

OIM UPDATE

May 2019

Now that the celebration of the Passover drama is complete, the annual march to the Feast of Weeks or *Shavuot*) commences. For fifty days, the command to daily Count the Omer, creates an excellent roadmap to encourage communion with the Lord through prayer, Bible reading and study, and meditation upon the Holy One of Israel and His majestic ways:

"You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD" (Leviticus 23:15-16, NASU).

While true followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob do not necessarily require specific commandments to frequently communicate with the Creator God, the promptings of the indwelling Holy Spirit literally compel intimacy despite the distractions of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. As a result, the Comforter's voice can be discerned—especially if something is incessantly repeated, and the mind is drawn to contemplate upon a subject matter multiple times. In my case, for a variety of reasons— including a congregational focus on evangelism, and my personal attempt to ask wealthy individuals to financially support humanitarian aid in Israel—the "words" that have scrolled up in my spirit in recent weeks are succinctly the notion of **"THE BIG ASK!"**

This is not a reference to the words of Yeshua that can be easily remembered by the acronym **A.S.K. (ask, seek, and knock)** when He stated the following:

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; **seek**, and you shall find; **knock**, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8, NASU).

No **"THE BIG ASK"** is much more than simply requesting something tangible or even intangible from the Savior in order to fulfill a perceived need of the moment. Instead, **"THE BIG ASK"** is actually the Messiah asking, **indeed requiring ANYONE** who wishes to follow Him, to literally offer their very life in exchange for "eternal life" . . . which obviously is a far cry from a simple prayer request:

"Then Yeshua said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. **For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?** For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:24-27, NASU).

Now when you contemplate these difficult to comply with words of the Messiah, is a perfunctory nod of agreement sufficient to satisfy His challenge? After all, Yeshua stated without reservation that in order for one to have eternal life, he or she must (1) deny their dreams, ambitions, goals, wishes, etc.; (2) take up the walk of the

cross or execution-stake (an implied substituted crucifixion in Yeshua's death per Galatians 2:20); and (3) follow Him by His leading of the Holy Spirit. In other words, according to this rather elementary statement, one must categorically "exchange" his or her life for His life indwelling in a redeemed heart of flesh. "Wow!" one might say. "What percentage of my life does that require?" Well, the simple answer is this **100%**. *All or nothing*, because a partial percentage just equates to double mindedness, and the Scriptures are quite clear about how unstable a double-minded person becomes (James 1:5-8).

Recall that earlier while sharing during the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua emphatically made it clear that human beings have **only** two stark choices when determining who or what they will serve during their time on Earth:

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24, NASU).

In the context of this declaration, the Messiah first introduced His Lord's Prayer, and then described some of the pitfalls of anxiety derived from worry about having needs met, because of the demands of serving and perhaps coveting the perceived security of money, replace dependence upon our Heavenly Father:

"Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.** Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. *Each* day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:31-34, NASU).

Of course, the solution to this binary choice is to not only serve God, but to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness without falling into the cleverly concealed trap of attempting to serve both Him and money. Nevertheless, I must confess from personal experience, arriving at the point where the cares of this world are eliminated, rarely occurs on Day One after our experience of being born from above!

Provisionally, this recollection occurred to me the other day when during a phone call to a contributor to humanitarian relief efforts, who happened to live less than 500 yards from the physical place on Earth where I had my "born again" encounter with the Living God. So, I was reminded of where I was before and after that revelatory experience. I flashed back on the 180 degree change in my life trajectory, and how my fervent and thankful response was to simply begin to immerse myself in the Scriptures **in order to know** the Savior of my soul. However, it was not until over

thirteen years later that the circumstances of my life revealed to me a passage of Scripture, which in many ways summarized what I longed to **know** and do when it came to pursuing knowledge of the Holy One of Israel:

"More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Messiah, **and may be found in Him,** not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, **that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.** Not that I have already obtained *it*, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Messiah Yeshua" (Philippians 3:8-12, NASU).

Strategically speaking from the Lord's perspective, He was allowing me to suffer the failure of a "Christian" marriage that literally brought me once again to the death of who I thought I had become in the Messiah. Through a combination of relational, financial, and physical difficulties, I was finally able to come to the end of my meager attempts to be what I perceived to be a good Christian man, husband, and father. Lamentably, from certain accounts, I had failed miserably, and of course, I blamed myself for the lack of success. Thankfully through some excellent counseling, I was led after two days of concerted prayer and reflection, to sign a **"total commitment"** pledge or vow which foundationally relied upon Romans 12:1-2, confessing Yeshua's Lordship over my life:

"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice,** acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,** that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2, NASU).

In the list of "rights" I consciously and faithfully conceded to God, I ultimately agreed to **"give God permission to do anything He wishes to me, with me, in me or through me that would glorify Him."** Quite frankly, this was a sober but deliberate choice to relinquish my entire life to His service. Gratefully, I had earlier in my pursuit of truth come upon a definition of "success" that wholeheartedly described where my emphasis would be going forward through time:

"If you would make the greatest success of your life, try to discover what God is doing in your time, and fling yourself into the accomplishment of His purpose and will." (*Anonymous*).

By the grace of God, and through His mercy to eventually reunite me in marriage with Margaret after a twenty-one year hiatus since our college days, the marital bliss and union with the Messiah was achieved. Thankfully, God gave Margaret an incredible gift of faith, and because our mutual respect and love for each other has led us on **"our spiritual scavenger hunt"** in order to discover what the Holy One is doing during our Earthly sojourn, we have been faithful to follow His cloud and returned full circle to the area where we were first led to relocate back in 1996. Amazingly, due to the call upon John McKee and our ministry efforts to **"cross examine"** much of the

noise resident in God's prophesied goal to restore the Jewish people to the Messiah Yeshua, we are fully engaged in Messianic Judaism, Messianic Jewish congregational life, and work centered on the restoration of Israel both spiritually and physically.

Nevertheless, you might query what all of this personal and familial reflection has to do with **"THE BIG ASK"** referenced earlier in this update? **Everything**—because after all is said and done, we each are going to be accountable for how we individually responded to Yeshua's offer of grace and salvation through belief in His atoning work at Golgotha. Then, when by faith in the blood sacrifice is hopefully accepted, one can take up His yoke and learn more about Him, in order to **"know"** Him intimately:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light" (Matthew 11:28-30, NASU).

But further "asks and questions" about who or what we are going to serve during our lifetime spent on Earth must be answered and acted upon. Of course this is where we each need to search our own hearts to determine exactly who or what we are serving. It's a dicey question. But we do have the Word of God to help each of us get to the bottom line in our heart of hearts:

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12, NASU).

So without belaboring the point, **ASK** yourself in the quiet time of your day: Who or what am I serving? Am I double minded? Am I seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in all that I am doing? Have I taken up His yoke? Am I anxious? What kind of witness am I for the Kingdom of God? Am I being and doing what God created me to be and do? Who do I look for protection and provision? Am I a pleasing aroma, and just what is my "spiritual service of worship"? *And the list of questions could go on and on.* And in so doing, we should each have the assurance that the Lord would be pleased with this self examination and judgment. Do you want to please Him? Ask Him if you are pleasing Him with your thoughts, words, and deeds. *He will let you know.* After all, He gave His all that we might be used by Him for His glory!

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. **For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.** And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans 5:8-11, NASU).

May He bless you during your walk to the Feast of Weeks this *Shavuot*/Pentecost, and reveal just how you have answered the questions the Holy Spirit continues to ASK!!

Blessings, Mark Huey

During our recent home and office remodel, Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics also went through some remodeling as well. This month, we are pleased to introduce the new BLOGCAST, which we believe will better respond to the many issues and questions circulating throughout the broad Messianic world.

What is your position concerning the Talmud? Should Messianic people consider the Talmud as containing important information for their study of the Scriptures?



It is fair to say that not enough of today's Messianic people are familiar with the role of extra-Biblical literature in their understanding of the Bible itself. While those from Orthodox Jewish backgrounds who have come to Messiah faith might have the most experience in dealing with literature like the Talmud, your average Messianic person has little to no knowledge about the Talmud or associated resources. When you find someone communicating that Yeshua of Nazareth opposed the traditions of the Rabbis, and opposed the Talmud, then it is obvious that the person making such remarks does not know what he or she is talking about. While there were certainly various oral traditions and customs circulating in the Judaism of Yeshua's day, in the First Century C.E., most especially those followed by the Pharisees—the Talmud as a formal body of work would not arrive onto the scene until the Second Century at the very earliest, but most probably much later.

What are some of the things that led to the production of the Talmud?

The Mishnah is the transcribed or written down form of what was considered to comprise the Oral Torah by the First-Second Centuries C.E. Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the surviving Jewish Rabbis wrote down the Pharisaic oral traditions that guided their Torah observance. The Mishnah was composed by around 200 C.E. in a unique form of Hebrew. The Mishnah forms the basis of Jewish law, being divided into six distinct segments: agriculture, the appointed times, women, damages, holy things, and purities. The Mishnah certainly records the history and procedure of how things were done in the Temple and much of the *halachah* or Torah application that Yeshua and the Apostles would have been exposed to in Judea. The Mishnah is an invaluable historical resource that gives us much insight into how the Torah was followed in the First Century, and there are many good wisdom sayings in it.

The Talmud is actually a broad term describing two principal bodies of literature: the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. Both of these works are composed in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, and span across two centuries from the Second to Fourth Centuries C.E. The Babylonian Talmud largely represents the interpretation and traditions of Eastern Judaism from Babylon building upon the Mishnah, and the Jerusalem Talmud represents the views and traditions of Judaism from Judea, although there are many, many areas of overlap. Reading through the Talmud can often be a very daunting task to the interpreter

who is unfamiliar with reading legal briefs. Much of the Talmud is compiled in the form of "Rabbi X said in the name of Rabbi Y that Rabbi Z said. . ." Most who examine the Talmud in any detail are religious scholars and teachers, whereas your average interpreter will have to have a tractate pointed out in a commentary or reference book so as not to get lost.

According to Jewish tradition, two Torahs were given to Moses on Mount Sinai: the Written Torah (the Pentateuch or Chumash), as well as the Oral Torah or explanations on how to perform the Written Torah's commandments. Such an Oral Torah is now written down in the Mishnah, with the Talmud offering commentary. In Orthodox Judaism today, both the Written Torah and Oral Torah hold equal status. In Conservative and Reform Judaism, they comprise the basis of Jewish custom and tradition, but are treated more as commentary and are flexible in terms of modern-day application.

For the Biblical scholar, Jewish literature such as the Mishnah and Talmud, contain valuable sources of commentary, historical data, philosophy, and even some spiritually edifying concepts. Because of their close proximity in time to the Second Temple era, they are considered valid to use as secondary and tertiary resources to aid in one's reasoning through various issues seen in the Bible (among other bodies of ancient literature). At the same time, the Mishnah and Talmud are also broad-sweeping collections, so one should expect (particularly with the Talmud) there to be some internal inconsistencies and differences of opinion among Rabbis. When the Talmud, in particular, is treated as a wide body of commentary with many different perspectives, then the interpreter should be able to employ it in a responsible manner. When the Mishnah and Talmud are treated as being Divinely inspired and authoritative the same as Holy Scripture, then we have problems.

For the Messianic layperson, one can encounter those who are greatly enamored with literature like the Mishnah and Talmud, and who then make the effort to synthesize much of what is seen in the Apostolic Writings with this material. While there are definitely overlaps of content and agreement of perspective on various issues, this is not a good way of employing the Mishnah and Talmud. More concerning, however, are those who completely dismiss literature like the Mishnah and Talmud, specifically because it is believed that these bodies, and others, of ancient Jewish literature were composed by those who consciously rejected Yeshua of Nazareth, and hence have nothing edifying or positive to communicate *at all, on any subject* to the Messiah's followers. The bigger and more complicated question, for certain, that today's Messianic movement must answer, is **Do Jewish non-Believers have anything useful to communicate to Messiah followers?** It is probably best that such a question be considered on an issue-by-issue basis. But those who are fair do recognize that the Rabbis have many useful things to say.

Why does the Hebrew Roots movement have such a negative reputation in the Messianic Jewish movement? Why is it looked at as a spiritual plague?

The development of today's modern Messianic Jewish movement goes back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah



established congregations, synagogues, and assemblies with the mission of facilitating **Jewish outreach, Jewish evangelism, and solidarity with the State of Israel.** This is a mission which continues to our present day, and should ever be on the hearts and minds of those

involved with today's Messianic congregations. A major reason, for the establishment of Messianic Jewish congregations, was to combat the errant idea that Jewish people, who come to faith in Israel's Messiah, stop being Jewish, start being "Christian," and should readily assimilate into a non-Jewish Christian Church system and culture. In stark contrast to this, Jewish people coming to faith in Israel's Messiah, hardly stop being Jewish; some would say that being a Believer in Israel's Messiah is one of the most Jewish things that one can do. The Messianic Jewish movement is present, to particularly communicate to the wider non-believing Jewish community, that expressing faith in Yeshua of Nazareth does not mean an abandonment of one's Jewish heritage and traditions. For much of Messianic Judaism's modern history, these convictions have put it at odds with a great deal of traditional Christianity.

Throughout much of the 1980s and into the 1990s, Messianic Judaism grew, primarily in North America, with the establishment of congregations to reach out to the local Jewish community in their immediate vicinity. This mission continues to our present day. However, while the original vision and purpose of the Messianic Jewish movement innately involved Jewish outreach, evangelism, and Israel solidarity—Messianic Jewish rabbis and congregational leaders frequently do get invited to speak at evangelical churches, and in particular speak not only on the Messiah in the Biblical festivals, but frequently host Passover *seder* presentations. The late 1990s saw a wide number of non-Jewish Believers being called into the Messianic community, for a variety of reasons. Many of these reasons involved evangelical Believers wanting to partake of their Jewish Roots in tangible ways, learning about the Tanach or Old Testament on a more regular basis, and participating in things that Yeshua and His first followers did. Some Messianic Jewish congregations were very welcoming of such non-Jewish Believers as their fellow brothers and sisters, actually concluding that as the Messiah's return was steadily approaching, that the Messianic movement would probably start looking more and more like the First Century *ekklesia*. Others, however, did not act so positively toward the large numbers of non-Jewish Believers coming into their ranks. Were these people going to help aid Jewish outreach and evangelism, or bring an all new series of issues (and problems) into the assembly?

Following the turn of the Millennium in the early 2000s, there were varied Messianic Jewish reactions to the many non-Jewish Believers coming into the Messianic movement. Some of these reactions were positive, and others were negative. Messianic Jewish leaders have properly emphasized that non-Jewish Believers need to be supernaturally called into the Messianic movement (certainly at this phase of its development), and committed to Jewish ministry, even though it will obviously involve some significant investigation and study of their own faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures. *This would also necessarily include being sensitive to Jewish concerns and historical resistance to Yeshua the Messiah.* Many Messianic Jewish leaders have eagerly embraced non-Jewish participation in the Messianic Jewish movement, with an emphasis on congregations representing the "one new man" or "one new humanity" of Ephesians 2:15, where all can confess sins of prejudice and misunderstanding to each other, and we can pool our talents and resources for the salvation and restoration of Israel (cf. Romans 11:26). Other sectors of the Messianic Jewish movement have not been so welcoming of non-Jewish Believers in its ranks. And, because of this, a number of movements or sub-movements spun off of the Messianic Jewish movement, from the 1980s to the 2000s.

It is safe to say, that just as many of the First Century Jewish Believers did not anticipate many Greeks and Romans embracing faith in Israel's Messiah—so did a number of Messianic Judaism's early pioneers not prepare themselves sufficiently for non-Jewish Believers coming into the Messianic movement. The salvation of the nations at large was anticipated in the Tanach, and in the case of non-Jewish Believers being drawn into the Messianic move-

ment in significant numbers, in modern times, it is also prophesied that the nations will stream to Zion to be taught God's Instruction, resulting in worldwide peace (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3). These prophecies are taking place in our day, just as in our day more Jewish people have come to Messiah faith than since the times of the Messiah. Yet, a holy message of seeing all of God's people with a faith grounded in all of God's Word, has been frequently used in an inappropriate manner to promote division, rather than to better understand the ways of God, so that we can better and more genuinely understand the two critical commands of loving Him and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

In the 1990s, when one encountered the term "Hebrew Roots" being used, it was most probably employed by various evangelical Christian teachers trying to stress how Christian people have a faith heritage in the Old Testament, the Bible of Jesus, and that it is important for people to understand the richness of the Hebrew language and how the Tanach points to the Messiah. The term "Hebrew Roots," for many, was a synonym for "Jewish Roots," or the term "Hebrew Roots" was used as a compliment to the term "Jewish Roots." The term "Hebrew Roots" was a term which could be employed to specifically emphasize the foundational importance of the Hebrew Scriptures, the importance of Hebrew language study, and getting Christian people plugged into more detailed examination of the Old Testament. The term "Jewish Roots" could be used to emphasize study of the Second Temple Judaism of Yeshua and His first disciples, the necessary examination of the broad history of this period and immediately thereafter, as well as a review of significant bodies of extra-Biblical and Rabbinical literature germane to this time. Certainly in many of my own writings, I have stressed how we all have Hebrew Roots in the Tanach Scriptures, and Jewish Roots in the Second Temple faith of Yeshua and His early disciples.

Today, the term **Hebrew Roots** is used by a wide variety of non-Jewish groups, with a starkly contrasting purpose to today's Messianic Jewish movement. Some of these people have a sincere desire of wanting to study the Tanach Scriptures and live in a similar manner to Yeshua and His first followers, but do so in a way much differently than non-Jewish Believers called into Messianic Judaism. For far too many, the term "Hebrew Roots" is used to represent a non-Jewish Torah movement, **not at all interested in Jewish outreach or evangelism**, widely dismissive of mainline Jewish traditions and customs, and coupled with a huge array of theological and spiritual problems teetering on disaster. Many non-Jewish people who are involved in "Hebrew Roots" not only have a great deal of unfair disdain toward the Jewish Synagogue, but also the positive legacy of evangelical Protestantism. An entire host of sensationalistic hype is today connected to the label "Hebrew Roots," not only involving a great deal of end-time paranoia and fear, but also conspiracy theories, postulations about the Nephilim of Genesis 6, and most recently Flat Earth—among other things. **It is an understatement to say that today, when the term "Hebrew Roots" is invoked, that many of today's Messianic Jewish leaders and teachers get tense.**

The major problem with the Hebrew Roots movement of the late 2010s is not non-Jewish Believers wanting to reconnect with their faith heritage in the Scriptures of Israel. The major problem with the Hebrew Roots movement is that it does not at all care about facilitating the Romans chs. 9, 10, 11 trajectory of salvation history! This most especially involves the non-Jewish vocation of "because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy" (Romans 11:31, NASU). The mercy shown to those of the nations via the salvation of Israel's Messiah, is to be reciprocated via acts of humility and kindness to the Messiah's own Jewish people. **This is decisively not something that is practiced by those identifying as a part of today's Hebrew Roots movement.** If anything, the Hebrew Roots movement is stigmatized by a great deal of anti-Semitism, failing to follow Paul's warning of Romans 11:18-21.

What is the Flat Earth theory and how badly has it affected the thinking of some of today's Messianic people?

Most reasonable and sane people who hear that there are those in their midst who believe that Planet Earth is a flat disk, are not only shocked, but also horrified, that such things are circulating in the Twenty-First Century. Is it not true that Christopher Columbus proved that the world was round over five centuries ago? Is it not also true that there were various philosophers and mathematicians from classical antiquity, who speculated that the world was round? How could it possibly be that there is a movement promoting a Flat Earth? *Are these people stupid?*

Is it not true that Christopher Columbus proved that the world was round over five centuries ago? Is it not also true that there were various philosophers and mathematicians from classical antiquity, who speculated that the world was round? How could it possibly be that there is a movement promoting a Flat Earth? *Are these people stupid?*

In total fairness, it needs to be recognized that the Flat Earth movement is not a product of the fringes of the Hebrew Roots movement, although that is surely a venue where it has found many adherents. The Flat Earth movement is mainly a part of the Christian Truther movement, and hence is associated with many different conspiracies. There have been a sufficient number of evangelical refutations of Flat Earth, as well as more secular evaluations of it. Netflix, for example, has a documentary entitled "Behind the Curve" among its programs.

Why have there been various people—perhaps even some you know—influenced by the Flat Earth movement? In short, the Flat Earth theory tends to be presented in terms of the Bible being *absolutely true*. Those who do not accept the Flat Earth theory, do not truly believe in the Bible, and are either compromised at best, or more likely have been influenced by modern Luciferian science. Supporters of Flat Earth are convinced that their perspective is the only viable one. Opponents of Flat Earth would conclude that believing that Planet Earth is flat disk only comes from a hyper-literal reading of Scripture, and from those who haphazardly and irresponsibly dismiss all modern science as though it is from the Devil.

Isaiah 40:22 says that our Creator "sits above the circle of the earth" (NASU) or "the vault of the earth" (NJPS). Does this require Planet Earth to be a flat disk? Or does it speak to the circular and/or spherical nature of Planet Earth? Be aware that supporters of Flat Earth believe that any scientific discovery of our planet as a sphere that revolves around the Sun has been completely fabricated by servants of Satan. Those who believe that modern science is trustworthy, at least in broad strokes, certainly believe that Isaiah 40:22 is compatible with the idea of a spherical Planet Earth.

Ecclesiastes 1:5 says that "the sun rises and the sun sets" (NASU); **Psalms 19:6** says that "Its rising is from one end of the heavens, and its circuit to the other end of them" (NASU). Supporters of the Flat Earth theory conclude that this is Biblical proof that the Sun and Moon are small objects that move above the flat disk of Planet Earth. Based on modern scientific discovery, from at least the past five centuries, those who conclude that our planet is spherical, will note that the Biblical authors are writing from their observable perspective as standing on the ground. Communicating from a terrestrial vantage point, humans see the Sun and the Moon rising, although from an astronomical perspective, the sphere of our planet is, in fact, rotating around the Sun, with the Moon rotating around the Earth. Many misunderstandings of Scripture can take place, not just from us misunderstanding the viewpoints of the ancients, who lacked some of our modern scientific equipment—but most especially when we fail to take into consideration how they viewed the world around



them.

Isaiah 41:9 has God speaking of taking Israel “from the ends of the earth. . .from its remotest parts” (NASU); **Daniel 4:11** talks of how “The tree grew large and became strong and its height reached to the sky, and it *was* visible to the end of the whole earth” (NASU); Yeshua said in **Matthew 12:42** “*The Queen of the South* will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (NASU). Supporters of the Flat Earth theory believe that the continent of Antarctica is actually an ice wall which encircles the disk of our planet. Rather than seeing “ends of the Earth” as being a metaphor indicative of a far away place, Flat Earth proponents actually do see “ends of the Earth” as being a termination point at the extreme ends of the flat disk of our planet. Those opposed to a Flat Earth, accepting the Earth as a sphere as observable by modern science, would take this as definite proof of a Flat Earther’s hyper-literal and irresponsible approach to Scripture.

1 Chronicles 16:30 says that “the world is firmly established, it will not be moved” (NASU); **Psalms 104:5** says that God “established the earth upon its foundations, so that it will not totter forever and ever” (NASU). To the Flat Earther, who believes that our planet is a disk, it is clear that our planet cannot possibly be a sphere which rotates in any direction. Opponents of Flat Earth, obviously supporting modern astronomy and cosmology, would conclude that these statements are poetic about God’s sovereignty over Planet Earth and the constancy that He has instilled in His Creation. Our planet is not just moving about to and fro in the cosmos, but it has a set orbit around the star Sol, and internal geological coherence with a mantle, outer core, and inner core.

Finally, God asks in **Job 38:4** “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (NASU), and in **Psalms 75:3** “It is I who have firmly set its pillars” (NASU). Once again, to the Flat Earther, there is only one correct way to interpret these statements: the flat disk of our planet sits on top of literal stone pillars. The Flat Earther cannot possibly interpret “foundation of the earth” or “pillars” in any other way. Those who recognize our planet as a sphere, would obviously have a more flexible approach to “laid the foundation of the earth” or “pillars,” mainly as it would be representative of the different processes of how our planet was geologically formed, and how it functions in a unique way in order to sustain human civilization. That a “foundation” of a cosmic object can represent the physical laws or constructs by which it functions, should be clear enough, in how 2 Samuel 22:8 describes “The foundations of heaven were trembling and were shaken, because He was angry” (NASU). Heaven, composing the sky or space beyond, is not a geological construct as Earth, but is instead an open expanse. For Heaven or Space to have foundations, means that it has certain physical laws or constructs which govern it—but in being shaken ultimately are subject to its Creator, God.

Flat Earth has become a major conspiracy theory, which many have addressed the fallacies of over the past several years. Flat Earth supporters dismiss all of the claims of modern science, particularly disciplines such as astronomy, cosmology, and geology—which all point to a spherical Planet Earth which revolves around the Sun. If someone has been convinced of the Flat Earth theory, and that *all modern science* has originated with Satan the Dark Lord, then there will almost always be no reasoning with such confused and ignorant people.

It is absolutely true that in the Middle Ages, many Christians believed in a Flat Earth. It is also true that during the Protestant Reformation, many Christians believed in a Flat Earth. Even as late as the Eighteenth Century, there were Christians who while accepting a spherical Earth, denied that the Earth revolved around the Sun, a heliocentric solar system, but instead believed in a geocentric solar system where the Sun revolved around the Earth. *Flat Earth is not a salvation issue*. But what Flat Earth is, is that it is a **severe credibility issue**

for the worldwide **Body of Messiah**, and is a severe embarrassment. People who support Flat Earth, should never be caught leading a small group Bible study, much less leading a local assembly. This issue was resolved in the Fifteenth Century, and it is obscenely ridiculous that we even have to discuss it today! It goes beyond the pale of “Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings” (Hebrews 13:9, NASU).

Why has the Flat Earth theory found some support in off-to-the-side places of the Messianic movement—and certainly the Hebrew Roots movement? It is because this broad sector of people, for better or worse, does tend to attract a lot of “Truth seekers.” If you attend a major Messianic conference today, it is an unfortunate reality that there are going to be some individuals who have been exposed to, and are considering, the Flat Earth theory.

While none of today’s mainline Messianic leaders and teachers believe in the Flat Earth theory, looking to the future, this issue should serve as an appropriate prompt for us to be recognizing that there are discussions regarding God’s Creation, our planet, the human race, and the wider universe, that today’s Messianic movement has tended to avoid. If the Flat Earth theory is certainly going to be talked about here or there, then it behooves us to be familiar with all the different perspectives and approaches witnessed in contemporary theology to Genesis chs. 1-11. We can use the presence of the Flat Earth theory as an opportunity to refine our theological skills and engagement level with the different models of Creationism, Theistic Evolution, and Intelligent Design which circulate in Biblical Studies today. At this point at the close of the 2010s, it would be naïve of any of us to conclude that there is one-hundred percent agreement among Messianic people on these issues. *Flat Earth has proved this!*

What are the seven Noahide laws? A new teaching circulating online proposes that Orthodox Jews are secretly controlling the New World Order, and that they will impose the Noahide laws to get people to only worship God proper, and that those who worship Yeshua the Messiah will be put to death.



The following is a brief description of “**Noahides**” as provided by the *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*:

“[Noahides] are non-Jews who observe the seven laws that apply to the descendants of Noah (namely, all peoples). According to rabbinic authorities, these include the following prohibitions: idolatry, adultery and incest, bloodshed, blasphemy, robbery, social injustice, and eating the flesh of a limb cut from a living animal (T. Aḇodah Zarah 8:4-8).”[\[1\]](#)

Today’s Messianic community has various opinions as they relate to what are often considered to be the Noahide laws. Some think that the Noahide laws form the basis of the Apostolic decree of Acts 15:20, 29, whereas others think that the Noahide laws—while surely useful principles to be followed by all followers of Israel’s God—were the product of post-Second Temple Judaism.

In a great deal of historic Jewish thought, while the Torah proper is widely concluded to only be applicable to ethnic Israelites and proselytes to Judaism, the nations at large are thought to only have to really follow seven precepts affecting the *b’nai Noach* or children of

Noah, derived from Genesis 9.^[2] Aside from many finer details, it is safe to say that today's broad Messianic community expects non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah to observe far more principles from Moses' Teaching than just the Noahide laws. But what is a little more important than this, is how academically, it is not agreed among scholars that there were seven stipulations known as the "Noahide laws" even in place during the Second Temple period. Many conclude that what has become known as the Noahide laws, were likely not formulated until after the destruction of the Second Temple. There are two lists of these different regulations found in Jewish literature:

"And in the twenty-eighth jubilee Noah began to command his grandsons with ordinances and commandments and all of the judgments which he knew. And he bore witness to his sons so that they might do justice and cover the shame of their flesh and bless the one who created them and honor father and mother, and each one love his neighbor and preserve themselves from fornication and pollution and from all injustice. For on account of these three the Flood came upon the earth. For (it was) because of fornication which the Watchers, apart from the mandate of their authority, fornicated with the daughters of men and took for themselves wives from all whom they chose and made a beginning of impurity" (*Jubilees 7:20-21*).^[3]

"Concerning seven religious requirements were the children of Noah admonished: setting up courts of justice, idolatry, blasphemy [cursing the Name of God], fornication, bloodshed, and thievery" (t. *Avodah Zarah* 8:4).^[4]

In his article "Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15," David Instone-Brewer points out how "The two versions of the list in Jubilees and in later rabbinic texts have so little in common that we cannot know what this list contained in the first century or even if such a list existed."^[5]

Moving on to more modern times, particularly concerning the positive contribution that the Jewish community has made to Western society, various governmental authorities have wanted to recognize the usefulness of what Judaism has deemed to be the Noahide laws. The United States government has officially considered the seven Noahide laws to be regulations to be followed by its citizens. Yet it needs to be fairly recognized how the United States government has also considered other religious codes and philosophies to be beneficial as well. Endorsing the usefulness of the Noahide laws is quantitatively indifferent than endorsing the usefulness of the philosophy of Plato or Aristotle, the speeches of Cicero, or the rights espoused by the Magna Carta.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason or series of reasons, various conspiracy theorists have concluded that the United States' historic support of the State of Israel and the Jewish community has gone too far, and concluded that certain Orthodox Jewish authorities are preparing the way for the persecution, and even execution, of followers of Yeshua the Messiah. By establishing the Noahide laws as regulations to be followed by American citizens, which includes prohibitions on idolatry and blasphemy, it is thought that the Jewish influence on American politics will lead to Believers being persecuted, and even killed, for having faith in a Messiah that Judaism corporately rejects. This will probably also lead to the rise of the antimessiah/antichrist, who as the false messiah will use the Noahide laws as a means to persecute Believers as well.

This conspiracy theory presumes a great deal about the Orthodox Jewish influence on global politics, and is rooted in a great deal of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist sentiment certainly extending back to the late Nineteenth Century. *The Orthodox Jewish community does not have the same kind of influence on the American political scene, as the evangelical Protestant community.* Furthermore, while it is safe to say that the antimessiah will claim to be the true messiah of Israel, the bulk of the worldwide Jewish community is secular, and

agnostic at best—meaning that principles such as the Noahide laws do not bear any significance to them.

More than anything else, though, the New World Order and government of the antimesiah, will not need the Noahide laws in order to persecute Believers. Revelation 13:3-4 makes it clear enough that the population of this planet will willingly worship the beast, and concede to his reign—meaning that he can do whatever he wants: “And the whole earth was amazed *and followed* after the beast; they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?’” (NASU).

NOTES

[1] “Noahides,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 456.

[2] Cf. Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp 376-377.

[3] O.S. Wintermute, “Jubilees,” in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), pp 69-70.

[4] Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew With a New Introduction*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 2:1291-1292.

[5] David Instone-Brewer, “Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 52 No. 2 (2009):308.

In encountering various materials and teachings that carry labels like “Messianic” or “Hebrew Roots,” have you seen the proper name of God, YHWH/YHVH, used quite affluently? Has it even been implied that various scribes and religious authorities have purposefully hidden the Divine Name? What is Sacred Name Onlyism?



Anyone who encounters the Hebrew Scriptures will see that our Creator has a proper name composed of the four Hebrew letters *yud, hey, vav, hey*, often represented by the English consonants YHVH or YHWH. They compose what is theologically designated as the Tetragrammaton, a term meaning “a word of four letters.”

In almost all major English Bible translations of the Tanach or Old Testament, the Tetragrammaton has been rendered as “the LORD” in SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS. Some Jewish Bibles use the term “HASHEM” meaning “the Name.” Messianic Versions may use ADONAI, Hebrew for “Lord.” Customarily in Bible translation, proper names are always transliterated, meaning that their sounds are communicated as closely as possible from one language into another, but titles are always translated. Yet in the case of the Divine Name YHWH, most English Bibles have rendered it as a title, respecting ancient Jewish protocols going back to the Second Temple period.

No honest Christian or Jewish examiner will disagree with those who strongly point out that our Creator indeed has a name. He first revealed His name to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15:

“Then Moses said to God, ‘Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God, furthermore, said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD [YHWH], the God of your fa-

thers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations'" (NASU).

The proper name of our Creator was revealed to Moses as he was preparing to go back to Egypt with His help to free the Israelites in slavery. He needed a name to distinguish YHWH from the pagan gods of the Egyptians. The *Jewish Study Bible* comments that while the name "YHVH is [often] represented by the word LORD. . . it is connected to the verb *h-y-h* [*hayah*], 'be' or 'become,' most likely in a causative sense, 'he who causes to be.'"[1] Another possible meaning of YHWH is simply "Eternal One," or perhaps even "Transcendent." While there is no uniform agreement on how the name YHWH is to be pronounced, a broad consensus of Hebrew and Semitic scholars posit that it was either Yahweh or Yahveh or something close.

Most English Bibles today use the title "the Lord" in place of YHWH, following Second Temple Jewish protocols. The Jewish Sages who returned from Babylonian exile did not wish God's name to be brought to shame, as misusing God's name was believed to have been one of the significant reasons that caused the exile. Substitutions were used for the Divine Name, such as *Adonai*, meaning "(my) Lord," or *HaShem*, meaning "the Name." Whenever YHWH would appear in a Biblical text, *Adonai* or *HaShem* would likely be pronounced instead. And, it is important to note that both of these titles appear independently in the Scriptures to refer to God.

Most Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon considered it blasphemous to speak the Divine Name. The Talmud states how the "sages say, 'On account of using the ineffable Name, one is subject to the death penalty, but as for euphemisms, one is subject to the admonition [not to do so, but not to the death penalty if he does so]'" (b.*Sanhedrin* 56a).[2] Post-exilic Judaism has historically maintained that if a person were to curse using the name YHWH in a sentence, he was to be given the death penalty. If it were just a curse with a title used in place of the Divine Name, then it was not worthy of death. This is one of the reasons why the proper name of God was not spoken by the First Century C.E. The intention was to disallow instances where pagan individuals would curse using the Divine Name.

Some think that the Third Commandment of Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11 is violated by those who refuse to use or speak the name YHWH, and by rendering YHWH with a title such as "LORD" or "HASHEM" in English Bible translations. Is the Third Commandment broken when people do not speak the name YHWH?

Jeffrey H. Tigay, in *The Jewish Study Bible*, identifying that the Creator indeed has a name, reflects on the tradition of why Jewish people over the centuries have avoided saying it. He remarks, "*The LORD* is actually a translation of 'adonai' (lit. 'my Lord') because that is what Jews now pronounce whenever the consonants YHVH appear. YHVH was probably originally pronounced 'Yahweh,' but in Second Temple times, as an expression of reverence, Jews began to avoid uttering it, substituting 'adonai' and other surrogates." [3] The *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* mirrors these remarks, adding, "When the high priest addressed God in the Temple's Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he uttered this name. When the priests blessed the people in the Temple, they used this name. By the third century B.C.E., God's name had become so hallowed that it could not be pronounced outside of worship, and the term *adonai* (my lord) was regularly substituted." [4]

While certainly recognizing that our Creator has a name, YHWH, both the Jewish and Christian traditions have avoided its pronunciation due to its extreme holiness. The rendering of YHWH as "the LORD" is identified in the preface to most major English Bible translations. In scholastic circles, however, it is not uncommon to see forms such as YHWH or Yahweh used to refer to God, as Jewish and Christian theologians do plainly recognize that our Creator has a name. But, in Second Temple Judaism the name of God was not spoken aloud. As

Messianic Believers, we must recognize that this was the same Second Temple Judaism in which Yeshua the Messiah lived, and from which the early Messianic community arose. Today's Messianic Jewish congregations—no different than mainline Jewish synagogues—do not use the Divine Name YHWH during their worship services, in deference to Second Temple precedents. However, it is not unlikely that the name YHWH might be spoken as either Yahweh or Yahveh, in piecemeal, during some kind of a closed Bible study discussion.

The Sacred Name Only movement, while raising the awareness of the proper name of our Creator, tends to purposefully interject a great deal of confusion into the Body of Messiah. A Sacred Name Only ideology is not at all concerned with how avid verbalization of the Divine Name YHWH in the public assembly can wreak unspeakable damage to Jewish evangelism, greatly offending Jewish non-Believers—and confuse many evangelical Protestants interested in Messianic things for that same matter. A Sacred Name Only ideology broadly promotes the idea that if you do not use the Divine Name YHWH in your regular speech, then our Creator will not be capable of hearing your prayers. Those who adhere to a Sacred Name Only ideology tend to be very contentious, and will not hesitate to bring confusion and derision into a Messianic congregation where Hebrew titles such as Adonai or HaShem are used. Yet, it is quite ironic that Sacred Name Only proponents tend to be internally divided among themselves, as they do not often agree on how the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH is to be pronounced. Standard forms proposed by scholars, such as Yahweh or Yahveh, now have to compete with other renderings, such as Yehovah or Yahuah.

While it is important for us to be aware of how our Creator has a proper name, appearing in the Hebrew Scriptures, a Sacred Name Only ideology is most probably going to bring great damage to your Messianic congregation or fellowship.

NOTES

[1] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2142.

[2] *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

[3] Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Exodus," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 112.

[4] "God, names of," in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 259.

What is polygamy? While it is surely an uncomfortable topic to discuss, a man having multiple wives is something that one encounters in reading various parts of the Tanach. How should we as Messiah followers approach this topic? Today's Messianic people do read the Torah on a fairly consistent basis, and doubtlessly encounter polygamy.



No one who reads the Bible denies that the practice of a man having more than one wife is seen within the text. The Patriarch Jacob, who was the progenitor of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, had two wives and two concubines (Genesis 31:17; 37:2). King David had multiple wives (1 Samuel 18:17-30; 25:38-43; 2 Samuel 3:2-5). King Solomon had hundreds of wives and concubines (1 Kings 3:1; 11:3) that made up an entire harem (Song of Songs 6:8).

From time to time, the thought will indeed be expressed that since some of the most important figures in the Tanach Scriptures had multiple wives, what is the problem if a man had multiple wives today? There are, in fact, many problems to be explored when considering

whether or not polygamy is an acceptable practice for today's Body of Messiah. Was it the ideal at Creation for the man to have more than one wife? When a man has more than one wife, is he truly fulfilled emotionally and spiritually with his multiple spouses? Is the household where one man has multiple wives and children from those multiple wives truly a place of love and affection, or one of discord and suspicion? Does the Bible portray men who had polygamous relationships as being genuinely fulfilled, and children who were true examples of godliness? Does a man having multiple wives express the sentiment that he places great value on women, or that they are simply property to be acquired? And, how many in the Biblical period actually had the financial means to afford more than one wife? **Does the Bible really lend support to the practice of polygamy today?** These are some of the vital questions that need to be considered when approaching polygamy.

While polygamy is recorded to have been practiced in Scripture—it **by no means is endorsed by Scripture!** Not a single commandment in the Torah condones the practice of polygamy. God never intended a man to have more than one wife, families where the husband is polygamous have suffered immensely from it, and male polygamists today are motivated by uncontrollable sexual urges that demean women and the equality which has been restored to the genders in the post-resurrection era (Galatians 3:28).

Polygamy as a practice is seen in various parts of the Tanach, but one which the Jewish Synagogue abandoned long before the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah.[1] Deuteronomy 17:17 specifically warned the future kings of Israel, "He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away" (NASU).

With the creation of the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden, the ideal state has been for marriage to be between one man and one woman: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, NASU), a principle upheld by Yeshua the Messiah (Mathew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8). It is only after the Fall that we see forms of polygamy practiced, and to argue that this is to be a normative, even encouraged practice, skews God's original intent at Creation.

It is true that various Patriarchs and monarchs of Israel did have multiple wives, and seemingly did not incur any significant penalties from the Lord for doing so. Yet this must be balanced with the fact that the whole nation of Israel was commanded to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days each year (Leviticus 23:33-34), and Nehemiah says that "The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day" (Nehemiah 8:17, NASU)—which was after the Babylonian exile! The Ancient Israelites did not always follow the commands of God, and because of His love and grace He often overlooked their significant transgressions. Severe chastisement to Israel often did not come until idolatry, gross child sacrifice, and outright rebellion against the Lord were practiced.

From a practical standpoint, while we see polygamy observed by some members of Ancient Israelite society, it is far fetched to think that every single Israelite man could economically afford more than one wife. On the contrary, the fact that only Patriarchs, leaders, and monarchs of Israel are portrayed as having multiple wives, demonstrates *how little* this practice was actually observed. And was it really worth it for them? When we read that Jacob had both Leah and Rachel as his wives, or David and Solomon had multiple wives—were their households places of genuine love and affection, or riddled with relational problems? Were their children behaved or unruly? 1 Kings 11:4 is not very good evidence in favor of polygamy: "For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God" (NASU). A significant reason why Ancient Israel was ultimately divided into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms goes back to Solomon's incessant polygamy, and the state funded idolatry he sponsored.