

The Surpassing Glory of Messiah

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The modern Messianic Jewish Movement began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when great numbers of Jewish people came to the conclusion that Jesus (Yeshua) was the Messiah foretold by Moses and the Prophets.

In previous centuries, a Jew who came to faith in Jesus was expected to assimilate, and he normally did. He abandoned Jewish forms of worship and lived like the Gentile Christians of whatever church he happened to join. Unlike Jewish believers of past centuries, Jewish believers in the 1970s desired to retain many of the Torah practices which Jewish believers of previous generations normally abandoned. In the 1970s many Jewish believers started meeting together to celebrate Shabbat and holy days in a Christ-centered (Messiah-centered) way, and to worship in a Jewish context.

Eventually this grew into a movement called the Messianic Jewish Movement because the overwhelming majority of Messianic believers were Jews. However, more and more non-Jewish Christians were drawn into the Messianic Jewish Movement, and soon there were far more non-Jews than Jews, especially in areas where Jews made up a small percent of the population. In other words, just about everywhere except perhaps in Israel and

New York. Now the movement is often referred to as the Messianic Movement instead of the Messianic Jewish Movement -- not to exclude Jews, but to more accurately reflect the fact that the great majority of Messianics today are non-Jews.

It is wonderful that more and more Christians are turning to the Torah, embracing the Sabbath and Feasts, and living as Messianic Israelites. This is a movement that is born of the Holy Spirit. It is God's doing; it is not something that some man initiated. Even though this Messianic Movement is of God, we need to be aware of the fact that every movement, every revival, every reformation carries with it the possibility and the probability -- nay, the certainty -- that there will creep into that movement elements of extremism, error, and fanaticism. If you have not yet seen extremism, error, and fanaticism in the Messianic Movement, you just haven't been in it long enough. Just wait, and you will eventually see these things. Or if you don't want to wait, just go online.

Except for second-generation Messianics, most non-Jews now in the Messianic Movement came out of the church world. The typical church-going Christian discovers that the Torah is still a vital part of the Biblical "faith which was once delivered unto the saints," so he begins to study the Torah and he

puts it into practice as he learns.

This is wonderful, and it is something that needs to be done. However, I get concerned when I see some Torah-toting Messianics who behave like a child with a new toy. A child with a new toy sometimes develops an unhealthy obsession with the new toy. He loses interest in everything else, and soon begins neglecting other important matters. Some Messianics do this with the Torah. They become so obsessed with the five books of Moses that they lose interest in the other 61 books of the Bible, except as those books relate to the Torah.

Don't get me wrong. The Torah needs to be studied and obeyed. But some commandments are of lesser importance than others (Yeshua spoke about "the least of the commandments" and "the weightier matters of the law"), and some commandments are so ambiguous that even the rabbis disagree over how they should be obeyed. It is often the less important commandments and/or the ambiguous commandments that intrigue (and divide) some Torah-toting Messianics. They become infatuated and overly-obsessed with the minute details of ambiguous instructions and with commandments that are of lesser importance. Like the Pharisees, they end up straining at gnats and swallowing camels.

Another problem that often arises is an extreme, fanatical fascination with rabbinical Judaism.

It is easy to see how this happens. When a Christian wants to start doing in-depth Torah study, he looks for books and commentaries and other Bible study aids to help him in his learning. He doesn't find what he needs in the Christian sources, so he looks into Jewish sources. There are not many Christian sources that tell a believer how to do Torah, but there are plenty of Jewish sources that discuss it. So, the Messianic immerses himself in the Jewish sources. Pretty soon he starts quoting Rashi and Rambam. If he's a Messianic Greenhorn, he might even quote something that Rabbi Talmud said. ("Yeah, you know, Rabbi Talmud. He must be the most authoritative rabbi who ever lived, 'cause the Jews are always quoting what Talmud said.")

Under the spell of rabbinical Judaism, the Messianic freely quotes Rashi and Rambam and other Jewish sources. But if someone quotes something from a Christian source -- something that Finney or Spurgeon or A.W. Tozer said -- then the Messianic says, "Why are you quoting them? Those guys didn't even keep the Sabbath on the right day!" True, those guys didn't keep the Sabbath on the right day. And Rashi and Rambam and Rabbi Talmud didn't believe in Yeshua. I ask you: Which is the greater error? Being mistaken about which day is the Sabbath, or being mistaken about who Yeshua is? Judge for yourselves. I say that the far greater error is being

mistaken about Yeshua. So why are some Messianics so eager to discard the Christian sources and embrace the Jewish sources?

I for one am thankful for my Christian roots and the wonderful truths that I learned from the Church. "But what about the lies and false doctrines the Church has taught?" I am not resentful or angry about the errors I learned (and had to unlearn), because I realize I was misinformed, misled, misguided, and mistaught by men who were themselves misinformed, misled, misguided, and mistaught by others before them. It was not a matter of deliberate deception on their part.

Our return to Torah is certainly important. Right before the so-called "400 silent years" between Malachi and Matthew, the last chapter of Malachi says, "Remember ye the law of Moses" (Mal. 4:4). This, coupled with a promise to send Elijah, is the very last word from the Prophets. And the very first statement about the Law in the New Testament is in Yeshua's warning to not even think He had come to abolish the Torah (Matt. 5:17). Thus at the very end of the Old Testament Scriptures we read a warning to "Remember ye the law of Moses," and near the beginning of the New Testament Scriptures we read a warning to not even think Messiah came to abolish the Torah. So we certainly need to remember Moses. But it's even more important that we remember Someone Else mentioned in Malachi 4, namely

"the Sun of righteousness" who arises "with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2). Both Jews and Christians understand "the Sun of righteousness" to be a reference to the Messiah.

Those of us who know Yeshua as the Messiah should understand that without the light of the Sun of righteousness, we would not even be able to see the Torah of Moses. Yeshua is the One who first pointed us to the Torah in the first place. He is the One who shined the spotlight on the Torah for us. It is only because of Him that Christians become interested in the Torah in the first place.

Moses is important, but the Messiah is even more important, as it is written: "For this man [Yeshua] was counted worthy of more glory than Moses" (Heb. 3:3). Yeshua's glory surpasses the glory of Moses. If Yeshua is the Sun of righteousness, then Moses is merely the moon, "the lesser light" which reflects the glory of the unseen Sun, "the greater light." The moon has no light of its own within it; it derives all of its brightness and glory from the sun. In the same way, a scroll of the Law of Moses has no light of its own within it; it derives all of its brightness and glory from the Sun of righteousness, the Messiah of whom it testifies. His glory is the surpassing glory, just as the sun's glory surpasses the glory of the moon.

I speak and write a lot about our need to personally experience

the glory of Messiah, and our need to focus on His glory. I stress this because it is so essential to unity. After Yeshua prayed that all believers might be one, He said something that reveals the key to unity: "And the glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them, that they may be one" (John 17:22). Yeshua gives us His glory so that we can be one. The glory is the glue that holds us together.

The Hebrew word for glory is *kavod*. Some readers may be familiar with this word from David Loden's worship song *Adon Ha-Kavod*, "The Lord of Glory." The word *kavod* is related to the word *kaved*, which means "heavy" or "weighty." When speaking of the glory of the Lord, *kavod* means heavy or weighty in the sense of profundity. As we personally experience and behold the weightiness and the profundity of Yeshua's glory, it transforms us and makes us more like Yeshua, as it is written: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

The Greek word translated "changed" in the above verse is *metamorpho'o*, the source of our English word *metamorphosis*. The same Greek word is rendered "transfigured" when describing Yeshua's transfiguration in Matthew 17:2, and it is rendered "transformed" when telling us to "be not conformed to this world, but

be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" in Romans 12:2. Yeshua's glorious transfiguration in Matthew 17 shows us a picture of that which we will eventually become; the instructions in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 12:2 tells us how this transformation takes place: our minds are renewed as we behold the glory of the Messiah Yeshua.

God wants to fill our minds with Divine revelation and understanding of spiritual matters, but our minds must first be renewed. When we first come to the Lord in sincere repentance and faith, our sins are forgiven and our heart is right, but our mind is not yet renewed. Our mind is like an old, dried-up leather wineskin -- stiff, inflexible, unbending, opinionated, fossilized, set in our ways. New wine must not be poured into old wineskins, Yeshua said, because the fermentation will split open the inflexible old wineskin, and both the wine and the wineskin will be lost. If God were to fill an unrenewed mind with the new wine of Divine revelation, it would "blow the mind," to use an old hippie expression. An unrenewed mind cannot handle a heavy dose of Divine revelation.

New wine must be poured into new wineskins, Yeshua said. In New Testament times, old wineskins were made new by a two-step process. First, they were thoroughly soaked in water until they were totally saturated. After that, they were rubbed with oil.

This renewing process is a beautiful picture of how our mind is renewed as we behold the glory of the Lord. Our mind must be soaked in "the water of the Word" (Eph. 5:26, which speaks of how the Lord sanctifies and cleanses His Bride). We must saturate our mind with the Scriptures, as old wineskins were saturated with water. Not just an occasional quick dip, not just a sprinkling here and there, but a total immersion into the mind of Messiah by memorizing and meditating on the Word. And like a wineskin, we must also be anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit. We must let the Lord rub His anointing into us -- not just smeared on the surface, but rubbed deep into the very fiber of our being, into that matter which makes up our mind.

A renewed mind will be flexible and pliable. Like a renewed wineskin, it will conform to the shape of whatever new-wine revelation the Lord pours into it. Thus by beholding the glory of Yeshua, we are transformed by the renewing of our mind from glory to glory, into His glorious likeness and image. As we all become more and more like Messiah, we automatically become more and more like one another. Thus the glory brings us into unity.

Before Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that we are transformed by beholding the glory of the Lord, he makes a point of telling us that the glory of Messiah is "the glory that excelleth." The greater glory of Yeshua surpasses

the lesser glory of Moses, "which glory was to be done away." (See verses 7-11.) The Torah itself is not done away with, but the glory of Moses is absorbed by the surpassing glory of Messiah.

Moses had his place. The commandments of the Torah are still to be obeyed. "Remember ye the law of Moses." But we are not transformed by beholding Moses. A seed will not grow by beholding the moon, and we will not be transformed by beholding Moses. A seed needs sunshine, not moonshine, to be transformed into a fruit-bearing plant. In the same way, we need the sunshine of the Son, not the moonshine of Moses, to be transformed into fruit-bearing disciples.

If you focus only on the Law of Moses, that will not transform you into the likeness of Yeshua. But if you fix your gaze on the surpassing glory of Yeshua, that will transform you into the likeness of Yeshua, from glory to glory. And because Yeshua was a Torah-keeper, you too will start keeping the commandments of the Torah as He instructs you by His Holy Spirit. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

The above verse explains how I ended up embracing the Torah. I first embraced Jesus, then received the baptism and filling of the Holy Spirit. I kept my

eyes fixed on Jesus. As time went on, the Holy Spirit brought to my remembrance some of the things Yeshua said about God's Law, and the Holy Spirit taught me (and is still teaching me) about the Torah.

The Torah is important, but our primary focus must be on Yeshua, not on the Torah. Focusing primarily on the Torah and secondarily on Yeshua can cause a person to lose their first love for the Lord. Remember Yeshua's words to the believers in Ephesus? "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works" (Rev. 2:4f).

When I pondered these words many years ago as a young disciple, I thought to myself: *I hope I never leave my first love for the Lord. I hope I never disappoint Him that way.* From Yeshua's command to "Remember from whence thou art fallen," I understood that these people had forgotten something. They had forgotten what it was like when they first fell in love with the Lord. Therefore I have made a conscious effort over the years to keep the memory of my first love for the Lord fresh in my mind so I will never forget it. From time to time I stir up my memory and recall my days as a new believer. I remember the freshness, the newness, the vitality, the passion, the gidiness. I remember the awe I felt as I experienced a keen awareness of the Lord's presence throughout each day. I remember

those days and I pray: "Lord, don't let me ever lose my first love for You." And I can testify that the Lord has faithfully answered this prayer and preserved the freshness of my first love for Him.

I do behold Moses; I do study the Torah and walk in the commandments as the Holy Spirit gives me understanding. But it is not beholding Moses that preserves my first love and transforms me. It is beholding Messiah that does this. When I meditate on Him, and the things He did for me, and the things He continues to do for me, it transforms me and preserves my first love.

And there's one more thing I want to say about remembering my first love for the Lord. When I think about my first love for Him, I think of Him as Jesus, not Yeshua. I realize that in some "Sacred Name" circles it's politically-incorrect to call Him Jesus, but that is the name by which I knew Him when I was a young disciple. I usually think of Him as Yeshua now, but in the context of remembering my first love, He is Jesus. He will always be Jesus in that context.

"So, Daniel, how are you going to address Him when you first see Him face to face in the age to come? Are you gonna say, 'Hi, Jesus!' or 'Hi, Yeshua!'"

I think neither. I'll probably be so overwhelmed and awed that I'll just silently fall at His feet like a dead man, as John did when he saw Him on the isle of Patmos. □