

BEING MESSIANIC

in a post-Christian world

by Mark Huey

Despite the uniqueness of walking out a Messianic lifestyle for over twelve years in my pursuit of the Holy One, it has been my experience that the Winter holiday season still generates some personal and familial challenges—especially in what appears to be a steadily devolving post-Christian world. This is particularly true when you subject yourself to spending quality time with family and friends, who do not necessarily understand or embrace your steadfast belief that Yeshua (Jesus) is the Savior of the world. The great irony is that during this time of year—almost universally chosen to celebrate the birth of our Lord—family and friends dealing with their nominal *or non-existent* beliefs about God, His Son, or the need for atonement are challenged and increasingly more confused. This reality all came into focus for me as I spent the week of Christmas in Boulder, Colorado visiting my octogenarian parents, my sister and brother-in-law, nephews, and my daughter accompanied by her boyfriend.

First, I need to tell you that back in 1978 when I was born again and changed by the power of the gospel, the transformation in my life was, in and of itself, **very confusing for my immediate family**. Like many Americans, we had attended various Protestant churches from Methodist to Presbyterian to Congregational to Episcopal during the 1950s to 1970s, and thus my family (parents and siblings) have always considered themselves to be “Christians.” When I explained the need to have a personal salvation experience with the Risen Savior, they thought I had gone overboard. They simply did not understand. Over time, as my pleas fell on deaf ears, I came to understand the fuller meaning of Paul’s words to the Corinthians about the difference between the natural man and the spiritual man:

“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

After years of frustrating attempts to share the gospel with my family, I purposed in my heart to fervently pray for their salvation. I would attempt to live out my life in such a way as to be a testimony to them, of a life dedicated to my relationship with God. To this very day, I continue to believe that my prayers will bear fruit, recognizing that the timing is in the Lord’s capable hands.

Yet in spite of my prayers, things have gotten complicated in the past thirteen years. To further confuse the natural minds of my family, the Lord led Margaret and me into a Messianic walk in 1995. For the next several years, my family’s reaction from a respectable distance was basically, “Are you all trying to become Jewish?” Please understand that they naturally considered themselves “Christian” because they were not Buddhist, Muslim, or Jewish. *They thought we had gone off the deep end*. While we did not impose our perspectives on *Shabbat* and the appointed times, or put them down for celebrating Christmas as they always had—the most pronounced difference actually came when we had the

occasion to share a meal with them. This was somewhat perplexing, because we were not eating things that we had eaten during our upbringing. Having grown up eating various shellfish delicacies, and bacon and ham, this radical departure from our typical diet made them somewhat uncomfortable. However, despite some of the heated debates that went on for a number of years, with a growing understanding about the health issues related to eating certain foods, my family has finally accepted our “peculiar” eating habits with a certain degree of respect.

With all of this in mind, perhaps you can personally relate to ongoing issues with your own family or friends when you subject yourself to their environment and mores, especially around the time of the year when the world at large recognizes and celebrates the birth of Jesus. This past month of December 2007, more so than others because of my visit with my parents around Christmas, coupled with our ongoing ministry discussions and emphasis on “Messianics and modernity” this year, I was specifically tuned into how being Messianic I could relate to those family and friends who do not necessarily understand spiritual matters the way we view them.

During the course of the week with my family, certain questions and thoughts percolated in my mind, as I dealt with the juxtaposition of memories from my childhood and my more mature Messianic understanding of life. How am I going to relate to those who do not have a relationship with Yeshua? How am I going to extend the love of Messiah to those who I have been praying for over the past thirty years, without any significant visible change? What am I going to say to my family when questions about religion inevitably arise? How can I point them to the Lord when the crass commercialization associated with Christmas is discussed? What about trees, decorations, presents, food choices, etc.? Am I going to unconditionally love my family, in spite of obvious differences of opinion on many aspects of the season? What would Yeshua do in these circumstances? Or better yet—how is *Yeshua in me* going to handle each and every opportunity to extend His love to my family?

The more time I spent analyzing these questions, and dealing with additional thoughts as they arose in my mind and heart, the more I received a peace about simply letting things come together—without trying to make anything happen in my own strength. Needless to say, my family generally knows where I am coming from, and if they want some clarification or greater understanding, then they will initiate a discussion that will give me the opportunity to share. I have learned from experience that trying to force my knowledge upon them has been somewhat fruitless. With this experiential wisdom, I had to conclude that I was simply going to enjoy their presence and continue to pray for them throughout the course of my visit.

As Christmas Eve approached this year, I could remember the last time at Christmas 2001 when I was in Colorado with my parents, my daughter (as an undergraduate at the University of Colorado), and my sister’s family, and how I was absolutely surprised when my unbelieving sister insisted that we all go to a Christmas Eve service at a Presbyterian church. Back then, despite my knowledge about some of the inaccuracies associated with Christmas, I was delighted that everyone was going to have to at least hear some Christmas hymns, and perhaps a

sermon on the birth of the Messiah. I had the wisdom to keep my mouth shut, and to simply pray that something sung or said would spark something in the hearts of my loved ones.

In an answer to my prayers and to my surprise this year, my sister and brother-in-law decided that we would all go to a high church Episcopal service for Christmas Eve that was geared for the children of the church. Here once again in what is obviously an annual family tradition, my parents, my sister's family, and my daughter and her boyfriend had to contend with Christmas chorals, Scripture readings appropriate for the Lord's birth, and even a homily about the blessing of serving rather than being served. As I sat through the service with tears welling up in my eyes, I prayed that something said or read or heard would pierce the hearts of my relatives. Whether it was Isaiah 9 or Psalm 96 or Titus 2 or Luke 2 (the Scriptures read), or the words of *O, Come All Ye Faithful* or *Joy to the World* (the hymns sung), or the reading of the Lord's Prayer, really did not matter. I was just thankful that at least once a year, each of these people had to deal with these truths as they were being articulated. I never once thought about how I could improve their understanding of Christmas with all of my "Messianic knowledge," because for largely non-religious people I knew it would confuse them more than anything else. **I thought about faith the size of a mustard seed**, especially regarding my aging parents. I just prayed that at some point in time, they will have enough faith to be saved from the ravages of an eternity outside the presence of God. As Yeshua summarizes it,

"Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you" (Matthew 17:20).

I recognize that it is not my responsibility to save my family; I am leaving this up to God through the agency of His Holy Spirit. I am simply required to pray for them and to have a witness for the hope that is within me:

"But sanctify Messiah as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." (1 Peter 3:15).

Acknowledging the mystery of the Messiah in me is **the hope of glory**:

"The mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Messiah in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27).

When you read Scriptures like these above, unless you are a spiritual person with at least a modicum of faith, perhaps the size of a mustard seed, you will not as a natural person be able to comprehend what is being stated by God's servants. As Messianic Believers in an increasingly post-Christian world, should we not be wise with whom we share our understanding about our particular (or even particularized) walk with Messiah Yeshua? Are my relatives ready for a discussion on the timing of the birth of the Messiah? If the concept of a virgin conception is too much for someone to fathom, let alone believe—as my sister related to me—why would I even bring up the origins of the Christmas tree? She cannot even see the forest of faith, let alone the trees. *And my view of Christmas concerns the*

"tree bark"!

Do you remember Yeshua's admonition about casting pearls before swine? In the greater context, Yeshua actually admonished His followers about the traps of judging others:

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. **Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.** Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:1-8).

Now I am certainly not considering my family to be dogs or swine, but rather in their ignorance of the truths of Scripture, I might actually be doing them *more harm* if I place before them spiritual truths that they are not ready to hear—let alone accept. If I share some of my distinct Messianic knowledge with my family, it could actually create greater barriers for future, profitable spiritual discussions. The admonition from Yeshua is not to judge those who may not yet have some kind of spiritual understanding *that we might already have*. There comes a point where each of us has to be very discerning, and to just get others to talk about "God" may be as far as we can go.

By extension, if today's Messianics really do have some truth about living a life in a way that is reminiscent of the First Century Apostles, are we to force-feed our beliefs onto others? Are we to chastise those who may not yet understand the blessings of a Messianic lifestyle? I myself do not believe that this would be profitable, recognizing that in the concluding remarks by Yeshua, He reminds us that those seeking truth will ask, seek, and knock. As they do so in their curiosity and pursuit of the Holy One, they will be given the understanding they desire.

Lamentably, every year since 1995 that we have walked out the Messianic lifestyle, we have encountered teachings from various Messianic ministries that do their utmost to condemn those who are still stuck in their Christmas traditions. There appears to be a total disregard for where people presently are in their individual quests for God. For the record, we as a ministry **do not believe** that such a mean-spirited approach is from the Holy One of Israel, but rather has been cleverly disguised by the Adversary and old flesh patterns to do *irreparable harm* to those seeking Him. Our prayer is that you would disassociate yourselves from any who promote these tactics, and seek more constructive and edifying solutions among *all Believers* this time of year.

On the other hand, speaking of those seeking God, it is interesting to note that on my recent visit to Colorado, I was given the opportunity to meet with a Christian ministry leader who is actually moving his ministry in a direction that is slowly embracing a Messianic perspective. For the past twenty years, it is obvious

from this man's writings that he is pursuing a relationship with the God of Israel that desires dynamic change. This led him to write a book in 1992 that dealt with aspects of the "ancient paths" of the Patriarchs. Over the years, this has morphed his outreach into an "Ancient Paths seminar" that deals specifically with the blessings of following many aspects of the Torah. In our lengthy conversation, it was interesting to note that the Holy Spirit has been slowly moving him, and those he influences through his ministry, to the point of finally understanding the blessings associated with a Messianic lifestyle. He acknowledged that his ministry disciples are finally to the point where they are struggling with some of the aspects of the Christmas season, as opposed to the appointed times of the Lord. He further told me that they are getting a proper handle on the significance of *Shabbat* and how to follow the basic dietary laws of the Scriptures.

As we shared back and forth, I admitted that in our family's relatively rapid progression to embrace a Messianic lifestyle, I was always convinced in my mind that once seekers of God saw the significance of greater obedience to Him, they would immediately adopt Messianic ways. Little did I realize that the Father is going about His business to draw people into a Messianic perspective *from a wider variety of ways* than I could have originally understood. I was humbly reminded of some distinct words declared by the Prophet Isaiah several millennia ago:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

In retrospect, during the course of my week in Colorado, the Lord actually allowed me the privilege of casting some pearls of wisdom before someone who did not trample them underground. I was allowed to be used by Him to confirm many of the things someone else had been led to do over the previous two decades. Thank you, Father!

I do have some gratifying news to report, especially as we consider God's mysteries and His thoughts and ways being higher than our thoughts and ways. As a result of going to the Christmas Eve service with my parents, the next morning at breakfast, it was quite easy to follow up many of the previous evening's conversations on a variety of family related topics. One point of family concern regards one of my nephews. Without any hesitation, I was able to discuss what the Bible says about blessings and curses as articulated in Deuteronomy chs. 28-29. All of a sudden, I found a Bible I had given my father years earlier, and turning to this passage of Scripture I read it aloud so that *both of my parents* could hear what God had to say about the consequences of certain actions. It was not long before we were all agreeing that what God said He would bless, and what He would curse, all made perfect sense. There was no animosity toward the Bible, but rather common agreement that it was accurately depicting some things that were manifesting themselves in my nephew's life. Additionally, as I started to get concerned over the bacon and eggs that my father was beginning to serve me, I simply gently moved the bacon to the side of my plate. My father, an adamant defender of "pig's meat," looked at me like I was doing something wrong. When I humbly mentioned that I was not a fan of bacon, he smiled and said, "It's

turkey bacon. Have you got a problem with turkey bacon?" To my surprise I said, "Of course not!" His reserved explanation was that you just have to know how to *cook it*.

In some small, relatively insignificant way, I felt like being a Messianic in a post-Christian world was actually having an impact on my family—albeit somewhat limited. But you never know, because His thoughts and ways—especially as they concern matters of the human heart—are certainly above ours. I do know this above all: I will continue to pray for my family members so that they can at least gain a mustard-seed-size faith to spend eternity with those who already know God. I also know that what God is doing in this world, with those of us walking out a Messianic lifestyle, is *way beyond* my ability to comprehend. His timing on bringing about the restoration of all things is simply that: **His timing**. How He is going to achieve what He has promised is His problem, *not mine*.

In the interim, I believe it is incumbent on every one of us who claim to be Messianic to not only grow in our faith, but also exemplify a condemnation-free love toward all that we come into contact with in our respective walks. This particularly applies to our close family and friends, who whether we admit it or not, are observing our every word and deed. **Have you ever thought about how you are measuring up to the standards established by Yeshua?**

It is my sincere prayer that you will no longer identify with the sentiments of some in the Messianic community that make statements echoing this thought: "*From Thanksgiving to the first of the year, I simply want to hold my breath or hide my head under the covers!*"

My friends, this is not how we are going to impact our world for the Lord. We cannot hibernate during certain times of the year because we might not have answers to not only our Christian brethren celebrating Christmas, but also people without God. There are scores of examples in the Bible where God's people have carefully, yet directly, tackled the issues of their day. **May we each grow in His wisdom and guidance, so that He might use us to draw others to Himself!** Truly, a great mission lies before us, and we have to be up to the challenge.