 involve leaders appointed for the community of Ancient Israel, appointed over different numerical groups. There can be no one-for-one transference of such requirements for any modern setting, as these are not universal requirements for leadership, for all places and times. Complementarians should be honest enough to recognize this.

Are the requirements for elders listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, universal for all places and times? Or are these principally instructions for Timothy in the vicinity of Ephesus and Titus on the island of Crete, to see the communities of Messiah followers firmly rooted and established? Whether the instructions involving congregational leadership in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 are universal or situation specific, are factors that complementarian examiners—and certainly egalitarian examiners—have had to weigh. Why are there no requirements issued in Titus 1 for deacons, but there are requirements issued in 1 Timothy 3 for deacons? If one can assume that the believing community on Crete was not sufficiently large enough to require various deacons, then a situational issuance of the instructions of 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9 must be considered as a legitimate interpretational option. A conclusion drawn by conservative egalitarians, who read such instructions as situational *and* weighing examples of females in leadership in the Apostolic Scriptures, is that 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9 cannot be used as prohibitions against female leaders. This is especially true given the presence of the female Apostle Junia in Romans 16:7, as the gifting of apostle would be considered of greater weight than that of elder!

“Torah presents men as head or leader of the household, not women.”

In just about every Messianic setting either you or I are likely to have been involved with, when the role of husbands and wives within the family is discussed, it is automatically assumed that the husband is the “head of the household,” meaning that he is the leader with whom final authority resides. This is a mainstay of complementarian thought.

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Unless one has been seriously engaged in academic debates between evangelical complementarians and egalitarians over the past three to four decades, one is not likely to have heard any proposal that the term “head,” as it appears in various places in our English Bibles, could mean anything other than “leader” (aside from the physical head of a human or animal).

It cannot be denied that the Hebrew term *rosh* can mean “**leader, chief**” (*HALOT*).¹⁹ The term *rosh* is used throughout the Hebrew Tanach to describe leaders within Ancient Israel. In a random passage like Joshua 22:21, where it is seen that “The Children of Re’uven and the Children of Gad and the half tribe of Menashe answered; they spoke to the heads of the thousands of Israel” (Fox), the Hebrew reads *rashei al’fei Yisrael*. However, contextually this is not speaking about fathers being the leaders of small families of a wife and several children; contextually this is speaking about the leaders of large clan units that compose subdivisions within the tribes of Ancient Israel. And, it also cannot go unnoticed how the Hebrew *rashei al’fei Yisrael* was rendered in the Greek Septuagint as, *tois chiliarchois Israēl*, “the officers of thousands of Israel” (NETS). The Hebrew *rosh* was rendered as *chiliarchos*, “lit. ‘leader of a thousand soldiers’” (*BDAG*).²⁰ While these leaders in Ancient Israel were doubtlessly male, complementarian examiners should be fair enough to recognize the difference between commanders of subdivisions within the Twelve Tribes, versus the leadership responsibilities of husband and wife within the family.

The two main places in the Apostolic Writings, where it is commonly concluded that males are to be the “head of the household” are 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:22-23. About the only thing that readers of 1 Corinthians 11 can all agree on, is that the Greek *kephalē* contextually has to mean the physical head of a man or woman in some of the verses (1 Corinthians 11:4-7, 10). However, it is quite safe to say that a significant majority of today’s Messianic congregational leaders and teachers, have never been exposed to how the Greek term *kephalē* frequently does not mean leader, but instead “*the head or source of a river*” (*LS*),²¹ or “*source, origin*” (*LSJM*).²² And indeed, given how in

¹⁹ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1166.

²⁰ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1084.

²¹ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott., *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 430.

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English, the term “head” frequently does relate to leadership, getting many of today’s Messianic people to think of the term “head” meaning something other than leadership, is going to be bereft with challenges.

In the Torah we encounter descriptions such as “head of his father’s household” (Numbers 1:4, NASU) and “head of the people of a father’s household” (Numbers 25:15, NASU), and so it is automatically assumed that many usages of “head” in the Scriptures just mean “leader.” Within the Pentateuch, the Hebrew *rosh* can mean “**leader, chief**” (HALOT),²³ yet the Greek Septuagint most often renders *rosh* as *archōn*, “a ruler, commander, chief, captain” (LS),²⁴ or something comparable. When “Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel” (Numbers 30:1, NASU) or Ancient Israel’s leaders, *rashei ha’mattot l’vnei Yisrael* is rendered by the LXX as *tous archontas tōn phulōn Israēl*, with *rosh* communicated as *archōn*.

Many, when reading a passage like 1 Corinthians 11:3, assume that “But I want you to understand that Messiah is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Messiah” (NASU). that there is a Creation hierarchy present. This Creation hierarchy begins with something like “God is the *leader* of Messiah, Messiah is the *leader* of man/male, and man/male is the *leader* of woman/female.” **Yet, that is precisely not the order presented in 1 Corinthians 11:3**, as the relationship between God, the Messiah, male, and female is not presented in either a descending or ascending order. When *kephalē* has been approached as either “source” or “origin” — “But I want you to understand that the source of every man is Messiah, and the source of the woman is the man, and the source of Messiah is the Godhead” (1 Corinthians 11:3, PME)—are actually three pairs of relationships expressed, leading from Creation to redemption. Adam as the first human being, originated from the Messiah as Creator; Eve as the first woman originated from Adam; and from the Godhead (*ho Theos*) the Messiah was incarnated as a human being to be sacrificed for the salvation of all humanity. An unambiguous term that Paul could have used, if “authority” or “leader” were expressly intended in 1 Corinthians 11:3, is *exousia*, “power or authority to do a thing” (LS),²⁵ appearing in 1 Corinthians 11:10.

²² BibleWorks 9.0: LSJM Lexicon (Unabridged). MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011.

²³ HALOT, 2:1166.

²⁴ LS, 122.

²⁵ LS, 276.

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Recognizing that the equivalent of the Hebrew *rosh* is typically the Greek *archōn*, Paul's statement of Ephesians 5:22-23 employs *kephalē* instead: "Wives...to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Messiah also is the head of the [assembly], He Himself *being* the Savior of the body" (NASU). This instruction is preceded by the overarching principle of submitting mutually to one another, "be subject to one another in the fear of Messiah" (Ephesians 5:21, NASU), meaning that there are actions to be demonstrated not only of the wife submitting to her husband (Ephesians 5:24, 33b), but of the husband submitting to his wife (Ephesians 5:25-27, 33a). A huge factor in favor of *kephalē* meaning "source" or "origin" in Ephesians 5:23—"For the man is the source of the woman, as Messiah also is the source of the assembly, *being* Himself the Savior of the body" (PME)—is how a husband has to treat his wife the same as he would treat his own body: "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies" (Ephesians 5:28a, NASU). Adam declared of Eve, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (NASU). Contrary to this, there is a plethora of classical Greco-Roman materials, to be sure, which demeaned females as being weak, deformed, and sub-human.

Conservative egalitarians hardly believe that male leadership in the family is something that should go away; conservative egalitarians believe that the Apostolic Scriptures present an ideal of husband and wife leading the family together, in submission to each other. There are scores of successful marriage examples in evangelical Protestantism, of where the husband and wife are co-equal partners and co-leaders of the family. Today, in too much of the Messianic movement, partnership marriages of husband and wife as co-leaders, are not too frequently encountered.

"Torah upholds male leadership in the family, because the husband has the right to cancel the oaths and vows of his wife and daughters."

Making an oath or vow, or some kind of binding commitment, is a very serious ordeal in Holy Scripture, and should not be taken lightly (cf. Deuteronomy 23:21-23). Ecclesiastes 5:4 is clear, "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for *He takes* no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!" (NASU). Readers of a passage like Numbers 30:1-8, are all astutely aware of the severity of vows, but can be at a loss for

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how to consider this instruction in a modern—especially post-resurrection era—context. Does a passage like Numbers 30:1-8 ascribe some kind of reserve powers to a husband and father, who is able to cancel the vows, oaths, and commitments of his wife and daughters? Liberal interpreters are often seen to dismiss this instruction as a product of Ancient Israelite patriarchy, as something with no relevance for modern people.²⁶ Numbers 30:1-8 directs,

“Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, ‘This is the word which the LORD has commanded. If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. Also if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by an obligation in her father’s house in her youth, and her father hears her vow and her obligation by which she has bound herself, and her father says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she has bound herself shall stand. But if her father should forbid her on the day he hears *of it*, none of her vows or her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will forgive her because her father had forbidden her. However, if she should marry while under her vows or the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself, and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her on the day he hears *it*, then her vows shall stand and her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand. But if on the day her husband hears *of it*, he forbids her, then he shall annul her vow which she is under and the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself; and the LORD will forgive her” (NASU).

Many people in today’s Messianic community believe that Numbers 30:1-8 do ascribe the authority to today’s husbands and fathers, to cancel the words issued by their wives and daughters—and thus the husband and father, as a male, has an authority that females do not have. *This is power, however, that can be quickly and easily abused.* Members of my family have sat through Messianic congregational messages, where principal, and certainly final, male leadership and authority—for both congregation and home—has been emphasized from Numbers 30:1-8. Yet, are the statements appearing in Numbers 30:1-8 set in stone? Almost no Messianic teacher or leader I have heard, invoke Numbers 30:1-8 as a passage supporting exclusive, or at least principal, male leadership, has ever really bothered to demonstrate that

²⁶ Thomas B. Dozeman, “The Book of Numbers,” in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 2:236.

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he has consulted a variety of resources on the Book of Numbers—which will certainly make some effort to place these statements in some context for the Ancient Israelites who originally received them.

Surrounding the instruction in Numbers 30:1-8, are details involving the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11), and general inheritance that was to take place among the sons of families and within the community of the twelve tribes of Israel (Numbers 36:1-13). These words are given in specific contexts for Ancient Israel, and can be properly deduced as case law. In order to properly appreciate these stipulations, a Bible reader must first evaluate these passages for what they meant to those who originally received them. Females in Ancient Israel inheriting property in a situation where a father had no sons, was surely something revolutionary and subversive for a high patriarchal Ancient Near East. Seeing that “no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another tribe, for the tribes of the sons of Israel shall each hold to his own inheritance” (Numbers 36:9, NASU), would have been very critical for the first few centuries after the Conquest—but clearly would have been read and applied differently for the post-exilic, Second Temple Judaism of Yeshua the Messiah. These kinds of words, appearing in the Torah, have no doubt produced various interpretations and applications, as useful principles, by Jewish and Protestant examiners wanting to appreciate the high value of God’s Law.

As one reviews the instruction of Numbers 30:1-8, are we, or are we not, dealing with Ancient Israelite case law? Are these instructions set in stone, so that male husbands and fathers have some sort of reserve powers that female wives and mothers do not have? Or, were these instructions given in a particular ancient context that needs to be accounted for? Commentators on the Book of Numbers are frequently witnessed as favoring some ancient context in view. Timothy R. Ashley indeed indicates in his Numbers commentary, “The form of the legislation (as is common in other passages dealing with vows) is casuistic or case law, which amounted to legal precedents drawn from specific cases.”²⁷

In Numbers 30:1-8, it is seen that husbands and fathers are responsible for what their wives and daughters say. While complementarian readers would conclude that this is an important responsibility of a husband and father as leader of the family, even

²⁷ Timothy R. Ashley, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 574.

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egalitarian readers who believe in husbands and wives serving as co-leaders of the family, should recognize that husbands and fathers should still be responsible for what their wives and daughters say, and thus what they might commit the family to. Yet it is too frequently overlooked, because of too many modern assumptions we can bring to the text, that *females in Ancient Israel could actually make vows*. Martin Noth describes in his Numbers commentary, “Here it is presupposed at the beginning that women have the right to undertake, on their own initiative, obligations of the kind mentioned.”²⁸ Ashley further observes in his Numbers commentary, “Ch. 30 reinforces the right of women to make vows...and limits a husband’s right to void a vow by requiring that his objection be made when he first hears of his wife’s vow and not long after a long period of reflection.”²⁹

As modern and post-modern readers of Numbers 30:1-8, we tend to be prone to only see the restrictions present via a husband and father being able to cancel the words of his wife and daughters, as a means of protecting them. **We instead need to recognize that Ancient Israelite females were being given rights that their contemporaries in other societies would largely have not had.** As Ronald B. Allen puts it in his Numbers commentary, “the very fact that women were making vows in this antique age is a step of great significance.”³⁰

Is it at all unreasonable to suggest that there were situations envisioned in Ancient Israel, designed to regulate females making oaths or vows, and husbands and fathers being given the authority to cancel them? Commentators have certainly proposed some valid options which need to be considered. Philip J. Budd indicates in his Numbers commentary, that the context of the instruction is “the patriarchal character of Israelite society, and the economic dependence of women upon men.” He further states, “The husband and father must be protected from any excessive commitments made by women who are not ultimately responsible for finding the resources by which those commitments can be honored.”³¹ That females could be seen making oaths, vows, or other statements which would have involved the transaction of money or property—for which they could have been taken advantage of in a broadly patriarchal environment—would necessarily require a husband or father to have the reserve power to

²⁸ Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 225.

²⁹ Ashley, 576.

³⁰ Allen, in *EXP*, 2:959.

³¹ Philip J. Budd, *Word Biblical Commentary: Numbers*, Vol 5 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 324.

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cancel such commitments. It has also been interjected, by Ashley in his commentary, that the context of the Numbers 30:1-8 instructions is the Conquest, “when fathers or husbands would likely be absent on military maneuvers for longer periods of time.”³² This would also represent a situation in which females in the largely patriarchal Ancient Near East could be taken advantage of, when conducting business transactions.

How inflexible or flexible are the instructions of Numbers 30:1-8? In this passage, husbands and fathers have authority over the vows or commitments made by their wives and young daughters. Yet it cannot go overlooked how there is one glaring demographic absent: young sons. If a young son were to make a vow, oath, or commitment on the part of the family’s flock or harvest, for example, would it not be appropriate for his father to have the power to cancel such a word? Of course it would! Gordon J. Wenham observes in his commentary, how “Although this looks at first sight like a comprehensive discussion of the topic, there are certain obvious omissions. For instance, vows by sons bound by parental authority are not discussed...” He then concludes, “Such omissions are typical of ancient oriental law: the biblical documents are not comprehensive codes but collections of interesting and important cases.”³³

If the instructions of Numbers 30:1-8 are indeed Ancient Israelite case law, then what does it communicate for today’s Messianic people? *This is a place where we have to look for more of the spirit of the Torah than the letter (cf. Romans 7:6).* Husbands and fathers are stated to have the authority to cancel the oaths, vows, and commitments of their wives and daughters. Few complementarians in today’s Messianic world would dispute that fathers have the authority to cancel the oaths, vows, and commitments of their sons as well. But how might egalitarians, who believe in a new status for human beings in the post-resurrection era (Galatians 3:28), and promote an ideology of mutual submission (Philippians 2:4; Ephesians 5:21), approach the instruction of Numbers 30:1-8?

An egalitarian approach to Numbers 30:1-8 should not dispute the authority given to husbands and fathers to cancel the oaths, vows, and commitments made by their wives, daughters, and even sons. An egalitarian approach would, however, conclude that mothers certainly

³² Ashley, 576.

³³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), 206.

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have the authority to cancel the oaths, vows, and commitments made by their daughters and sons. And, an egalitarian approach would most especially conclude that wives, who are co-equal leaders of the family with their husbands, would indeed have the authority to cancel the oaths, vows, and commitments made by their husbands. The instruction of Numbers 30:1-8 for its Ancient Israelite recipients, afforded significant rights and liberties to females, in permitting them to actually make oaths and vows. But now in the post-resurrection era, the oaths and vows of males do not have to stand on their own (Numbers 30:2), as wives as the significant helper or ally of their husbands can step in and look out for their husband's well being and protection. As Dennis T. Olson concurs in his Numbers commentary,

"The portrait of family and marriage relationship in these laws in which a father or husband has veto power over a woman's religious decisions with no reciprocal right on the part of the woman obviously reflects a different and ancient social situation that is not analogous to many families or marriages today. Reciprocity, joint decision making, and the sharing of responsibilities would be considered a more viable model of family and marriage life for our contemporary context."³⁴

We have probably all seen situations where a husband has made a particular commitment for his family, perhaps in something as simple as making an appointment, and then his wife has had to step in and cancel it, because she knew that there was a previous engagement at the same time. There are likely scores of examples we could also think of, where a husband has written a check, or paid for something with the wrong credit or debit card, and then his wife has had to step in and cancel payment because of lack of funds. These would be some practical, reciprocal, mutually submitted approaches to the Numbers 30:1-8 instructions, in light of the post-resurrection era and its egalitarian realities.

³⁴ Dennis T. Olson, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Numbers* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1996), 175

“Women occupying positions of prominence or leading is an exception in the Bible; it is not something normative to God’s order.”

Frequently heard among evangelical complementarians, is the thought that when females are seen to take positions of leadership in the Bible, it is because males have not done their job. So, any scene where it is witnessed that females have had to step up and take the lead, did not take place because a female was genuinely endowed by God with a gift of leadership, but instead took place in order to shame the males who should have been leading.

There are various culturally-conditioned statements appearing in the Tanach, which are reflective of how in the patriarchal Ancient Near East, women were not the equals of men, and were inherently weaker and defenseless (i.e., Isaiah 19:16; Jeremiah 50:37; 51:30; Nahum 3:13). Yet, in the discussions and debates over men and women in the Body of Messiah, many of us have doubtlessly witnessed a passage like Isaiah 3:12 invoked, repeated, and then embellished and even exaggerated: “O My people! Their oppressors are children, **and women rule over them.** O My people! Those who guide you lead *you* astray and confuse the direction of your paths” (NASU). Almost no one in the contemporary Messianic movement, to date, has bothered to recognize that there is a textual issue present, regarding the reading of “women,” in Isaiah 3:12. As indicated by the Left of Center *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*,

“[B]ased on the LXX, it is probably better to read the Hebrew *noshim*, as ‘creditors,’ instead of *nashim*, ‘women.’ If *women* is retained, however, note how Israel’s male-centered worldview lodged legitimate authority only in the hands of men.”³⁵

The more conservative NET Bible notes the presence of “an emendation (with support from the LXX) of... (*nashim*, ‘women’) to... (*noshim*, ‘creditors’; a participle from... *nasa*).”³⁶ Isaiah 3:12 is notably rendered in the NET Bible as, “Oppressors treat my people cruelly; creditors rule over them. My people’s leaders mislead them; they give you confusing directions.” This follows a reading of the Hebrew *n-sh-y-m* as *noshim*. This was translated into the Greek Septuagint as

³⁵ Susan Ackerman, “Isaiah,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 963.

³⁶ *The NET Bible, New English Translation* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), 1268.

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apaitountes, “extortioners” (LXE) or “creditors” (NETS). Recognizing the textual issues in the MT, and how it was translated in the LXX, is not something that most of today’s Messianic people are going to do. However, the original reading of Isaiah 3:21 being *noshim*, indicates that **Isaiah 3:12 should not and cannot be used to speak against female leaders in the Body of Messiah.**

In his essay “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” appearing in the 2001 *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, Nadler recognizes that there are females in the Bible, serving in important ministry positions.³⁷ But, he considers such positions to be widely supportive and not primary. Among the different females referenced, include:

- the Prophetess Miriam: “Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing” (Exodus 15:20, NASU).
- the Judge Deborah: “Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time” (Judges 4:4, NASU).
- the Prophetess Huldah: “So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter); and they spoke to her” (2 Chronicles 34:22, NASU).
- Queen Esther: “The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (Esther 2:17, NASU).
- the Prophetess Anna: “And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage” (Luke 2:36, NASU).
- Mary Magdalene and various others: “and *also* some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were

³⁷ Nadler, “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, pp 160-162.

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contributing to their support out of their private means” (Luke 8:2-3, NASU).

- the businesswoman Lydia: “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14, NASU).
- the businesswoman Priscilla: “But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26, NASU).
- the daughters of Philip: “Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses” (Acts 21:9, NASU).
- the deaconess Phoebe: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the [assembly] at Cenchreae” (Romans 16:1, NRSV).

Conservative egalitarian examiners, do have to recognize that a number of the females serving in positions of leadership or spiritual authority, are doing so in a secondary or ancillary capacity. But among the examples listed above, it cannot go unnoticed that as one gets to the period of the Messiah’s ministry, and the post-resurrection era, that the number of females serving increases. Egalitarians take this as a sign that with the Messiah’s death, burial, and resurrection, the equality of men and women that was lost at the Fall (Genesis 3:16) has been restored (Galatians 3:28), and had begun to assert itself.

Of the examples listed above, Nadler makes a number of comments which need to be acknowledged. Regarding the Judge Deborah (Judges 4:4), he draws the conclusion, “women were not restricted from the role of judge, as in the case of Deborah...Although one might be otherwise disqualified from assembly leadership, this does not mean that they could not serve adequately in some other place of leadership. Therefore, a woman could serve as judge although she could not serve as an assembly leader.”³⁸ Per Deborah leading Ancient Israel through difficult times—and hardly being rebuked for it as a female—Nadler deduces that while principal leadership in a congregation or assembly should be reserved for males, there might be various other places for females to serve in leadership. One would legitimately wonder, though, what place in the assembly he would envision females taking on some leadership capacity, honoring of the spirit of Deborah as a judge of Israel.

³⁸ Nadler, “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 161.

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One possible place of leadership where Messianic Judaism might see fit to see more women serve, is in the role of a deacon. Nadler labels Phoebe from Romans 16:1 as “shamashah (deaconess/diakonon).”³⁹ A Messianic Jewish Bible like the CJB/CJSB, is seen to employ Hebrew terminology for Romans 16:1, having “our sister Phoebe, *shammash* of the congregation at Cenchrea.” The TLV has, “our sister Phoebe—who is a servant-leader of Messiah’s community at Cenchrea,” something reflective of a complementarian ideology. The source text, however, unambiguously labels the female Phoebe *diakonon tēs ekklēσίας*, “a deacon of the assembly” (PME). Phoebe was not just a mere deacon, either, as she was commended by Paul to be helped by the Romans (Romans 16:2), having been given the authorization by him to carry his epistle, and as such was doubtlessly given various explanations about what Paul intended by the contents of the letter to the Romans.

Various evangelical complementarian today, do actually recognize the legitimacy of females serving as deacons in the *ekklēsia*, albeit with males alone serving as elders. However, given the complementarianism of the majority of today’s Messianic movement, how many females might be seen to occupy secondary capacities of leadership—such as that of deacon(ness)—given the presence of a female deacon in Phoebe? How many of the examples of significant female service in the Bible, are not emphasized, taught about, or even mentioned by many of today’s male, Messianic congregational leaders? If they were mentioned, then the greater frequency of them, as seen in the Apostolic Writings and post-resurrection era, might actually get a number of people to wonder why females are often under-utilized in the Body of Messiah, after all. Not adequately employing all of the gifts and talents and skills of God’s people, is what certainly causes many to reevaluate many of the tenets of complementarianism.

A figure like Nader, in “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” does think that “Women could teach and were encouraged to teach in women’s ministries...Priscilla, at least, assisted in the teaching [of] Apollos, a man, though this was done in conjunction with her husband.”⁴⁰ For most of today’s Messianic Jewish male leaders and teachers, females can occupy very limited teaching roles, such as teaching other females. On occasion, a gifted woman may theoretically

³⁹ Ibid., 160.

⁴⁰ Nadler, “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 161.

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arise who can help mentor a male, in private, with her husband present (per one interpretation of Priscilla's activities).

For many egalitarians, however, it is the presence of the female Apostle Junia in Romans 16:7, which indicates that females should not at all be barred from high positions of leadership, on a level playing field with males: "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kindred, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Messiah before me" (PME). The presence of a female, *Iounia*, is fraught with controversy—so much so that throughout much of Christian history, at least, textual sources were changed to read with the masculine *Iounias* or Junias, even though such a name did not exist in antiquity. If the figure of Junia were indeed an apostle, then an apostle is notably a higher office than that of teacher, pastor, or evangelist—and it would mean that restrictive instructions (i.e., 1 Timothy 2:12-15) are entirely situational to the First Century C.E., and it is more normative in the post-resurrection era to see females occupying high level positions of leadership in the Body of Messiah.

"The writings of the Apostles make it clear that wives are to submit to their husbands."

It is safe to say that the significant majority of today's Messianic leaders and teachers would promote some form of wives being in one-way submission to their husbands. In all of my family's experience in the Messianic movement, I have yet to really see that many in today's Messianic community ever *reevaluate* the concept of one-way wifely submission to a husband.

The context of a passage like 1 Peter 3:1-7 is correctly recognized as not being universal for all places and all circumstances. In a patriarchal Greco-Roman Mediterranean world, the Apostle Peter was mainly addressing how wives who were Believers were to relate to their husbands who were non-Believers: "you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives" (1 Peter 3:1, NASU). The *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, which is broadly complementarian, notably does point out, "wives should submit even to unbelieving husbands unless doing so would violate obedience to Christ...In Greco-Roman society, wives were expected to follow the religion of their husbands. But Peter subverts that expectation by

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instructing wives on how their unbelieving husbands ‘may be won over without words.’”⁴¹

There are indeed some contextual and historical considerations for the wifely submission depicted in 1 Peter 3:1-7, which necessarily begs the question of how a wife should relate to a husband who is a non-Believer in a more modern setting, and in a culture and society where freedom of religion is greatly valued. Likewise, while the believing wife in 1 Peter 3:1-7 was to relate to her non-believing husband, as Sarah related to Abraham in the **highly patriarchal** Ancient Near East (1 Peter 3:5-6), influencing her husband by a quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:2-4)—it is a mistake to think that for couples in the post-resurrection era, where both husband and wife are Believers, that the wife should be entirely passive, to the point of never speaking to her husband about decisions or choices he might make. Yet, in today’s Messianic movement, I have definitely encountered marriage relationships where the wife never speaks to her husband about his choices, precisely because of a misapplication of 1 Peter 3:1-7.

From the Apostle Paul’s writings, it is witnessed that he says, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18, ESV). Yet when one reads Paul’s words about household codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5:21-6:9, they are all controlled by the overriding principle: “submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Messiah” (Ephesians 5:21, TLV). While there are instructions given as they involve submission of a wife to a husband (Ephesians 5:21-24, 33b; Colossians 3:18)—given the requirement of all to be submitted mutually—it cannot go overlooked how there is more instruction issued regarding the submission of a husband to his wife (Ephesians 5:25-29, 33a; Colossians 3:19). In today’s Messianic community, though, while one is certainly going to hear about the necessity of a wife submitting to her husband, the reciprocal submission of a husband to his wife—per the Ephesians 5:21 emphasis of mutual submission and how “we are members of His body” (Ephesians 5:30, NASU)—will almost never be heard. In fact, in the view of Resnik, in his article “The Two Shall Become One Flesh,” it is necessary that one party in the marriage be a subordinate to the other party:

“[O]ne purpose of marriage may be to display the quality of ordered relationship free of the dynamics of power and status that seem inherent in every human society. The dominant party is to sacrifice self

⁴¹ Karen H. Jobes, “1 Peter,” in D.A. Carson, gen. ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2011 NIV (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2544.

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on behalf of the subordinate party. The subordinate submits, not out of coercion or inferiority, but as a free act of service that reflects the service of Messiah himself.”⁴²

Ephesians 5:21-24, and the position of the wife in relation to her husband, is read by Resnik as representing “mutuality within the hierarchy.”⁴³ Egalitarians are not appreciative of these sorts of conclusions, as they would think that one purpose of marriage, is that husband and wife are to demonstrate a partnership of equals, as was originally intended by the creation of humanity in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:26-27).

While the service of the Messiah to the *ekklēsia* is invoked in Ephesians 5:25-27, 29b, in order for husbands to properly love and care for their wives—it cannot be dismissed that this actually portrays the Messiah’s submission to the *ekklēsia*. As egalitarians frequently note, regarding the usage of *kephalē* as “source” or “origin” in Ephesians 5:23—woman originated from man, and consequently husbands should treat their wives the same as their own bodies (Ephesians 5:28). This ran contrary to most Greco-Roman, and even a few Jewish, stereotypes of women, as being inferior to men. When husbands would look at their wives the same as themselves, it should cause them not to be domineering or dictatorial, but instead caring and compassionate (Ephesians 5:29a). On a human level, it composes some of the significant elements of a submission of a husband to his wife, because a husband looking at his wife the same as he looks at his own body, **means that a husband will approach his wife as his equal.**

Today’s Messianic community has a very long way to go, as you are likely to have never heard the concept of **mutual submission** ever talked about in your congregation, or at popular conference events. In her 2001 essay, “Women Can Be in Leadership,” Fleischer believes that there is to be mutual submission of brothers and sisters to one another in the faith community, but only wifely submission in the home.⁴⁴ There has been no quantitative Messianic discussion present, by the early 2020s, on mutual submission of wife to husband *and* husband to wife, as to my knowledge, in any major Messianic venue. (There has certainly been no discussion on *kephalē* meaning “source” or “origin”!) As we move into the future, things are going to have to seriously change in this regard. I can personally testify that I have heard about mutual

⁴² Resnik, “The Two Shall Become One Flesh,” 28.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Fleischer, “Women Can Be in Leadership,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 151.

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submission discussed in more closed settings, such as homegroup Bible studies, and among Millennials who are being groomed for future positions of leadership in Messianic Judaism. This is encouraging, at least for the short term.

“Paul had a high regard for women, but his writings do not permit females serving in high positions of leadership in the Body of Messiah.”

Those who are egalitarian, and who believe not only in the full equality of males and females, but that females in the post-resurrection era can occupy positions of high leadership in the Body of Messiah, necessarily place a high emphasis on a verse like Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua” (TLV). Obviously, males and females have different reproductive anatomy, and females hardly start *becoming* males. Yet, it has been long recognized among examiners, how Galatians 3:28 is subversive to an ancient Jewish prayer: “A man must recite these three benedictions every day: ‘Praised [be Thou, O Lord...] who did not make me a gentile’; ‘Praised [be Thou, O Lord...] who did not make be a boor’; ‘Praised [be Thou, O Lord...] who did not make me a woman’” (t.*Berachot* 6:18).⁴⁵ Far from Galatians 3:28 only affirming the essential dignity of all persons in Messiah, egalitarians conclude that the thrust of Galatians 3:28 was to represent a new status for human beings in the post-resurrection era. This affects how females can serve in positions of leadership in the Body of Messiah.

Within the independent sectors of the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, a statement such as “let women keep silent in the communities, for it is not permitted for them to speak out. Rather let them be in order, as the Torah also says” (1 Corinthians 14:34, TLV), could very well be interpreted as a universal requirement for all times and settings. Not only are females permanently barred from serving in positions of leadership, but they should not even be found speaking in the assembly. Today’s Messianic Judaism, however, is most probably going to be found supporting some kind of Corinthian-specific reason, for the statement of 1 Corinthians 14:34. Nadler, in “Male Leadership

⁴⁵ Tzvee Zahavy, trans., in Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew With a New Introduction*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 1:42.

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and the Role of Women,” thinks “that the issue was actually women asking questions of their husbands in a service where women did not sit with men.”⁴⁶ Females in today’s Messianic Jewish congregations, should not at all think that they have to be “silent,” especially in a Torah study, Bible study, or some other group discussion. Yet, 1 Corinthians 14:34 might still be invoked to limit the participation of women in leadership roles. It is witnessed, however, that there are a small number of voices who do not consider 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to be a non-Pauline interpolation, thus inauthentic to Paul’s letter.⁴⁷ Various evangelical scholars have proposed this as well, based on textual and theological criteria,⁴⁸ and I myself have been very inclined to agree with their conclusions. There is no specific prohibition witnessed in the Torah or Pentateuch, silencing females in the general assembly.

The Pastoral Epistles of 1&2 Timothy and Titus, and their various instructions regarding females (1 Timothy 2:11-15), and the requirements for elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13), are almost always read by today’s Messianic people as being universal instructions for all times and places, rather than being situationally conditioned to some extent, due to the false teaching that had erupted in Ephesus and on Crete. But, the absence of deacons in Titus, for instance, will cause various complementarians to note situational circumstances present—yet in almost every ordination I have witnessed, of a man being appointed as a new elder or deacon in a Messianic congregation, 1 Timothy 3 and/or Titus 1 has been read.

Not recognizing the place of the Ephesian false teaching, which advocated that the resurrection had taken place (2 Timothy 2:18), and an apparently pre-Fall condition of abstaining from meat and sexual intercourse (1 Timothy 4:1-5), will lead to some misinterpretations and misapplications of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Did Paul prohibit all women for all time from occupying positions of authority? It is doubtful that many of today’s Messianic congregational leaders or teachers have even

⁴⁶ Nadler, “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 163.

⁴⁷ Joshua Brumbach. (2007). *Women Rabbis and Messianic Judaism*. Retrieved 12 February, 2014, from <<http://messianicjudaism.me/yinon/>>.

⁴⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp 699-708; “1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Did Paul Forbid Women to Speak in Church?”, in Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), pp 217-267. Against: Adam D. Hensley. “*sigāō, lalēō, and hupotassō* in 1 Corinthians 14:34 in Their Literary and Rhetorical Context” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 55 No. 2 (2012): 363-364.

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looked into the verb *authentēō* as regarding not authority in general (*exousia*), but instead usurping authority: “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to **usurp authority** over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:12, KJV). The Ephesian women were to learn or be educated (1 Timothy 2:11), but not to be found usurping the position of the educated males who were already recognized leaders in the assembly. Egalitarians hardly think that 1 Timothy 2:12 is universal, if females *and* males are properly educated in the Scriptures, and have the genuine spiritual gifts and calling necessary to lead.

Noting the verb *plassō*, “generally, to mould and form by education, training” (LS),⁴⁹ egalitarians will often conclude that “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13, RSV/ESV), involves the educational forming of Adam before Eve. Eve did not have the sufficient knowledge or understanding of the Creation, that she should have had, and that is why she was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14). The figure of Eve, was likely important to female adherents of the Ephesian false teaching (cf. 1 Timothy 4:7; 2 Timothy 3:6). Paul’s difficult statement of 1 Timothy 2:15, is best viewed with a literal translation of *dia tēs teknogonias* with, “she will be saved **by the Child-bearing**; (so will they all), if they live in faith and love and holiness, with self-restraint” (Montgomery New Testament), a reference to the Genesis 3:15 promise, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (NASU). Far from women finding their “salvation” in child-rearing, the Ephesian women were to look to the Child-Bearing or Seed promised to Eve, the Incarnate Yeshua.

An egalitarian perspective of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 will not be present in today’s Messianic movement, except perhaps in detailed studies of the Pastoral Epistles. Complementarian perspectives are instead going to be witnessed, which conclude that 1 Timothy 2:12-15 reflect a broad Creation order of men leading and women following. In “The Two Shall Become One Flesh,” Resnik thinks that there is a Creation order of men leading and females following present in this passage:

“First Timothy...draw[s] out the implications not only of an ordered creation but also of the cataclysmic sin of the garden, which continues to affect husband-wife relationships, even in Messiah. The faithful woman, however, will be brought safely through the harsh conditions of childbirth imposed after the transgression in Eden.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ LS, 643.

⁵⁰ Resnik, “The Two Shall Become One Flesh,” 28.

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Egalitarians would be seen to disagree with any conclusion by complementarians, that the sin of Garden, which affected the genders (Genesis 3:16), is not to somehow be reversed by the work of the Messiah (Galatians 3:28). Unfortunately, some of today's Messianic Jewish leaders think "the cataclysmic sin of the garden" still "affect[s] husband-wife relationships...in Messiah." Is there truly to be no significant effort to overcome post-Fall dynamics?

In his 2001 essay, "Male Leadership and the Role of Women," Nadler appreciably recognizes how there are interpreters who conclude that the instruction of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is situation-specific to Ephesus. But, as a complementarian, it is clear that he cannot break out of any view of 1 Timothy 2:13 that does not portray some kind of "Creation order" of men leading and women following:

"There are those who believe that this is an instruction that applies specifically to the first century congregation at Ephesus and not to the present day congregation in American culture. This could be a plausible understanding were it not for Paul's mention of Adam and Eve and a creative order."⁵¹

Egalitarian perspectives or approaches of 1 Timothy chs. 2-3, Titus 1, or other passages, have not too widely been considered by today's Messianic leaders, teachers, and scholars. In her 2001 essay, "Women Can Be in Leadership," Fleischer observed, "As a movement, Messianic Judaism has not yet seen fit to ordain women as rabbis...Leaders within the movement have various reasons for excluding women from ordination. Some continue to believe that Rabbi *Sha'ul's* teaching about women was for eternity, and not for his own time and place."⁵² My personal view is that for most of the male leaders and teachers in the Messianic movement, they simply have not looked into the issue as thoroughly as they ought. Perhaps this is due to their theological training, which did not focus on issues of males and females to the degree and detail that it should have. Or, perhaps such male leaders and teachers indeed do represent *a previous phase of development*, as is indicated by an unwillingness on the part of many to reevaluate their complementarianism.

⁵¹ Nadler, "Male Leadership and the Role of Women," in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 165.

⁵² Fleischer, "Women Can Be in Leadership," in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 155.

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Fleischer's "Women Can Be in Leadership" did briefly mention how women have steadily been occupying positions of rabbinical leadership in Conservative and Reform Judaism, as well as positions of ordained ministry in various Protestant denominations.⁵³ Why this has not allowed for a more open discussion on the issue, is a great mystery for many of the younger people in our faith community. It may be somewhat surprising, though, to see that Nadler, at least, does permit females to occupy the office of deacon in his congregation:

"The *z'keynim* fulfill only part of the needs for leadership in the congregation. In light of this, apart from holding the office of and serving as elders, women are needed and encouraged to lead in the various ministries of our congregation. The *shammashim* (deacons and deaconesses—both Hebrew and Greek transliterated terms mean 'servants') assist the *z'keynim* in ministry and in administration of the congregation."⁵⁴

Here, Nadler is to be commended for recognizing the place of female deacons in the assembly (cf. 1 Timothy 3:11); many Messianic congregations do not recognize the place of female deacons, in spite of unambiguous Biblical evidence to it (Romans 16:1-2).

More recently, in the 2013 publication *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, Wolf details how "many Messianic synagogues have an egalitarian policy when it comes to liturgical prayer and worship, so many women serve as cantors, Torah readers, and in other traditionally male roles."⁵⁵ My family has been a part of Messianic congregational environments, where females have canted from the Torah, they have publicly read from the Scriptures, and they have even issued public prayers during the *Shabbat* service. In the Messianic Jewish movement of the present, Wolf summarizes the various opportunities open for women to serve:

"Based on my discussions with Messianic Jewish rabbis' wives, these women are involved in the following activities: Most lead local prayer groups, retreats, Bible studies, and other women's events on a regular basis. Some co-founded and co-lead their congregation with their husbands, though nearly all would agree that the rabbi (husband) holds the head leadership role. Many women work as congregational administrators or sit on the board of the congregation; some serve as

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp 154-155.

⁵⁴ Nadler, "Male Leadership and the Role of Women," in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 165.

⁵⁵ Wolf, "Messianic Judaism and Women," in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 100.

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president of their synagogue. Women sit on the boards of national organizations..."⁵⁶

There are complementarians in the Messianic community who would think that there are already too many opportunities open for women to serve, and that more men need to take up the sorts of leadership responsibilities listed above. Egalitarians, quite contrary to this, would say that as time moves forward, and traditional interpretations of various Pauline passages such as 1 Timothy chs. 2-3 are reevaluated, that many more opportunities should be afforded to Messianic women. The challenge is, these opportunities will need the support of Messianic men who hold to an egalitarian ideology, who at present are not too frequently encountered.

"In spite of some of Paul's own personal opinions, celibate singleness is not at all to be encouraged in the Body of Messiah."

In a great deal of complementarian Protestant teaching, the disposition of single people tends to be greatly overlooked or downplayed. Does not every man or woman have a pre-destined "soul mate"? Complementarian evangelical voices have to reluctantly admit, from time to time, that there are many young men and young women who are unmarried not due to selfishness—but rather due to circumstances beyond their control. These circumstances often involve education, economics, and not a fear of commitment but a genuine concern about the possibility of divorce. Marriage in the Twenty-First Century is something that comes with a high degree of risk, and many young men and young women in the faith, who have remained sexually pure, are hardly just going to give themselves to another person without some certainties that a possible marriage is going to last.

While evangelical complementarians are forced, at times, to recognize that there will be many young people in the contemporary church who will remain unmarried—and that pastors and spiritual leaders need to be sensitive to their needs—the same sensitivity is not frequently witnessed in today's broad Messianic community. Even though there are many single people in today's Messianic movement, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, one is not too likely to hear a teaching

⁵⁶ Ibid.

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from one's congregational leader upholding the value of celibate singleness for an unmarried man or unmarried woman—even though Biblically there is no other disposition available to the unmarried man or unmarried woman who wishes to be in obedience to God. Instead, much of the spiritual culture of the Messianic movement is geared toward lauding the value of marriage, while indirectly, at least, discriminating against the sexually chaste unmarried person. *That married people are believed to be more spiritually fulfilled and mature than unmarried people, is a value firmly embedded in the minds of many of today's Messianics.* This has to change as we enter into an uncertain global future, with rising anti-Semitism for sure, and an evaluation of what our faith community is to genuinely achieve as we face the final stretch of salvation history.

When the discussion of the disposition of the unmarried arises in the Messianic community—rather than address legitimate Twenty-First Century issues as to why various young men and young women should consider being celibate, at least for an elongated season—the statement of Genesis 2:18a instead is invoked: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (TLV). None of us like being lonely, and most single people in today's Messianic community are not single by choice; they are single because of circumstance. But unlike what some interpreters might conclude, Genesis 2:18a is not a statement made to all human beings at all times in all places that they must be married; Genesis 2:18a specifically concerns *ha'adam* or Adam as the first human being. Unlike all of the animals of God's Creation, Adam had no female counterpart, and he was necessarily lonely. Today in the Twenty-First Century, on a planet of almost eight billion human beings, there is no reason for any man or woman to feel lonely. Too many of today's teachers and leaders can be seen quoting Genesis 2:18a to unmarried men and women in their midst, with not enough sensitivity to their life circumstances. Rather than emphasizing how, given the difficulties of marriage and high possibility of divorce, that congregations and assemblies should make a greater effort to make singles in their midst feel welcomed and valued—Genesis 2:18a is more likely to make single people feel guilty and unwelcome because of their disposition.

Evangelical egalitarians, because of holding to an ideology where men and women are equals in the Messiah, absolutely believe that married couples and celibate singles are equal in the Messiah. While heterosexual marriage and celibate singleness both have their advantages and disadvantages, it is not as though married persons are more spiritually mature and thus more “complete” than unmarried

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persons. Yeshua Himself upholds the equality of married and unmarried, when answering the Disciples' question, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry" (Matthew 19:10, NASU):

"Not all can accept this saying, but those to whom it is given. For there are sexless men who have been so from their mother's womb, and there are sexless men who have been made sexless by other men, and there are sexless men who have made themselves sexless for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let him who can accept, accept" (Matthew 19:11-12, *Lattimore*).

Yeshua, employing the term "eunuch" (Grk. *eunouchos*) a bit metaphorically, affirms how there are people who have been destined for a life without sexual intercourse, often by a difficult choice they have had to make for the purposes of God's Kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, in addressing various questions that the Corinthians posed to him about marriage, the Apostle Paul affirmed that celibate singleness has a valued place in the Body of Messiah: "Yet I would that all people were even as I myself am. However, each has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they abide even as I" (PME). Paul considers celibate singleness to be a gift from God, and recognized for the present First Century circumstances, that those who were married could perform less Kingdom work than those who were unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:26, 29). But Paul nowhere discounts the value of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:28), because Paul did not approach celibate singleness from the perspective of later Roman Catholicism, which requires its clergy to make vows of celibacy. The celibate singleness that Paul envisioned was one where the time and energies that one would necessarily have to invest in a marriage and child-rearing, instead get recycled into the tasks and goals of the Kingdom.

It is witnessed that today's Messianic movement does not widely have the perspective of either Yeshua or Paul when it comes to the value of celibate singleness—especially for Messianic men and women who would like to be married, but circumstantially have been unable to find a suitable spouse. In his Messiah Journal article "The Two Shall Become One Flesh," Resnik properly recognizes how the statistical probability of divorce, definitely affects people considering marriage. And he also reasonably indicates,

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“[Y]oung people are encouraged to focus on education and career before considering marriage, and postponement can decrease the likelihood of getting married at all. The Apostolic Writings affirm singleness as a choice, but we should also support those who find themselves single without choosing it. Our community needs to be careful to view and speak of singleness without stigma and affirm the benefits of singleness clearly articulated in 1 Corinthians 7:24-40 without minimizing its difficulties and challenges.”⁵⁷

Resnik has just described the state of most Messianic single men and women: **“those who find themselves single without choosing it.”** He is to be commended for acknowledging, “Our community needs to be careful to view and speak of singleness without stigma and affirm the benefits of singleness.” Unfortunately, even though he has recognized some of the issues present among single men and women in the contemporary Messianic movement, many other teachers and leaders do not.

Noting Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 7:25, “Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy” (NASU), Boaz Michael concludes, in his Messiah Journal article, “The Intimate Union of Messiah and His People,” “With these words, the apostle invites us to question his authority on the subject.”⁵⁸ There is no doubting the fact that within the Pauline Epistles, or any part of the Bible, there are anecdotes of human wisdom, which are conditioned by various circumstances. However, in the case of celibate singleness for many of today’s Messianic young men and young women, it is unfortunately witnessed how some of today’s Messianic writers—who are usually married males, and thus have no anxieties about ever getting married—can just easily dismiss Paul’s statements on such a matter. Paul made the observation in 1 Corinthians 7:32-33 of the necessary attention a husband must pay to his wife, in order for there to be a happy marriage, and how celibate singles have no such anxiety:

“But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife” (NASU).

Michael draws a conclusion, contrary to the tenor of what Paul says:

⁵⁷ Resnik, “The Two Shall Become One Flesh,” pp 28-29.

⁵⁸ Boaz Michael. “The Intimate Union of Messiah and His People” Messiah Journal Issue 128, Spring 2017/5778:45.

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“I have met many single people in our communities who, because they hold high Messianic Jewish values, struggle with a sense of hopelessness over their singleness. We can encourage them all day long with a higher or more holy ideal—but in today’s world I would say that those who are single suffer more worldly anxiety than those who are married.”⁵⁹

Single men and women in today’s Messianic movement can have anxiety for the same reasons that married men and women have anxiety. *The ultimate source for many people being anxious is because they consider human approval and acceptance to be more important than God’s approval and acceptance.* Yet, today’s broad Messianic movement—in no small part due to its deeply seated complementarianism—is guilty of making too many single men and single women feel out of place, at best, or unwelcome, at worst. In today’s Messianic movement, are single men and single women, treated as the equals of married men and married women? Or, are single men and single women more likely to find themselves dismissed, excluded, and even discriminated against—at least in various indirect ways—because of their disposition? How many single men and single women find themselves excluded from various social activities and functions at today’s Messianic congregations, precisely because of their single status—when “the couples” get preferential treatment?

Certainly, there are various young men and young women in contemporary Protestantism, who are not willing to commit themselves to the responsibilities of marriage and child-rearing—and would instead like to focus on their careers, making money, or some other self-pleasing pursuit. But in today’s Messianic movement, a majority of the unmarried men and unmarried women you will encounter, are unmarried because of circumstances—and what they see as the impossibility of finding a suitable spouse in a rather small faith community and limited pool of options. Rather than their disposition being understood by various leaders, they feel like they compose a niche demographic, that too many want to conveniently avoid. Never in our family’s Messianic experience since 1995, at least, have we ever seen celibate singleness promoted as a vocation blessed by God, which can be embraced as a means to combat sexual promiscuity. Instead, it is only marriage that is promoted as a vocation blessed by God.

For a writer like Michael, Paul’s conclusions about celibate singleness were based entirely in his personal eschatology (1

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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Corinthians 7:29-31), and should not be taken too seriously today. He asserts, “except in special cases, in my opinion, singleness should never be encouraged under the perception that we are in the latter days.”⁶⁰ However, most Messianic single men and single women are not single because they think the end-times might be approaching; they are more likely to be single because they do not make enough money to contribute to a household. Michael’s opinion for action is, “I think we need to...help [singles] find spouses....This is an urgent matter. We must prioritize our efforts on behalf of our singles, find qualified spouses for them, and give them solid communities in which to raise godly families.”⁶¹ It is certainly appreciated that he wants single men and single women in the Messianic movement to be married, but there are still inevitably going to be unmarried men and women in the Messianic movement who will feel left out—because the complementarianism of too much of today’s Messianic movement is just too strong to see the unmarried treated as the equals of the married.

What will the legacy of Messianic complementarianism be?

This analysis of **Messianic Questions** has hardly been comprehensive in covering the varied and diverse aspects of males and females present among today’s Messianic Believers. There are many more things which will have to be addressed by our ministry, in future resources and teachings. We have discussed some of the major components of males and females, which one is likely to encounter in Messianic congregations and venues, when the subject matter of gender roles comes up.

With a handful of exceptions—and mostly among individual people attending Messianic congregations and fellowships, who are most probably going to keep their views private at the present—**the Messianic movement of today is strongly complementarian.** The majority of marriage relationships in today’s Messianic movement are centered around some complementarian model of the husband having the final authority or final say, at least on a selection of issues. The majority of today’s Messianic congregations are led by not only males, but married males. Are there any marriage relationships in today’s Messianic movement, where the husband and wife are co-leaders of the family, and a mutual submission ideology is practiced with decisions

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

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made by the consensus of both spouses? Are there any Messianic congregations today which incorporate females into the leadership structure, and where females at least serve as deacons?

Fortunately for a complementarian like Nadler, he concludes how “The issue of whether women should be in senior congregational ministry is not an issue of orthodoxy regarding a major doctrine of Scripture. Therefore, it should be considered (by those who differ on the matter) a discussion point among brothers and sisters in Messiah and not an opportunity to ‘refute heretics.’”⁶² He further states, “Differences between our congregation and others in this matter will not prevent us from remaining in fellowship with those [other] congregations [which disagree].”⁶³ However, it cannot be overlooked how Nadler’s orientation to the debate over men and women in the Body of Messiah, is not always the position one sees. Messianic people who are sympathetic to an egalitarian ideology may be pejoratively referred to as being “feminists” at best, and indeed have been called heretics.

The present generation of Messianic congregational leaders and teachers, who for the most part are married males, is largely unprepared to account for some of the differing views of the next generation, which is quite open to seeing females occupy more positions of leadership and authority. Many of the next generation are not as egalitarian as myself, but would certainly be regarded as minimalist complementarian or complementarian-lite. This would see females occupy almost every position of leadership in the assembly, with the possible exception being the main congregational leader or rabbi. Wolf summarized this as much in her essay “Messianic Judaism and Women,” from the 2013 *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*:

“The majority of women today would...lean toward what may be termed a ‘progressive conservative’ position. Most want to see a man leading a congregation in the rabbi’s position, but would like to see women represented more evenly in other roles of teaching and decision making. Younger women tend in greater numbers to advocate for the egalitarian model they see in more liberal forms of Judaism, including ordaining female rabbis.”⁶⁴

⁶² Nadler, “Male Leadership and the Role of Women,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 159.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁶⁴ Rachel Wolf, “Messianic Judaism and Women,” in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, pp 102-103.

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While as an egalitarian I would have no difficulty, in principle, seeing a female ordained as the main leader of a Messianic congregation or fellowship—I recognize that in reality, there are huge obstacles to be overcome in just seeing a minimalist complementarian ideology implemented across the Messianic movement. Our faith community is not functioning well, when females are excluded from the decision making process of the elder and deacon board of an assembly, females cannot teach the general congregation during a *Shabbat* service, and females are relegated to various help functions such as kitchen duty. Things have got to change, and I suspect that they will take quite a while, particularly with the shifting of the generations.

In the meantime, there is only **one Messianic movement**, and our unity as Jewish and non-Jewish followers of the Messiah of Israel as part of the “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV/CJB/PME), is predicated on His sacrifice for sinful humanity—and not on the issue of women in ministry. Today’s Messianic movement *is* complementarian.

As a Messianic Believer who is egalitarian, I have to work for change and reform over the long term. A significant part of the end-times is how “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Joel 2:28, RSV). Not only are all human beings, Jewish and non-Jewish, male and female, to be regarded as equals (Galatians 3:28), **but the Holy Spirit is universally available to all human beings**. As the Holy Spirit-endowed gifts of service are blind to gender, it is necessary for Messianic people who hold to an egalitarian ideology to be tempered by patience (Galatians 5:22) and fortitude. We should not try to foment an egalitarian rebellion or insurrection in the midst of a complementarian supermajority. Instead, we must facilitate change and reevaluation of what many have accepted, one person at a time, when some of the negative fruits of a complementarian ideology manifest themselves, *and then people are genuinely open to considering another point of view...*