The Epistle of Ephesians is a letter which contains a very important message for the people of God, who are to be encouraged in accomplishing His mission for the world. Yeshua the Messiah is portrayed as exalted above the cosmos, with His resurrection power being accessible to all Believers. God's people have been selected by Him to be holy, corporately composing a Temple in which His presence can dwell. By His sacrificial work, Jewish and non-Jewish followers of the Messiah are to be united together as a "one new humanity"—the mystery of the gospel! All are to serve one another in the Body of Messiah in mutual submission, as Yeshua's thoughts and mindset nourish the whole *ekklēsia*. People are encouraged to emulate God in their behavior, living distinctively different lives from those around them.

In varying degrees, Ephesians has often been highly valued by today's Messianic movement, because of its emphasis of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. It does speak of the unity we are to all have in the Lord, as a testament to the grander redemption of Creation to come in the future eschaton. But while Ephesians is a text we often turn to, Messianics are often not aware of the more detailed issues surrounding this letter present in contemporary scholarship. Were the "Ephesians" the only audience who received the letter, or was this a general epistle written to Believers in Asia Minor? Did the Apostle Paul really write Ephesians, or was it written by a second generation Believer in his name? What is the specific debate surrounding the dividing wall which has been abolished—was the wall abolished really the Torah of Moses in its entirety *or* could it have been something else? Are husbands the head/authority of their wives, *or* the head/source of their wives? How interconnected is the composition of Ephesians with the composition of Colossians?

In the commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*, Messianic Apologetics editor J.K. McKee addresses the known and unknown questions, which this important letter asks us as Messianic Believers. A Jewish and Greco-Roman Mediterranean background is considered of the issues. Careful attention has been given to opinions present today surrounding the dividing wall, and complementarian and egalitarian views of the household codes. References to Tanach (Old Testament) concepts in the author's words are considered, along with an evaluation for how Ephesians challenges us as a faith community trying to achieve our Father's objectives. Poignant questions as to how we can be molded into a mature people, are asked for today's season of Messianic uncertainty.

EPHESIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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J.K. McKEE

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.blog

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
ECB: *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encylopaedia Judaica*
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: Greek New Testament
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: King James Version
Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: Septuagint
m. Mishnah
MARV: Messianic Apologetics Revised Version[*]
MT: Masoretic Text
NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: New English Bible (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)

[*] This is a modified and adapted edition of the public domain World Messianic Bible (WMB).

NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
NT: New Testament
OT: Old Testament
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

PROLOGUE

Each of Paul's letters seems to have a specific message to the person who reads it. We have encountered this in our previous two studies (2007-2008). In Philippians, we have seen how for Paul, the center of his life is Yeshua the Messiah. In Galatians, we have seen that he considered Jewish and non-Jewish Believers to be one in Him, with faith in Israel's Messiah being the main determining factor of one's membership among God's people. As we prepare to turn to Ephesians, we are presented with yet another of one of the most important texts for today's emerging Messianic movement. An undeniable theme for today's Messianic community, is the Apostle Paul's emphasis on Believers in Yeshua being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13). This is a call which has certainly gone forth from many Messianic venues since the 1990s, as scores of non-Jewish Believers have embraced their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures, and have desired a oneness with their fellow Jewish Believers. But what does it mean for any of us to be a part of the Commonwealth of Israel?

I would submit that one of the most difficult things for today's Messianic community to consider, is what it means to be a people empowered by God and able to accomplish His mission for the Earth. This was certainly something demanded of the Ancient Israelites in the Torah, who were called by God to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6, NASU), with the intention of recognizing that "all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5, NASU). Being a testimony to the nations involved declaring His goodness, and being obedient to God via proper conduct (cf. Deuteronomy 4:5-6). When one examines Ephesians, these qualities are explained in a very eloquent and appropriate manner, especially for a group of non-Jewish Believers redeemed by the blood of Israel's Messiah. The premise of one demonstrating himself or herself as a part of the people of God via holy living, has not changed between the Tanach or the Apostolic Scriptures, or even up until today!

The letter of Ephesians among the Pauline corpus also addresses First Century issues from which today's Believers can gain much insight. As Christopher J.H. Wright might remind some us,

> "Most of Paul's letters were written in the heat of missionary efforts: wrestling with the theological basis of the inclusion of the Gentiles, affirming the need for Jew and Gentile to accept one another in Christ and in the [assembly], tackling the baffling range of new problems that assailed young [assemblies] as the gospel took root in the world of Greek

> polytheism, confronting incipient heresies with clear affirmations of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and so on" (*The Mission of God*).[i]

Preparing myself to comment extensively on Paul's letter of Ephesians, I find myself in a similar predicament. I am a teacher in a Messianic community today which struggles with the issues of non-Jewish inclusion and unity, the questions posed by what it means to be Messianic in the Twenty-First Century, various personal and congregational struggles common to us as Believers, and even some false teachings which have entered in, deriding who the Messiah is to us as our salvation. How relevant is Ephesians to us, and why is it one of those texts of Scripture which can get overlooked by our community? Should we not be concerned with "the unfathomable riches of Messiah" (Ephesians 3:8, NASU)? How might Ephesians mean *even more to us*, when we place it against its ancient Jewish and Mediterranean background?

Paul spoke of the work of Yeshua in Believers, as "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18, NASU). The Holy Spirit is sent to Believers, as "the guarantee of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14, RSV). Ephesians largely spoke to non-Jewish Believers in the First Century who were once "dead in…trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1, NASU), yet who were made alive via the work of the good news. These people, being made a part of God's Kingdom, now had some roles and responsibilities to perform. While they were saved by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), He nonetheless requires good works of His children (Ephesians 2:10). And by inference, the Jewish members of Paul's audience must treat the non-Jewish Believers as equal members of the Messiah's Body, or their "fellow citizens" (Ephesians 2:19, NASU). *All* who have come to know the God of Israel via His Son have suffered, to one degree or another, from the consequences of sin unleashed upon humanity (Ephesians 2:2-3)—yet they have *all* been redeemed and *all* can enter into God's marvelous purpose!

While Ephesians undoubtedly inspires us to never take our salvation for granted, what does it teach us about God's Torah? Did Paul take a negative view of God's Law in this letter (Ephesians 2:14-15; cf. 6:13)? Is there any Torah background behind the behavior he asked his audience to demonstrate? What might Ephesians teach us about the person of Paul, and the unique work God assigned to him among the nations (Ephesians 3:8-10)? How are we as the *ekklēsia* to be a united people focused on Yeshua the Messiah as our central hope (Ephesians 4:3)? What does it mean for each of us to wear the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-19)? What does Ephesians teach us today about spiritual warfare and the challenges life presents us? These are all important questions which need to be answered.

I believe today's Messianic movement is one which possesses great potential to enact a positive difference in today's world, when we will learn to take God's mission for His people seriously. While Paul undoubtedly emphasized that the good news is to be proclaimed "to the

[i] Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 49.

Jew first,"[ii] Ancient Israel was given a mandate to proclaim the goodness of its God to the world around it. It is my personal opinion that while today's Messianics should be commended for evangelizing and seeing that a generation of Jewish people came to a saving knowledge of Yeshua, it has not often done well with the other side of evangelism and discipleship: "also to the Greek" or "all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). A number of people in today's Messianic Judaism avoid the letter of Ephesians, because of Paul's emphasis on a oneness and unity between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers—a unity which either they do not want, or want to act as though does not exist in the Bible.

For those Messianics who do believe in equality between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers as part of the "one new humanity" (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV/CSJB), I wonder why they do not often read Ephesians—because it gives us the clues on how we are to conduct ourselves, demonstrating the transforming power of God within us (Ephesians 4:23-24). **The audience of Ephesians is one which we should all truly strive to emulate and see replicated, as new Messianic fellowships are birthed.** How do we all learn to respect one another as human beings who have been redeemed by the Lord? How do we learn to function as one Body of Messiah? How does personal holiness extend to familial holiness, and manifest itself into corporate holiness? Perhaps most avoided, how are we preparing ourselves for people—Jews, Christians, and others—who will one day come to us wanting unique *Messianic* answers? Ephesians has much to say which we need not overlook any more.

In order for today's Messianic community to enter into the great things the Lord has in store for it, we probably need to go through a season of intense spiritual and theological refinement. I can think of no better text to consider for this than Ephesians. I consider the primary thrust of this letter to be, as Paul so aptly put it, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1, NASU). As the sons and daughters of the Most High, men and women who have come to know Him via His Son Yeshua, we should be following after the instructions of God. We are those who should be reaching forward "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Messiah" (Ephesians 4:13b, RSV). Ephesians teaches important life lessons about what it means to live not only as born again Believers—but as *adults* accomplishing the tasks of God! It tells us things about congregations and fellowships made up of both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, and how we must "attain to the unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13a, NASU).

So as we prepare to begin, what life lessons do you believe Ephesians will teach you, and aid you with, concerning the tasks the Lord has in store (Ephesians 5:3-33)? It is my sincere hope and prayer that our study of Ephesians will once again be helpful, as we all desire to a see that mature, transformed, and impactful Messianic movement emerge—which can be more than a movement—but a force for the power of God in the Earth! *Amein v'amein.*

J.K. McKee, Editor Messianic Apologetics
May 2008

[ii] Romans 1:16; 2:9-10.

For the 2012 printing, areas where some further analysis has been conducted include Ephesians 2:11-13 with some new developments in Messianic ecclesiology and what the "Commonwealth of Israel" (*politeia*) actually is, and Ephesians 5:21-33 including consultation with the rather brilliant and thorough book *Man and Woman, One in Christ* by Philip B. Payne (2009). With this release, it will now be much easier to use both this resource and *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* (2010) together, given the overlap in content among these epistles.

This update of *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic* (2024), mainly involves a refresh of the material, as well as a smoothing over and streamling of some arguments. Also considered, are new theological and spiritual developments, which have taken place within the Messianic community. These most especially include some of the experiences our family has had, in relocating from Central Florida back to North Texas (late 2012), and then getting reintegrated into the Messianic Jewish movement (2013-present). I am much more aware now, from firsthand interactions with various Messianic Jewish rabbis and leaders, of some of the matters concerning the future development of our faith community. I hope and pray that this commentary can continue to be a useful resource for many.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter of Ephesians[1] (Grk. *Pros Ephesious*) is a very rich, full, and spiritual text of the Bible, having brought great inspiration to many Believers. Throughout history, this has been one of the favorite books of many, particularly as it regards the nature of God's people and Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) ruling and reigning over them. Yeshua the Messiah is uplifted over the cosmos, as the One from whom great blessings originate. It places an emphasis on proper living, and how God's people are to be empowered for His service. Ephesians is also a rather broad and general epistle; it includes both doctrine as well as an emphasis on the corporate election of God's people. Many have considered Ephesians to be a masterful work of ecumenicism, emphasizing the unity which God desires to have among all of His people. Ephesians certainly asks important questions of any generation or group of people which desires to be used by the Lord in the world, and place Him at the center of their mission.

Among many who read Ephesians, is certainly the question of what kind of a text it actually is. While it is easy to call Ephesians a letter or an epistle, some have considered it to be a kind of tractate or manifesto.[2] Others have considered Ephesians to be a homily. Ephesians has been considered to be the "crown"[3] of the Pauline Epistles. Ephesians has been thought to perhaps more closely match the genre of the General Epistles (James, 1&2 Peter, 1-3 John),[4] and would almost serve as a capstone or summation to all of Paul's teachings. Some commentators have considered Ephesians second only to Romans in its significance among the Pauline corpus, calling Ephesians "the quintessence of Paulinism" (F.F. Bruce).[5] In my

[1] Please note that in spite of the common reference to Ephesians as "the Book of Ephesians," I am going to purposefully not refer to this text by this designation. By failing to forget that this text was a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

Per the debate of Ephesians' actual audience, I will simply be referring to its recipients as "the audience," "Paul's listeners," "those who received the letter," etc.

[2] Victor Paul Furnish, "Ephesians, Epistle to the," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:536.

[3] Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 613.

[4] Cf. I. Howard Marshall, "Ephesians," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1385.

[5] F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 229.