

DISCERNING THE TIMES

by Mark Huey

The ability to discern what is happening in the here and now, in order to anticipate what is going to happen in the future, has been a challenge for humanity since the beginning of time. While scientific knowledge and understanding have increased exponentially over the millennia, to the point of allowing many in the scientific community to make relatively accurate predictions about astronomical and even some meteorological events—the Holy Scriptures indicate that much of this forecasting ability was available almost 2,000 years ago. Recall that Yeshua admonished some of Pharisees and Sadducees who tested Him, because while they could discern the physical signs regarding the weather, the same did *not* have the capacity to discern the spiritual signs leading to eternal life:

“The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Yeshua, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, ‘When it is evening, you say, “*It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.*” And in the morning, “*There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.*” Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot *discern* the signs of the times? **An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.**’ And He left them and went away” (Matthew 16:1-4).

With the Son of God speaking directly to them, these critics were spiritually blind and could not discern who He truly was as the Messiah and Savior. At the time, these Jewish religious leaders were considered to compose an evil and adulterous generation, seeking signs from Heaven that would in their minds verify that Yeshua was sent from God. They did not have the eyes to see or the ears to hear and understand that the Lamb of God was to be slain in order to shed His blood for the sin of humanity. Even after the Messiah was crucified, and resurrected after three days—the sign of Jonah—most of Yeshua’s detractors still would not believe that He was the Messiah of Israel.

Lamentably, the inability to discern “the signs of the times” still plagues many in the broad religious community who continue to follow the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the modern era. Of course, this certainly might be understandable with those who have not yet professed a full belief in the atoning work of Messiah Yeshua, or those who claim Him but have not really received a promised heart of flesh and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27), which come when one is born from above. Likewise, many people are still maturing in their faith, and have to learn the ins and outs of discernment. But, in seeing those who lack discernment, it especially hits home when we see it in a Messianic community of faith that claims Yeshua, is trying to understand Him in His First Century context, and is often sincerely trying to search out the Scriptures. **In general, our Messianic movement lacks discernment in determining our times.** *Why is this so?*

- Why do so many professed Believers fail to discern the times, yet falsely believe they are “very discerning”?
- Why do Believers often follow after various false prophets and

teachers, who generate followings by fear mongering?

- Why is discernment in the Messianic community so noticeably lacking?
- Why is the gift of discerning of spirits seemingly missing in action?
- Why do Believers often fail to test the spirits (1 John 4:1)?

These, and a multitude of other questions, surface when I think about the subject of discerning the times. In order to answer some of these conflicting questions, I would like to share a bit of personal testimony. Hopefully, our experiences will encourage others to learn how to discern the times and ask the Lord for some wisdom. After all, we all need to be able to Biblically discern what is legitimately of the Holy One, and is what is clearly not of Him.

Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in conjunction with studying the Holy Bible as a young Believer, a voracious appetite for sanctified enlightenment inspired me to read volume after volume on spiritual subjects pertaining to aspects of Biblical life. In time, I read a book written in 1956 about revival in Scripture and history, entitled *In the Day of Thy Power* by Arthur Wallis. While the author's treatise was extremely informative about the essence of revival in Christian history, there was an anonymous quote located between the forward and the introduction that impacted me much more than the contents of the book itself.

As a relatively young Believer in the business world attempting to balance my Christian walk with a determined pursuit of achievement in commerce, the following untitled quotation—which I appropriately entitled “Success”—was suitably framed on parchment and perched on a credenza at my office:

If you would make the greatest success of your life, try to discover what God is doing in your time, and fling yourself into the accomplishment of His purpose and will.

In order to achieve *spiritual success* as the underlying theme from this encouraging statement, the instigating action was to **first** discover what God was doing during a person's time on Earth. *This would clearly require one to **discern the times***. Then, the critical link to succeed in life requires Believers to correctly discern His purposes and will for them to accomplish

Understandably, this search for God's fingerprints in the affairs of people—“discerning the times”—mandates a vigilant pursuit of Him and His ways as seen in the Scriptures, **so that authentic moves of God can be verified**. Secondly, an ardent inspection of the enduring spiritual fruit will positively indicate that **what is happening is undeniably God's handiwork**. Without these *two timeless witnesses* to confirm a work or move of God, one could be misled, or even worse deceived—by either flesh-driven selfish ambition (James 3:14-16), or a counterfeit work or move of the Adversary (Ephesians 6:11).

Discerning the times **and** the origin of what we see happening are **both** absolutely critical for Believers who desire to properly advance the work of God's Kingdom. Is something that we witness truly evidencing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26), or manifesting itself as a fruit of the flesh or a scheme of the Devil? These determinations will avoid an inadvertent promotion of a flesh-

driven enterprise, or aid the Accuser of the brethren, whose methods are often cleverly disguised to rob, steal, and destroy as many as possible.

In 1994 after my marriage to Margaret, we concluded that on our mutual spiritual journey, the “success” quotation above was an appropriate guide for making significant spiritual choices about how we wanted to pursue the Almighty together. As a family, we understood that it was absolutely critical to discover what God was doing during “our time,” along the spectrum of human progress. As ardent students of history and the Holy Bible, we were suitably prepared for what we believed, at the time, was the final approach of the End of the Age. In many respects, we were like many other seekers of the Most High, who over the past several decades were providentially prepared to embrace the Messianic lifestyle when the Holy Spirit arranged the introduction and opportunity.

In our case, the overture began on a tour to Israel in 1994 with Zola Levitt Ministries. Upon returning to the United States after what we both perceived to be a miraculous spiritual experience in the Holy Land, the Lord directed and led us in 1995 to a Messianic Jewish congregation where our journey back to the ancient paths of the faith (cf. Jeremiah 6:16) was initiated. Within a matter of weeks, we both discovered some kind of a restorative process going on (Acts 3:19-21), which God was convicting us of—and so we wholeheartedly embraced a Messianic lifestyle. Since then by His grace and leading, we have immersed our family in the accomplishment of His purpose and will for His people with the spiritual gifting we have received.

Our grasp of world and Twentieth Century history, as well as knowledge of Biblical history, helped accelerate our learning curve when it came to **discerning the times**. Since the reestablishment of the State of Israel in 1948, complimented by a temporary conquest of the Egyptian Sinai in 1956, the liberation of Jerusalem during the Six Day War in 1967, the miraculous Yom Kippur victory of 1973, and other victories over superior forces—it seems that many of the prophecies about the return of Israel to the Promised Land have taken place in just over sixty years. Additionally, the renaissance occurring with many Jewish people coming to salvation in Messiah Yeshua—specifically with the growth of Messianic Judaism since the late 1960s—convinced us that the Lord was in the process of doing something unique. So, upon encountering various passages tucked away in the Torah, it appeared that the “Last Days” were not only rapidly approaching, but they had to be already upon us:

“The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. **When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.** For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them” (Deuteronomy 4:27-31).

This prophecy from the Book of Deuteronomy reveals a number of things that have been seen over the millennia, in the scattering of Israel, and have also

been seen in varying degrees in the past hundred years. Biblical history is clear that there have been several scatterings of God's people into the nations because of their sin and idolatry. The promise is that if they turn and seek the Lord, repenting of these sins, then He will remember His covenant and they will return. The timestamp for this occurring is "in the latter days." Naturally, when one sees what is happening in the Messianic movement today—specifically with so many Jewish people recognizing Yeshua as Savior—one can only include that the end-times are upon us. The return of the King must be soon! As Peter taught at *Shavuot*/Pentecost:

"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Yeshua, the Messiah appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (Acts 3:19-21).

There are other places in Scripture that emphasize seeking-and-finding (i.e., Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Jeremiah 29:13). In His mercy toward His people, God provides multiple, comforting confirmations, that those who seek Him with all of their hearts will eventually find Him and be able to more clearly hear His voice. Of course, for born again Believers, who have been given a heart of flesh and have been filled with the Holy Spirit, having "ears to hear" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) is a vital part of the spiritual equipment for living a life that is pleasing and useful to the work of the Almighty:

"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Over the course of a year, the indwelling Spirit in both Margaret and me confirmed—not only in the Land of Israel, but when we started attending our first Messianic Jewish congregation—that the restoration of all things was definitely a work in progress. *We just did not know exactly where we were on the timeline to completion of the restoration process.* The ability to discern the times of this unique move of God was so overwhelming, that leaving the relative comforts of the evangelical circles we frequented, never became a concern. Perhaps many of you reading this article know exactly what I am referring to, when it was confirmed in your heart that once you understood that He had called you into the Messianic movement, you never really considered returning to your former circles of spiritual association.

Hopefully, you can relate to our experience of what it means to "discern the times," in order to know why you have committed yourself (and perhaps also your family) to a Messianic lifestyle. If you have done this—we commend you for it! We know that the Father has been drawing many forerunners into this unique work for the Kingdom over the past fifteen years. But where we *exactly are* on the timeline to the completion of the restoration process is not something that we fully know. Bringing Jewish Believers and non-Jewish Believers, together as one people in Messiah Yeshua, anticipating His return, **is no easy thing.**

This seems to be a critically overlooked component in much of the Messianic-

ic community of faith. Regrettably, there is a significant lack of discernment when it comes to the future and the anticipated time of Yeshua's return. Our family has discovered that even some of the more "seasoned" Messianic leaders and teachers lack such discernment. **Their position as perceived voices of insight regarding the Last Days only comes because they have been in ministry the longest.** Some of these people have made presumptuous declarations in the past about the timing of the Great Tribulation and Second Coming—although they dismiss them when such past false prognostications are now mentioned. Contrary to any person today knowing the exact moment of the Lord's return, the Scriptures are clear that only the Father knows when His Son returns:

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36).

If you have ever heard—or even hear—someone conjecture a detailed series of calculations, or some kind of chart, laying out the return of the Messiah incumbent with dates, is this contrary to the words of the Messiah Himself? *Be warned.* Do not fall for snares. Many people use prophecy predictions as a means to only promote themselves, and are not at all concerned with those who will be consumed by the coming judgment of God. When you hear a prophecy prediction, appeal to the Lord for discernment, so that you might know whether it is He who is speaking through what is said—or whether it is *another spirit*. Is prophecy being used to really stimulate people to repentance, *or something else?*

The Holy Scriptures are replete with warnings and instructions about what to expect in the course of a Believer's life. Here are admonitions from the Apostle Paul that we should frequently take to heart—especially as it concerns much of the end-time teaching circulating in the Messianic world:

"[F]or the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Messiah; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Messiah. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Messiah, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:12-16).

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

"So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Messiah in this way, if indeed you have

heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Yeshua, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Ephesians 4:17-24).

When we consider the strong need for Believers to have discernment, an issue that frequently does come to mind concerns the granting of spiritual gifts to the Body of Messiah. 1 Corinthians 12:10 asserts that the gift of the distinguishing or the discerning of spirits has been imparted to the company of Believers. It is given to supernaturally assist in discerning all sorts of activities which take place in and around the assembly. I encourage you to recognize the larger context in which the gift of discerning of spirits is given, so that you might make sure that you possess this gift, or are in close relationship with someone who has it:

"Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. **You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.** Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Yeshua is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Yeshua is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. **But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.** For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, **and to another the distinguishing of spirits**, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Messiah. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. **For the body is not one member, but many"** (1 Corinthians 12:1-14).

Since the Lord is sovereign over the affairs of His people, you must prayerfully petition Him and solicit His gifting of these different spiritual gifts to your Messianic congregation or fellowship. **Having people with the gift of discerning of spirits will benefit the entire body**, should various deceiving spirits enter into your assembly and wreak havoc with the less discerning. The writer of Proverbs gives us all a model, and proper reasons for putting these prayers into action:

"My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; **for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding**; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; **then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God.** For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; *He is* a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. **Then you will**

discern righteousness and justice and equity *and* every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you” (Proverbs 2:1-11).

Additionally, the Believers in any assembly need to remember the Biblical admonition from the Apostle John to test the spirits—and recognize some specific criteria in determining the origins of a teaching. People can certainly claim that Yeshua is the Messiah, but is this a genuine claim? False teachers and false prophets are said to claim Yeshua as Messiah in some way or another...

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Yeshua is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antimessiah, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them” (1 John 4:1-5).

The Lord Himself warned about how many would come in His name, proclaiming that He is the Messiah, prophesying in His name, casting out demons in His name, and performing miracles in His name. **In reality, though, these people did not truly know Him:**

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never **knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’ [Psalm 6:8]”** (Matthew 7:15-23).

Is it possible that the modern-day Messianic community is falling into some of the same traps that ensnared Ancient Israel during the time of Isaiah? When you ask why there is a noticeable lack of discernment in the Messianic movement, one answer can be found in the text of Isaiah, as the Prophet addressed some of the same problems in his era. We see how many people were offering an empty worship of mere lip service, with their hearts far removed from the Holy One. This passage indicates what happens to those who lack proper worship in their hearts:

“Then the Lord said, ‘Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*, therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the discernment of their discern-

ing men will be concealed. Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the LORD, and whose deeds are *done* in a dark place, and they say, 'Who sees us?' or 'Who knows us?' You turn *things* around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made would say to its maker, 'He did not make me'; or what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He has no understanding?'" (Isaiah 29:13-16).

Losing wisdom or lacking discernment is a form of judgment that comes to the assembly, when the Lord notes that His people are paying lip service to Him rather than approaching Him with all of their hearts. **Is it possible that this lack of wisdom and discernment is being repeated by the Messianic movement today?** If so, *this is quite an indictment*. May it never come to pass! I hope that we are not those who are dull of hearing, and that we are steadily moving toward being a faith community that can be mature and handle some of the really challenging aspects of spirituality and theology:

"Concerning him [Melchizedek] we have much to say, and *it is hard to explain*, since you have become dull of hearing. Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. **But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil**" (Hebrews 5:11-14).

May we all get to the point where we can handle the solid food of the Scriptures! May we all be trained to discern good and evil, by employing the Word of God as an active, two-edged sword that is able to cut through the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12-13).

As you can read, the lack of discernment is a very distressing topic. Perhaps various Messianics who have returned to God's instruction in the Torah and the ancient paths have been blinded by their "new found knowledge." They have eagerly accepted, often without question or critical analysis, errant theories like: a 6,000-year chronology for human history, or every feast date requiring a traumatic event to occur, or so-called "blood red moons," or radical reinterpretations of the Olivet Discourse or other prophecies made to "fit" current events. *Lord, forgive us if our pride has blinded us! Please allow us to approach the prophetic message of Your Word in a better way.*

May this prayer be forever on our minds for all who are seeking discernment:

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Messiah; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Messiah Yeshua, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11).

Until the restoration of all things...