

are to “return to Torah,” with Yeshua placed as an accessory. **This is an incomplete message.**

Secondly, we must also consider the fact that the Messianic movement has grown with people not always teaching about the Hebraic Roots of our faith with honorable motives. There are teachers “out there” in the Messianic world of ideas who are not at all trying to help people grow in the knowledge and grace of God, but are rather out there to promote themselves and/or their own cardinal teaching(s). No effort is ever made by these teachers to properly disciple and mentor people who hear about our Hebraic Roots and how God’s revelation begins with the Torah.

Thankfully, there are people well intentioned, just like some of the Believers in Rome, who proclaim what God is doing in this hour through “true goodwill” (NEB). These are people who are filled with the love of Yeshua, who have practical Biblical knowledge that people can use, and who have discernment to judge critical situations when they arise. These are the people who know that the reason we are to obey God’s commandments in the Torah is because we love God and are to grow toward maturity. These are the people who are more concerned about promoting who the Lord is and what He has done in their lives. These are the people who are able to let their Master handle anyone disgracing the Messianic message, recognizing that it is His job—and not theirs—to deal with them (no matter how great the temptation may be to do otherwise.)

These people have a patience and serenity similar to that of the Apostle Paul expressing himself to the Philippians. **Are you one of these Messianics?** Consider the fact that Paul is able to speak quite openly and frankly to his Philippian friends—indicating that most of them had their faith in Yeshua, their obedience to God’s commandments, and their testimony to the world in the right order.

18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Messiah is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Yeshua the Messiah, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Messiah will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

1:18 Paul is able to express a confidence to the Philippians that few of us even today would be able to have, in light of those going out and “ministering” with improper motives. He says, “But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice” (NIV). Various readers have noted that at least in Paul’s situation, those proclaiming Yeshua with insincere or dishonorable motives were probably not preaching heresy. Kent considers that “They were doctrinally orthodox, but at the same time mean and selfish, using the occasion of Paul’s confinement to promote themselves.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Kent, in *EXP*, 11:111.

For some reason, Paul has a masterful ability to see the “big picture.” In spite of the dishonorable intentions of some wanting to deter his work in Rome, or even skew the gospel message for their own purposes, the message of Yeshua the Messiah was being proclaimed. The Lord, being bigger than both Paul and these people, is still going to accomplish things. Not surprisingly, none of these things have changed—even almost two millennia since Paul wrote to the Philippians. Dunnam explains, “Others were interested in success for its own sake. Jealous of Paul, they were determined to show that they could be successful and that the church could prosper without him. How ‘human’ the church, then as now! So there was strife and envy.”⁶¹

Should we be surprised when similar things happen in today’s Messianic movement when teachers appear to be “competing” with one another? How difficult is it for some of us to realize that in spite of the fallen condition of human beings—the Lord is still able to work? Even more so, how difficult is it for some Messianics to realize that God still works through the Christian Church, in spite of its limitations regarding Israel and the Old Testament?

Of course, in these statements about Paul’s rivals, he is indirectly warning the Philippians about their own attitudes, should they have anyone among them who is “ministering” for ungodly purposes.

1:19 In spite of some of the negative circumstances surrounding him in Rome, Paul tells his Philippian friends, “I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance” (RSV). Of important note is his usage of the term *sōtēria* (σωτηρία), also meaning “salvation.” What Paul is considering *sōtēria* to be in v. 19 is not agreed upon by all expositors. Some believe that he is looking forward to the future day when he is able to enter the presence of Yeshua. Others, however, believe that he is referring to a release from his incarceration. This is certainly something we should consider, as it implies that God’s “salvation” is more than just personal redemption—but it is evidenced in major acts that require great faith.

V. 19 includes a quote from the Septuagint version of Job 13:16⁶², “This also will be my salvation, for a godless man may not come before His presence,” as Paul would have committed whatever would happen to him entirely to God. Concurrent with this are some parallels seen concerning the “poor man” in the Psalms:

“O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces will never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles” (Psalm 34:3-6).

“Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness, and do not let them rejoice over me. Do not let them say in their heart, ‘Aha, our desire!’ Do not let them say, ‘We have swallowed him up!’ Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress; let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over

⁶¹ Dunnam, 264.

⁶² Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 673.

me. Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; and let them say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified, who delights in the prosperity of His servant.’ And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness *and* Your praise all day long” (Psalm 35:24-28).

Certainly when we consider Paul’s condition being incarcerated in Rome, these may have been psalms he was meditating upon—or even reciting or singing—as he pondered the difficulty of his situation. He had to place his complete trust and confidence in the Lord. But notice that it is not just the Lord who will provide a resolution to his condition; provision will come from *tou pneumatos Iēsou Christou* (τοῦ πνεύματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), “the Spirit of Yeshua the Messiah” (CJB). Paul recognizes the strong interconnectivity between the Son and Spirit as members of the Godhead, and Yeshua is surely resident inside of him via the Holy Spirit. We should see a connection between this and how “the Spirit of Yeshua” (Acts 16:7, CJB) had to lead Paul and his associates into Philippi.

1:20 In v. 20, Paul is able to say, “For, as I passionately hope, I shall have no cause to be ashamed, but shall speak so boldly that now as always the greatness of Christ will shine out clearly in my person, whether through my life or through my death” (NEB). In his confinement, Paul is able to express that the power of God will be demonstrated through him regardless of what happens—even whether he lives or dies. Shame and exaltation are some additional intertextual themes from the Tanach that Paul is likely incorporating into these words:

“O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together. I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces will never be ashamed” (Psalm 34:3-5).

“Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress; let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over me. Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; and let them say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified, who delights in the prosperity of His servant’” (Psalm 35:26-27).

The term used to describe Paul’s “deep desire and hope” (Good News Bible) is *apokaradokia* (ἀποκαρδοκία). The only other place it is used in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures is Romans 8:19: “For the anxious longing [*apokaradokia*] of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.” Regardless of what happens to him, Paul has a great expectation that Yeshua the Messiah will be exalted and glorified. Paul’s message of exhortation in difficult circumstances is a message for all seasons in any time period. We need to resolve ourselves both individually and corporately as the Messianic community to recognize that God’s will is going to be accomplished—regardless of what negative things we may encounter. We need to continue the course that He has us on with the empowerment of the Spirit.

21 For to me, to live is Messiah and to die is gain. 22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Messiah, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Messiah Yeshua through my coming to you again.

1:21 Death is never something that any of us like to contemplate, even though it is a part of the human condition that we will all have to encounter—be it the death of a loved one, or even our own death. For the Apostle Paul, death is not something to be feared. As he says in v. 21, “For to me, life is the Messiah, and death is gain” (CJB). Dunnam observes, “Verses 21-26 form one of these marvelous passages in which Paul opens the door of his innermost being and invites us in to visit.”⁶³

Some commentators think that Paul is shifting to a language style more common in various Greek and Roman literary works. The female protagonist Antigone declares, “I knew that I should die—how otherwise? even although your voice had never so prescribed. And that I die before my hour is due, that I count gain” (*Antigone* 463-464).⁶⁴ It is possible that dealing with a largely Greek and Roman Philippian audience that Paul may have considered phrases they were familiar with. Hawthorne notes, “The universality of this sentiment can be demonstrated by numerous quotations drawn from lyric poetry, drama, philosophy and rhetoric spread over several centuries of Greek and Latin literature.”⁶⁵ Dying for a just cause was not something limited only to the Tanach; it did have its parallels in Greek and Roman society.

Were Paul to die at the hands of Rome, he would have considered it a great gain. It would have been a considerable testimony for the early Believers to gain strength from, and possibly even emulate. It would help people who were weak in their faith to see that dying for the cause of Yeshua was something noble and honorable—even to former Roman soldiers in Philippi who would have been the proverbial “tough guys.”

1:22 Even though Paul recognizes the great testimony he could leave by dying for the Messiah, he must conclude “If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me” (NIV). There is still a great deal of work to be done on Earth by Paul, that he knows he cannot leave. O’Brien remarks, “There is an antithesis between bodily existence on earth (τὸ ζῆν [to zēn]) and death (τὸ ἀποθανεῖν [to apothanein]). But both are oriented towards Christ, as the paragraph does make plain. Paul’s living is wholly directed towards him, while the apostle’s death means a departure and being with his Lord forever.”⁶⁶ The gain that Paul refers to is not only leaving a sure legacy behind for others to emulate, **but it would be being**

⁶³ Dunnam, 265.

⁶⁴ Sophocles: *Antigone*, ed. Stanley Appelbaum (New York: Dover, 1993), 18.

⁶⁵ Hawthorne, 45.

⁶⁶ O’Brien, 121.

welcomed into the very presence of the Lord Himself in Heaven. However, Paul must admit “I do not know which to choose.”

1:23 In v. 23, Paul expresses his deep emotion “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (NIV). He employs the verb *analuō* (ἀναλύω), meaning “to loose a ship from its moorings, weigh anchor, depart” (LS).⁶⁷ AMG explains that this was used by “the ancient Greeks...to indicate loosing the anchor of a ship in order to sail from a port.”⁶⁸ The verb *analuō* is also used as a military term to describe breaking camp and moving to another location: “About that time, as it happened, Antiochus had retreated [*analuō*] in disorder from the region of Persia” (2 Maccabees 9:1). In a way, Paul is sitting in prison as though he were a ship in harbor. This ship is loaded with goods and supplies that the people in the town desperately need. Paul admits this in v. 24 by saying, “to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account” (RSV). However, Paul’s strong desire is to set sail and depart—to leave this world and enter into the presence of His Lord and King.

The clause *kai sun Christō einai* (καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι) makes it very clear that Paul expected upon time of death to enter into the presence of the Lord. The verb *eimi* (εἶμι) generally relates “of things, to be, exist” (LS),⁶⁹ and it would not be a stretch to render this phrase as, “and with Christ exist.” This would undeniably be a death considered “gain” (v. 21). While Paul’s body would be asleep (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16), Paul’s expectation is one of meeting his Lord immediately after departure. Fee explains,

“[H]e belonged to a theological-spiritual milieu wherein his Lord could speak of God as ‘the God of the living, not the dead,’ referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Mark 12:18-27 and //’s), and wherein Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus at the Transfiguration. It seems most likely, therefore, that Paul expected to be ‘with the Lord’ in full consciousness...Paul understood death as a means into the Lord’s immediate presence, which for him and countless thousands after him has been a comforting and encouraging prospect. Very likely he also expected such ‘gain’ to include consciousness, and for most believers, that too has been a matter of encouragement.”⁷⁰

The Apostle Peter expresses similar thoughts to Paul as his death approached:

“I consider it right, as long as I am in this *earthly* dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my *earthly* dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Yeshua the Messiah has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind” (2 Peter 1:13-15).

Peter compared his “body” (RSV, NRSV) to being “this tabernacle” (KJV, NKJV). He said that He would be putting it off or laying it aside via a “departure,” “outgoing” (YLT), or his “decease” (KJV). Literally from the Greek, his departure is an “exodus.” *Exodos* (ἐξόδος) means “movement from one geographical area to another, departure, path, course,” and

⁶⁷ LS, 58.

⁶⁸ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 154.

⁶⁹ LS, 229.

⁷⁰ Fee, 149.

“**departure from among the living**” (BDAG).⁷¹ *Exodos* (ἔξοδος) was the term used by the Septuagint Rabbis to call the Book of *Shemot* (שְׁמוֹת) in the Torah, because its primary theme is the Ancient Israelites’ departure from Egypt. The Apostle Peter did not employ the term *exodos* by accident. In a way, he likens his Earthly death to the Israelites’ departure from Egypt.

Neither the Apostle Paul nor the Apostle Peter were advocating any kind of “soul sleep” for Believers in these words, the belief that when a person dies, he or she remains unconscious in the grave until the resurrection. Neither does Yeshua advocate a “soul sleep” as He told the thief next to Him on the cross, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Martin clearly states, “Any idea of an unconscious state following death or of a purgatorial discipline in the next world is denied by the sheer simplicity of Paul’s expectation.”⁷² Robert A. Morey remarks in his work *Death and the Afterlife*, “there is no legitimate way to escape the truth that Paul desired to depart this life and to be with Christ.”⁷³

Even though Paul affirms the reality of a disembodied afterlife in Heaven for Believers (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8-9)—which is notably an *intermediate state*, and may in no way be regarded as something permanent—he in no way denies the reality of the bodily resurrection, either, a mainstay of First Century Pharisaical theology most present in his teachings (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16; cf. Daniel 12:1-2), especially in this letter itself (3:20-21). Some think that Paul disavows an afterlife, in response to many forgetting about the reality of the resurrection, but as Bible readers we need to learn to carefully maintain the integrity of both. One’s consciousness does go to an intermediate place after death in another dimension,⁷⁴ and those who have died will be resurrected, with reanimated bodily remains, at either the Second Coming of Yeshua to Earth, or at the Great White Throne judgment of the condemned (Revelation 20:13). Fee validly remarks, “a person’s death did not usher him into ‘timeless’ existence. Hence the bodily resurrection still awaits one ‘at the end,’”⁷⁵ further stating that “‘being with Christ’ at death is not the final goal; resurrection is. But the former is nonetheless ‘gain’ to Paul, precisely because Christ is the beginning and end of all for Paul.”⁷⁶

While the mechanics of what lies beyond this dimension are things that have been widely hidden from mortals, Paul did anticipate a “gain” to come about from his death. He desired to depart and see Yeshua in all His glory. He had overcome the fear of death that so many people have. However, Hawthorne correctly adds, “Paul does not speculate on the nature of this ‘interim condition.’”⁷⁷ Paul recognized that his primary duty was to his fellow brothers and sisters in Yeshua on Earth, and to leave the hereafter in the care of the Lord.

⁷¹ BDAG, 350.

⁷² Martin, 79.

⁷³ Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), 212.

⁷⁴ The belief in an intermediate state for humans until the resurrection is an affirmation that we are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6; James 3:9), possessing a unique Divine imprint independent of the animal kingdom (Genesis 2:7), and have been made just lower than the celestial host (Psalm 8:5). The lot of humanity is thus cast with those of another dimension, and not exclusively this one.

⁷⁵ Fee, 149.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fn#48.

⁷⁷ Hawthorne, 50.

Much of what we believe about death today and the state of Believers, or even non-Believers who have died, is profoundly affected by our spiritual experience. When my own father died on September 1, 1992 of melanoma, I was present at his deathbed. I saw and experienced some things I will never forget. I know that the spiritual dimension is something that is real and—beyond the Scriptural exegesis of the truth of an intermediate afterlife in Heaven for Believers—that it is a real place where my father has gone until the resurrection. But with this I also have to concede some unpleasant things as well. I have other relatives, who as to my knowledge made no profession of faith in Jesus, and are possibly in Hell and will experience an eternity separated from their Creator. Most of those who deny the Biblical reality of an intermediate afterlife for Believers in Heaven, prior to the resurrection, are not doing it so much because they do not want to see the Lord; they do so because it requires that the condemned also be in a place of intermediate punishment before they face their final judgment standing before God. Yet, for them individually, why would they not desire to meet the Lord immediately after dying?

For Paul writing to the Philippians, the existence of an afterlife was something that was sure. He had been in the service of Yeshua the Messiah for many years. He had the Holy Spirit permeating every aspect of his being, guiding his thoughts, decisions, and words to others. He had seen God miraculously lead him out of difficult circumstances. Now, as he may face the end, did Paul simply expect to die and *then experience sheer unconsciousness* until the resurrection? No. Paul was looking for something beyond Earthly life.

Many of us today, even in the Messianic community, can forget about these important things. Is it because we have not had the experience with God that we think we have had? Is it because we do not have the Holy Spirit to bear witness to us that there is a great beyond? Fortunately, we are not alone as this can also be a Christian problem. Fee remarks, “In a world that has lost its way, believers in Christ Jesus have the singular word of hope. We expect eventually ‘to depart and be with Christ.’ For Paul this was a yearning, for us it is too often an addendum.”⁷⁸

Even though we do look for the day we can see our Lord face-to-face, this does not mean that we should not be living for Him now on Earth. O’Brien comments, “[Paul] does not regard earthly life, over against the heavenly realm, as being insignificant.”⁷⁹ While on Earth, Believers are to run the marathon race of life, knowing that when we cross the finish line we will enter into the presence of the Master. But in order to get there—we still must run the race.⁸⁰

1:24-26 In vs. 23-24 the Apostle Paul clearly recognizes the joy he will experience of going to be with the Lord at the time of his death. In the meantime, he nevertheless recognizes the great responsibilities he has to minister to God’s people on Earth. He writes in vs. 25-26, “Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your advancement and joy in the faith, so that, because of me, your confidence may grow in Christ

⁷⁸ Fee, pp 150-151.

⁷⁹ O’Brien, 123.

⁸⁰ For a further discussion, consult the FAQ, “Philippians 1:23,” as well as the author’s publication *To Be Absent from the Body*.

Jesus when I come to you again” (HCSB). As Martin indicates, “Paul’s only reason for existence is that he may spend his life in that glad service; and death for that cause will be the crowning service.”⁸¹ It should be our same prayer that we come to this place of assurance in our own walks with God!

Paul did have an impression that he would be released from his incarceration to perform additional service. That Paul was released from an imprisonment in Rome is well attested in Christian history (cf. *1 Clement* 5; *Ecclesiastical History* 2.22). He expresses a desire to see his Philippian friends once again: “in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again” (RSV). In v. 26 he actually uses the term *kauchēma* (καύχημα), meaning “**expression of pride, boast, what is said in boasting**” (BDAG).⁸² Paul’s desire is that the Philippians will be able to boast or have pride in Messiah Yeshua because he has been released—and even more so—because he is able to visit his close friends in Philippi one last time. There is a likely allusion to Jeremiah 9:23-24 in these words:

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the LORD.”

27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Messiah, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. 29 For to you it has been granted for Messiah's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

1:27 Having expressed his own steadfastness in the cause of Yeshua, Paul tells the Philippians what they should learn from his present condition. He writes, “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (RSV). He issues the imperative *politeuesthe* (πολιτεύεσθε), derived from *politeuomai* (πολιτεύομαι), which means “**to be a citizen, have one’s citizenship/home**” (BDAG).⁸³ Hawthorne renders this as “show yourself to be good citizens” (WBC).⁸⁴

The unity of “one mind” that Paul desires the Philippians to have among themselves can only come as a result of their good behavior. Using a term describing citizenship was by no means an accident. The Philippians were all Roman citizens by virtue of Philippi being a Roman colony. Paul will later tell the Philippians that their citizenship exists in Heaven—not

⁸¹ Martin, 77.

⁸² BDAG, 537.

⁸³ Ibid., 846.

⁸⁴ Hawthorne, 54.

in any pagan city on Earth. In a similar manner, any Jewish Believers in Philippi may have been challenged by these words as well. For the longest time, the Jewish community would largely have seen an Earthly Jerusalem as the city that it belonged to. But, as Diaspora Judaism would grow, the “city” concept would actually extend more to the Jewish community as a whole. Therefore, Paul was urging the Philippians to function properly in the world at large, but recognize that their true citizenship was somewhere else—Heaven (3:20)—and that their fellow citizens were their fellow Believers in Messiah. As O’Brien summarizes it,

“The theme of the gospel is particularly significant: just as the apostle read his own circumstances in light of the gospel’s progress, so now he desires that the Philippians’ behaviour be entirely worthy of that same gospel of Christ (εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ [*euangeliou tou Christou*]), resulting in their contending together with one accord for the faith of the gospel (πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου [*pistei tou euangeliou*], 1:27).”⁸⁵

Paul’s admonition here is certainly a good one, but will require the Philippians to have a unity under pressure that they may have not had. He uses the participle *sunathlountes* (συναθλοῦντες) to describe their “standing firm” or “contending” (NIV). This participle appears in the plural, and undoubtedly would require a *group effort* on the Philippians’ part. Kent considers this to be “The athletic metaphor or teamwork [that] reinforces the previous references to ‘one spirit’ and ‘one soul,’ and is a reminder that a unified effort is needed if they are to be victorious in the contest.”⁸⁶ This unity of having *psuchē mia* (ψυχὴ μία) or “one soul” is seen among the Believers in Jerusalem having unanimity:

“And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them” (Acts 4:32).

Surely, Paul desired unity among all of those groups to whom he ministered. He wanted them to be united in mind and purpose so that they could fulfill the individual and corporate callings that God had upon them to change their communities with the good news. But this is not something that would come easily for some. Ultimately, it may have been hard times, persecution, harassment by the authorities, or some combination thereof that would have to drive some of the early Believers together. Fortunately for the Philippians, they did not suffer a great deal of division or factionalism when compared to the Corinthians, or even the Romans in Paul’s immediate vicinity.

1:28 The principal deterrent that Paul lists for the Philippians to be aware of in v. 28 are human opponents. He says, “Don’t be intimidated in any way by your enemies” (NLT). These opponents are not identified, but unity was undoubtedly required for countering their tactics appropriately. Most expositors think that they were either false teachers, government officials, or some combination of both. A few think that they are the opponents that Paul will list by specific actions later in ch. 3, but others think that this is just a general remark concerning any opponents. Any group of people functioning in the high calling of God and making a difference will encounter some opposition from somebody.

⁸⁵ O’Brien, 143.

⁸⁶ Kent, in *EXP*, 11:119.

O'Brien is of the position that the opponents of v. 28 are the Philippians' pagan neighbors. He comments, "Such a description best fits an opposition coming from outside the congregation rather than from within, and probably has particular reference to heathen inhabitants at Philippi who would use persecution, or the threat of it, to intimidate the believers."⁸⁷ Paul tells them not to be "frightened," using a unique term to describe this emotion. The verb *pturō* (πτύρω) is unique to the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, and may be used elsewhere in Greek works to describe the state of frightened horses in some kind of show. As Martin speculates, "*Adversaries* is more likely to be a veiled reference to mob violence."⁸⁸ Would this be something that the Philippians would face in the days ahead of them?

Paul tells the Philippians that whatever they face from whatever opponents face them, to remember "This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God" (RSV). When the Philippians do not cower in view of the crises they will face, those whom the enemy has sent in will suffer a lasting defeat. The term *apōleia* (ἀπώλεια) notably has a wide array of applications, it is "Rare in secular Greek, [and] means a. 'destruction,' 'ruin,' b. 'perishing,' c. 'loss'" (TDNT).⁸⁹ This kind of "destruction" should be understood as relating to the everlasting loss that the Philippians' opponents will suffer, "an evident token of perdition" (KJV), and thus serve as their own vindication. O'Brien notes, "later texts...give to the term a far-reaching significance, relating to the state after death,"⁹⁰ making it far worse than just "destruction" on a physical plain. *Apōleia* is a process of extreme loss that the Philippians' opponents will have to carry throughout eternity.

1:29 The Philippians actually have a great privilege according to Paul. He says in v. 29, "For he [God] has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well" (NEB). In lieu of the historical background surrounding these words—Paul incarcerated in Rome—we must be very thankful that most of us do not have to suffer the way that Paul did for his ministry. Many of the Philippians may have not had to be incarcerated, but they certainly faced challenges that we do not have to experience today.

The Apostle Paul considers suffering like Yeshua to be a very important part of his faith experience. As Dunnam explains, "Jesus had already suffered for the sins of the world; Paul would suffer, not as a repetition of Calvary but as an extension and expression of it, in the name of Christ for the sake of others."⁹¹ So important does Paul consider the experience of suffering for Yeshua that he uses the verb *charizomai* (χαρίζομαι), "**to give freely as a favor, give graciously**" (BDAG).⁹² In other words, Paul believes that being "granted" suffering is actually a part of God's grace manifested toward us. Fee notes, "What is even more striking to the Greek reader, which is not easily captured in English translation, is how thoroughly Christocentric this...is."⁹³ Is this because the suffering Paul endured helped mold him into a

⁸⁷ O'Brien, 153.

⁸⁸ Martin, 87.

⁸⁹ A. Oepke, "*apōleia*," in TDNT, 67.

⁹⁰ O'Brien, pp 156-157.

⁹¹ Dunnam, 268.

⁹² BDAG, 1078.

⁹³ Fee, 171.

better example for people to emulate? When we face our own trials today, do we consider them to be a part of God's grace?

1:30 Paul does express the opinion that the Philippians will undoubtedly have to endure some suffering, even though he does not specify what it might be. He only says, "you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (NRSV). This could be harassment, imprisonment, or even the threat of death. These words would have been extremely important for him to write to the Roman Philippians—who at one point in their lives probably recognized Caesar as "Lord." Many of them had turned their backs on Caesar worship, and were now worshiping the King of Kings Himself, Yeshua the Messiah.

The concept of turning one's back on what is familiar toward a life of faith and devotion to Yeshua is true for many others, and not limited to only the First Century Philippians. Every single one of us have had to turn our backs on something as we have walked the path of faith in the Messiah. David H. Stern is keen to point out the trials that Jewish Believers face in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*:

"Throughout the world Messianic Jews face rejection by family, friends and the Jewish community. In the State of Israel believers fear loss of their jobs, unpleasantness from Gospel-opposing neighbors and co-workers, violence from anti-Gospel zealots, governmental imposition of restrictions on evangelism. Non-permanent residents fear being expelled from the country..."⁹⁴

Messianic Jews generally have an easier time living in North America than in modern Israel. The laws that protect freedom of religion also protect Messianic Judaism, and American society is much more pluralistic. Modern Christianity itself has allowed for many "ethnic" variants of the faith to emerge, and the Messianic movement—at least in some circles—is considered to be of these "ethnic specific" manifestations. In time, however, as the Messianic movement grows and theologically matures, this is bound to change. We are bound to receive more criticism as our numbers swell, as more Jews come to faith in Yeshua, and as more non-Jewish Believers embrace their Hebraic Roots in a very tangible way.

Still, with these prospects looming, how many of us as Messianics have ever faced death at the hands of the authorities? How many of us victimize ourselves when we think we are being "persecuted," when in actuality the harassment we receive from a person is levied against many others for different reasons? The same person who might make a snide remark in the office for a Messianic Believer eating kosher, may make a similar remark to someone who eats only salad, or drinks only diet soft drinks. We need to thank God every day that what we face may only be injury to our human pride or egos—and not our very lives.

Even though most of us will probably never have to endure physical harm for our faith in Yeshua, we still have serious sacrifices to make. These sacrifices have very real consequences for our daily lives and the testimony that we present to others in the outside world. Some of us do have to give up friends for being Messianic. Others of us have to wait because some aspects of our lives have been placed "on hold." All of us have to give up some degree of comfort that either the local synagogue or church provided, as our local Messianic communities become more established.

⁹⁴ Stern, 595.

When Paul writes about “the same struggle” (NIV) to the Philippians, this is likely a reference to his beating and imprisonment that he experienced during his first visit. Would the Philippians be prepared to endure similar things? What are you prepared to endure for the cause of Messiah Yeshua?