The letter of Paul to the Philippians is a frequently overlooked and disregarded text in the Bible by today's Messianic community—yet it speaks so profoundly to many of the spiritual issues we are facing, or will undoubtedly be dealing with in the near future. With some of the highest Roman character among the texts of the Apostolic Scriptures (NT), Philippians invites readers into a community of First Century Believers on their own in the colony of Philippi. These people were surrounded by neighbors hostile to both Judaism and the good news of Yeshua the Messiah. Their numbers were few, but the Apostle Paul was able to consider them his close and affectionate friends, and seldom had a negative word for them. The Philippians were generous to his ministry work, and Paul had strong feelings for their well-being and labor in the Lord.

The Epistle to the Philippians presents many theological and social questions which cannot be avoided by anyone who reads it. Above all things, the Apostle Paul placed Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) at the center of his life, and urged his Philippian brothers and sisters to do the same. He urged the Philippians to be kind, generous, and significantly different from their neighbors. He urged them to show humility and to be about the supreme service of the good news, even unto death. He urged unity in the assembly, and that all demonstrate God's love to others. He affirmed the mystery of both the Divinity and humanity of Yeshua. Paul also recognized the value of women in the local congregation as servants and leaders. For modern Messianic people, Philippians offers a significant example of how small fellowships and congregations on their own should function, in addition to the huge questions of how we must have a global vision which recognizes the virtues of other ethnicities and cultures, while still maintaining a Jewish-centric view of the Scriptures and God's mission for the restoration of Israel.

In the commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*, Messianic Apologetics editor J.K. McKee addresses many of the avoided issues which this text asks Messianic Believers. He takes into account the First Century Jewish and Roman background of Paul's letter. He also considers the large amount of intertexual references which Philippians makes to the Tanach (OT), deeply embedded in Paul's vocabulary and mannerisms. Most importantly, he considers the centrality of Yeshua and His completed work for Paul, and how all human achievements pale in comparison to who He should be for born again Believers who have experienced His transforming power.

Also included in this commentary is an exposition on Acts 16:6-40: Paul's visit to Philippi.

PHILIPPIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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J.K. McKEE

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.blog

PHILIPPIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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This volume is dedicated to the life and ministry of

Kenneth Kimball McKee (1951-1992)

a husband, a father, a servant of Jesus Christ

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better…For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 1:21-23; 3:20-21, NASB).

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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
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)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)

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

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

In 2006, I finished a lengthy project by writing a commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews is a unique text, as many verses can easily be taken out of context by someone who is unfamiliar with the historical circumstances surrounding its composition. Some well-meaning Messianics can assume that its author may be disparaging God's Torah by saying, "since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never…make perfect those who draw near" (Hebrews 10:1, RSV). For Messianic Believers today, these kinds of misunderstandings can be easily solved by examining the text as a whole, and knowing that the statement being made was how the Torah itself cannot provide final redemption for a person. The Law of Moses is designed to show a person that he or she cannot be made perfect without Divine intervention, revealing one's need for salvation in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ).

Hebrews has some statements which are admittedly difficult to understand without going to some lengths to reconstruct the background events its author probably addressed. It is a complicated text for today's Messianic community to understand. While I view Hebrews as a very important text of Scripture, as it affirms the Divinity and humanity of Yeshua, His superiority over the world, as well as His final sacrifice—there are other texts in the Apostolic Scriptures which affirm these very same things using less complicated language. We can more easily reconstruct the historical setting behind them. As I was completing *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*, I began to pray and ask the Lord to direct me to "the next book" of the Bible which needed to be examined. The answer that I kept receiving was: **Philippians.**

Other than the obvious fact that Philippians is only 4 chapters compared to Hebrews' 13 chapters, and would not take as long to work through, Philippians, just like Hebrews, has statements in it, which if not carefully understood in some original First Century context, can be interpreted as meaning something other than what they were saying—particularly as they relate to the validity of the Torah and the faith heritage we have inherited from Judaism. The challenge which this presents is immense, because unlike Hebrews which is ultimately anonymous, we know that the author of Philippians is the Apostle Paul—something recognized by conservative and liberal commentators alike. If we cannot reconcile Paul's words in this letter to the words of Yeshua which uphold the Torah (Matthew 5:17-19), then what are we to do? I accept Paul's words as inspired of God, and think we need to work through some of Philippians' "problem verses." I believe you will discover that we can do this without difficulty.

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians is very easy to overlook when compared to some of his others. Some of Paul's major letters include: Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians, and all offer Bible readers some foundational teachings regarding the role of Yeshua in their lives, the spread of the good news or gospel, and/or some negative circumstances which arose in the First Century *ekklēsia*. Philippians is a short letter with few negative remarks, if any, made to its audience. It is generally a letter which people turn to when they need encouragement during difficult times, or are looking for a way to thank someone for being generous. It is not often a text we think of when it comes to "deep theology," but it speaks profoundly to the condition of much of today's emerging Messianic movement.

The Philippian assembly was largely made up of non-Jewish Believers with a handful of Jews, in a Roman, Gentile pagan environment. They were a very small group of people on their own in the colony of Philippi. Paul addressed the Philippians with great affection, thanking them as his close, trusted friends. His exhortation to them was to be humble, contrite, and always be about the loving work of God. His only negative words were to beware of false teachers and for two women in the congregation to get along. On the whole, these are not difficult things for us to consider, and anything negative would largely represent the "garden variety" problems of any fellowship of Believers.

These are not the challenges which Philippians presents to today's Messianic Believers. The ethnic composition of the Philippian assembly, its location, the miniscule number of Jews in the fellowship, and then the fact that Paul may have had *better personal relations* with a largely non-Jewish fellowship compared to some of the largely Jewish fellowships elsewhere—makes more than a few Messianics scratch their heads. This is probably why few Messianic Bible studies have ever been conducted examining Paul's letter to the Philippians.

The Philippian assembly is an example and model which has been preserved in Scripture of a type of fellowship which has existed throughout the centuries. It is a small group of people on their own in a largely hostile environment. As we rediscover and integrate the distinct Hebraic and Jewish character of Yeshua's and Paul's teachings into our faith, Messianic people will often minimalize or disregard the importance of classical studies for understanding the history of the Scriptures, in particular the Apostolic Writings. But in understanding any of the Pauline Epistles and their unique audiences, this factor cannot be ignored. Ironically, knowing about the Greco-Roman history of Philippi is *the* element which has been largely missing in a proper Messianic handling of Philippians, and holds the key to many of the answers we need.

When we gauge the development of today's Messianic community with Philippians, we see some distinct parallels. Since the mid-1990s, increasingly more numbers of non-Jewish Believers have been embracing their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures and have been drawn into Messianic congregations. In most of these congregations, the number of non-Jewish Believers far outweighs the number of Jewish Believers. While the first Messianic Jewish congregations were planted in regions with traditionally large Jewish populations, such as

the East Coast or West Coast of the United States, or highly urban areas, the Messianic movement has definitely branched out to places which do not have large Jewish populations. It has branched out to in rural communities and in states and provinces where the total number of Jewish people is only in the few thousands, if not the hundreds. These are the fellowships which are largely, if not entirely, non-Jewish. But our Heavenly Father, for some reason or another, has used sincere non-Jewish Believers, to form communities which are in full alignment with the salvation of the Jewish people and restoration of Israel (cf. Acts 1:6).

Our call as Believers in Yeshua, whomever we may be, is to witness to the world around us by a testimony of good works. These good works are primarily demonstrated in how we are to treat others with respect, compassion, and with the love of God. **These are all concepts commanded by and exemplified throughout the Torah.** Paul wrote the Philippians,

> "it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Messiah" (Philippians 1:9-10, ESV).

This would be the same prayer which I would have for any small Messianic fellowship which thinks that it is alone and irrelevant. Paul wrote the Philippians as beloved friends, thanking them for their support of his ministry and for helping him. Today, regardless of how small (or even how large) we may be, we need to likewise grow in God's grace *and* His discernment. If we can do this, then we can have the satisfaction of knowing that we are faithfully performing the work of His Kingdom. If we can live like the Philippians lived, then we can possibly avoid the more major sins which Paul had to address in his longer letters. But what warnings might Paul be issuing to us—were he living today—as possibly seen in Philippians?

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics
December 2006

It has been almost eighteen full years, since I have really read through *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*, and give it some kind of refresh. This 2024 release does not see any of the major conclusions I have made regarding Philippians, at all altered. Some statements here or there have been tweaked, to reflect current Messianic circumstances of the 2020s, and at least partially represent a number of new experiences our family has had. Some integration from other studies, notably the 2014 *Messianic Kosher Helper*, 2018 *Salvation on the Line, Volume II*, and 2024 *Messianics and the Afterlife* have been incorporated. It is my sincere hope that this commentary continues to be a useful resource, for many across today's Messianic movement.

J.K. McKee
May 2024