

OUR MESSIANIC FUTURE

by Mark Huey

As many of you are already aware, I have spent the past few months attending to a personal family health crisis. This gave me—during the thirty days of Elul, the Ten Days of Awe and *Yom Kippur*, and the Feast of Tabernacles—a considerable amount of time to ponder not only eternal issues associated with the life and possible death of a loved one, but also on personal spiritual decisions I have made over the past thirty years. Certainly, numerous conversations with searching family members, coupled with multiple exchanges with concerned brothers and sisters in the Messiah, challenged me. I had to more carefully consider the circumstances in which I found myself, but I also had to think about the past—and how choices I have made have brought our family to where we are today serving the Messianic community. It just so happens that this month is the seventh anniversary of the birth of Outreach Israel Ministries. A confluence of various memories has prompted in me a desire to contemplate not only where we presently are as a ministry, but more strategically, where our ministry efforts are headed, with the second decade of the Twenty-First Century less than two months away.

A Personal Historical Perspective

Before we consider some of the things on our future horizon, I think our personal historical perspective needs a little reviewing. It was over fifteen years ago (June 1994) when the Lord allowed Margaret and me to marry, after the end of two marriages—one by the premature death of Margaret's first husband, and my unwarranted and unwanted divorce—that we started this journey. Needless to say, when we were brought together, after a twenty-one year hiatus since our only date in 1972, we were convinced that the Lord was giving us a chance to be useful in His Kingdom's work. Within a few weeks of our marriage, the strong impression that our life together was going to revolve around Isaiah 43, was received separately by us both. At the time, with our limited spiritual understanding, we could not comprehend just what the Holy Spirit was communicating when we read and reread passages like this:

"But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place. Since you are precious in My sight, *since* you are honored and I love you, I will give *other* men in your place and *other* peoples in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, "Give *them* up!" And to the south, "Do not hold *them* back." Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and

whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made." (Isaiah 43:1-7).

When we first had to consider this passage in the Fall of 1994—we heard that the Lord was pouring out His Spirit on the Earth, and so many were flocking to see (purported) outpourings in Toronto. *But, we were prompted instead to go to Jerusalem.* In December 1994, Margaret and I joined a tour to Israel led by Zola Levitt Ministries. We did not fully understand what the Lord was revealing to us on the tour, but while we were at Masada, we vocally responded by loudly declaring the entire text of Ezekiel 37 to the valley to the north.

Returning to the U.S., the two of us knew by supernatural revelation that the Lord wanted us to pursue the Hebraic Roots of our faith, and in particular, celebrate the Biblical feasts. Within a number of months of our tour to the Holy Land, we were led to a Messianic Jewish Congregation, Baruch HaShem, in Dallas. After several weeks, we realized that this was where we were being fed spiritually. By the Fall of 1995, we were learning Hebrew and were enrolled in a new member's class, marveling at His obvious hand upon our walk.

We were extremely excited about learning about the Jewish Roots of our faith, as we readily embraced honoring *Shabbat*, celebrating the feasts, and adopting a kosher diet. Naturally, we believed that any true seeker of God would get *just as excited* about these concealed truths, and return to the ancient paths (Jeremiah 6:16) just as we had. Within several years of these changes, the prophecies of Isaiah 43 and Ezekiel 37 began to take on more of a focus, and made considerably more sense. The restoration of all Israel—from our new perspective—appeared to be on the near horizon. However in retrospect, it is not until we look back upon this revelatory time that we realize that God moves at *His pace* and not ours! **Change nor the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy happen overnight.**

For the balance of the 1990s and until 2002—what we might consider to be the first seven year cycle of our Messianic walk (1995-2002)—the Lord allowed Margaret and me to work in a consulting capacity with a number of Messianic ministries. It was during this time that we got to interact with many of the teachers who were not only a part of Messianic Judaism, but also many who were involved with the growing branch of independent Messianics. We thought that the uncompleted work of the Reformation was in the process of being completed, and that the prophesied "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:19-21) was moving along at an extremely accelerated pace. It was quite unique to witness thousands of Jewish people come to faith in Messiah Yeshua, but also many non-Jewish Believers beginning to study and embrace the relevance of God's Torah for their spiritual instruction. For the first time since the First Century, it appeared that a group of people were coalescing who shared the two common denominators of what might be described as end-time saints: those who believed in Yeshua and who consciously kept God's commandments (Revelation 12:17; 14:12). Since the early Believers in the Messiah held these two characteristics and radically changed the Mediterranean world, would today's Messianic movement be able to do the same?

An Observant Adversary

As many people have been forced to witness, the Adversary was definitely watching what was transpiring as the Messianic community began to rapidly multiply in the late 1990s. With the great potential to once again be a strong spiritual force of redeemed people—led by the Holy Spirit and emphasizing our faith's forgotten foundations in the Torah—the fledgling Messianic movement became a ripe target for the schemes of the Devil. Not enough people made the effort to truly consider how we are involved in a supernatural fight against forces of darkness. In fact, some people were even led to believe that the “armor of God” listed by Paul in Ephesians, was not even to be like the weapons of a soldier, but just the garments of a priest, and that they had been deceived by Christianity to think otherwise. Sadly, many of the “Hebrew Roots” teachers out there cannot easily discern when quotations from the Tanach are used by the Apostles to make an important point, such as when Paul appropriates themes from Isaiah, where the Lord is described as a warrior dressed for battle:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:10-17; cf. Isaiah 11:1-5; 59:14-18; and Wisdom 5:17-20).

Lamentably, the full armor of God that is to enable His people to fight properly, was under utilized, opening the way for some deviant teaching to take root. Consequently, for much of the past decade (1999-2009), the Messianic movement has been beleaguered by strife, controversies, conflict, and utter foolishness. Have you ever heard the disparaging term Messy-antics be used? Probably. The enemy of our souls, coupled with the immaturity of unqualified individuals who have positioned themselves as “teachers” and “leaders,” have used a variety of subjects to get people diverted from the goals and mission that we believe the Lord has sovereignly gifted the Messianic community.

In many regards, a number of modern-day Messianic Believers are repeating some of the same errors that plagued those in the First Century. Of course, due to an unbalanced over-emphasis upon “Torah” that we see in many quarters, why would we even know about these things, when we often do not really read the Apostolic Scriptures in any detail? Consider the various admonitions the Apostle Paul gave his students **that are quite applicable for Messianics living today**. When it comes to so-called “Israelite identity,” take this rebuke to heart, as Paul instructs Titus on Crete:

“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about

the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless" (Titus 3:9).

How many tertiary or quaternary issues were there on Crete, related to genealogies and the Torah, that would get the Believers Titus was responsible for off course? Our primary identity as Believers is to be focused around who Yeshua is for us and how He has saved us from sin.

On the other hand, when some leaders attempt to misconstrue and hijack the Torah, in order to make it a means to control their followers—or introduce strange mystical doctrines—listen to how Paul warned his student Timothy:

"As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made [laid down, RSV] for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted" (1 Timothy 1:3-11).

Here, Paul affirms how the Torah can be used properly, as its principal purpose is to identify and condemn sin, being the high standard of holiness God has given to His people. Yet in much of the "Torah movement," as it calls itself, the Torah's function in condemning sin—and in showing why we need a Redeemer (Galatians 3:24)—is not as emphasized as much as it should be. In fact, love for the Lawgiver is too frequently overtaken by love for the Law.

Of course, one of the most insidious attempts is seen when Jewish anti-missionaries—Jewish groups that oppose Yeshua and the gospel—are invited into the Messianic camp. Too frequently, these Orthodox and ultra Orthodox Jewish sects have more influence on Messianic Believers, than Messianic Believers have on them. I would think that Paul's further instruction to Timothy should be embraced by all of us without reservation:

"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain" (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

The fact that false teachers will come into the midst of the faithful is to be expected, so we should not be too surprised. Both Yeshua and Peter describe how the multiplication of false prophets is a sign that humanity is nearing the End of the Age:

“Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come...Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There *He is*,’ do not believe *him*. For false Messiahs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance” (Matthew 24:11-14, 23-25).

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Based on these, and many other warnings, it is not surprising that something as potentially transformational as the Messianic movement could be hijacked by those influenced by the Adversary: those with a strong carnal inclination, those who seek financial gain, those who desire to influence others by their strong personalities, or those who desire to control others with a firm fist of presumed authority.

What are we to do about all this? Is there any hope?

Present Messianic Challenges

Some of the controversial issues that have caused much division and strife over the past decade, which are quite *and* currently debilitating the Messianic movement, include, but are not limited to, the following things. I have placed them in the order that has disturbed me the most:

1. End of the Age paranoia and constant fear of the start of the Great Tribulation
2. The Sacred Name Only agenda which derides using terms like God, Lord, and Jesus as being “pagan,” and then invents its own forms of the Hebrew names of the Father and Son
3. Those who claim that it is illegitimate to use the traditional Jewish calendar, often altering dates of the appointed times in order to predict the end-times, infuriating both Jews and mainline Messianic Jews
4. Pseudo-histories associated with so-called Israelite identity, taking our attention away from the Biblical promises of Israel's restoration
5. Ear-tickling mystical teachings derived from Kaballah or Medieval Jewish mystery texts, from a millennia or more after the time of the Apostles
6. A Messianic movement that deliberately excludes non-Jewish Believers, and claims that the Torah is to only be followed by Jews, perhaps relegating non-Jewish Believers to the status of some kind

- of associate “God-fearers”
7. Deviant teachings about sexuality and gender roles, deliberately designed to denigrate females
 8. A general hatred toward anything Jewish or Christian as just being vain “traditions of men,” without any careful consideration for history or reasonable dialogue

These are just some of the more controversial topics, used to divide and create strife among Messianics—or at least create a great deal of confusion—seen in the past decade. Sadly, any new person investigating Messianic things could take just one of these negative issues, and use it not only as a legitimate reason to leave the Messianic movement, **but also attack us as being a deceptive move of the Adversary**, even though they are not by any means shared by all people. The issue of equality for all of God’s people alone (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11) is something that we know for sure has to change in the near future!

We have the capacity to be a faith community that can make a significant difference in the world in which we live, by returning people to a firm rooting in all of the Scriptures, and setting others on a life of steady holiness. But how can we do this when we ourselves do not have such a firm rooting? How can we be all of the things we are called to be, if we are constantly stymied by false teaching and a general lack of discernment?

As we prepare to enter the second decade of the Twenty-First Century, the ability to admit our inadequacies and address our mistakes, **can possibly make the coming ten years far more productive in terms of representing the Messiah Yeshua to this wicked and perverse generation.**

Our Messianic Future

When turning to consider our Messianic future, I am quite humbled by the realization that I am speaking about just a relative minute microcosm of what the Father is doing with His people. It is critical for all of us to acknowledge that the Holy One is ultimately in charge of the restoration of all things, *He is much bigger than we are*, and as I have witnessed, **He is going to accomplish His will according to His timetable and certainly not ours.** If things were according to our timing, some of us might be well on the way to living in Israel and participating in the feasts in Jerusalem three times a year. At the same time, we might be on the verge of denying faith in Messiah Yeshua in order to fit in with the Jewish population—or alternatively, given the difficulties of living in Israel, we might be shortly entering into bankruptcy. When humans take total control of things, they have a strong tendency to completely ruin what the Father has decreed from eternity past.

While I might have some personal experiences and opinions about the Messianic community of faith, where we have been planted for the past fifteen years, it is unwise for me to venture beyond what the Father has given our family ministry to do. For me to conjecture just where God is going with His “restoration project,” would be nothing more than a guess derived from some experiential knowledge, combined with a sense of historical patterns. I would probably also

be leaving many things out of the picture, considering the complexities of people. I do not at all consider myself to be a “prophet,” but I would like to recollect some of the things that the Lord has called Outreach Israel Ministries to do, especially as we prepare to enter into a new decade and a new season of ministry.

As affirmed in our mission statement: **OIM has been commissioned to reach, teach, encourage, and disciple the Israel of God to return wholly to Him in spirit, soul, and body in order to better serve in the work of His Kingdom.** In order to accomplish this, we have disciplined ourselves to produce written and recorded teachings that are balanced, loving, scholarly—but also quite relevant to our emerging Messianic movement. Since we *freely* send out our various teachings—articles, newsletters, blogs, and Bible studies—we find that many around the world are being positively influenced by our unique approach. Yet, to be perfectly honest, this walk of faith requiring us to freely give what we have received (Matthew 8:10), has had its “moments.” Like all people who strive to serve the Lord, we have wondered if our hard work and dedication are really worth it at times, and if we really are making a difference.

If we have ever doubted, it has never been because of who Yeshua is in our lives, nor of our need to commit ourselves to a Biblical lifestyle. On the contrary, it is quite easy when you are doing the right thing to be frustrated with all of the superfluous and sub-standard teaching floating around the Messianic world, which is counterproductive to advancing God’s Kingdom. Too much of our attention is spent addressing things that we have no particular desire to address, but if we do not, then who else will? At times, we have addressed much of the deviant teaching in various articles and FAQ entries. But at other times, poor teaching has prompted the need for the production of resources like the *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic* commentary, or the upcoming Acts 15 Bible Study. It has been our preferred ministry policy to address the teachings rather than the teachers, allowing us to maintain objectivity and deal with the subject matter which needs to be addressed. And, it is much better to let God in His infinite wisdom handle those who might recklessly abuse His people. The Lord can certainly deal with those who are mishandling the great responsibility to teach (James 3:1).

So our biggest question, considering some of the negative trends of the 2000s, is: **Will the 2010s be any better?** I believe they have to be, because our ministry affirms that the Messianic movement has been something predestined from eternity past by the Almighty Creator to perform some critical work in the end-times. We might have put a list or two together about bad and heretical teachings floating around our midst, but they should not drag us down and make us give up and quit. Rather, they present opportunities for us to learn, expand our reading of the Scriptures, and demonstrate that we have hearts and minds changed by the Lord as we fulfill His purposes! Every time there has been a “crisis,” our ministry strives to analyze what is occurring with the discernment He has given us, and how we can provide an answer for people not only in the short term, but also long after such a crisis has past. The Bible certainly has many areas of difficulty to navigate, and in embracing a long-term perspective, it has been our goal to provide teachings and materials that are not significantly marked with a “timestamp.”

Suffice it to say, the easy answer to much of what we have faced in the past, is probably the hardest answer: **always making sure that we are functioning in the power of God's love.** Paul states in Romans 13:10, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law." The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27, while surely involving obedience to God's Torah, is enacted by the power of the Holy Spirit—which is to cause His people to love. How many bad things have taken place in the Messianic world because congregational communities have not been places where people have felt welcome, saturated in an environment where love and respect for others is encouraged above all else? The local assembly is to be a *safe place* where people are disciplined and encouraged by the love of Yeshua, and where they can grow at a steady pace among mature Believers who will not beat them with a "mean stick" if they do not change to their viewpoint immediately. They are not to be places where people have to be constantly on guard, worried about the next wave of heresy or nonsense that might hit. Sadly, many Messianic congregations prefer beating others and being places of anger and harsh condemnation, as opposed to letting their good works and God's love in their hearts be a testament of why the Torah remains relevant instruction (Matthew 5:16ff).

Messianic congregations and fellowships need to be places where everyone has a place, and where the gifts and talents of God's people are honored and respected—and we also recognize that we have more in common with our evangelical Christian brothers and sisters than we might think (Ephesians 4:1-4). **Until this changes in significant numbers, we will stay behind the curve and neutered from being effectual.** When it does change, though, we will be well on the way to accomplishing our full potential! As we look toward the 2010s, we believe that our involvement in helping to formulate solutions, fixing some of the problems of the 2000s, will definitely be able to be integrated. We really do desire to make a difference in the lives of Jewish people who need Messiah Yeshua, and Christians who need to return to the high standard of God in the Torah. We desire more respectful and constructive spiritual methodologies to be employed by Messianic congregations, fellowships, and individuals.

We want to encourage you that every born again Believer is gifted for some kind of service to our King. If you happen to understand and embrace your walk with the Messiah from a Messianic perspective, then be a beacon of His light and love to all you encounter. Demonstrate your Messianic faith in ways that bring honor and glory to Him, as we all strive to lay the final stepping stones on the path to His restored Kingdom! I know that it has been a privilege to be called into Messianic ministry, serving God's people, and encouraging them to be all that He has called them to be. I know that great things are coming not just in the long term future, but even in the short term!

Until the restoration of all things...