

# CHAPTER 10

## BIBLICAL MESSIANIC JEWISH THEOLOGY, TRADITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY



### Authority of the Scriptures

The Bible's inspiration means the Biblical writers wrote what God desired to convey. Everything is truth; nothing is in error. God did not usurp the writers' personalities by placing them in trance-like states. Rather, He used their unique styles and personalities to convey His truth.<sup>1</sup>

### Interpreting God's Word

The only objective way of interpreting the Bible is in context. A verse must be seen in light of the context of the entire Bible. Original language of revelation (Hebrew) should be considered. Original language means the language used at the time of revelation. Also of importance is whom the author wrote, why the author wrote, and how his audience understood his writings.

“The Spirit does not teach us to parse Hebrew verbs; but indeed illuminates the Scripture to every sincere reader. ‘Every sincere reader of a good translation receives much understanding of the basic teaching of the Bible on salvation, love and service.’ The Spirit reveals this to our hearts, empowers us and helps us to apply the Word. However, our perceptions of the Spirit are fallible.”<sup>2</sup>

### Salvation by grace

“In Scripture, salvation includes the fullness of deliverance from a meaningless life of transgression, emptiness, alienation and darkness, concerning life after death to a life of fellowship with our Creator, as well as hope, healing, community with others, and the assurance of everlasting life with God.”<sup>3</sup> Grace does not mean God suspended the moral standards of His Torah. The response, on our part, is faith in God and atonement for our sins. We can only be righteous before God because we are in Messiah. “The Hebrew word for faith, ‘Emunah,’ cannot be divorced from the word for faithfulness, ‘Emunah.’ A true response to God issues in a heart or spirit whose desire is to obey and please God. Salvation by faith never leads to moral looseness when rightly understood. God in

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots, a Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*, pp. 157-158

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 159

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 163

Yeshua has delivered us from the penalty of the Torah; but we do not cast away the Torah or its value for teaching and guiding” (II Timothy 3:16-17).<sup>4</sup>

## **Spirit and Torah**

Some theologians place Spirit and Torah in total opposition — this is not true. “First, let us note that sin is transgression of Torah, ‘whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the Torah’” (I John [Yochanan] 3:4).<sup>5</sup> According to Jeremiah (Yirmeyahu) 31:33 and Ezekiel (Yechezk’el) 36:26, “The Spirit revealed the Torah; He will write God’s Torah on our hearts.”

“The way of obedience is through the Spirit’s power. Due to the power of our fallen nature (the flesh), it’s impossible for us to obey the Torah. The problem is not the Torah that reflects God’s character and standard.”<sup>6</sup> As Paul (Sha’ul) said, “If it had not been for the Torah, I should not have known sin . . . the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good” (Romans 7:7, 12).

## **Is the Messiah divine?**

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has not been made. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen this glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John [Yochanan] 1:1, 2, 3, 14).

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John [Yochanan] 14:9,10).

“I and the Father are one” (John [Yochanan] 10:30).

“‘Tell us if you are the Son of God,’ and he answered, ‘It is as you say . . . you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven’” (Matthew [Mattityahu] 26:63, 64).

One of Yeshua’s clearest self-pronouncements of His divinity is seen in John (Yochanan) 10:30 and John (Yochanan) 8:58, 59:

“Before Abraham came into being, I am. (The declaration “I am” echoes Adonai’s self-revelation, “I am who I am,” Exodus [Sh’mot] 3:14).

Yeshua says, “I am” nine times in John’s (Yochanan’s) Gospel.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 164

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots, a Foundation of Biblical Theology for Messianic Judaism*, p. 165

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 166

<sup>7</sup> David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 168

Every Messianic organization in the community believes in the divinity of Yeshua. This includes the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, the Fellowship of Messianic Congregations, and the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. The problem in Messianic circles is how this concept is taught. How does the Word become flesh? “One of the most controversial issues between Jewish people and believers in the Messiah is the triune nature of God. Some have questioned why Messianic Jews, coming from a strong monotheistic heritage, would accept belief in Tri-unity (Trinity). Part of the problem in accepting this term lays in the fact that trinity is a theological word, based on a Biblical concept. If this were a Biblical term or if there were a Jewish equivalent, it would be more acceptable. The reason a formal Trinitarian concept does not exist in the Old Covenant is not because it is borrowed from Hellenism (Greek thought). It is because the revelation of God is progressive. A full enough revelation did not exist in Jewish Scripture until the New Covenant. Yeshua is the ultimate revelation of God, and through him, we find the fullest revelation of God which we are capable of understanding.”<sup>8</sup>

### **The mystery of God from the Tanakh**

The Shekhinah, according to the Encyclopedia Judaica (Volume 14, pp. 1349-1351), is “the Divine presence, the numinous immanence of God in the world . . . a revelation of the holy in the midst of the profane . . .” The Shekhinah is the same as Kevod Adonai (the Glory of God), which served as an intermediary between God and man . . .” “Glory to God” is the Biblical term, and Shekhinah is the Talmudic term for the created splendor of light which acts an intermediary between God and man, which sometimes takes on human form.”<sup>9</sup>

Shekhinah is a Talmudic term based on Exodus 25:8: “Then have them make a sanctuary (Mishkan) and I will dwell (Shakan) among them.” Rabbis took the Hebrew letters from “shakan” and added vowels from “Mishkan” to get Shekhinah. A rabbi who was seeking to understand the nature of Yeshua described him as a “walking, talking Shekhinah.”

“The Tanakh reports many instances of God appearing to man — to Abraham in Genesis (B’resheet) 18, to Ya’akov (Genesis [B’resheet] 32:25-33), Moshe (Exodus [Sh’mot] 3), Y’hoshua (Joshua [Y’hoshua] 5:13-6:5), the people of Israel (Judges [Shof’tim] 2:1-5), and Gideon (Judges [Shof’tim] 6:11-24). In all these passages, the term ‘Adonai’ and ‘the angel of Adonai’ (or Elohim and Angel of Elohim) are used interchangeably. In some of them, the Angel of Adonai (or Elohim) is referred to as a man. The Tanakh itself teaches that the all-powerful God has the power, if He chooses, to appear among men as a man. The New Covenant carries this Jewish idea one step further: not only can God ‘appear’ in human form, but the Word of God can ‘become’ a human being — and did so.”<sup>10</sup>

The doctrine of the Tri-unity is not an apologetic, it is an explanation. People may object to its language, but the fact is, it does not teach the existence of three deities. The Tri-unity is not inconsistent with The Shema, or any other concept of Biblical Judaism.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Schiffman, *Return to the Remnant, The Rebirth of Messianic Judaism*, pp. 93-94

<sup>9</sup> David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp. 662-663

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 155

The idea of three persons in the godhead is well within the concept of Jewish thought. What Messianic Jews believe is based on God's revelation in His Messiah. The traditional Jewish view of God without the Messiah is incomplete. The Messiah is the key to understanding the Scripture. He is the fullest revelation of God."<sup>11</sup>

The word "Ruach Elohim" appears in many instances throughout the Tanakh empowering His messengers. It can only be understood as God Himself in the Spirit form directing men's life. In fact many Rabbis see it this way. What is missing from this equation is the rejection of Yeshua HaMashiach as God Himself in human form.

### **The virgin birth<sup>12</sup>**

"Therefore Adonai Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah [Yasha'yahu] 7:14).

Mainline Messianic Judaism accepts the concept that Yeshua was born of a virgin. Rabbis outside our movement give three objections:

- "Almah" (a Hebrew word used in Isaiah [Yeshayahu] 7:14) means "young woman," not "virgin."
- If God wanted to say "virgin," he would have used "betulah."
- Context is irrelevant with the Messiah.

### **Almah**

The Jewish Family Bible translates the word "virgin" into "Almah" in Genesis (B'resheet) 24:43. The Septuagint also translates "Almah" as "virgin" in Genesis (B'resheet) 24:23, as well as in Isaiah 7:14. When the Septuagint was written, around 250 B.C., most Jews spoke Greek as it was the international language of the time. The Septuagint was the Bible used by many Jews.

According to Cyrus Gordon, the renowned Jewish scholar, "The New Covenant rendering of Almah as virgin for Isaiah (Yeshayahu) 7:14 rests on the older Jewish interpretation."

Rashi, a medieval Jewish commentator, wrote on Isaiah (Yeshayahu) 7:14, "Behold the Almah shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. This means our Creator will be with us. And this is a sign that the one who will conceive is a girl who never in her life has had relations with any man. Upon this one shall the Holy Spirit have power."

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Schiffman, *Return to the Remnant, the Rebirth of Messianic Judaism*, p. 103

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Gruber, *God, The Rabbis, and the Virgin Birth*, pp. 5-43

## Almah or betulah

Almah is used seven times in the Hebrew Bible, and in each instance, it either explicitly signifies or implies it. Until recent times the word Almah was unequivocally understood by all Jews to mean a young woman who had never known a man, therefore a virgin.

### Context of Isaiah (Yeshayahu) 7:14

“Therefore, Adonai Himself will give you a sign.” The Hebrew word for sign (OT) means an extraordinary event that demonstrates and calls attention to God’s direct involvement in human affairs. (See David Stern Commentary, pg. 7 for an in-depth look at this passage).

Supernatural births: the rule is not the exception! Throughout the Bible, there are cases where God supernaturally implants life in the womb of a woman who is not physically able to conceive and give birth:

- **Isaac (Yitzchak):** (Genesis [B’resheet] 21) Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah was well past the age of childbearing according to Genesis [B’resheet] 18:6-11 (menopause). After menopause, a woman’s body no longer contains any eggs.
- **Jacob (Ya’akov):** (Genesis [B’resheet] 25) “And Isaac entreated Adonai for his wife, because she was barren. And Adonai let Himself be entreated of him, and Rebecca, his wife, conceived.”
- **Joseph (Yosef):** (Genesis [B’resheet] 30) Rachel was not able to bear children. “God harkened to her and opened her womb.”
- **Samson (Shimshon):** (Judges [Shof’tim] 13) “Behold, now you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son” (God speaking to Menoah’s wife).
- **Samuel (Sh’mu’el):** Adonai had closed Hannah’s womb, but “God harkened unto her prayer and she conceived a bore a son. She named him Samuel: “God hears.” (I Samuel [Sh’mu’el Alef] 1:20).
- **Son of a Shunamite woman:** She had been gracious to the prophet Elisha. “Because the woman was barren and her husband was old, she knew that it was not possible for her to bear a son. And the woman conceived and bore a son at that season next year . . .” (II Kings [M’lakhim Bet] 4:17)

The lives of these six supernatural births point to the seventh — Yeshua:

**Isaac (Yitzchak):** The first person to enter the covenant from birth. In the sight of God, he was the only son, whom his father loved. In rabbinic literature, on the Day of Atonement, forgiveness for Israel is seen in the binding of Isaac. The people of God, and God Himself, are called by **Jacob's (Ya'akov's)** name Israel. **Joseph (Yosef)** was chosen by God to be exalted. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers and was accused of a crime he did not commit. His own brothers' lives would later depend on him, and they didn't recognize him.

However, Joseph (Yosef) recognized them. But they came again a second time, and he revealed himself to them. **Samson (Shimshon)** was a Nazarite, and was anointed to judge Israel and deliver Israel from their oppressor. Samson (Shimshon) was rejected by his brethren, and was betrayed to the Philistines to be put to death. He later willingly gave his life to destroy the enemy's power. **Samuel (Sh'mu'el)**, the prophet and judge, was consecrated to the Lord all the days of his life. But the people would not listen to him, and they demanded a king. "This day they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being King over them." **The son of the Shunamite woman** later died (from an injury) in his mother's lap. Adonai raised the boy from the dead! Their lives reveal the story of the seventh supernatural birth, the Messiah, the King.

## Common worship practices

The Tzitzit (fringes): "Adonai said to Moses (Moshe), speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come, you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel for you to look at and so you will remember all the commands of Adonai.'" (Numbers [B'midbar] 15:37-41) "This command does not mean we have to return to the dress of 3,500 years ago and sew tassels on the corners of our garments. Messianic Jews may find value in the prayer shawl (tallit), a garment developed for the purpose of keeping this command. A tallit katan can be worn under the shirt, so the fringes are worn during all waking hours. It is the principle of memory that counts, not enforcing the particular means of memory."<sup>13</sup> Yeshua wore fringes, and those who wanted healing from him would seek to touch the fringes of His garment (Mark 5:28, 6:56).

## Tefillin, phylacteries, mezuzzah

"You shall love Adonai with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might . . . and that these words should be bound as a sign upon their hands and as a sign on their foreheads . . . written on the doorframes of your houses and . . . gates." (Deuteronomy [D'varim] 6:4).

God gives us another device to remember His word, and that we are His children. The spirit of the Torah allows freedom in the usage of these memory elements. The mezuzzah is a good, simple memory device that adds Jewish character to a home. The foreignness of tefillin, to many modern Jews, should not discount it as a meaningful way of worship

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Juster, *Roots*, p. 214

when done in heartfelt gratitude to God. However, we are strictly warned not to make any sign an ostentatious display to call attention to ourselves (Matthew [Mattityahu] 23:5-6).<sup>14</sup>

## **Yarmulke — the Kippah**

“The earliest Jewish reference to a head covering is found in Exodus (Sh’mot) 28:4, where it is called a “mitznefet.” It was part of the high priest’s wardrobe. In other Biblical references, the covering of the head and face is regarded as a sign of mourning (II Samuel [Sh’mu’el Bet] 15:30). The Talmud, however, associates the wearing of the headgear with the concept of reverence to God.”<sup>15</sup> Orthodox circles require the kippah, but in Reformed and Messianic circles, it is a symbol of identity with Israel and the Jewish people.

Some Christians have rebuked Messianic Jews for this tradition, pointing to I Corinthians 11:4-15, “But any man who prays or prophecies with his head covered dishonors his head . . .” It is important to note that the kippah was not in vogue at the time, and therefore did not directly refer to a kippah. It is also worth noting that these same critics **do not** require women to cover their heads, as the passage mentions.

“One of the first rules for Biblical understanding is that we must understand the passage in its original historical and cultural context. The question is what Paul (Sha’ul) meant by the veil or head covering, and its relationship to hair length and to male and female distinctions. The rule we must follow is what the Biblical writer intended to teach. There are two levels of intent: there is a universal principle that male and female distinctions are part of the creation order. These distinctions are to be reflected in dress and action. In Paul’s day, the way to maintain this order was by the head coverings and other symbols that reflected sexual distinctions and purity.”<sup>16</sup>

## **Kashrut — Kosher**

Leviticus (Vayikra) 11-16; Deuteronomy (D’varim) 14

See section on rabbinic Judaism and Biblical Judaism.

## **Circumcision**

“Circumcision, a basic Jewish law prescribed in the Torah, requires that every son of a Jewish parent be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. The word for circumcision

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 215

<sup>15</sup> Alfred J. Kolatach, *Jewish Book of Why*, pp. 121-122

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Juster, *Roots*, pp. 216-217

in Hebrew is “brit,” “covenant.” This refers to a pledge God made to Abraham (Genesis [B’resheet] 17:2), in which He promised to bless Abraham and make him prosper if Abraham, in turn, would be loyal to God. Circumcision is considered more important than any other commandment. Circumcision must be performed on the eighth day following a male child’s birth, be it Sabbath or Yom Kippur, unless a postponement is necessary due to the ill-health of the child.”<sup>17</sup>

## **Messianic Jewish Tradition and the Bible**

Messianic Jews should respect the Jewish application of the Torah-Halakah, while at the same time reserving the right to criticize it in love. Traditions must never blind us to the true intent of the Word. “How does a Messianic Jew approach Halakah? He seeks to return to the original Biblical teaching and understanding it in context. Is the Torah a direct universal principle (i.e. “thou shalt not commit adultery”), or is it an application of a moral principle? (Deuteronomy [D’varim] 22:8) Universal moral principles are to guide all believers in the spirit. Is a particular Torah part of Israel’s heritage in celebrating God’s grace in her history? Is it part of Israel’s God-given national/cultural identity rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant (feasts, Shabbat, circumcision), which has application to Jews today? Our goal, however, should always be to discern the Spirit. Our minds should be submissive to the Word of God, humbly seeking God’s direction-without pride or narrow dogmatism. If we love Israel, our involvement will show respect, as well as disagreement.”<sup>18</sup>

## **Terminology**

The terminology used in most Christian circles is generally culturally foreign, ineffective, and very offensive to Jewish ears, and with good reason. The crusaders killed thousands of Jewish people in the name of Jesus Christ, as did Hitler. The cross was a weapon of persecution and hatred used against the Jews. Scores of Jews were forced to be baptized or faced death. For this reason, we must prove we believe in a Jewish Messiah.

## **Use the Correct Terms**

### **Instead of**

Jesus  
Christ

### **Use**

Yeshua  
Messiah, Mashiach, Anointed One

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<sup>17</sup> Alfred J. Kolatach, *Jewish Book of Why*, pp. 15-17

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Juster, *Roots*, pp. 229-230

Christian	Believer, follower of Messiah, Messianic Jew, Messianic Gentile
Church	Congregation, synagogue, temple
Going to church	Going to services, synagogue, etc.
Sunday School	Torah, Scripture study
Saved	Atoned for
Converted	Completed Jew, Born Again
Hebrew Christians	Messianic Jews
Redemption/salvation	Atonement
Cross	Execution stake, tree
Baptism	Mikvah, Immersion
Gospel	Good News
Holy Ghost	Holy Spirit, Ruach HaKodesh
Pentateuch	Torah, the Books of Moses
Old Testament	Tanakh, Old Covenant
New Testament	New Covenant, B'rit Hadashah
Lord	Adonai, Elohim
Jehovah	Adonai of Israel
Devil	Hasatan
Hell/Hades	Sh'ol
Reverend, Pastor	Messianic Rabbi
Trumpet	Shofar
Wafer	Matzah, unleavened bread
Deacon(s)	Shammash (im)
Law	Torah
Unclean food	Treif
Trinity	Triune Nature

**“Watch what you do, where you go, and what you do.  
Your actions advertise who you are”**

**Do not**

- Tell Jewish jokes

- Use anti-Semitic terms (i.e. “Jew them down.”).
- Use Christian terms: church vs. congregation
- Say you are going to hell or “turn or burn.”
- Leave the sanctuary during the Torah reading
- Witness only from the New Covenant (New Testament).
- Wear a cross to synagogue

## **Do**

- Be a friend
- Use Hebrew terms
- Ask how they atone for their sins
- Know Jewish customs and traditions
- Learn to share to both Jew and Gentile
- Wear a Star of David; men wear a prayer shawl, kippah, etc.