

OIM UPDATE

November 2013

During the nearly twenty years that our family has pursued a Messianic, Torah observant lifestyle, one of our primary motivations has been to seek to walk like Yeshua walked, as we are through the course of time, being conformed into His image (Romans 8:29). This means that as we have searched the Scriptures and discovered the things that Yeshua did during His ministry—thus endorsing celebrations like the Biblical feasts found in Leviticus 23—we have incorporated them into our annual cycle of life. Years ago, we discovered that Yeshua was in Jerusalem during the time beginning on Kislev 25, when the Jews celebrated the eight-day Feast of Dedication (or Festival of Lights) more commonly known as *Chanukah*. It was during this Winter celebration of the rededication of the Temple by the followers of Judah Maccabee that Yeshua made some profound declarations about His nature to some inquiring Jews, which almost led to Him being stoned:

“At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Yeshua was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, ‘How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’ Yeshua answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand. **I and the Father are one.**’ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Yeshua answered them, ‘I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?’ **The Jews answered Him, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God’**” (John 10:22-33).

Yeshua was not stoned. However, in discerning that Yeshua was recognizing this national celebration for Israel, we correspondingly have incorporated *Chanukah* into our Winter holiday season in lieu of Christmas, which we believe inaccurately considers the historical birth of the Messiah. We highly recommend that if you do not yet have a copy, that you access our *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* for a constructive approach about how to interact with Christian friends and family, who look with some skepticism as to what Messianic Believers are doing this time of year. This publi-

cation includes a wide amount of information on *Chanukah*, the Macca-bees, and Christmas, which you are sure to find very helpful!

This year, the Feast of Dedication actually commences on Thanksgiving Eve here in the United States, November 27, and ends on December 4. We are very excited about the opportunity to incorporate all of our personal, family traditions with Thanksgiving Day into our commemoration of *Chanukah*. Throughout much of the American Jewish community, this season is actually being called **Thanksgivukkah**, and for us, we will have the added blessing of having most of the immediate Huey family in attendance. While the great majority of my family is not Messianic, we are approaching the time together as an opportunity to witness to them about our love for the Lord, highlighting all of the many blessings we have received from serving Him with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength. It is our ministry's prayer that many of our readers will likewise take this unique time to share the love of the Messiah with family and friends. Hopefully in so doing, we can each bring the hope of His light to the darkness that continues to increasingly plague this generation.

We want to thank every one of you for your continued support of the **Theological Defense Trust**. We sincerely believe that it is critical that sound and balanced, written Biblical teachings, continue to reflect what the Father is doing at this point in salvation history. As we approach the end of the age with the Holy Spirit inspiring Jewish and non-Jewish Believers to decisively have a testimony of Yeshua and obey His commands (Revelation 12:17; 14:12), we are convinced that the materials we are producing will be used by the Holy One to assist in the development of our Messianic community, into which more and more people are entering.

Additionally, we appreciate everyone who is contributing to our **Prison Ministry Free Book Outreach**. We are increasingly amazed by how many incarcerated people in different penal systems around the country are discovering the availability of our many resources. Almost daily, we receive impassioned, written pleas from inmates who are obviously being ministered to by what they are reading. Many use various books for topical studies, and from their statements, they are beginning to work out their salvation with fear and trembling—perhaps finally recognizing the blessing of grace in light of the consequences of disobeying the Holy One of Israel. Your increased support to minister to these special people is most needed!

Thank you in advance for your prayers and support of what the Father has called our family to do, to minister to the Body of Messiah!

“The LORD bless you, and keep you; the LORD make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

Advancing His Kingdom, until the restoration of all things...

Mark Huey

Do you believe that Messianic Believers in the United States should celebrate Thanksgiving Day?



The tradition of celebrating Thanksgiving Day goes back to the Pilgrims who settled the Plymouth Colony in 1621. Originally, these colonists were English Puritans who had protested against much of the popery or Catholic elements present in the Church of England. Being persecuted in England, they had settled in the Netherlands for a season, but discovered that they would not be totally satisfied until they found a home of their own where they could practice their religious convictions in total peace.

The Pilgrims' intention was to actually settle in the colony of Virginia, but their voyage to the New World caused them to be led off course and settle in what is today Massachusetts. They were greeted by a harsh Winter that caused many of them to die from cold and hunger. In the Spring of 1621, the Pilgrims planted their first crops with the help of the local Indians. By that October, the Pilgrims celebrated their harvest to boost the morale of those who had endured terrible loss and hardships. They wanted to thank God and their Indian neighbors for the bounty that had been provided.

As Puritans, the Pilgrims' spiritual convictions came from a strict reading of the Bible. They were very intent on eliminating any opulent elements of Catholicism from their worship. Much of their society was focused around the idea that they had fled England in a similar way to how the Ancient Israelites were led out of Egypt. As America was viewed as a new "Promised Land," much of the symbolism of the Old Testament was adopted for the Pilgrims' life. The emphasis on thanking God with a large communal meal in the Autumn is likely appropriated from the Tanach themes of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Thanksgiving Day is a holiday intended to commemorate the hardships of some of the early settlers of America, and how thankful they were to have God preserve them through times of difficult trial. These early pioneers and pilgrims were godly men and women who left Europe to flee religious persecution and establish a Bible-based community in the New World. Because we as Messianic Believers would not be here without Christians such as these, it is entirely appropriate for us as Americans to remember what they did.

Potato Latkes with Cranberry Sauce

5 large potatoes, peeled and cut up
1 onion
2 eggs, beaten
1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
3 tablespoons flour

Salt to taste

Cranberry Sauce

Chop potatoes in a food processor. Put in drainer and run cold water over them for 1 minute. Drain. Chop onion in processor and place in mixing bowl. Add all the other ingredients to onions and mix well. Heat ½ inch oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Drop a tablespoon of batter into hot oil for each latke. Flatten and fry for 3 minutes on each side until they are brown and crisp. Serve with Cranberry Sauce!

“CHRISTMAS IS PAGAN”

how to offend family and alienate friends

by J.K. McKee

“What! Did we just convince McKee to finally use the word pagan?”

If this is what you were thinking, **no**, you did not convince me to use the exclamation “Christmas is pagan!” During the eighteen years of my family’s time in the Messianic movement, this is what I have commonly heard declared throughout our faith community during the month of December. I have not only heard it proclaimed from the pulpit by teachers, but I have also heard it whispered—well, too often screamed—among the people. Those who have a problem with this approach to Christmas are viewed as either being too young or naïve in their Messianic faith, or are viewed as having succumbed to compromise in their Torah observance. Their views often get dismissed or ignored, and even if some people feel momentarily pricked to change their negative attitudes when interacting with Christians this time of year, they will generally relapse into a mean-spirited or harshly judgmental attitude. Even Messianic leaders who have a problem with the negative attitude that often manifests itself do not have the courage to speak against it.

I would like to make it perfectly and abundantly clear for those of you reading: **I have not celebrated Christmas since 1995.** Christmas is a part of my old life. From my birth until 1991 I celebrated Christmas with my family in Northern Kentucky. I grew up in the same home in which my father grew up. Kim, Margaret, John, and Jane McKee all celebrated Christmas together. It was a beautiful and ideal place. We had a glassed in porch that overlooked a lake, with trees and hills surrounding it. When it snowed you truly did have the ideal white Christmas out of story books.

When my family celebrated Christmas in the past, it was not unlike your typical American celebration. We did have a tree, we did have evergreen throughout the house, and we did have mistletoe. My mother preferred to decorate in a style consistent with colonial America, so we did not have a huge place for Santa Claus, as we only had candle lights in our windows. Our church was the focal point of much of our commemoration, especially the Christmas Eve service. We did give gifts to one another, and we had a Christmas dinner not unlike what we previously had eaten at Thanksgiving. Yet our Christmas celebration more than anything else was focused on the Biblical story of Yeshua’s birth, and the scene of the angelic host declaring that something profound had taken place. My Christmas memories are more of hearing Handel’s Messiah and traditional hymns, than singing Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer.

When my father died in 1992, all of those Christmas experiences came to an end. While I did celebrate Christmas from 1993-1995, it was not at all what I remembered from before his death and it was substantially different. Just like the previous life I remember with my father with the Northern Kentucky house, my old church, even my father’s office—Christmas has been consigned to a past memory. I look back fondly on those memories, remembering the good times I

had with him, the good times I had going to church and participating in the Christmas play—but those are in the past and they do not make up my future. My Christmas experience was one where I and my family worshipped the Lord, never knowing its questionable origins until we turned toward the Messianic movement.

Because Christmas is something that was a part of my past with my late father, I do not think about it any more (even though I do think about him quite a bit). It does not bother me to not celebrate Christmas as my life has moved forward and I have embraced a Messianic lifestyle concurrent with *Shabbat*, the appointed times, and celebrations like *Purim* and *Chanukah*. It does bother me, though, when I see a mean-spirited attitude manifest itself among Messianics—who do not appear to know how to love their neighbor as themselves (Leviticus 19:18), or treat others as they would like to be treated during the holidays (Luke 6:31). This is especially true when we consider that most evangelical Christians celebrate Christmas believing that they are honoring the birth of the Lord—an event attested to in the Scriptures! How are we to mature in this area, acting more like adults, and showing respect for others?

One of the publications that has encouraged a grossly unfair attitude toward Christians, that I have seen floating around the Messianic world since 1999, has been *Fossilized Customs*.¹ It is not a book that can be trusted to convey an historically accurate representation of the “facts” it purports—with very little engagement with primary sources. Its Hebrew examination is limited to Strong’s Concordance. Its author, a former Roman Catholic, has a major beef with the Church and the Synagogue. The writing style of this publication is something more consistent with the supermarket tabloids than with reasonable Christian, Jewish, or even Messianic writing. I can criticize *Fossilized Customs* by name, because I have seen the negative impact it has had on the Messianic community over an extended period of time. Many of its sentiments have been picked up and repackaged by others.

The role of *Fossilized Customs* is to expose what its author perceives as paganism that has trickled into the Christian Church. I doubt any of us have a problem with this in principle, as we do want to rightly expose those things which have neither a Biblical basis nor are spiritually edifying (Philippians 4:8). But if we are going to say that something clearly originates from paganism, then we better have the information to back it up. This book’s section on Christmas begins with the following remarks:

“The popular celebration of one’s annual birth-day is acknowledged to be, by all authorities on ancient customs, a Pagan ritual from Babylon. The Babylonians served the sun, moon, planets, and constellations, a Gentile practice condemned by YHWH.”²

No one will disagree that the Babylonians worshipped the stars,³ but who are the “all authorities” here when it comes to the commemoration of someone’s

¹ Lew White, *Fossilized Customs: The Pagan Sources of Popular Customs* (Louisville, KY: Strawberry Islands, 2001). I have the Third Edition in my library, although it is currently in its Eleventh Edition.

² *Ibid.*, 29.

birth? **No evidence is provided.** And even though information is offered which would appear to condemn the practice of having a Christmas tree today (i.e., Jeremiah 10:2-4), the actual birth of Yeshua the Messiah as recorded in the Gospels (Matthew 1:18-2:13; Luke 2:1-20) is not examined or even referred to.

Is the birth of Yeshua a part of the Bible that we cannot trust, having been inserted by so-called lying scribes or those trying to make parallels with pagan religion? If it is, then to be consistent do recognize how liberal scholars and higher critics have long advocated that the Jewish exiles in Babylon took the Mesopotamian mythology of the *Enuma Elish* and Epic of Gilgamesh⁴—and rewrote it into Adam and Eve and Noah and the Flood in the Book of Genesis! When the point is made that you can seemingly trace everything in Holy Scripture to a “pagan” root, **most especially treasured accounts in the Tanach**, today’s generation of ill-equipped Messianic teachers just do not know what to do.⁵

To be fair to *Fossilized Customs*, a warning does appear in how to approach those who celebrate Christmas: “It must be done in a gentle, loving way, otherwise they will be repelled. We must help them to see we do not judge **them**, but rather the customs they have embraced since childhood.”⁶ Unfortunately with publications such as this, no solutions in how to communicate properly are ever offered—so the warnings are easily glossed over. Instead, people who have adopted a Messianic lifestyle resort to just saying “Christmas is pagan!” What happens is that they offend their family and they alienate their friends. Is this the testimony any of us want to have? *One of constantly being an offense?* Do we want to truly make people mad?

Some people actually want to make others mad. However, I have believed for the longest time that there is a better way to demonstrate one’s Messianic faith and convictions. Several years ago I was talking to the wife of a Messianic Jewish congregational leader, who was non-Jewish, and she was recalling the experiences she had with her Jewish in-laws. Her husband’s grandfather, who had come to America from Eastern Europe, would look at her in the eye, holding her hand, and simply tell her at either Christmas or Easter “I hope you have a good holiday.” He was not going to celebrate either holiday, but he knew that a Christian America provided him with a freedom that he did not have in the old country. In spite of some of the problems with the origins of Christmas, God has still blessed my country and He has used it to help the Jewish people.

None of you have to celebrate Christmas or even tell people to have a good holiday season. If you are a Messianic Believer from an evangelical background,

³ Cf. A.L. Oppenheim, “Assyria and Babylonia: Religion,” in George Buttrick, ed. et al., *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:297-300; A. Kirk Grayson, “Mesopotamia, History of (Babylonia): Religion,” in David Noel Freedman, ed. et al., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 4:773-776.

⁴ An English translation of these two mythologies is available in Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), and also N.K. Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

⁵ For a further discussion, consult the articles “Is the Story of Yeshua Pagan?” and “Encountering Mythology: A Case Study from the Flood Narratives” by J.K. McKee. Also consult John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

⁶ White, 38.

Christmas should be part of that past experience—and you should be looking to the future. This is a future where *Chanukah* can be embraced and remembered as a part of your new December experiences. (And yes, there are those who commemorate *Chanukah* in an unbalanced way—a subject for another time.) Yet surely, you should also want to be a reflection of our Heavenly Father's love and grace and mercy to our Christian brethren this time of year. **I know I do.** Many of them celebrate Christmas, believing in ignorance they are doing something Biblical. They think that the traditions of Christmas are pure and holy, not knowing where many of them originate.

How does today's Messianic movement communicate that Christmas on December 25—not *the birth of God's Son in Bethlehem*—was not our Father's original intention? The leaders and teachers of Messianic Chapter 1, **the pioneer stage**, have largely decided that the way to communicate is by exclaiming "Christmas is pagan!" and have given Ebenezer Scrooge a real run for his money in the anti-Christmas department. The leaders and teachers of the forthcoming Messianic Chapter 2, **the building stage**, have to do better and have to show that there is a different way to do this. We have to communicate via our actions of faith that we are not unloving, mean-spirited, and unbalanced people for whom "pagan" is the word of choice. We have to communicate instead that we love our Lord and Savior so much, that we will not commemorate His birth on a day that was used to honor gods and goddesses and licentious revelry. We instead have an eight-day celebration of God's victory over evil to remember during this same time, where we consider resisting assimilation into the world, and His ongoing plan of salvation history yet to unfold.

This December, I challenge each one of you that if you have ever used the "Christmas is pagan!" line, and have offended family or alienated friends, **to apologize and ask for their forgiveness.** They are our brethren in the Lord who do not deserve some of the treatment that they have received from our faith community. Publicly admit that you went a little too far or were too zealous in your views of Christmas, when your intentions were not to degrade or demean the birth of our Savior. Tell your family or friends that although you might not celebrate Christmas any more, that your intention was not to condemn them. Ask them to understand that the Lord has you doing something differently now, and that you will be there to answer their *solicited* questions should they ever ask. And tell them that in the future, you will not force your new Messianic views on them unless they do ask you for your opinion. **When that time does come**, be prepared to answer "with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15, RSV), armed with credible and fair-minded research material.

TNN ONLINE EDITOR'S UPDATE

November 2013

Dear Friends:

As I write this, it has just about been a full year since our family and ministry relocated back



to the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex. Having an introverted side, which is internally reflective most of the week for both my work and prayer routine, I am constantly evaluating where I have been and where I am going.

Last year at this time, my library and most of my possessions were here in DFW. I had yet to leave Central Florida, but was actively reading through some books left, compiling notes for ***Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?***, dealing with the different models of ecclesiology (study of God's elect) present in the Messianic world, and which advocates the enlarged Kingdom realm model—with a restored Twelve Tribes of Israel at the center, and the Kingdom of Israel incorporating the righteous from the nations with expanded borders. This publication, the first that we officially released here from Texas, certainly asks some questions—and offers some conclusions—a *bit ahead of its time*, which I hope will help to moderate some contemporary debates.

The first full Wednesday Night Bible Study conducted out here in Texas was a revisit of our 2005 study of the Epistle of James. This was a study which required a revisit for paperback and eBook release, not at all because my own views or conclusions on James had really changed, but mainly because new resources and commentaries on James—requiring some level of attention and engagement—had been released since 2005. Taking up the first half of 2013, I know that the James Bible study was able to help many people, not only in helping to pay attention to more of the finer details surrounding James' letter, but also in reflecting on the contemporary spirituality of Messianic people. The paperback and eBook release, of the ***James for the Practical Messianic*** commentary in September, now allows for any new *Practical Messianic* release to be something entirely new!

The first new Wednesday Night Bible Study, which has started out here in Texas, has been what I have anticipated to be a year-long or so examination of **Paul's letter to the Romans**. While I would like the study to go at a reasonably brisk pace—as I have personally already worked through many of the difficult passages over the past five to six years—it might very well take one month a chapter. Already, just getting to Chapter 4 in my Romans notes, I am having to probe some of the deep spiritual dimensions of Paul's writing, not only contemplating what his epistle meant to its ancient recipients—but how each of us needs to evaluate the condition or quality of our salvation, and how we are progressing in holiness. The Jewish and non-Jewish issues of Romans chs. 1-3,

for sure, have many questions that have remained relatively elusive for too many of today's Messianic people, as they regard the universality and consequences of sin. And so, I look forward to what this complete study of Romans, perhaps finished by this time next year, is going to bring!

My workload would not be complete—if in addition to a commentary—there were not another book project I was also in the process of coordinating. One of the nagging wants of mine, as I have stated many times, has been to give the topics of kosher and Sabbath the proverbial “royal treatment.” In the middle of September, the work on the forthcoming *Messianic Kosher Helper* got started in high gear. While we have written on this issue here and there, assembling together the necessary articles and analyses of Bible passages, is going to be a significant task. This is going to be a publication for the 2010s, and there are going to be aspects of this which will finally be brought out into the open. Up until now, the major Messianic kosher books have stayed away from addressing a number of passages (i.e., Acts 10; Romans 14) in any substantial detail, have focused a bit too much on minor issues (i.e., separating meat and dairy) and not major issues (i.e., being served unclean things by family or friends), and issues like kosher human behavior and attitudes—much less bio-ethics (i.e., genetic engineering and genetically modified foods). When this gets released, sometime in 2014, it is going to challenge many of us—but hopefully answer some critical questions!

The major highlight of my past year, after being relocated back here, has undeniably been in developing a new circle of friends my own age, who share some of the concerns for the issues that a number of the older people within the Messianic community have not really paid attention to. Over the past several months, I have become a part of a small Bible study, made up of about half a dozen or so young men and women in their 20s and 30s, probing the Bible and asking some questions, which have not really been addressed by anyone, in any part, of the Messianic movement (as to my knowledge). Some of these questions pertain to topics like spiritual warfare and interacting with demonic presences in life. Others of these pertain to various Genesis-related issues. And still others pertain to how we can be effective servants of the Lord in the world. Suffice it to say, I have never been in a Bible study, ever, where all of the members get along so well, and are pretty much in agreement on everything, as born again Believers dig a little deeper into God and probe the great mysteries of His Word. The questions that are asked, and the issues presented, have certainly given me a number of ideas on things to work on!

I have had a full year in 2013: getting relocated, reestablished, and getting my bearings in a new place. I look forward to what my second full year here in Dallas is going to bring for our ministry and ongoing projects and assignments, and for me personally. I know that whatever happens, many people all over the world are going to benefit from it! Until next month... J.K. McKee