



OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries
and MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS



OCTOBER 2025
MATTHEW 16:18
"ON THIS ROCK"



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STATEMENT OF BELIEF

*Outreach Israel Ministries
and Messianic Apologetics*

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts

All Believers in Israel's Messiah are to be regarded as a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to respect one another in mutual love as brothers and sisters, and are to work together for the salvation of the Jewish people and return of Israel's Messiah.

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be studied and heeded by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the Believers after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

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OIM UPDATE

October 2025

J.K. McKee

I understand that your ministry questions the existence of the Church, as a second body of elect. How do you approach Jesus' explicit words to Peter that He would build His Church?

MATTHEW 16:18
"ON THIS ROCK"

This entry has been reproduced from
Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?

Matthew 16:18-19

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (NASU).

Yeshua's statement, **"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church"** (NASU), has been traditionally interpreted by Roman Catholicism, that with the Apostle Peter began an unending line of papal succession, with Peter serving as the first bishop of Rome. Protestants, who obviously reject papal claims, tend to offer a variety of other explanations for who or what "this rock" (*tē petra*) is or represents. Some will adhere to "this rock" still representing Peter, or Peter as the main apostle representative of the other Apostles. Some adhere to "this rock" representing Peter's confession of faith in Yeshua as the Messiah (Matthew 16:16). And, others think that "this rock" represents the Messiah Himself, per various Tanach passages which describe God as the Rock (i.e., 2 Samuel 22:3).

I personally view "this rock" as being the Messiah Himself, and with authority being granted by Yeshua to His Disciples, as it can be said that the *ekklesia* established has "been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Messiah Yeshua Himself being the corner *stone*" (Ephesians 2:20,

NASU). Yeshua is the cornerstone, and the work of God's vessels in the world continue what He has started for His people.

Messianic examination of Matthew 16:18-19 has often tended to focus more on the issue of binding and loosing—a well-documented Hebraism regarding prohibiting and permitting—and how what is in view pertains to the establishment of *halachah* or orthopraxy for the faith community.¹ This is an authority which the Messiah granted to the Apostles. As the issue of *halachah* is considered by today's Messianic people, there is a delicate balance which is often desired between Apostolic authority in the Messianic Scriptures, and fairly considering many of the perspectives and views of the Sages and Rabbis of Judaism. Yet, to the person interested in ecclesiology and the identity of God's chosen, more attention should understandably be focused on Matthew 16:18 and not 16:19, and to the assembly Yeshua stated He would establish.

Stern, in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, was only seen to comment on the term *ekklēsia*, which is rendered as "community" in his JNT/CJB. He made some connections between *ekklēsia* and *qahal*:

"Community, Greek *ekklēsia*, which means 'called-out ones,' and is used in the Septuagint to translate Hebrew *kahal*, 'assembly, congregation, community.' The usual English translation of *ekklēsia* is 'church'; and from it comes the word 'ecclesiastical,' meaning, 'having to do with the church.' The *JNT* sometimes uses 'Messianic community' or 'congregation' to render *ekklēsia*. What is being spoken about is a spiritual community of people based on trust in God and his son the Messiah Yeshua. This can be all people throughout history who so commit themselves, or a group of such people at a particular time and place, such as the Messianic community in Corinth or Jerusalem. The phrase, 'the *ekklēsia* that meets in their house' (Ro 16:5), refers to a particular congregation. Unlike 'church,' *ekklēsia* never refers to either an institution or a building."²

While making a connection between the Greek *ekklēsia* and the Hebrew *qahal*, as well as some useful observations on the usages of *ekklēsia* in the Apostolic Scriptures—conspicuously absent from Stern's remarks on Matthew 16:18, is how, precisely, *qahal* is used in the Hebrew Tanach. What "community" or "assembly" was being established by Yeshua here?

¹ For an important review, consult Raymond F. Collins, "Binding and Loosing," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:743-745.

As Matthew 16:19 is rendered in a version like the CJSB, "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

² David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 54.

More recent Messianic Jewish reflection on Matthew 16:18 can be seen in the commentary *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah*, by Barney Kasdan (2011):

“Many English Bibles translate the word *ekklesia* as ‘church’ but this is merely an English adaptation of the Greek which itself is derived from the Hebrew *kehilah*. Upon this inspired confession of Yeshua’s messianic identity the entire community of New Covenant believers (both the Jewish and Gentile branches) would be built. In fact, the physical setting of this dialogue strongly confirms this view. One can imagine Yeshua standing at the foot of the massive cliff at Caesarea Philippi and bending down to pick up one of the many stones. It would have been a graphic object lesson as he quite logically held up a small stone as a symbol of Peter and then pointed to the massive cliff as symbolic of the foundational confession of Yeshua’s messiahship.”³

Kasdan interjects his own observations here: the community which Yeshua came to establish has two branches, or is composed of two sub-communities. Yet, other than making some kind of connection between *ekklēsia* and *kehilah*, we do not see that much more we can really evaluate regarding what congregation or assembly Yeshua was intending to establish.

It might be that the answer, of what assembly Yeshua intended to establish, can be easily deduced by conducting one of the most basic parts of Inductive Bible Study: seeing where the verb **“build”** appears elsewhere, either in the Apostolic Scriptures or Septuagint. This is one important feature of the discussion over “upon this rock I will build My community” (Matthew 16:18, TLV), which I have yet to really see any Messianic examiner consider in detail.

The verb translated as **“will build”** in most English Bibles, is the Greek future active indicative *oikodomēsō*. Here are some key places where *oikodomēsō* appears in the Greek Septuagint (LXX), which need not escape an examiner’s notice:

“Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed to the ear of your servant, saying, ‘I **will build a house for you** [LXX: *oikon oikodomēsō soi*; MT: *bayit ebeneh-lakh*].’ Because of this your servant found his own heart to pray to you this prayer” (2 Samuel/2 Kingdoms 7:27, LES).

“It will be that if you watch everything, whatever I command you, and you walk in my ways and you do the right thing before me by keeping my com-

³ Barney Kasdan, *Matthew Presents Yeshua, King Messiah: A Messianic Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2011), 174.

mands and my ordinances just as David my servant did, then I will be with you. **I will build for you a faithful house** [LXX: *oikodomēsō soi oikon*; MT: *u'baniti lekha bayit*] just as I built for David" (1 Kings/3 Kingdoms 11:38, LES).

"Forever I will provide offspring for you and **will build** [LXX: *oikodomēsō*; MT: *u'baniti*] your throne for generation and generation" (Psalm 89:4, NETS).

"For **I will build you, and you will be built** [LXX: *oikodomēsō se kai oikodomēthēsē*; MT: *eb'neikh v'niv'neit*], O virgin Israel! You will seize your tambourine, and you will come out with an assembly of people playing" (Jeremiah 31:4 [38:4], LES).

"And I will return the exile of Judah and the exile of Israel, and **I will build them** [LXX: *oikodomēsō autous*; MT: *u'benitim*] just as also the former time" (Jeremiah 33:7 [40:7], LES).

When Bible readers encounter these varied usages of *oikodomēsō*, they all pertain to either the establishment of the Davidic monarchy, the building up of the Temple of God, or even the end-time restoration of Israel. It also appears in Mark 14:58, in reference to the work of Yeshua: "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days **I will build** [*oikodomēsō*] another made without hands'" (NASU).

Two notable definitions of the verb *oikodomeō*, provided by *BDAG*, include "to construct a building, **build**" and "to help improve ability to function in living responsibly and effectively, **strengthen, build up, make more able**."⁴ *AMG* offers the definition "to rebuild or renew a building decayed or destroyed,"⁵ which is something that surely fits the context of the restoration of God's people in the eschaton.

With some of these passages in view—notably Jeremiah 31:4 and 33:7—it legitimately sits within the semantic range of definitions to render Matthew 16:18 as "**upon this rock I will rebuild My assembly.**" And, the assembly which Yeshua came to build/rebuild was hardly a new *ekklēsia* of chosen, but rather a restored Kingdom of Israel brought to fruition via His work, and certainly enlarged to incorporate the righteous from the nations.

⁴ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 696.

⁵ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 1030.

If Matthew 16:18 can be directly associated with various Tanach promises about God restoring, i.e., rebuilding Israel—then what does this do to a number of the claims from either dispensationalism or bilateral ecclesiology, about “the Church” being a separate entity, perhaps related to but ultimately separated from, Israel? **It severely weakens, if not demolishes, such a claim.** The assembly in view, in Matthew 16:18, is none other than an explicit claim from the Messiah *to restore Israel upon the work of Himself*, and subsequently the Apostles. The assembly of Israel He came to rebuild (*oikodomēsō*) surely involves the fulfillment of the many promises of regathering and the end of exile for the Jewish people and the Twelve Tribes at large—but also the expansion of Israel to include the righteous of the nations into an enlarged Kingdom realm.

There is not a huge surprise in my mind, why some of the finer details of Matthew 16:18—beyond *ekklēsia* and *qahal* being somehow related—have not really been explored by a number of today’s Messianic Jewish leaders and teachers. No different than the Christian teacher who wants to dismiss Matthew 5:17-19, affording a degree of continuity and validity to the Torah of Moses—so does Matthew 16:18 not affirm the establishment of a new entity of elect, but instead affirms how the Messiah’s mission was to restore Israel. This is not just an anticipated national restoration of Israel, but is a spiritual entity incorporating far more than just ethnic Jews or Israelites into its Kingdom polity.

Sadly, there is rhetoric present in a few parts of today’s Messianic Judaism, where if non-Jewish Believers get to be incorporated into Israel’s Kingdom realm—which has been expanded and enlarged—that one might as well be guilty of promoting replacement theology. Yet, interpreters such as myself have not denied the Jewish right to the Holy Land, nor have we denied the promises to the physical descendants of the Patriarchs; **I am not** going to be making *aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael*. I am simply one who considers himself as a citizen of Israel’s Kingdom (Ephesians 2:11-13), a realm whose rule reaches beyond the Holy Land. As a non-Jewish Believer, I am a part of the righteous remnant from humanity which has sought the Lord (Acts 15:15-18; Amos 9:11-12), and I surely get to participate in Israel’s restoration and expansion, without expecting to live in territory only specifically promised to Israel’s Twelve Tribes.

THE MESSAGE OF EPHESIANS”

a summary for Messianic teaching and preaching

The Epistle of Ephesians is often one of the most appreciated letters of the Apostolic Scriptures for today’s Messianic community, even though there are probably various themes and issues seen within Ephesians which have not been explored thoroughly enough. You have heard references to the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13), and Jewish and non-Jewish Believers being fellow heirs and citizens with one another (Ephesians 3:6). You have heard about some kind of “one new man” (Ephesians 2:15) which God is supposed to create from the Jewish people and the nations. What you have likely not heard that much about, is what the letter of Ephesians meant to the First Century people who originally received it.

One of the most frequently unknown issues, among standard Bible readers, regarding Ephesians, appears in its opening verse. While the Apostle Paul extended opening greetings to be sure (Ephesians 1:1a, 2), there is sufficient manuscript evidence to support the view that the Ephesians did not originally receive this letter. The Revised Standard Version notably rendered Ephesians 1:1 with, “To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus,” as the designation “in Ephesus” does not appear in the oldest textual witnesses. And there is certainly good cause for readers to consider why the Ephesians were not specifically addressed in this letter: for one who spent a total of three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), the tenor of this letter does not seem to be written by someone who was that personally familiar with its recipients. What does this mean to modern readers of “Ephesians”?

There is excellent cause to think that instead of originally being written to the Ephesians, that this epistle was actually a circular letter written by Paul for Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21) to take to a group of assemblies in Asia Minor. In all likelihood, the rather ambiguous letter Paul claimed to have written to the Laodiceans (Colossians 4:16), is the circular epistle called “Ephesians.” In some ancient witnesses of Ephesians, there is actually a blank space where one would expect an audience to be named. When this circular letter eventually made its way to Ephesus, the third most important city for the early Believers after Jerusalem and Antioch, the reference *en Ephesō* was likely transcribed. For readers of the Epistle of Ephesians, what this means is that unlike some other Pauline letters which were written for a specific audience—and where there might be a visit recorded in Acts—a general knowledge of Asia Minor and the relationship of Greco-Roman religion in general to Judaism, is only really necessary as background material. In describing the audience of “Ephesians,” it is best to classify them as a group of Believers in Asia Minor. “Ephesians” would surely affect the Ephesians, but also notable groups like the Laodiceans or the Colossians, in the

broad geographical area.

There is no doubting that when one reads through Ephesians, it was written in a very upbeat and positive tone, almost as though as a homily. The Lord is praised, and the salvation available to all in Messiah Yeshua is exclaimed. God the Father “has blessed us in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Messiah. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Ephesians 1:3-4, NIV). In so being adopted (Ephesians 1:5-6), it is in Yeshua that “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished upon us with all wisdom and understanding” (Ephesians 1:7-8, NIV). Not only has eternal salvation and great blessing been granted to Believers, but Paul also told his audience “he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Messiah, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment” (Ephesians 1:9-10a, NIV). The Father’s plan is that all of Creation be ruled by His Son (Ephesians 1:10b), something which is to be most especially understood by those who have experienced the power of the gospel.

Paul expressed the great honor it was to be a part of the first generation of Messiah followers (Ephesians 1:11-12), and how his audience in Asia Minor too had been able to be “included in Messiah when you heard the word of truth...Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 1:13, NIV). The Holy Spirit has been granted to Believers as “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14, NIV), giving them the confirmation, every day, of how more is to occur in God’s most awesome plan of salvation history (cf. Romans 8:23; Hebrews 9:28).

The Apostle Paul was most diligent in the prayers he offered for his audience (Ephesians 1:15-16), especially in that they be granted more of the power of the Holy Spirit, “so that you may know him better” (Ephesians 1:17, NIV). He prayed most importantly, “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18, NIV)—an indication that God strongly values His redeemed people! If Believers wish to be truly mature, **they will value their fellow brothers and sisters** who have been saved by the Lord Yeshua. The power which raised Yeshua from the dead, is currently at work in His exaltation in Heaven (Ephesians 1:19-20), where the Messiah sits “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:21, NIV). Yeshua has been placed by His Father as Supreme Ruler, under which are all things (Ephesians 1:22). Yeshua’s body on Earth is the *ekklēsia*, filled by Him (Ephesians 1:23), and is to serve as a tangible representative of what is to occur in the cosmos one day, when He truly returns to take up His throne from Jerusalem!

Paul informed his audience how great a transformation they had received, in

coming to faith in Yeshua: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world" (Ephesians 2:1-2a, NIV), and they knew nothing but the power of the Devil (Ephesians 2:2b). This was a sorry state all people have once had to suffer from, including Paul himself, his Jewish brethren, and all who are without the Messiah (Ephesians 2:3). Paul could only declare, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Messiah even when we were dead in transgressions" (Ephesians 2:4-5a, NIV). Paul was quite insistent to assert **"it is by grace you have been saved"** (Ephesians 2:5b, NIV), a significant result of which is being "seated with [Messiah] in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 2:6, NIV). In the future or "coming ages," those redeemed by Yeshua will be fully shown "the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness" (Ephesians 2:7, NIV). Even though individuals today might have a strong feeling as to what this involves—just try to imagine the revelation of being able to *completely* see how God's hand has worked throughout history, guiding people toward Himself!

In the meantime, Believers are to know that "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Ephesians 2:8a, NIV), as salvation is not a human action via works (Ephesians 2:8b-9). It is only because of the sheer grace of the Creator that any one of us can possess redemption. Yet every Believer has a great responsibility in being saved by the Lord, because "we are God's workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us" (Ephesians 2:10, NIV). It is only by a life which faithfully demonstrates actions becoming of those who have been saved, that Believers can truly be readied for all of what is to come in eternity. *Salvation does not come to Believers by works or human effort, but Believers do come to salvation and as a result are **to manifest** good works.* Such works begin by manifesting a diligent love of God and neighbor (Cf. Mark 12:31; Matthew 19:19; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8)!

The significant majority of Paul's audience in Asia Minor was not Jewish, and they were regularly criticized by many Jews for being "uncircumcised," something which Paul observed could lead to significant and ungodly pride (Ephesians 2:11). No matter, he said, because "formerly you who are Gentiles by birth...were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:11a, 12, NIV). Without the Messiah and without the One True God, these non-Jews had no hope of salvation. They were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel" (Ephesians 2:12, RSV). Yet such a status had been reversed! "[N]ow in Messiah Yeshua you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Messiah" (Ephesians 2:13, NIV). Yeshua's sacrifice on behalf of all of humanity has brought redeemed, non-Jewish people "near" and into the Commonwealth of Israel (cf. Deuteronomy

4:7; Isaiah 56:3; Psalm 148:14). They possess a citizenship, which their trespasses and sins once barred them from having.

Yeshua's accomplishment of bringing Jewish and non-Jewish Believers together as one in Him, being "our peace," was most serious to the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 2:14a). The way the Lord had done this, was that He "has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14b, NIV). In Second Temple times, there was actually a barrier wall erected which prohibited anyone who was not a Jew or proselyte, from entering into the inner sanctuary of the Jerusalem Temple (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.417; *Wars of the Jews* 5.194). Those persons who were prohibited from crossing the barrier faced immediate death if they did. Spiritually, it symbolized how most of the Jewish people of the First Century had hemmed themselves in from the nations—hardly the purpose God's Temple was to have, being a House to which all of the world could come and worship (1 Kings 8:41-43; Isaiah 56:6-7). This wall was not specified in the Scriptures of Israel, and was most contrary to the mission of Israel being a light to the nations (Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 42:6). **Yeshua rendered what such a wall represented, completely inoperative by His sacrifice.**

The challenge which Bible readers should have, is that Yeshua has specifically, as the NIV renders it, abolished "the law with its commandments and regulations" (Ephesians 2:15b). If the Messiah actually abolished the Torah of Moses, would this not contradict His own perspective on the matter (Matthew 5:17-19)? Likewise, why would Paul appeal to the Fifth Commandment, later in this letter (Ephesians 6:2), if he considered the Law totally abolished? Throughout much of historic Reformed/Calvinist interpretation, Ephesians 2:15 has often been interpreted to only be the "ceremonial law" of the Torah, but not at the "moral law" of the Torah. More specifically though, the Greek *ton nomon tōn entolōn en dogmasin* should clue readers in, to something else actually being abolished by the work of the Messiah.

Nowhere does the Law of Moses ever say anything about erecting a dividing wall in the Holy Place, to keep people out of God's presence. Is it at all important that *dogma* can mean "something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief, doctrine, dogma" (BDAG)?¹ Consider how *dogma* is not used at all in the Septuagint translation of the Pentateuchal books, to describe any category of commandments. It principally appears in the Book of Daniel to describe the decrees of the Babylonians and the Persians (Daniel 2:13; 3:10, 12; 4:6; 6:9ff, 13f, 16, 27; cf. Acts 17:7), as it can certainly be referring to "an imperial declaration" (BDAG).² Such declarations could follow with a prescription of death penalty.

Rather than Paul and Yeshua being at odds with one another in Ephesians

¹ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 254.

² Ibid.

2:15, it seems proper to recognize *ton nomon tōn entolōn en dogmasin* as not the Torah of Moses—which specified no barrier wall—but rather artificial or man-made decrees, which frequently passed themselves off as “law,” a “religious Law of commandments in dogmas” (my translation). Only in the Messiah’s example can one find a true meaning of the Torah in action (cf. Matthew chs. 5-7); those who follow a “barrier wall” ideology, will at best, skew the Torah’s original purpose in guiding God’s people in holiness. A law of human dogma will be more prone to keep people *out* of God’s presence, than welcome people *into it*. While Yeshua emphasized loving one’s enemies as quite important (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35), sectarian instructions such as those of the Qumran community, actually emphasized hating one’s enemies (1QS 1.9-11). To a strong degree, the barrier wall in the Second Temple, was a manifestation of Jewish hatred for the nations—not at all a manifestation of love and of spiritual concern. By His sacrifice, Yeshua tore down this wall, and with it whatever human regulations placed unnecessary barriers between people and the Father. In so doing, Yeshua would be able to bring Jewish people and those from the nations together as *kainon anthrōpon* or “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15c, NRSV/CJB/TNIV) in Him.

It is only at the foot of Yeshua’s tree of sacrifice, where redemption for all people can be found, and reconciliation between all people can be enacted (Ephesians 2:16). Paul asserted, “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18, NIV), as the true unity which God desires among the redeemed, can only be found in the work of His Son. A significant effect of this, which Paul explained to the non-Jewish Believers of Asia Minor, was “you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:19, NIV). **They are a part of the Messianic Kingdom realm of Israel**, as a direct result of their faith in Israel’s Messiah. The assembly which the Messiah has established, has been built up by the faithful work of both apostles and prophets, made to be like the Jerusalem Temple—but one composed of people filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Paul was very serious about his God-given mission to see that in the Messiah Yeshua both Jews and those from the nations can be one. He was after all, a prisoner for this (Ephesians 3:1). Suffering in Rome for Believers (Ephesians 3:3), he expressed how what he strove to see present in the *ekklēsia*, was something which was a mystery revealed to him by God (Ephesians 3:2). He desired those in Asia Minor, to “understand my insight into the mystery of Messiah, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:4-5, NIV). While this mystery surely involved the salvation accessible in Yeshua, what was not shown to those who came before Paul is most serious: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Messiah Yeshua” (Ephesians 3:6,

NIV). Because of their faith in Israel's Messiah, the nations are *sugklēronoma* or "fellow heirs" (NASU, RSV) with the Jewish people. *They are to be considered an equal part of the Commonwealth of Israel, along with their Jewish brothers and sisters in the Messiah.*

Paul could only describe how grand such a purpose is, as the reconciliation of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Body of Messiah depicts a **much grander redemption** to come in eternity (Ephesians 3:7-13). Realizing how significant his calling was, as a steward of such a mystery, Paul could only kneel before the Father and pray with intensesness (Ephesians 3:14-21). Paul's position as a prisoner should have elicited an appropriate response from his audience, as he said, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1-2, NIV). Paul was physically suffering for the Divine call upon his ministry, which the Believers hearing his message need to seriously respect.

Since the good Apostle was quite concerned about bringing fellow Believers together, it is no surprise why his letter includes a major emphasis on "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3, NIV). He specified how there were broad areas of agreement which the mixed community of Messiah followers are to share: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6, NIV). In spite of some differences which may exist, Believers have more in things in common which unite them together—as **all have sought the same salvation in Yeshua**—than what should separate them. What all Messiah followers need to learn to appreciate, is the fact that "to each one of us grace has been given" (Ephesians 4:7, NIV), because after Yeshua's ascension into Heaven, He saw fit to see that specific spiritual gifts were granted to Believers (Ephesians 4:8-11). All of these important gifts are to cause "all [to] reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Messiah" (Ephesians 4:12-13, NIV). With such spiritual maturity and wholeness, then the Body of Messiah will not be able to be taken in by false teachings and can properly work together (Ephesians 4:14-16).

Writing to a broad, largely non-Jewish audience in Asia Minor, Paul admonished, "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking" (Ephesians 4:17, NIV). Paul listed a number of inappropriate sinful activities, how "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4:18a, NIV), but these could also be just as relevant for unredeemed Jews as well. Paul desired that his hearers not have hardened hearts, giving themselves over to lust and base human desires (Ephesians 4:18b-19). The way that these Believers

came to know the Messiah, was to put aside their old selves (Ephesians 4:20-22), and “to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:23-24, NIV). Sins such as lying, anger, and stealing, have absolutely no place in the life of a mature man or woman of God (Ephesians 4:25-28). Those who have been transformed by the Spirit are also to speak properly, as words of malice or bitterness are to be replaced by edifying words of kindness and compassion (Ephesians 4:29-32).

It is not difficult to discern how many of the Believers, who would have received Paul’s letter, were still rather young in their faith, and wrestling with foundational ethical issues. While Paul encouraged them, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Messiah loved us and gave himself up for us...” (Ephesians 5:1-2, NIV)—he spoke strongly against sexual immorality and foul talk about such things (Ephesians 5:3-4). Those who are sexually immoral or idolatrous have no place in the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:5-6), and Believers are to separate themselves from such sins and sinners (Ephesians 5:7). As Paul said, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...and find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8, 10, NIV). The deeds of darkness were to be exposed, even given the fact that they should not really even be discussed (Ephesians 5:11-12). The light of God’s truth exposes the futility of sin (Ephesians 5:13-14), requiring that Messiah followers be careful with how they live (Ephesians 5:15-17). Born again Believers are to be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18), and always have praises to God spoken and exclaimed from their lips (Ephesians 5:19-20).

Perhaps the most vigorously discussed area of Ephesians, among evangelical Protestants today, is Ephesians 5:21-6:9, a piece of instruction which regarded ancient household codes. It is unfortunate that many Messianic readers do not make the strong effort to read these instructions, in light of the cultural norms of the First Century Mediterranean. A proper view of Ephesians 5:21-33, is most especially important for those who are egalitarian, and who believe that in the Messiah Yeshua husbands and wives are to be reckoned as fully equal and as co-leaders of the home.

The concept of Biblical submission for the Body of Messiah begins with the main admonition, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Messiah” (Ephesians 5:21, NIV). From this mutual submission to one another, the wife is to submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22, 24). She is to respect her husband because he is her *kephalē* (“head”), correctly meaning her source or origin, as Eve came from Adam (Ephesians 5:23; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3, Grk.). Husbands demonstrate a submission to their wives via a manifestation of the love Yeshua Himself demonstrated, by dying for His followers (Ephesians 5:25-27). Most significant and subversive for the ancient period, is how “husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:28, NIV), a testament to how woman came from man as her head/source. Jewish and classical history are both

replete with examples of how women were commonly treated as either the significant inferiors of men, or sub-human to some degree. Here, Paul expressed how “no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Messiah does the [assembly]” (Ephesians 5:29, NIV). A husband is to treat his wife the same way he would *treat himself*. The relationship and oneness which husband and wife are to have together, is to teach Believers important things about the relationship the Messiah has to the *ekklēsia* (Ephesians 5:30-32).

The First Century setting of Paul’s instruction is quite obvious, not necessarily in his instruction that children obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3; cf. Deuteronomy 5:16) or that fathers not “exasperate your children” (Ephesians 6:4, NIV), but in what he said about slaves. Slavery was an economic reality of the time, and although there is no reference in the Pauline letters that the good Apostle ever approved of the practice, he nonetheless adjoined slaves to act responsibly toward their masters as a kind of service unto the Lord (Ephesians 6:5-9).

The closing vignette of Paul’s letter, to the Believers in Asia Minor, is one which has given great encouragement to many generations since: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:10-11, NIV). Each man or woman of God is to wear a kind of spiritual armor, emulating the Lord Himself who fights as a warrior (Isaiah 11:1-5; 59:14-18; cf. Wisdom 5:17-20). The necessity to be ready, to fight a spiritual battle, is most evident: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12, NIV). Believers are to “put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground...” (Ephesians 6:13, NIV). The armor was described in terms of the common elements of a soldier: a belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet shod with the gospel, a shield of faith, and a helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:14-17). As Believers prepare to take on the Adversary, they are to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Ephesians 6:18, NIV). Paul himself asked his audience to pray for him, as he was an ambassador for the good news in chains (Ephesians 6:19-20).

The Epistle of Ephesians ended with a salutation from Paul as his dear friend, and likely scribe Tychicus, would be able to personally convey much more about his condition in prison, to those who received it (Ephesians 6:21-22). He issued peace and grace to the congregations and fellowships in Asia Minor who would hear his letter (Ephesians 6:23-24), which eventually made its way to Ephesus (cf. Ephesians 1:1).

Today’s broad Messianic movement should be commended for having an appreciation for the Epistle of Ephesians, yet we are admittedly struggling with what it means to truly implement much of what the Apostle Paul emphasized as

“the mystery” (Ephesians 3:3, 9). There are divergent views as to what the Commonwealth of Israel is to be (Ephesians 2:11-13), whether it is a singular entity of which all Believers are a part, or a bilateral entity made up of separate branches in the ethnic Jewish people/Messianic Jewish community and “the Church.” Are non-Jewish Believers still strangers and sojourners, or not (Ephesians 2:19)? What does it mean for them to be fellow heirs (Ephesians 3:6)? Is what the Messiah has created, to be understood in terms of a “one new man” *or* a “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15)? What does mutual submission entail in both the home and wider assembly Ephesians (5:21)? And, most in today’s Messianic community—regardless of which slice of the pie you cut it—have not even heard the discussion regarding *kephalē*/head meaning “source” (Ephesians 5:23, 28), and how it regards woman coming from man, and not some kind of hierarchical authority.

I do not believe I am alone in recognizing that as the Messianic movement grows, with more Jewish people coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and more evangelical Believers embracing their faith heritage in Israel’s Scriptures—that our engagement level with Ephesians is bound to improve and become more serious. Ephesians’ message of grand unity among all Messiah followers, born again Believers actually representing God’s “inheritance” (Ephesians 1:18), and Jewish and non-Jewish Believers depicting a greater redemption to come to the universe (Ephesians 2:6-7; 3:10-11)—are all themes we need to consider more closely. Also extremely important, is how we need to learn to focus on the common elements of faith which are to unite us with other Messiah followers (Ephesians 4:3-6), and which bind us all together—which could do wonders to stop much of a culture of internal and external rivalry, resultant in much division and controversy.

How will we learn to really plow into Ephesians for the spiritual richness it possesses? This will only occur by making sure that each of us has truly put on the new self (Ephesians 4:23), and that we strive to be kind and courteous to one another (Ephesians 4:32). When today’s Messianic movement is truly most concerned with issuing words of edification for the community of Believers (Ephesians 4:29), *then* we will be able to truly let Ephesians serve its purpose of unifying us as one people in Messiah Yeshua: mutually submitted and positioned to be an example of the greater redemption to come in eternity!