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The Assurance of Our Salvation

People investigate the Messianic movement and their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures, for an entire host of reasons. People who enter into the Messianic movement should do so because they are seeking God's truth, and they are seeking to be in greater compliance with His Word. They enter into the Messianic movement because they have discovered that they are not entirely satisfied with what much of evangelical Protestantism today has taught them, and they instinctively know that there is more to their faith and in living like Yeshua (Jesus). Most importantly, these are people who know that Christian theology has been incomplete in many areas, and they are lacking spiritual fulfillment. *And, these are people who should be specially called into the Messianic community, not only to experience a growth in their own faith—but to participate as co-laborers in the salvation of the Jewish people and end-time restoration of Israel's Kingdom.*

Those of us who have been called by God into the Messianic movement, from evangelical backgrounds, and have been in this faith community for some time—have certainly experienced *more* spiritual fulfillment as Messianics, than we did while we were average Churchgoers. While it may have been a process—and that process was longer for some and shorter for others—we nevertheless sought God's truth, and sought greater compliance with Scripture. We changed our lifestyles and overcame the hurdles of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, the Biblical holidays of Leviticus 23, and eating a kosher style of diet, among other things. We study the Torah portions now on a consistent basis, and examine the Bible unlike never before. We have reevaluated things we

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were taught in the past, like the any-moment pre-tribulation rapture, and found that they were not supported by Scripture.

Sadly, one issue which is often not reevaluated from a Messianic viewpoint is that of salvation. Far too frequently in the Messianic movement, the understanding of “asking Jesus into your heart,” is only cosmetically changed to “ask Yeshua into your heart.” The salvation message of far too much of the Messianic movement, is quantitatively indifferent than what is presented in much of contemporary evangelicalism. This is a problem, because what you will discover is that the modern gospel message, like so many other things, is incomplete. As Messianic people who have a Torah foundation in our walk of faith, we have a responsibility to present a *fuller* salvation message to others, and most importantly have the assurance ourselves that we are redeemed children of God.

The Dilemma

It is important that salvation be reevaluated from a Messianic perspective, because of what many people in the Messianic community often face. As people read the Scriptures and are challenged with things that they believed in the past, doubts can inevitably creep into a someone’s mind—so much so that the individual can question whether or not he or she is truly, spiritually regenerated. These doubts often manifest in the form of people wondering if they were truly pursuing things of the Lord in their Church experience. The enemy can use these doubts to get people to even start wondering “what if,” and perhaps get them dwelling on bad, unforgotten memories of their past which may not even directly relate to their spiritual life. Some people can be so overwhelmed with new information, and they do not know what to do, that the enemy can use it to attack them and at the very least get them confused, or at the very most, get them to deny faith in Messiah Yeshua.

Consider what we have all faced upon entering into a Messianic movement which is new to us, was mainly setup for the purposes of Jewish outreach and evangelism, and does not quite know what its own future is going to be. Many of us were raised in an established, evangelical Protestant tradition, where we were *rightly* taught that Jesus Christ is the Savior of humanity. We were *rightly* taught that we were to receive Him into our lives and accept His sacrificial death to be forgiven of our sins. We were *rightly* taught that as born again Believers we are to follow Christ’s Earthly example for living. But this is often an incomplete message.

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Many of us were not taught that the original name of our Lord and Savior was Yeshua, meaning "salvation." (I was from a young age, however, taught via Messianic Jewish teacher Zola Levitt that Jesus' original name was Yeshua.) Many of us were not taught the complete Biblical meaning of confession and repentance of our sin. And, many were not taught that a *critical part* of following the Messiah's Earthly example for living was to be submissive to the commandments of the Torah or the Law of Moses. *Here is where the doubts can begin.* They are often then compounded by those you are likely to encounter, who try to judge others' salvation, who is and who is not specifically "saved," and those who are unbalanced in regard to our Christian theological and spiritual heritage.

Let us state very clearly from this point that **it is not our job to determine who is and who is not "saved."** That is something that only God can do, as He is the only One who knows the true heart intent of any human being. As obvious as it is, only God Himself gets to determine who enters into the Kingdom of God!

Consider the position of the person who is new to the Messianic movement and is now finding out that Jesus' original name was Yeshua and that He was a Torah obedient Jewish Rabbi. What happens when certain people might start telling this new person that he or she must immediately stop going to Church where worship of the sun god takes place; that he must have a long beard and that she must have her head covered at all times; that regardless of whether or not he or she is a nice person that the spiritual experiences that he or she had in Church were utterly worthless; and that even though having asked Jesus to come into his or her heart, because the person did not use "Yeshua," such a salvation experience was meaningless.

This might be a somewhat extreme or exaggerated example, **but it can and does happen.** (It is especially compounded by all of the independent and unstable Hebrew Roots teachings available via social media.) These sorts of unfair and grossly inaccurate accusations can lead to someone questioning his or her salvation, and lead to someone having a very uncertain faith and unnecessarily dramatic Messianic experience. Those of us who have been in the Messianic movement, and have weathered the storm of the extremists, have a responsibility to help new people to grow constructively in their faith, and also be accountable to one another.

The tactic of the Adversary is to take as many with him to the Lake of Fire as possible. He can use someone thinking that he or she was not a true Believer while attending church to persuade the person to deny his or her faith.

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Our job must be to know that we *truly know* Yeshua the Messiah as Savior, are forgiven of our sins and have been spiritually regenerated, and have the assurance that—**no matter what**—we hold onto salvation while we grow and mature in our faith.

What is missing from the modern gospel?

The good news or gospel message, as most will present it, is the very simple understanding that all human beings are sinners, that people need forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation with God, that forgiveness is available through the atoning work of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), and that by acknowledging Yeshua as one's personal Lord and Savior and receiving Him into your life you will spend eternity with Him. **I certainly agree with this message**, *but* I also find that it is often incomplete. Consider, for example, what happens with many people who pray the so-called "Sinner's Prayer," then believe that they have been spiritually regenerated, yet whose lifestyles do not reflect those who are supposed to be spiritually transformed children of the Most High. While the gospel should be simple to understand, reception of the gospel does require action on the part of the recipient.

Romans 10:9-10 directs, "if you confess with your mouth Yeshua as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (NASU). In order to come to faith, a person must acknowledge Yeshua the Messiah as LORD,¹ His atoning work, and one must confess. Specifically, a person is required to confess his or her sins: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NASU). Even more specifically, a person is required to confess his or her violation of God's Instruction, as sin is lawlessness: "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4, NASU).

Now you can probably begin to see some divergences with the modern, popular gospel message, which is commonly taught throughout both Christian and Messianic settings. It is not enough to just acknowledge oneself as being a sinner, and the need to be forgiven. In order to properly come to faith, confession of one's sins is required. For some, this may seem

¹ This is not just a recognition of Yeshua as "Master," but theologically in view of Romans 10:13 following, and its quotation of Joel 2:23, would be an affirmation of Yeshua as God (YHWH) as well.

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rather mundane, but does the following statement truly qualify as being a “confession” of one’s sins?

“Lord, please forgive me of my sins.”

Certainly, it is not the place of any of us to eternally judge those who have said this, or something similar, whose intentions were sincere, whose heart was truly repentant, and whose life has indeed been changed by God. But, considering the fact that many people are unsure of their salvation, or have lives which do not reflect a true spiritual change, it is justified to question whether or not this type of confession fits the bill of what God requires.²

The critical element in the salvation process that is too frequently missing from the modern gospel is **the requirement for individuals to confess their sins**. By verbally confessing sins, a man or woman should be forced to recall the things which separate us as human beings from God. We are forced to feel remorse and shame, and the fact that we are fallen creatures in the sight of His great holiness. We are forced to realize that only God Himself can save us and cry out for mercy. As the sinner should say, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24, NASU).

The Torah Reveals Our Need for Salvation

By violating the commandments of God’s Torah, those who refuse to receive Yeshua’s atoning work have guaranteed themselves eternal punishment, unless they turn in repentance and receive Him into their lives. The Torah is the high and holy standard that the Lord will judge human beings by (Romans 3:20b). Because men and women have inherited a sin nature from the Fall, we each fall short of God’s standard, whether knowingly or unknowingly. As disobedience to the Torah is sin,

² I could mention many examples that my sister Jane witnessed, while she was a student president of Campus Crusade for Christ at Vanderbilt University as an undergraduate (2001-2005). Campus Crusade had a very strict accountability for its members at the time, because proper sexual morals were not often taught in many of the other campus-based ministries. It was either assumed, improperly, that Christian students were familiar with the Bible’s teachings on sexuality. Or worse yet, that a few inter-personal sexual experiences would not greatly affect the spirituality of a college student.

The root of much of the apathy toward sexual ethics was that as young adolescents, Christian college students “prayed the Sinner’s Prayer.” (This was only further compounded by a popular form of Calvinism where salvation is believed to be something that can *never* be lost [against: Hebrews 6:4-6]).

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lawlessness, it is our disobedience that condemns us. The Apostle Paul wrote of a person who would say,³

“...I would not have been conscious of what greed is if the *Torah* had not said, ‘**Thou shalt not covet.**’ But sin, seizing opportunity afforded by the commandment, worked in me all kinds of evil desires....For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me; and through the commandment, sin killed me” (Romans 7:7-8, 11, CJSB).

From this testimony, the Tenth Commandment is a significant ordinance (among other commandments) which can cause a person to sin: “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17, NASU; also Deuteronomy 5:21). It is not the holy commandment of God which causes the sin, but sin taking opportunity through a person knowing about it.

What happens to those who sin? Paul specified,

“For what one earns from sin [meaning: violation of the *Torah*] is death; but eternal life is what one receives as a free gift from God, in union with the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord” (Romans 6:23, CJSB).

Biblically, by sinning, or by transgressing God's commandments, human beings are worthy of death—eternal separation from Him. This is no different than how Adam and Eve were ejected from the God's presence in the Garden of Eden after eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:23). But if a man or woman receives Messiah Yeshua, such a penalty is taken away and one can have eternal life—eternal communion with Him.

The *Torah* of Moses is to demonstrate to human beings that they need a Redeemer. Because people cannot perfectly keep God's commandments, given their mortal limitations, and will fall—such commandments are to reveal our common need for salvation. This is why Paul can say that “the goal at which the *Torah* aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts” (CJSB). Yeshua is the focus of the *Torah*, “the

³ Be aware of how many Romans interpreters are agreed that the “I” of Romans 7 is a hypothetical sinner, and not necessarily the Apostle Paul providing autobiographical information. For a summary of this, consult J.M. Everts, “Conversion and Call of Paul,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 158.

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culmination of the law” (TNIV), because everything in the Word is to point to Him and is to reveal Him.

The Torah and Its Ordinances Point to Yeshua

Problems have ensued among many new Messianics when they begin to engage in Torah study for the first time. While they read important ordinances which relate to morality and human conduct, they also read commandments related to animal sacrifice and the atonement of sin, which they often find confusing. As Messiah followers we have all been taught, and rightfully so, that Yeshua’s death on the tree at Golgotha (Calvary) was the final sacrifice to cover for all sin: past, present, and future.

But even though true, many do not understand the fullness of the Messiah’s sacrifice, because they do not often study and learn what the Torah teaches about sin and how it was to be covered in Ancient Israel. Many people miss out on what it took prior to death of Yeshua to have sin covered. The Lord directed Israel in Leviticus 17:11, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement” (NASU). This is resonated later in Hebrews 9:22: “And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (NASU). The Ancient Israelites had to sacrifice an animal in order to *temporarily* cover sin, but it could not provide permanent atonement as sacrifices would have to be repeated later.

It is important for to grasp these concepts. Without the shedding of blood, no “atonement” (Heb. *kippur*) can be made. The Israelite who would offer up an unblemished animal for sacrifice had to confess sin, and in so doing the sin was transferred upon it:

“So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned. He shall also bring his guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin” (Leviticus 5:5-6, NASU).

After confessing sin, the person’s offering would then be burnt, and the “sin” represented by the animal would be fully consumed. The sinner would be pardoned by God’s mercy and rededicated to His service. Reconciliation with God would be *temporarily* accomplished.

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This is, of course, a very brief overlay of how sin-offerings were to be conducted in the Tabernacle and Temple. These ordinances were to point to the final atonement which the redeemed are to now have in Messiah Yeshua. Hebrews 10:4 astutely states, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (NASU). The best that the animal sacrifices of the Torah could provide for Ancient Israel would have been a temporary covering for sin. But fallen human nature will eventually cause a person to sin again. This is why Yeshua the Messiah can and was sacrificed for all human sins. His sinless blood is to cover us:

“Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET [Psalm 110:1]. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:11-14, NASU).

Hebrews 10:14 specifies, “by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (NIV). If we are in the Messiah, we are indeed made perfect by our spiritual regeneration and brought to the intended goal,⁴ which is salvation in Him and reconciliation with God. This is what the animal sacrifices in the Torah foreshadowed and pointed to.

Confessing Your Sin Before God

While it is no longer necessary to sacrifice animals for the atonement of human sin, as Ancient Israel once did—because the shed blood of the Messiah Himself covers sin permanently—there is still one important Torah principle which remains: **confession of sin**. But what does it mean for people to confess their sins, precisely? Numbers 5:6-7 specifies,

“When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give *it* to him whom he has wronged” (Numbers 5:6-7, NASU).

⁴ Grk. *teteleiōken*; “he has brought to the goal” (CJSB).

The verb *teleiōō* specifically means, “to make perfect, complete” (H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 797).

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In the context of this Torah passage, in order for restitution to be made, a *verbal* confession of the sin which had been committed was necessary. **Each of us should take significant notice of this.** Although one does not have to sacrifice an animal for the restitution of sin today, as now each one of us can claim the blood atonement of Messiah Yeshua—the premise of *confession of sin* for forgiveness most definitely remains. It is a beneficial exercise which forces one to acknowledge his or her guilt. Surprisingly, perhaps, the Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Chumash* commentary on Numbers 5:7 states,

“[T]he thrust of this verse is that to gain atonement, one must repent, and this repentance is expressed by confession, for one can only repent if he recognizes and regrets his sin...[The] obligation is stated here to teach that even where the Torah mandates a specific offering, as in this case, there cannot be atonement without an oral confession.”⁵

How many of you were ever told or taught something like this? Or, how many of you were ever told that it is at least *recommended* to recall sins committed in prayers, so as to truly feel repentant before God, and grateful for the grace that has been provided in the Messiah?

In many religious settings today, the good news or gospel message of Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus) is not taught with any Torah background. Many ministers do not preach that sin is violation of God’s Law, and that in order to be forgiven, people should confess their sins—in the sense of something greater than “Lord, I confess my sins to you.”

Again, it is not our place to judge the heart intent of many people who have sincerely prayed the simplistic statement, “Lord, I confess my sins to you.” Many who have prayed this have genuinely meant it and are born again Believers. But, what about the person who is uncertain of his or her salvation? What about the person who does not have the assurance that he or she truly had that “encounter” with God? What course of action does this kind of person need to take?

Sadly, based on the fruits of many who have prayed “the Sinner’s Prayer,” many such people can be witnessed as being either very spiritually immature, because they do not live a lifestyle consistent with Scripture—or perhaps they were not sincere about their “confession of sin.” Many such individuals are not truly born again and do not truly know the Lord. This is because they have never dealt with their sin *and*

⁵ Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 753.

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have understood that they are guilty in the sight of a holy and righteous God.

Specific recollection and confession of sin will cause a person to be humbled and ashamed and broken before a holy and righteous Creator. **Specific confession of sin was required in Ancient Israel for atonement of sin—and if any of us wants the most of our salvation experience, we should endeavor to do the same.** The Apostle Paul observed, “For the sorrow that is according to *the will of God* produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10, NASU). I believe much damage has been caused among contemporary people of faith, because they are not commonly taught to confess their specific sins, to the best of their knowledge, in seeking redemption.

Those who today identify as being Messianic Believers, and who follow the Torah, are going to be held to an extremely high standard. Paul wrote how, “For as many as have sinned without the Torah will also perish without the Torah, and as many as have sinned in the Torah [*en nomō*] will be judged by the Torah” (Romans 2:12, PME). When a person has a fuller knowledge of God’s Torah, sitting decisively within its sphere of influence—then he or she will be held accountable to a very high mark. All conservative evangelical Christians who read their Bibles and know the difference between right and wrong, and know what the Law says—certainly in terms of ethics and morality—will likewise be held accountable. Our responsibility as Believers is to make sure that we have properly confessed of our sin so that we may be forgiven of our sin, and that we are continuing to grow in our spiritual lives—having a right and vibrant relationship with the Lord.

Some of My Story

If it is Biblically required for a man or woman to confess their sin in order to receive forgiveness, then how should a person go about doing this? For that same matter, should a person who has already acknowledged Yeshua as his or her Lord and Savior go through the process *once again* of “getting right” with God?

I was not truly born again until I was fourteen years old, in 1995. I had been raised in a Christian family, one that was actually pursuing some Messianic things, my parents had been lay leaders in the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church, I attended a Baptist elementary school, and I was well versed in my Bible. At the age of five, I

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had prayed the Sinner's Prayer and asked Jesus into my heart. But as I got older and I reached puberty, I had less and less of a desire to pursue God. This was compounded by my father's death from cancer in 1992, and me moving from my only home in Northern Kentucky to Dallas, Texas in 1994. I had become a rebellious child and had great disrespect for my parents, notably my new stepfather.

It was not until the Summer of 1995, when my mother finally sat me down and told me that I had some things I needed to get straight with the Lord. She told me that I had been raised better, and that I was not pursuing God, reading my Bible, or that I really cared about my faith. *She was right.* In the course of our conversation, she told me that when I was a young child I was covered by grace, and it was not until I reached an age of accountability when I could understand my sin nature that I could truly understand why I needed a Savior. She then told me, flat out, that **"John, you're not saved."**

Providentially, the previous week my stepfather and I had attended a father-son week long retreat in Northern California, where there was a strong focus on the Ten Commandments. The Lord had been preparing my heart that week to convict me that I needed to get serious about my faith. Looking back on it now with what I know, I was being convicted from God's Torah that I was a sinner who was deserving of eternal condemnation.

After our little mother-son "talk," I knew that I had to get myself right with God, and that my mother telling me that I was not saved was absolutely true. I knew that truly confessing and repenting of my sin via "the Sinner's Prayer" route would not be sufficient if I wanted answers for my pleas. I knew that I was Biblically required to do more, and I was strongly convicted that I should not hide anything from God. I knew that I had to talk to God and *just tell Him* what I had done wrong in my life, recall the types of sins that I had committed, and truly ask Him to give me a new heart so that I might change and turn to a life of holiness.

What I proceeded to do was follow the list of the Ten Commandments and verbally confess of sins that I had committed. I had made myself first in my life, and had forgotten God. I had used the terms God and Lord as curse words. I had coveted, I had lusted, I had lied, stolen, and cheated. I even had hatred in my heart for my parents. I confessed sins for hours. What I did was much, much more than just, "Lord, forgive me of my sins." It was, "Lord, please forgive me of Sins A, B, C...X, Y, Z...AA, BB, CC..." In recalling these sins, I felt deep regret, sorrow, and I even cried. When this was all over, I felt a physical lifting of my heart, and I truly felt

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different. I had a spiritual peace and a desire to pray and study my Bible more. *I knew I had been saved. I knew I had assurance of that salvation!* Since 1995, I look back on all the things the Lord has had me do and I am amazed.

Our personal testimonies of coming to faith are supposed to be weapons which we can use against the attacks of the enemy. I offer this brief summary to help you in your walk of faith, so that you might be strengthened and hopefully gain something from it, or perhaps realize that you too have *some business* you need to take care of with the Lord. It was not by coincidence that shortly after being born again that my family was supernaturally drawn into the Messianic movement. Since that time in 1995, my life has not been the same!

Confessing Your Sin

If you have **never truly confessed** your sins before God, then it is time for you to do so! Remember that specific confession of sin was required for a burnt-offering to be accepted by the Lord, and for a sinner to be forgiven in Ancient Israel. The same precedent is true for us today who believe that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel. Please understand that ultimately it is God's job to determine who is saved and unsaved, so do not all of a sudden think that I think that you, the reader, are not truly saved. But, it is likely that there are some things that you can do to have greater peace and assurance that you truly know the Lord. It is always a good exercise to reevaluate where we stand before the Almighty, and resolve various spiritual matters.

We now provide a listing of each of the Ten Commandments, the basis of the rest of God's Torah, and offer some advice which should help you confess your sins before Him if you truly feel as if you need to get right with the Lord. (This may also be something that you can follow on *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement, where God's people are called to reflect inwardly and confess sin.)

The First Commandment

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3, NASU).

We are to remember that the Lord has brought redeemed men and women out of slavery to sin to freedom in Him through His Son, Yeshua

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the Messiah, who died for us. Those who acknowledge Yeshua as their personal Lord and Savior can have true freedom from sin. But, in doing so the redeemed cannot have any gods other than the Holy One of Israel in our life. Anything or anyone which is placed above or before the Lord, results in violation of this commandment. We have to place God as first in our lives. This is the prime focus of the *Shema*, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one [or: the LORD alone, NRSV/NJPS]!” (Deuteronomy 6:4, NASU). The Lord asks us to make Him first, and to make all things secondary in light of Him.

The Second Commandment

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:4, NASU).

God’s people are prohibited from making any images as objects of worship. For Ancient Israel, this would have largely constituted worshipping graven images in the manner of their pagan neighbors. Today, however (with the notable exception of Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy), evangelical Protestantism does not use images of God or statues in worship. Today’s Messianic Judaism, following a great deal of traditional Judaism, does not either. But, as each of us has placed ourselves above the Lord, and have perhaps concentrated on how we look, dress, or conduct ourselves—we have made ourselves into the manner of an idol, which we have worshipped.

This is an important sin to confess, because it results in God visiting a curse upon the third and fourth generations of those who practice in idolatry. How many people may unknowingly have such a curse upon them—or at least some kind of a reverberating, negative spirituality presently affecting them—because a past ancestor participated in an idolatrous practice and the consequences of that sin continues to be passed down?

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The Third Commandment

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7, NASU).

The primary emphasis of the Third Commandment is that God’s people are not to take the usage of His name lightly. This has many connotations such as using the titles Lord and God as curse words. It also includes claiming to speak in the name of God, or represent Him, and using such a representation falsely. It involves God’s people misrepresenting His character in their speech, and whether or not they have brought glory or disrepute to Him.

The Fourth Commandment

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11, NASU).

The Fourth Commandment is one which many of those who have entered into the Messianic community, especially from various Christian backgrounds, have violated in various ways. Many have failed to recognize that the seventh-day is the true Sabbath or *Shabbat*, and have replaced it with Sunday Church. While many Messianic people from evangelical backgrounds went to Church on Sunday, believing they were keeping the Sabbath—and while God has certainly honored many for what they did in ignorance—we nevertheless all need to confess of what we did, and recognize that we were not honoring the actual, specific Sabbath. We need to most especially review and confess things that we did on the Sabbath which were wrong, such as strenuous work and buying and selling. We need to ask the Lord to give each of us a heart so that we might consecrate *Shabbat* entirely unto Him and to our pursuit of Him. We need to learn how to enter into the great gift of rest provided to God’s people by *Shabbat*.

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The Fifth Commandment

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12, NASU).

Each of us needs to confess that we have dishonored our parents. We have each failed to give our father and our mother the proper respect, as we have each cursed them and treated them with contempt. We must remember that a rebellious child who failed to honor his or her parents was subject to being stoned in Ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 18:18-21). If we intend to be granted long and prosperous lives by the Lord, then we owe it to ourselves to confess of things that we have done to our parents, and how we have refused to obey them—especially if we do actually regard ourselves to be redeemed sons and daughters of God. We also need to confess any disrespect of any grandparents or ancestors who had to live and exist, especially in a different set of (religious) circumstances than us, in order for us to be here today.

The Sixth Commandment

“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13, NASU).

It is doubtful that any one of you reading, has actually murdered another person, committing homicide, ending another human being’s life (although some women may have had abortions). But, there is little doubt that each one of us has had thoughts about murdering a person, people, or wanting someone else dead—and this surely does constitute breaking the commandment. We each have to confess thoughts of malice, hatred, and bitterness we have had toward other people, or even ourselves—and recognize how we have all committed murder in our hearts and minds. We must ask God to give each of us a burden for those who have done wrong to us, so that we might pray for them and their salvation—rather than find ourselves usurping the position of God, condemning anyone to eternal damnation.

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The Sixth Commandment

“You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14, NASU).

The Seventh Commandment, while specifically prohibiting adultery, is related to the many kinds of sexual immorality which one finds condemned in the Scriptures. We see throughout history how Satan has certainly done his best in perverting something which God originally intended to be between a husband and wife, in the context of marriage. Today in the Twenty-First Century, the estate of marriage has lost much of the sanctity that it once had, as many husbands and wives do not take their marriage commitments too seriously, perhaps demonstrated by extra-marital affairs—and given how in many places in the modern world, a couple can divorce by merely stating they have some sort of “irreconcilable differences.” The Seventh Commandment also sees gross violations via the practice of pre-marital sex and homosexuality. And, even if given the small chance that a few of us have remained untouched by these matters, we are all still bombarded by sexual images via the media and our society on a continual basis.

Yeshua clearly taught that if one possesses lust in the heart, then one has committed the sin of adultery (Matthew 5:28). This is an offense which we all must confess of! We must ask God to give each of us a heart and mind of sexual purity, as we keep our thoughts focused on the purposes of His Kingdom.

The Eighth Commandment

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15, NASU).

Each of us, in some form or another, have stolen something—even if we have not participated in armed robbery. It may have been as simple as taking more than one of the “free samples” at the grocery store or a restaurant, or by cheating on a test. We have also certainly stolen things in our hearts, by wanting things from other people. The quest for money, power, or sex often involves stealing.

The Assurance of Our Salvation

The Ninth Commandment

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16, NASU).

Each of us has lied to cover ourselves. We have each lied to other people, to God, and even to ourselves. We have each exaggerated or stretched the truth, and we have often failed to recognize the reality of the truth, because we are fearful of its implications and consequences. The foremost lie that every human being is seen to have accepted, at one point or another, is that we can manage by ourselves without needing God or Yeshua. We each have to be honest with ourselves and with God, confessing falsehoods which we have subjected ourselves to. We each need to recognize anything false which we have done in our lives, and how we have misrepresented various matters for our own fleshly purposes.

The Tenth Commandment

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16, NASU).

The sin of covetousness is sometimes described by the Rabbis of Judaism as the root of all other sins.⁶ It is said that in order for someone to lie, one must first want something. In order for someone to adulterate, one must covet another person's husband or wife. In order for someone to steal, one must covet someone else's possessions. And the list goes on...

This point should be well received by those who truly want to be right with the Lord. Each of us has coveted things, and it has led us to commit other sins and walk down a path that God's people have no business walking. We each have a responsibility to confess what we have done wrong, so that we might have reconciliation with God and the best possible relationship we can have with Him.

The Tutor That Leads Us to the Messiah

One of the most confusing passages in the Bible for many, are Yeshua's words, “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God

⁶ Scherman, *Chumash*, 413.

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like a child will not enter it *at all*” (Mark 10:15, NASU; cf. Matthew 19:14). Many have concluded that what Yeshua was saying is that the best time for someone to come to faith in Him is when one is a small child. The problem with this, is that a small child cannot often fully understand his or her sin nature. A small child can often have a basic understanding of what is right and wrong, and a small child can often comprehend the love of God—but a small child cannot often comprehend his or her human limitations and the fact that all are sinners condemned and worthy of separation from God.

What Yeshua was actually teaching is that people are to be *as children* when they come to faith. We are not to be concerned with complex theologies or doctrines or in trying to figure out all the mysteries of God’s universe all at once—but each of us is to return to God as a child coming home to his or her loving father. We are to each return to our Heavenly Father humble and broken, and receive His mercy and His grace.

This is not to say that small children cannot truly come to faith, but it does not widely align with the Hebraic understanding of being accountable for oneself and knowing that one is a sinner, often by one’s teens (as is perhaps alluded to in Josephus *Life* 1.9). Throughout traditional Judaism, boys and girls today are taught the commandments of God’s Torah from their infancy. The commandments are rigorously instilled in them, so that by the time they reach puberty the boy can go through his *bar mitzvah* and be considered a man, and similarly the girl can go through her *bat mitzvah* and be considered a woman. *Bar mitzvah* means a “son of the commandments,” and *bat mitzvah* “daughter of the commandments.” At the age of 12-13, one who goes through *bar/bat mitzvah* recognizes that he or she is accountable as an adult before the God of Israel and the standard of Torah, as they assert themselves as members of the Jewish community.

(Some Protestant denominations do a similar, but less rigorous practice, in confirming teenagers as members of the Church. Usually, teens will go through a class which talks about Church history and one’s responsibilities as a member of the faith community. I went through this tradition in 1993, in the United Methodist Church.)

The practice of preparing a youth for *bar/bat mitzvah* is to instill in the boy or girl the understanding that he or she is accountable for living up to the Torah’s commandments, and being set-apart as a member of Israel. The Torah up to this point largely serves as the person’s tutor or schoolmaster—perhaps strictly—and hopefully when the youth gets up to bema to read from the Torah scroll and is *bar* or *bat mitzvahed*, he or she has an understanding that what he or she is doing is very serious in the

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eyes of the God of Israel. This is some of what I believe the Apostle Paul was alluding to in Galatians 3:24-25:

“Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:24-25, NASU).

A tutor or pedagogue (Grk. *paidagōgos*) in Ancient Greece was a household servant who would guard young boys on their travels to and from school. The pedagogue would also rear the boys in learning and instill into them what was acceptable and not acceptable for proper citizens. When the boys grew of age so that they could protect themselves, the pedagogue no longer would guard them in their travels. The foundational life principles and disciplines that the pedagogue would teach the young boys would now be instilled into their psyche.

How many of you were possibly trained in the truths of God’s Torah, even if they were just the Ten Commandments from a (limited) evangelical Protestant understanding—that human beings are sinners in the eyes of God and all need salvation in the Messiah? How many of us had the Torah guarding us while we were young, so that in the future when we reached a point of maturity, we no longer had to be reminded of basic truths of what was sin and not sin? Neither the Jewish *bar/bat mitzvah* nor the Protestant practice of confirmation will result in a young person becoming born again—but they can be very important in the salvation process, as a young person is made aware of human limitations *and* his or her sin nature.

My personal testimony is that I was revealed the sin in my life through the Ten Commandments. I had to come to faith as a child who could not fully understand everything. When I was finally born again, I truly had the spiritual desire to read my Bible and seek the things of the Lord. As I contemplated His Word, I found additional things which I needed to confess and change in my life. I was not raised in the Torah as a Jewish child would be, but I certainly had had a strong Biblical foundation instilled in me so that I knew enough regarding what was sin and not sin. When our family entered into the Messianic movement, we did have to change some things. We did not know that certain things we had done previously were in error, and that we committed them in ignorance. We confessed these things, received forgiveness, and continue to ask the Lord where we need to change our lifestyles so that we may be further conformed to the image of the Messiah (Romans 8:29).

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Staying the Course and Continuing in the Faith

Yeshua taught that His followers are to come to faith as though they were a child. A child is not concerned with all of the miniscule details of theology and in “figuring things out.” But nowhere—once a man or woman comes to faith—**are we called to *remain as children***. We are to always be moving forward. The Messiah directed, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7, NASU). The Apostle John would further write,

“As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (1 John 2:27-28, NASU).

Born again Believers are called to *abide in Him* and *continue in faith*. God’s people are *always* to be in a state of growth. We are to always be seeking to know our Heavenly Father better, and to be knowing more about Him and His Word. One of the most serious problems which many people in today’s Messianic community have with contemporary evangelicalism, is that it appears that there are many who are satisfied with having a stagnant faith. Many people, quite sadly, do not have a growing faith. They are not seeking the deeper truths of the Scriptures, and they frequently criticize Messianics for wanting to seek more of the Lord. *Yet, Messianics frequently observe how many evangelical Protestants want little or nothing to do with their faith heritage in the Tanach, or are interested in God’s future plans and intentions with Israel and the Jewish people.*

A person who has been spiritually regenerated and born again **should want to know God and have the best possible relationship with Him**. Most of us who have been called by Him into the Messianic movement, from evangelical backgrounds, are here because we have been earnestly seeking God and we want to know Him better. We are seeking for a better foundation for our faith, and we are willing to admit that we have been wrong in the past regarding various matter. We should each be willing to confess our sins before God, receive forgiveness, and ask Him to give us the heart to turn toward doing the right things, being a good example to others.

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Repentance of one's sins means that each of us has the responsibility to turn toward doing the right things. It is not just enough for a person to confess and receive forgiveness of one's sins; we each must be supernaturally empowered to "sin no more" (John 5:14). Knowing that we are truly right with the Lord is contingent upon whether or not we actually demonstrate a heart eager and ready to obey and please Him. Such an obedience is not forced, and is natural evidence of a heart change—not because one is trying to "earn" salvation. The keeping of God's commandments is a great delight for those who have them written on the heart via His Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27), and not be a burden: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3, NASU). Salvation comes by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), but God did create us for good works (Ephesians 2:10).

It is my sincere hope and prayer that *your* motivation for being in the Messianic movement is to grow and mature in your faith—being part of something significant, as a co-laborer in the restoration of Israel and salvation of the Jewish people. You may have done things in the past in your Christian experience which need to be confessed of as error, and rectified. You may have never seriously considered confessing your sin before God, which is required by the Torah. I believe that if you seriously reflect upon your spiritual condition, that this will be a very freeing exercise for you and will help you in your relationship with the Lord. We also each need to be accountable to one another, and to help one another when the enemy tries to attack us and get us to doubt whether we truly know Him. We need to continually *be experiencing* the salvation and goodness of God in our lives.

We each have to recognize that as human beings we will find ourselves in various stages of spiritual growth and maturation—and no single person has at all "arrived." But, are you in a state of continual growth? Are you seeking more of Him? I believe this is the key to knowing whether or not one is truly "saved," or if one is just going through the various motions. I also believe it can be an excellent test to determine whether any of us really does have honorable intentions in being "Messianic."

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SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 13

1. What are some of the reasons why people enter into the Messianic movement from evangelical Christian backgrounds?
2. What are some of the challenges for newcomers in the Messianic movement? How can many of them question, or be unsure of their salvation? Why does this happen?
3. Do you think it is appropriate for us to judge another person's salvation? Why or why not?
4. Do you think that confession of sin is an element that is missing from the modern gospel message? Why or why not? What do you think Biblically qualifies as "confession of sins"?
5. How is the Torah to reveal the sin nature of the individual?
6. How are the animal sacrifices of the Torah supposed to point to Yeshua? How was the person in Ancient Israel offering the sacrifice supposed to receive atonement when bringing his offering? How does this relate to the salvation experience today?
7. Do you believe that there are people in either mainstream Christianity and/or the Messianic movement who think they are saved, but really are not? Explain.
8. What do you think is the best way for Believers to confess their sins?
9. How is the Torah to be our "tutor"? How does this relate to the salvation experience?

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10. How are we to be properly growing and maturing in our walk of faith? How many people in the Messianic movement do you believe are truly doing this, and are led by the Holy Spirit?