

## The Assurance of Our Salvation

People investigate the Messianic movement and their Hebraic Roots for an entire host of reasons. People who enter into the Messianic movement do so because they are seeking God's truth, and they are seeking to be in greater compliance with His Word. They enter into the Messianic movement because they have discovered that they are not entirely satisfied with what mainstream Christianity today has taught them, and they instinctively know that there is more to their faith and in living like Yeshua (Jesus). Most importantly, they know that Christian theology has been incomplete in many areas, and they are lacking spiritual fulfillment.

Those of us who have been in this situation and have been in the Messianic movement for some time have certainly experienced *more* spiritual fulfillment as Messianics, then we did while we were average Church-goers. While it may have been a process for us—and that process was longer for some and shorter for others—we nevertheless sought God's truth, and sought greater compliance with Scripture. We changed our lifestyles and overcame the hurdles of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, the Biblical holidays of Leviticus 23, and eating kosher, among other things. We study the Torah portions now on a consistent basis and examine the Bible unlike never before. We have reevaluated things we were taught in the past like the pre-tribulation rapture, and found that they were not supported by Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, one issue that is often not reevaluated from a Messianic viewpoint is that of salvation. Oftentimes in the Messianic movement the understanding of "asking Jesus into your heart" is only changed to "ask Yeshua into your heart." The salvation message of the Messianic movement by-and-large is no different than what is presented in contemporary Christianity, except with the names changed. This is a problem, because what you will discover is that the modern gospel message, like so many other things, is incomplete. As Messianic Believers who have a Torah foundation in our walk of faith, we have a responsibility to present a *complete* salvation message to others, and most importantly have the assurance ourselves that we are redeemed children of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Consult the author's publication *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism* for a detailed discussion of this issue.

## The Dilemma

It is important that salvation be reevaluated from a Messianic perspective because of what many people in the Messianic community are facing. As people read the Scriptures and are challenged with things that they believed in the past, doubts can inevitably creep into a person's mind, so much so that the individual can question whether or not he or she is truly spiritually regenerated. These doubts can be in the form of people wondering if they were truly pursuing things of the Lord in their Church experience. The enemy can use these doubts to get people to even start wondering "what if," and perhaps get them dwelling on bad, unforgotten memories of their past that may not even directly relate to their spiritual life. Some people can be so overwhelmed with new information, and they do not know what to do, that the enemy can use it to attack them and at the very least get them confused, or at the very most, get them to deny faith in Messiah Yeshua.<sup>2</sup>

Consider what we have all faced when entering into the Messianic movement and exploring our Hebraic Roots. Most of us were raised in an evangelical Protestant denomination, where we were *rightly* taught that Jesus Christ is the Savior of humanity. We were *rightly* taught that we were to receive Him into our lives and accept His work on the cross to be forgiven of our sins. We were *rightly* taught that as born again Believers we are to follow Christ's Earthly example for living. But this is often an incomplete message.

Many of us were not taught that the original name of our Lord and Savior was Yeshua (ישוע), meaning "salvation." (I was from a young age, in fact, taught via Messianic Jewish teacher Zola Levitt that Jesus' original name was Yeshua.) Many of us were not taught the complete Biblical meaning of confession and repentance of our sin. And, we were likewise not taught that a *critical part* of following the Messiah's Earthly example for living was to follow the Torah or the Law of Moses. *Here is where the doubts can begin.* They are often then compounded by those in the Messianic community who try to judge others' salvation, who is and who is not "saved," and those who are unbalanced in regard to our Christian theological and spiritual heritage.

Let us state very clearly from this point that it is **not our job to determine who is and who is not "saved."** That is something that only God can do, as He is the only One who knows the true heart intent of any individual. Only God Himself gets to determine who enters into the Kingdom of God!

Consider the position of the person who is new to the Messianic movement and is now finding out that Jesus' original name was Yeshua and that He was a Torah obedient Jewish Rabbi. What happens when certain Messianics start telling this new person that he or she must stop going to Church where worship of the sun god takes place; that he must have a long beard and that she must have her head

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<sup>2</sup> Consult the author's article "Answering the 'Frequently Avoided Questions' About the Messiahship of Yeshua" for a defense of Yeshua's Messiahship (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

covered at all times; that regardless of whether or not he or she is a nice person that the spiritual experiences that he or she had in Church were utterly worthless; and that even though having asked Jesus to come into his or her heart, because the person did not use “Yeshua,” such a salvation experience was meaningless.<sup>3</sup>

This might be a somewhat extreme or exaggerated example, **but it can and does happen.** (And some Messianic leaders, who know that these attitudes are wrong, unfortunately lack the courage to speak out against them.) These sorts of unfair and grossly inaccurate accusations can lead to someone questioning his or her salvation, and lead to a very unstable Messianic faith. Those of us who have been in the Messianic movement, and have weathered the storm of the extremists, must help the new people to grow constructively in their faith, and also be accountable to one another.

The tactic of the Adversary is to take as many with him to the Lake of Fire as possible. He can use someone thinking that he or she was not a true Believer while attending church to persuade the person to deny his or her faith.

Our job must be to know that we *truly know* Yeshua the Messiah as Savior, are forgiven of our sins and have been spiritually regenerated, and have the assurance that—**no matter what**—we hold onto salvation while we grow and mature in our faith.

### What is missing from the modern gospel?

The gospel message, as most will present it, is the very simple understanding that all human beings are sinners, that people need forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation with God, that forgiveness is available through the atoning work of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), and that by acknowledging Yeshua as your personal Lord and Savior and receiving Him into your life you will spend eternity with Him. **I certainly agree with this message,** *but* I also find that it is often incomplete. Consider, for example, what happens with many people who pray the so-called “Sinner’s Prayer,” then believe that they have been spiritually regenerated, and whose lifestyles do not reflect those who are supposed to be children of the Most High. While the gospel should be simple to understand, reception of the good news does require action on the part of the recipient.

Romans 10:9-10 tells us, “if you confess with your mouth Yeshua *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” In order to come to faith, you must acknowledge Yeshua the Messiah as LORD,<sup>4</sup> His atoning work, and you must confess. Specifically, we are required to confess our sins: “If we confess our sins, He is

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<sup>3</sup> For a further discussion, consult the author’s exegetical paper on Ephesians 4:29, “How Are Messianics to Properly Communicate?”

<sup>4</sup> This is **not** just a recognition of Yeshua as “Master.” As C.E.B. Cranfield validly notes, “The usage of κύριος [Kurios] more than six thousand times in the LXX to represent the Tetragrammaton [YHWH] must surely be regarded of decisive importance here” (*Romans 9-16*, 529), indeed indicating that acknowledging Yeshua the Messiah as God Incarnate is required for salvation.

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faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Even more specifically, we are required to confess our violation of God’s Torah, as sin is lawlessness: “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).

Now we can begin to see some divergences with the modern, popular gospel message, which is commonly taught in both Christian *and* Messianic settings today. It is not enough to just acknowledge oneself as being a sinner, and the need to be forgiven. In order to properly come to faith, confession of one’s sins is required. For some, this may seem rather mundane, but does the following statement truly qualify as being a “confession” of one’s sins?

*“Lord, please forgive me of my sins.”*

Certainly, it is not our place to judge those who have said this, or something similar, whose heart was truly repentant and whose life has indeed been changed by God. But, considering the fact that many people are unsure of their salvation, or have lives that do not reflect a true spiritual change, it is justified to question whether or not this type of confession fits the bill of what God requires.<sup>5</sup>

The critical element in the salvation process that is too frequently missing from the modern gospel **is the requirement for individuals to confess their sins**. By verbally confessing sins, a person is forced to recall the things that separate us as human beings from God. We are forced to feel remorse and shame, and the fact that we are fallen creatures in sight of Him. We are forced to realize that only God Himself can save us and cry out for mercy. As the sinner should say, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).

## The Torah Reveals our Need for Salvation

By violating the commandments of God’s Torah, those who refuse to receive Yeshua’s atoning work have guaranteed themselves eternal punishment, unless they turn in repentance and receive Him into their lives. The Torah is the high and holy standard that the Lord will judge us by (Romans 3:20b). Because we are fallen human beings, we all fall short of God’s standard, whether knowingly or unknowingly. As disobedience to the Torah is sin, lawlessness, it is our disobedience that condemns us.

The Apostle Paul writes of a person who says,<sup>6</sup> “I would not have been conscious of what greed is if the *Torah* had not said, **‘Thou shalt not covet.’** But sin,

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<sup>5</sup> I could mention many examples that my sister Jane witnessed, while she was a student president of Campus Crusade for Christ at Vanderbilt University as an undergraduate. Campus Crusade had a very strict accountability for its members, because proper sexual morals were not often taught in many of the other campus-based ministries. It was either assumed, improperly, that Christian students were familiar with the Bible’s teachings on sexuality. Or worse yet, that a few inter-personal sexual experiences would not greatly affect the spirituality of a college student.

The root of much of the apathy toward sexual ethics was that as young adolescents, Christian college students “prayed the Sinner’s Prayer.” (Only to be further compounded by a popular form of Calvinism where salvation is believed to be something that can *never* be lost [against: Hebrews 6:4-6]).

<sup>6</sup> Be aware of how many Romans interpreters today are agreed that the “I” of Romans 7 is a hypothetical sinner, and not necessarily the Apostle Paul giving us autobiographical information. For a

seizing opportunity afforded by the commandment, worked in me all kinds of evil desires....For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me; and through the commandment, sin killed me" (Romans 7:7-8, 11, CJB).

From this testimony, the Tenth Commandment is a significant ordinance (among other commandments) that can cause one to sin. Exodus 20:17 states, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." It is not the holy commandment of God that causes the sin, but sin taking opportunity through one knowing about it.

What happens to those who sin? Paul tells us, "For what one earns from sin," meaning violation of the Torah, "is death; but eternal life is what one receives as a free gift from God, in union with the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord" (Romans 3:23, CJB).

Biblically, by sinning, or by transgressing God's commandments, we are worthy of death—eternal separation from Him in the Lake of Fire. This is no different than how Adam and Eve were *ejected* from the God's presence in the Garden of Eden after eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:23). But if we receive Messiah Yeshua into our lives, such a penalty is taken away and we can have eternal life—eternal communion with Him.

The Torah of Moses shows us that we need a Redeemer. Because as human beings we cannot possibly hope to keep God's commandments perfectly, and we will fall, they reveal our common need for salvation. This is why Paul writes in Romans 10:4 that "the goal at which the *Torah* aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts" (CJB). Yeshua is the focus of the Torah, "the culmination of the law" (TNIV), because everything in the Word points to Him and is to reveal Him.

### The Torah and Its Ordinances Point to Yeshua

Problems have ensued among many new Messianics when they begin to engage in Torah study for the first time. While they read important ordinances that relate to morality and human conduct, they also read commandments related to animal sacrifice and the atonement of sin, which they often find confusing. We have all been taught, and rightfully so, that Yeshua's crucifixion at Golgotha (Calvary) was the final sacrifice to cover for all sin: past, present, and future.

But even though true, many do not understand the fullness of the Messiah's sacrifice, because they do not learn what the Torah tells us about sin and how it is to be covered. Many people miss out on what it took prior to the cross to have sin covered. The Lord tells us in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." This is resonated in

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summary of this, consult J.M. Everts, "Conversion and Call of Paul," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 158; and the author's commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

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Hebrews 9:22: “And according to the Law, *one may almost say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” An animal had to be sacrificed in order to *temporarily* cover human sin, but it could not provide permanent atonement.

It is important for us to grasp these concepts. Without the shedding of blood, no “atonement” (Heb. *kippur*, כִּפּוּר) can be made. The person who would offer up an unblemished animal for sacrifice had to confess his sin, and in so doing the sin was transferred upon it:

“So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned. He shall also bring his guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin” (Leviticus 5:5-6).

After confessing his sin, the person’s offering would then be burnt, and the “sin” represented by the animal would be fully consumed. The sinner would be pardoned by God’s mercy and rededicated to His service. Reconciliation with God would be accomplished (at least until another offense was committed).

This is, of course, a very brief overlay of how sin-offerings were to be conducted in the Tabernacle and Temple. These ordinances were to point to the final atonement that we now have in Messiah Yeshua. Hebrews 10:4 astutely states, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The best that the animal sacrifices of the Torah could provide were a temporary covering for one’s sin. But fallen human nature will eventually cause a person to sin again. That is why Messiah Yeshua has come and has been sacrificed for all our sins. His sinless blood now covers us:

“Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:11-14; cf. Psalm 110:1).

Hebrews 10:14 specifically tells us “by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (NIV). If we are in the Messiah, we are indeed made perfect by our spiritual regeneration and brought to the intended goal,<sup>7</sup> which is salvation in Him and reconciliation with God the Father. This is what the animal sacrifices in the Torah foreshadowed and pointed to.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Grk. *teleiōken* (τετελείωκεν); rendered in CJB as “he has brought to the goal.”

The verb *teleiōō* (τελειόω) specifically means, “to make perfect, complete” (LS, 797).

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed examination, consult the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

## Confessing Your Sin Before God

While it is no longer necessary for us to sacrifice animals for the atonement of human sins—as Messiah Yeshua’s blood covers the sin of all times—there is still one important Torah principal that remains: **confession of sin**. But what does it mean to “confess our sins,” exactly?

Numbers 5:6-7 tells us, “When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged.”

In the context of this Torah passage, in order for restitution to be made, a *verbal confession* of the sin that had been committed was necessary. We need to take significant notice of this. Although we do not have to sacrifice an animal for the restitution of our sin today, as now we can claim the blood atonement of Messiah Yeshua, the premise of *confession of sin* for forgiveness most definitely remains. It is a beneficial exercise that forces one to acknowledge guilt.

The *ArtScroll Chumash* commentary on Numbers 5:7 states that “the thrust of this verse is that to gain atonement, one must repent, and this repentance is expressed by confession, for one can only repent if he recognizes and regrets his sin...[The] obligation is stated here to teach that even where the Torah mandates a specific offering, as in this case, there cannot be atonement without an oral confession.”<sup>9</sup>

How many of us were ever told or taught something like this? Or, how many of us were told that it is **at least recommended** to recall sins committed in prayers, so as to truly feel repentant before God?

In many religious settings today, the gospel message of Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus) is not taught from the Torah. Many ministers do not preach that sin is violation of God’s Law, and that in order to be forgiven we all must confess our sins—in the sense of something greater than “Lord, I confess my sins to you.”

Again, it is not our place to judge the heart intent of many people who have prayed the simplistic statement “Lord, I confess my sins to you.” Many who have prayed this have sincerely meant it and are born again Believers. But, what about the person who is uncertain of his or her salvation? What about the person who does not have the assurance that he or she truly had that “encounter” with God? What course of action does that person need to take?

Sadly, based on the fruits of many who have prayed the “Sinner’s Prayer,” many such people are either very spiritually immature, because they do not live a lifestyle consistent with Scripture, or perhaps they were not sincere about their “confession of sin.” Many such individuals are not truly born again and do not truly know the Lord. This is because they have never dealt with their sin *and* have understood that they are guilty in the sight of a holy and righteous God.

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<sup>9</sup> Scherman, *Chumash*, 753.

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Specific recollection and confession of sin will cause a person to be humbled and ashamed and broken before a holy and righteous Creator. **Specific confession of sin was required in the Torah for atonement of sin—and if we want the most of our salvation experience, we must endeavor to do the same.** “For the sorrow that is according to *the will of God* produces a repentance without regret, *leading to salvation*, but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). I believe much damage has been caused among contemporary people of faith, because we are not commonly taught to confess our specific sins, to the best of our knowledge, in seeking redemption.

Those of us who are Messianic Believers and who follow the Torah are going to be held to an extremely high standard. Paul writes in Romans 2:12, “All who have sinned outside the framework of *Torah*<sup>10</sup> will die outside the framework of *Torah*; and all who have sinned within the framework of *Torah*<sup>11</sup> will be judged by *Torah*” (CJB). When we have full knowledge of God’s Torah, then we will be held accountable to a very high mark. All conservative evangelical Christians who read their Bibles and know the difference between right and wrong, and know what the Law says, will likewise be held accountable. Our responsibility as Believers is to make sure that we have properly confessed of our sin so that we may be forgiven of our sin, and that we are continuing to grow in our spiritual lives so that we might have a right and vibrant relationship with our Heavenly Father.

## Some of My Story

If it is Biblically required to confess one’s sin in order to receive forgiveness, then how should a person go about doing this? For that same matter, should a person who has already acknowledged Yeshua as his or her Lord and Savior go through the process *once again* of “getting right” with God?

I was not truly born again until I was fourteen in 1995. I had been raised in a Christian household, that was nominally pursuing some Messianic things, my parents had been lay leaders in the United Methodist Church, I attended a Baptist elementary school, and I was well versed in my Bible. At the age of five, I had prayed the Sinner’s Prayer and asked Jesus into my heart. But as I got older and I reached puberty, I had less and less of a desire to pursue God. This was compounded by my father’s death from cancer in 1992, and me moving from my only home in Northern Kentucky to Dallas, Texas in 1994. I had become a rebellious child and had great disrespect for my parents, notably my new stepfather.

It was not until the Summer of 1995 that my mother finally sat me down and told me that I had some things I needed to get straight with the Lord. She told me that I had been raised better, and that I was not pursuing God, reading my Bible, or that I really cared about my faith. *She was right*. In the course of our conversation, she told me that when I was a young child I was covered by grace, and it was not

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<sup>10</sup> Grk. *anómōs* (ἀνόμως); “without law” (YLT).

<sup>11</sup> Grk. *en nomō* (ἐν νόμῳ); “in law” (YLT).

until I reached an age of accountability when I could understand my sin nature that I could truly understand why I needed a Savior. She then told me, flat out, that **“John, you’re not saved.”**

Providentially, the previous week my stepfather and I attended a father-son week long retreat in Northern California, where there was a strong focus on the Ten Commandments. The Lord had been preparing my heart that week to convict me that I needed to get serious about my faith. Looking back on it now with what I know, I was being convicted from God’s Torah that I was a sinner who was deserving of eternal punishment.

After our little mother-son “talk,” I knew that I had to get myself right with God, and that my mother telling me that I was not saved was absolutely true. I knew that truly confessing and repenting of my sin via the “Sinner’s Prayer” route would not be sufficient if I wanted answers for my pleas. I knew that I was Biblically required to do more, and I was strongly convicted that I should not hide anything from God. I knew that I had to talk to God and *just tell Him* what I had done wrong in my life, recall the types of sins that I had committed, and truly ask Him to give me a new heart so that I might change and turn to a life of holiness.

What I proceeded to do was follow the list of the Ten Commandments and verbally confess of sins that I had committed. I had made myself first in my life, and had forgotten God. I had used the terms God and Lord as curse words. I had coveted, I had lusted, I had lied, stolen, and cheated. I even had hatred in my heart for my parents. I confessed sins for hours. What I did was much, much more than just “Lord, forgive me of my sins.” It was, “Lord, please forgive me of Sins A, B, C...X, Y, Z...AA, BB, CC...” In recalling these sins, I felt deep regret, sorrow, and I even cried. When this was all over, I felt a physical lifting of my heart, and I truly felt different. I had a spiritual peace and a desire to pray and study my Bible more. *I knew I had been saved. I knew I had assurance of that salvation!* Since 1995, I look back on all the things the Lord has had me do and I am amazed.

**Our personal testimonies of coming to faith are supposed to be weapons that we can use against the attacks of the enemy.** I offer this brief summary to help you in your walk of faith, so that you might be strengthened and hopefully gain something from it, or perhaps realize that you too have *some business* you need to take care of with the Lord. It was not by coincidence that shortly after being born again that my family entered into the Messianic movement. Since that time in 1995, my life has not been the same!

### Confessing Your Sin

If you have never truly confessed your sins before God, then it is time for you to do so! Remember that specific confession of sin was required for a burnt-offering to be accepted by the Lord, and for the sinner to be forgiven. The same precedent is true for us today who believe that Yeshua is the Messiah. Please understand that ultimately it is God’s job to determine who is saved and unsaved, so do not all of a sudden think that I think that you, the reader, are not truly saved. But, it is likely that there are some things that you can do to have peace and assurance that you

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truly know Him. It is always a good exercise to reevaluate where we stand before the Almighty.

We now provide a listing of each of the Ten Commandments, the basis of the rest of God's Torah, and offer some advice that will help you confess your sins before Him if you truly feel as if you need to get right with the Lord. (This may also be something that you can follow on *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement, where we are called to reflect inwardly and confess sin.)

**1. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3).**

We are to remember that the Lord has brought us out of slavery to sin to freedom in Him through His Son, Yeshua the Messiah, who was crucified for us. Those who acknowledge Yeshua as their personal Lord and Savior can have true freedom from sin. But, in doing so we cannot have any gods other than the Holy One of Israel in our life. Anything or anyone that we place above the Lord causes us to violate this commandment. We have to place God as first in our lives. This is the prime focus of the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 where we proclaim "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"<sup>12</sup> The Lord asks us to make Him first, and to make all things secondary in light of Him.

**2. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:4).**

We are prohibited from making any images as objects of worship. In ancient times, this would have largely constituted worshipping graven images. Today, however (with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church), evangelical Protestant Christianity does not use images of God or statues in worship. Messianics do not either. But, as we have all placed ourselves above the Lord, and have perhaps concentrated on how we look, dress, or conduct ourselves, we have made ourselves into an idol that we have worshipped.

This is an important sin to confess, because it results in God visiting a curse upon the third and fourth generations of those who practice in idolatry. How many of us may unknowingly have such a curse upon us, because a past ancestor participated in an idolatrous practice and the consequences of that sin continues to be passed down?

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<sup>12</sup> Or, "the LORD alone" (NRSV/NJPS).

**3. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).**

The primary emphasis of the Third Commandment is that we are not to take the usage of the name of God lightly. This has many connotations such as using the terms Lord and God as curse words. It also includes claiming to speak in the name of God, or represent Him, and using such a representation falsely. It comes down to us misrepresenting the character of the Holy One in our speech, and whether or not we have brought glory or disrepute to Him.

**4. “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11).**

The Fourth Commandment is one that many of us who have entered into the Messianic community have broken. We have failed to recognize that the seventh-day is the true Sabbath, or *Shabbat*, and have replaced it with Sunday Church. While many of us went to Church on Sunday, believing we were keeping the Sabbath—and while God certainly did honor us for what we did in ignorance—we nevertheless all need to confess of what we did, and recognize that we were not honoring the actual Sabbath. We need to most especially confess things that we did on the Sabbath that were wrong, such as laborious work and buying and selling. We need to ask the Lord to give us a heart so that we might consecrate *Shabbat* entirely unto Him and to our pursuit of Him. We need to learn how to enter into the rest provided to us on *Shabbat*.

**5. “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).**

We all must confess that we have dishonored our parents. We have all failed to give them the proper respect and we have all cursed them and treated them with contempt. We must remember that a rebellious child who failed to honor his or her parents was subject to being stoned in Ancient Israel. If we intend to live long and prosperous lives, we owe it to ourselves to confess of things that we have done to our parents, and how we have refused to obey them, especially if we are sons and daughters of God. We also need to confess any disrespect of grandparents or forbearers who had to live in order for us to be here today.

**6. “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13).**

It is doubtful that any one of us has actually murdered another person, ending his or her life (although some women may have had abortions). But, we have no doubt each had thoughts about murdering a person, or people, and this does constitute breaking the commandment. We have to confess thoughts of malice,

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hatred, and bitterness we have had toward other people, or even ourselves—and recognize that we have all committed murder in our hearts. We must ask God to give us a burden for people who do wrong to us, so that we might pray for them—rather than serve as their judge, jury, and executioner.

### 7. **“You shall not commit adultery”** (Exodus 20:14).

The Seventh Commandment pertains to all kinds of sexual immorality, and Satan has certainly done his best in perverting something that God originally intended to be between a husband and wife, in the context of marriage. Today, the Biblical ordinance of marriage has lost the sanctity that it once had, as many husbands and wives have extra-marital affairs. This is complicated even more so by the practice of pre-marital sex and homosexuality. And, even if we have been untouched by these things, we are still bombarded by sexual images and thoughts on a continual basis.

Yeshua makes it clear that if we have lust over a person that we have committed adultery in our hearts (Matthew 5:28). This is a sin that we all must confess of and we must ask God to give us a heart for serving our husband or wife, or in the case of the unmarried, our future husband or wife. We must all strive to have sexual purity and keep our thoughts focused on the Lord.

### 8. **“You shall not steal”** (Exodus 20:15).

All of us, in some form or another, have stolen, even if we did not participate in armed robbery. It may have been as simple as taking more than one of the “free samples” at the grocery store, or cheating on a test. We have also certainly stolen things in our hearts, by wanting things from other people. The quest for money, power, or sex often involves stealing.

### 9. **“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”** (Exodus 20:16).

All of us have lied to cover ourselves. We have all lied to other people, to God, and even to ourselves. We have exaggerated the truth, and we have failed to recognize the truth because we are fearful of its consequences. The foremost lie that we have accepted is that we can manage by ourselves without needing God or Yeshua in our lives. We have to be honest with ourselves and with God, confessing falsehoods that we have subjected ourselves to. We need to recognize anything false that we have done in our lives, and how we have misrepresented or exaggerated things for our own fleshly purposes.

### 10. **“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor”** (Exodus 20:16).

The sin of covetousness is sometimes described by the Rabbis of Judaism as the root of all other sins.<sup>13</sup> They say that in order to lie, you must first want

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<sup>13</sup> Scherman, *Chumash*, 413.

something. In order to adulterate, you must covet another person's husband or wife. In order to steal, you must covet someone's possessions. And the list goes on...

This point should be well received by those who truly want to be right with the Lord. We have all coveted things, and it has led us to commit other sins and walk down a path that God's people have no business walking. We have a responsibility to confess what we have done wrong so that we might have reconciliation with God and the best possible relationship we can have with Him.

### The Tutor That Leads us to the Messiah

One of the most confusing Scriptures in the Bible are Yeshua's words, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*" (Mark 10:15; cf. Matthew 19:14). Many people have concluded that what Yeshua is saying here is that the best time to come to faith in Him is when one is a small child. The problem with this is that a small child cannot understand his or her sin nature. A small child has a basic understanding of what is right and wrong, and a small child can comprehend the love of God, but a small child cannot comprehend his or her sin nature and the fact that all are sinners condemned and worthy of eternal punishment.

What Yeshua is actually telling us is that we are to be *as children* when we come to faith. We are not to be concerned with complex theologies or doctrines or in trying to figure out all the mysteries of God's universe—but we are to return to Him as a child coming home to his or her loving father. We are to return to our Heavenly Father humble and broken, and receive His mercy and His grace.

This is not to say that small children cannot truly come to faith, but it does not align with the Hebraic understanding of being accountable for oneself and knowing that one is a sinner, often by one's teens.<sup>14</sup> In Judaism, boys and girls today are taught the commandments of the Torah from their infancy. The commandments are rigorously instilled in them so that by the time they reach puberty the boy can go through his *bar mitzvah* (בַּר מִצְוָה) and be considered a man, and similarly the girl can go through her *bat mitzvah* (בַּת מִצְוָה). *Bar mitzvah* means a "son of the commandments." At the age of 12-13, one who goes through *bar/bat mitzvah* recognizes that he or she is accountable for knowing what the God of Israel considers sin and does not consider sin. The youth is fully accountable for adhering to the standard of God's commandments.

(Some Protestant denominations do a similar, but less rigorous practice, in confirming teenagers as members of the Church. Usually teens will go through a class that talks about Church history and one's responsibilities as a member of the faith community. I went through this procedure in 1993.)

The practice of preparing a youth for *bar/bat mitzvah* is to instill in the boy or girl the understanding that he or she is accountable for living up to the Torah's

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<sup>14</sup> As would be witnessed by Josephus *Life* 1.9.

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standards. The Torah up to this point largely serves as the person's tutor or schoolmaster—perhaps strictly—and hopefully when the youth gets up to bema to read from the Torah scroll and be *bar/bat mitzvah*, the person has an understanding that what he or she is doing is very serious in the eyes of the God of Israel. This is some of what I believe the Apostle Paul was alluding to in Galatians 3:24-25:

“Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

A tutor or pedagogue (Grk. *paidagōgos*, παιδαγωγός) in Ancient Greece was a household servant who would guard young boys on their travels to and from school. He would also rear the boys in learning and instill into them what was acceptable and not acceptable for proper citizens. When the boys grew of age so that they could protect themselves, the pedagogue no longer would guard them in their travels. The foundational life principles that the pedagogue would teach the young boys would now be instilled into their psyche.<sup>15</sup>

How many of us were trained in the truths of God's Torah, even if they were just the Ten Commandments from a (limited) Christian understanding, that we were sinners in the eyes of God and we needed salvation in the Messiah? How many of us had the Torah guarding us while we were young, so that in the future when we reached a point of maturity we no longer had to be reminded of basic truths of what was sin and not sin? Neither the Jewish *bar/bat mitzvah* nor the Protestant practice of confirmation will result in a young person becoming born again—but they can be very important in the salvation process as a young person is made aware of his or her sin nature.

My personal testimony is that I was revealed the sin in my life through the Ten Commandments. I had to come to faith as a child who could not fully understand everything. When I was finally born again, I truly had the spiritual desire to read my Bible and seek the things of the Lord. As I contemplated His Word I found additional things that I needed to confess and change in my life. I was not raised in the Torah as a Jewish child would be, but I certainly had had a strong Biblical foundation instilled in me so that I knew enough regarding what was sin and not sin. When our family entered into the Messianic movement, we did have to change some things. We did not know that certain things we had done previously were sin, and we did them in ignorance. We confessed these things, and continue to ask the Lord where we need to change our lifestyles so that we may be conformed to the image of the Messiah (Romans 8:29).

## Staying the Course and Continuing in the Faith

Yeshua says that we are to come to faith as though we were a child. A child is not concerned with all of the miniscule details of theology and in “figuring things out.” But nowhere—once we come to faith—**are we called to remain as children.** We are to always be moving forward. The Messiah says, “If you abide in Me, and

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<sup>15</sup> For a further discussion, consult the FAQ, “Galatians 3:24, 25.”

My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). The Apostle John writes, “As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (1 John 2:27-28).

We are called as Believers to *abide in Him*. Another way we could say that we are to abide in the Lord is that we are to *continue in our faith*.<sup>16</sup> We are *always* to be in a state of growth. We are always to be seeking to know our Heavenly Father better, and to be knowing more about Him and His Word. One of the most serious problems that we have today in modern Christianity is people who are satisfied with having a stagnant faith. Many people, quite sadly, do not have a growing faith. They are not seeking the deeper truths of the Scriptures, and you may even be put down or criticized by such people for wanting to seek more of the Lord.

A person who has been spiritually regenerated and born again **should want to know God and have the best possible relationship with Him**. Those of us who are in the Messianic movement are here because we are earnestly seeking God and we want to know Him better. We are seeking for a Scripturally sound base for our faith, and are willing to admit that we have been wrong in the past regarding various things. We should be willing to confess our sins before God, receive forgiveness, and ask Him to give us the heart to turn toward doing the right things, being a good example to others.

Repentance of one’s sins means that we must turn toward doing the right things. It is not just enough to confess and receive forgiveness of one’s sins; we must be supernaturally empowered to “sin no more” (John 5:14). Knowing that we are truly right with the Lord is contingent upon whether or not He has given us the heart to obey and please Him. This obedience comes naturally and is evidence of a heart change, not because we are trying to “earn” our salvation. The keeping of the commandments of God’s Torah is to be a delight for those who have them written on the heart (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27), and not be a burden: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). Salvation comes by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), but He did create us for good works (Ephesians 2:10).

It is my sincere hope and prayer that *your* motivation for being in the Messianic movement is to grow and mature in your faith. You may have done things in the past in your Christian experience that need to be confessed of and rectified. You may have never seriously considered confessing your sin before God, which is required by the Torah. I believe that if you seriously reflect upon yourself

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<sup>16</sup> The Greek verb *menō* (μένω), rendered as “abide” in John 15:7 and 1 John 2:27-28, fully means “remain, stay, abide; live, dwell; last, endure, continue” (CGEDNT, 113). Obviously, while this provides the Biblical reader with a range of meanings to consider in a particular text, its meaning of “continue” should be of notable interest for one who is to *abide in the Lord*—an impetus to move forward and mature in such a relationship.

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that this will be very freeing for you and will help you in your relationship with the Holy One of Israel. We also need to be accountable to one another, and to help one another when the enemy tries to attack us and get us to doubt that we truly know Him. We need to continually *be experiencing* the salvation and goodness of God in our lives.

We have to all recognize that as human beings we are works in progress—and none of us has “arrived.” But, are we in a state of continual growth? Are we seeking more of Him? I believe this is the key to knowing whether or not one is truly “saved,” or if one is just going through the motions. I also believe it can be an excellent test to determine whether we really do have honorable intentions in being “Messianic.”