

## Adopting a Messianic Lifestyle

Up to this point in our study introducing the Messianic movement, we have examined some of the aspects of Messianic theology and lifestyle practice. Some of the most obvious differences, between your standard Christian and Messianic Believer, is that Messianics believe themselves to be a part of Israel and not part of a separate “Church”; Messianics believe in the continued validity of the Torah or Law of Moses for Believers; and all Messianic Believers tend to know that future events involving Israel’s restoration will somehow involve them. It is imperative that before we move forward that we discuss the various aspects of the Messianic lifestyle, steps that you need to take if you are new to all this, challenges that you will face, and the appropriate attitude that you should have should you be criticized.

You should be motivated to pursue Messianic things first and foremost, because **the Holy Spirit has convicted you** and personally shown you that there is indeed “something” to all of this. Your motivation should be wanting to get the most out of your relationship with the God of Israel, pursuing full compliance with Holy Scripture, and living as a disciple of Messiah Yeshua.<sup>1</sup> You should be motivated out of a strong desire to grow and mature in your faith, and because you are not satisfied with having a stagnant faith. You want to know more about the mysteries of God, and indeed know God better yourself, being more sensitive to His leading.

It is likely that many of you, as readers, come from an evangelical Protestant Christian background, as I do. As such, we need to recognize the fact that regardless of what denomination we came from, that denomination had both truth and error. The Protestant Reformation was birthed out of the inherent need for the *ekklēsia* to return to a strong Scriptural foundation and eliminate any non-Biblical, Roman Catholic practices from the faith. This was certainly accomplished to a large

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<sup>1</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen makes the important remark, “Christians throughout the history of the church who have advocated the authority of the Old Testament law in Christian moral instruction, such as the Reformers or Puritans...have done so only because their true Lord and Authority, Jesus Christ, directs them to honor and obey the moral commandments of Moses” (“Response to Douglas Moo,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 391). Similarly, Messianic Torah observance must be focused around what Yeshua has instructed for His followers to do.

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extent as your conservative, Bible believing Protestant denominations do not practice Mary veneration, prayers to the saints, confession to a priest, a belief in purgatory, and veneration of images—among other things. Bible believing evangelical Christians rightly teach that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and is the only way to salvation. They rightly teach that we must receive Him into our lives for the forgiveness of our sins and that we must emulate Him and His love.<sup>2</sup>

The challenge that people face is the fact that when you are completely honest, and you recognize who the Messiah actually is, you recognize that as the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1) that He embodies *all of Scripture* in His teachings, actions, and deeds—and He in no way contradicts it. The foundation of all of Scripture is found in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible more commonly called the Law of Moses or Pentateuch. One thing that the Messianic movement emphasizes quite strongly is a return to a Torah foundation in our faith. When an inquisitive Christian begins to study the Torah on a consistent basis, and then begins to examine the Messiah’s words in light of the Torah’s instruction, he or she often has many questions. The person’s understanding of our Lord’s ministry and teachings may be challenged. This is because the person does not see Yeshua contradicting the Torah, but rather living it out properly (cf. Matthew chs. 5-7). This runs contrary to much of modern Christian theology which tells us that the Messiah came to abolish the Law, when in fact Yeshua *upholding* the Law is one of the definite proofs of His Messiahship (cf. Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2; Romans 3:31).

The biggest challenge that one will face as he or she enters into the Messianic movement is encountering criticisms regarding the Messianic lifestyle. This is different from one’s theology concerning God’s elect or Torah study or even the end-times. The criticism that you will face regards how you practice your faith on a daily basis, and the actions that others see you perform (cf. Matthew 5:16).

There are three critical elements that exist when one realizes that the Messianic lifestyle is for them. Three areas where the bulk of criticism against us is often found include:

1. The seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*
2. The appointed times of Leviticus 23
3. The kosher dietary laws

It is likely that many of you reading this publication, and who have been involved with Messianic things for any elongated period of time, have no doubt heard about the importance of these things. (In our further studies, we will examine the significance that these areas of obedience have for Believers today, and respond to the criticisms that many encounter.) These three areas may often be described as “hurdles” for the new person. It is not just because these are three things that are often not practiced by Christians today; it is also because there are an incredible amount of stereotypes that exist regarding them, and social pressure not to do them exercised by friends and family. This can be very frustrating for the

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<sup>2</sup> I would add that my own Wesleyan background placed a high emphasis on personal holiness and obedience to God via the moral law, positively affecting my own Messianic experience.

new person whose understanding of Scripture is growing on one side, but is being criticized on the other side.

We must all remember that the pursuit of truth is not an easy one. Many of the Reformers who protested against the false doctrines of Catholicism were tried as heretics and executed. Our family and friends *will never* go to such lengths as this, but people who are new to the Messianic movement do receive confrontational criticism, are often treated unfairly, and can be socially spurned by others. Yet, if one's heart is in the right place, we should all remember that the Lord is merciful to us and will see us through whatever difficulties we may encounter. If you are a new person to Messianic things, remember that God will *only* give you what you can handle. Criticism you may be experiencing is a part of your refinement process, so you can perform the life tasks that He has before you. Take encouragement from the following Scripture passages:

“You, O LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me” (Psalm 40:11).

“He will send from heaven and save me; He reproaches him who tramples upon me. Selah. God will send forth His lovingkindness and His truth” (Psalm 57:3).

“He will abide before God forever; appoint lovingkindness and truth that they may preserve him” (Psalm 61:7).

“For His lovingkindness is great toward us, and the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 117:2).

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).<sup>3</sup>

You must also remember that while the Father will see you through any challenges that you may face, you have a responsibility to forgive others who may slander you and reject you or exclude you. Yeshua the Messiah tells us that if we do not forgive others, then our Heavenly Father will not forgive us. These are some very direct words from the Lord:

“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matthew 6:14-15; cf. 18:35).

If we fail to forgive others for any criticism that we receive, then God cannot forgive us. Not only will God not be able to forgive us, but we will give the enemy a legal right to harass us. When this happens, we not only damage the communication that we have between God and His Holy Spirit, but also will present the truths that the Lord is restoring to His people in a way that is neither

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<sup>3</sup> “Righteousness” (Heb. *tzedaqah*, תְּדָאָה; Grk. *dikaiosunē*, δικαιοσύνη) has a variety of contexts, notably including God's vindication of His people. As the Psalmist cries out, “Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; be gracious to me and hear my prayer” (Psalm 4:1).

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edifying nor constructive. In adopting a Messianic lifestyle, we must demonstrate a *positive* change in our walk of faith to others around us, as opposed to a *negative* change. Be aware that many of the problems that people encounter for becoming Messianic is not exclusively because of how the message was received by Christian friends or family. *How* the message was presented may have something to do with how it was received.<sup>4</sup>

Adopting a Messianic lifestyle is by no means an immediate process. In fact, some of us who have been in this for a number of years are still discovering areas of our lives that need to be altered, as we study the Scriptures more and more and the Lord continually refines us. However, even though these changes do not occur instantaneously, our heart should be in the right place where we allow the Lord to accomplish His will and change us for the better. Slow, consistent growth is by far much better than a rapid growth followed by a rapid decline.

There are challenges you are going to face if you are relatively new to the Messianic understanding. Because the Messianic movement, as compared to mainstream Christianity, is relatively small, be aware of the fact that you will find yourself lonely at times. But be rest-assured that God is with you and that there are others in your same situation. Be thankful for the multiple tools available via venues like the Internet and e-mail, where you can communicate with others of like mind all over the world. However, do try to be in some kind of fellowship with Believers of like mind, that search the Scriptures with you, encourage you, and most importantly are there to support you when personal issues arise that are not theological.

One of the most common issues relates to those who are just coming into the Messianic movement and are still involved in a Church setting. The person wonders whether or not he or she should stay in Church, or move exclusively into a Messianic congregation. This is challenging, not because the new person realizes that much of what is taught in mainstream Christianity is incomplete (or even shallow), but often because of friends and family and their valued fellowship. This is a dilemma for many, and one where there is no definite answer. I can only tell you that based on my experience your time in the Church is likely to not last forever.

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<sup>4</sup> Do note how James 1:2 says "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." The verb *peripiptō* (περιπίτω) actually means "so to fall as to be encompassed by" (Thayer, 504), better rendered as "when you fall into various trials" (NKJV). None of us is to actively seek trial, and do keep in mind that much of the criticism Messianics receive is actually of their own doing.

Stay away from many of the "Messianic" voices out there that fail to build bridges of understanding and spiritual continuance with Messianics' shared Christian and Jewish heritage (i.e., as epitomized by pseudo-scholarly publications like *Come Out of Her, My People* or *Fossilized Customs*, or sensationalistic personalities like Michael Rood). Exposing Christian family and friends to a negative and spiteful approach to Messianic things has not at all aided our faith community in the 2000s, and its ability to dialogue constructively with our Christian and Jewish brethren.

Consult the author's article "The Quest for Credibility" for a further discussion (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

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As the Holy Spirit moves upon you to search out your Hebraic heritage more and more, the Messianic understanding becomes much more than just “enrichment” to your faith or a phase—it becomes a lifestyle. Keeping *Shabbat* and the festivals take top priority to Sunday Church and Christmas and Easter. You begin to have less in common with your Church friends, because you cannot communicate with them on the same spiritual level. In time, many of your Church friends could shut you off. Some of you who are new to Messianic things might have an open door with your Church friends right now to share new truths with them, but in time do not be surprised when those doors are closed. But when they are closed, have faith that the Lord will have prepared you for new opportunities and that you are in His will. You planted seed that could very well germinate in the future, when you encounter your Church friends again.

The greatest challenge regarding adopting a Messianic lifestyle is for us to overcome the hurdles and prejudices that we all have, and seek Scriptural compliance. While doing this, we must demonstrate to our Christian family and friends the testimonies of people who are truly seeking God and are experiencing a positive lifestyle change. Furthermore, we must maintain good relations with these people, and endure the criticism we may encounter. *We must live and act and love like Messiah Yeshua!* As you are criticized, you will be forced back into the Scriptures like never before, and will be forced to reevaluate some things you were taught in the past. But, be aware that your faith will not be stagnant. You will have to rely on the Lord unlike never before! And above all things, that is what He wants. Our Heavenly Father wants you to make Him the first priority in your life, **so He can bless you and prepare you for great things ahead.** That is what the Messianic lifestyle is ultimately about, and regardless of any obstacles any of us may have faced—it is what keeps people like me committed to the Messianic movement.