

OIM UPDATE

January 2014

In the past few weeks, after having several year-end discussions with a number of respected Believers, who are pursuing a Messianic lifestyle, the subject of choices began reverberating in my spirit. Each person I spoke with had chosen (at some point in time like our family), to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to leave the relative comfort of evangelical Christian settings, and embrace a more Torah observant approach to their relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Naturally, these choices have led to some uncomfortable moments around some of the December activities with family and friends, but it was evident from my conversations that all were comfortable with their decisions. However, I did notice in a number of these dialogues that their respective Messianic assemblies or fellowships were currently devoting an inordinate amount of time to end-time theories and speculative myths, which have continually infiltrated the Messianic community of faith over the years. Invariably, what came to mind a number of times was a Scriptural warning issued by the Apostle Paul to his disciple Timothy, as he peered into the future prior to his execution:

“I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Messiah Yeshua, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. **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 4:1-4).

Consequently, my verbal response when prompted was to relate how our family appreciates and has taken measures for practical preparedness in the event of unforeseen events like tornadoes, hurricanes, or power outages that might disrupt the supply chain. I also acknowledged from our experience that the Holy One has certainly used a number of highly publicized end-time prophecies, and even unsound teachings, to expand the numbers of the Messianic movement worldwide—while indicating that those controversial topics should not be the resounding focus of their groups. Inevitably, I was quick to add that our ministry has strongly advocated a more balanced, written teaching style, which promote love and sound doctrine, with an emphasis on scholarly research and engagement.

After all, as we concluded years ago, the Messianic perspective—which we believe is a vital part of the promised restoration of all things

(Acts 3:19-21)—must be able to withstand critical analysis by both its Jewish and Christian critics. For the latter, it should be stated that we indeed have much in common with Christianity, as we affirm Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth to be the Divine Messiah, whose sacrifice for the sin of humanity is required to receive eternal salvation. But, we do believe that the emerging Messianic approach to worship and study, which returns the Body of Messiah to an orthopraxy more closely represented by Yeshua and His First Century disciples, is something that is deeper and more enriching than much of what is witnessed in contemporary Christianity. Such a “revolutionary” understanding is not too dissimilar to what has occurred since the early Sixteenth Century, when the suffocating tentacles of Roman Catholicism were challenged by the Protestant Reformers. So, when Christians applaud a Reformation that emphasized *sola fide* or “faith alone” as one of their rallying cries, we simply indicate that there is much more blessed intimacy to be had in our relationship with the Holy One during this period of Restoration.

Thankfully for the past five centuries or so, the Holy Spirit has used the work of many godly people in Christianity to bring untold millions of people into a personal relationship with the Risen Savior. Hence, ardent followers of Yeshua the Messiah have done just as Paul admonished Timothy to do: by preaching the gospel found in the Word in and out of season, in order to patiently reprove, rebuke, and exhort those who may have been led to turn away their ears from the truth. It is our prayer that what we have written will likewise be used by the Father to advance His Kingdom, as the End of the Age approaches. The Outreach Israel Ministries **Theological Defense Trust** was established to elicit financial support to allow us to continue our timely work! Partner with us this year on a monthly basis, so that sound written theological arguments can continue to be produced to foster in the promised restoration!

My meditation and contemplation about the choices available to humanity has led me to write this month’s lead article, entitled “**Choose Wisely.**” This will hopefully encourage every reader to faithfully consider the choices they make through the course of their remaining lives.

Finally, we are most grateful for your prayers and support for the rapidly expanding **Prison Ministry-Free Book Outreach** this past year. We are very excited about all the projects planned for 2014, which we pray will be used by the Lord for His glory!

Until the restoration of all things...

Mark Huey

CHOOSE WISELY

by Mark Huey

When the Creator God made human beings in His image (Genesis 1:26-27), He also endowed Adam and Eve, the crown of His Creation, with a free will like His to independently exercise choices. Only one recorded prohibition with a corresponding severe penalty, regarding all that He provided for them, was directly communicated in the Garden of Eden:

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die’” (Genesis 2:16-17).

Lamentably, the unwise choice to partake of the forbidden fruit, from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, has initiated the human suffering that has followed the first couple’s obstinate act of disobedience. Hence, since this transgression, a person’s course in life is directly affected by both wise and unwise freewill choices that a man or woman makes, unless unexpected circumstances intervene. Consequently every person, no matter when he or she physically exists in time, is directly or indirectly subject to the choices made in the course of his life. Given that reality, it is highly recommended that people choose wisely or suffer the negative results.

From the instant a person awakens, choices are available that range from the mundane needs for sustenance and basic hygiene, to where one will concentrate thoughts that eventually lead to actions. Moment-by-moment, or day-by-day, or year-by-year, ultimately one’s destiny is usually a sum total of his or her choices. Once coherent and cognizant of all the input that is flooding into the mind through all the senses, most people generally resort to ingrained habits, customary daily routines, and repetitious patterns of behavior—unless something unusual interrupts the usual flow of activities. Nevertheless, it must be understood that like the force of gravity which keeps the cosmos in perfect order, the Creator has embedded into His Creation the principle of cause and effect, or what Job and Proverbs refer to as sowing and reaping:

“As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (Job 4:8, RSV).

“He who sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail” (Proverbs 22:8, RSV).

According to these ancient astute observations of humanity, such unwise choices to foster iniquity and injustice inevitably negatively and personally affect the decision maker.

In a contrasting manner according to the Apostle Paul, who references this timeless axiom in his letter to the Galatians—while “flesh” or self-oriented choices result in the corruption or destruction of the flesh, choosing life derived

from the Spirit of God reaps eternal life:

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7-8).

Here with the temporal and eternal considered, the preeminent Apostle adds a spiritual component to some of the instructional words attributed to Moses, when he admonished the Ancient Israelites to consider the choice between life versus the curse of death:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

Notice that Moses’ wise counsel to Israel was to choose the blessing of life offered by the Holy One, in order to lengthen one’s physical life and maintain residence in the Promised Land. Those, who received this judicious instruction and their descendants, were to love the Lord God, obey His voice, and hold fast to Him for His protection and provision. Accordingly, the next generation led by Joshua, the faithful servant of Moses (Exodus 24:13), who like Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5) was remembered as a servant of the Lord (Joshua 24:29), famously challenged his fellow Israelites to choose to serve the Lord:

“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; **but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.**’ The people answered and said, ‘Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.’ Then Joshua said to the people, ‘You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.’ **The people said to Joshua, ‘No, but we will serve the LORD.’** Joshua said to the people, ‘You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him.’ And they said, ‘We are witnesses.’ ‘Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.’ **The people said to Joshua, ‘We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice.’** So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. Joshua said to all the people, 'Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God.' **Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance. It came about after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old**" (Joshua 24:14-29).

For a period of time, as recorded in the Book of Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, and 1&2 Chronicles, the willingness of the people of Israel to choose to serve the Lord waxed and waned, with either good or bad consequences resulting. Throughout the balance of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Ancient Israelites did not necessarily choose to follow the instructions communicated to them through Moses, even when warned over and over by prophets sent by the Holy One. Instead, the majority far too frequently chose to disregard the prescribed ways of the Lord and suffered the punishments of trusting in their own fleshly strength, or worse chose to follow after other gods. The history of Ancient Israel is replete with example after example of disobedience and the resultant judgments, to the point of multiple expulsions from the Promised Land.

Of course, the omniscient Creator God knew from before He created time that many of His uniquely chosen people would *not* choose wisely—**because free will motivated by the flesh without faith, invariably chooses poorly**. This is why in eternity past the Almighty One conceived a "faith" plan, exemplified in the life of Abraham, which would overcome the predilections of the flesh, the influences of the world, and the wiles of the Devil. *This sovereign solution to contend with the sinful nature inherited from Adam was for people to live by faith*. By believing in the infallible Word of the Lord, as communicated through His chosen vessels, one could receive the free gift of the righteousness He requires in order to have eternal life. Abraham, the father of faith (Romans 4:11, 12, 16), modeled this attribute when he listened to the voice of the Lord, chose to believe what was spoken to him, and then had God's required righteousness supernaturally imputed to him:

"Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:5-6).

Obviously Father Abraham, who is later referred to as "God's servant" (Genesis 26:24), chose wisely and confirmed the understanding later communicated by the author of Hebrews, which summarizes the absolute requirement for faith and belief in God, in order to please and be rewarded by Him:

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Providentially, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob before and during their temporary enslavement in Egypt, knew about not only Abraham's testimony of faith, but also the similar promises that the Lord communicated to his heirs Isaac and Jacob regarding the ultimate destiny of Israel. Additionally, based on the generation to generation transmission of the ancient words that

begin with the creation of the world and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, there was also the understood promise that the Creator God would at some point in time, send one of Eve's seed, who would overcome the works of the Evil One, by bruising or crushing his head, despite having His own heel bruised. This "Anointed One" or "seed of the woman," would fulfill the archaic prophecy found in God's curse spoken to the Serpent after the transgressions of Adam and Eve:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel" (Genesis 3:15).

For generations, the faithful children of Jacob/Israel had anticipated a promised deliverer, anointed to rule over them, who would crush the head of the deceiving Serpent. When under the oppression of the Egyptians, some Israelites came to the conclusion that Moses fulfilled at least aspects of that role (Exodus 2:4; cf. Acts 7:35). However, down through Biblical history it has become apparent that Moses was called to be the "lawgiver," or the author of the Torah, who happened to lead Israel out of Egypt toward the Land of Promise. Instead of being the ultimate deliverer or prophet, who Moses later said would come at a future time (Deuteronomy 18:18-19), Moses was used to compile in written form what God communicated to him (Exodus 17:14; 24:4; 34:29). This would be God's first significant revelation to humanity that would be transcribed, and understood for generations by the Israelites (Deuteronomy 31:9)—all of which is critical to comprehend salvation history. Thankfully, Moses chose wisely to follow the leading of the Spirit of God, and recorded for posterity's sake, what is preserved in the Torah.

Hundreds of years later it is the Spirit-filled Apostle Paul, a servant of the Lord (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10), a highly respected Torah scholar and one zealous for the Law of Moses (Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:5), who in his letter to the Galatians, properly interpreted the promises spoken to Abraham about his "seed" and the promised covenants made by God to His people. Here, one discovers that God's revelation of the codified Mosaic Law in salvation history was and is necessary to lead one to faith in the accomplished atoning work of the Messiah. After all, if one does not know that he or she has broken God's laws and commands, there would not be a need for a Savior, and people could rely on their perceived self-righteous living for justification, or even everlasting life:

"Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'AND TO YOUR SEED' [Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 17:7; 24:7], which is Messiah. Now what I am saying is this: the Torah, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is by the Torah, it is no longer by promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by a promise. Why the Torah then? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not of one; but God is one. Is the Torah then against the promises of God? May it never be! For if there had been a law given which was able to make alive,

then righteousness would have been by the Torah. But the Scripture has shut up all things under sin, so that the promise by the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Torah, being shut up to the faith intending to be revealed. Therefore the Torah became our pedagogue *to lead us* to Messiah, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a pedagogue. For you are all children of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua. For as many of you as were immersed into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is no male and female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua. **And if you are Messiah's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise"** (Galatians 3:16-29, author's rendering from *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*).

It is within these statements to the Galatians that the Apostle Paul clarifies the distinction between how faith like that of Abraham generates righteousness, and how the Law communicated through Moses does not result in righteousness. In the post-resurrection era, both understandings are used to lead people to faith in the atoning work of Yeshua the Messiah for salvation, because one cannot understand one without the other. Additionally, one discovers that in the summary remarks, Paul elucidates some incredible truths about the Lord's perspective on the equality of those who have faith in the Messiah. Lamentably, modern-day Believers struggle to understand and embrace this egalitarian perspective for all of those in the Lord. Frequently, they choose to fall back upon ancient patriarchal misperceptions, or distinctions due to bloodlines and heritage, or even prejudice based on stations in life. Thankfully, Paul chose wisely, to allow the Spirit of God to use him to communicate these critical truths that when understood properly, help abolish the wall of partition and the enmity (Ephesians 2:14-15) that has survived and even thrived between people groups and the genders.

Faithful people living today have these wonderful Biblical examples of God's distinguished servants Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and Paul choosing wisely to allow the Lord to use them for His specific purposes during their respective lifetimes. **But notice that each of these chosen vessels is in a unique way, noted in the Scriptures as a "servant" of the Most High. This recognition of unbridled service to the Holy One could lead one to conclude that being or becoming a servant of God is beneficial, if not critical, to consistently making wise choices that result in furthering God's plan for the Creation.** Certainly the pattern is there to contemplate. But what is required to become a servant of the Lord? Do people need to have dramatic first hand encounters with the Lord, where they see Him or hear Him speak audibly, as each of the above servants had? Or is it possible to wisely choose to believe what the word of the Lord has communicated in the Holy Scriptures, and then commit one's life to doing what it says to do?

After all, once someone is truly born from above with the Holy Spirit resident in his or her heart of flesh, there is the supernatural ability to submit one's will to the will of the One who resides inside. But doing so, not only requires the commensurate faith and belief modeled by a cloud of witnesses recorded in the

Scriptures (Hebrews 11, 12:1), but the free will choice to believe and adhere to words of Yeshua the Messiah, the “promised Seed” (Genesis 3:15; 22:18; Galatians 3:16-19). After all, according to some additional admonition, faithful children of the Most High are being conformed to the image of the Messiah Yeshua (Romans 8:29), who is the ultimate Servant of servants, as denoted in the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty deceit, but in humility of mind consider one another better than himself, each of you not *only* looking out for his own interests, but each of you also for the interests of others. **Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Messiah Yeshua, who, existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross**” (Philippians 2:3-8, author’s rendering from *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*).

In order to become a Messiah-like servant, one needs to take the words of Yeshua seriously. As noted centuries earlier by the servant Moses, he referenced the coming of a future prophet or servant, who would speak the words of the Lord that would be required of all:

“I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him” (Deuteronomy 18:18-19).

These “words” of the Messiah are what many refer to as the “hard words” of the Lord that can only be understood and embraced by those who have the spiritual eyes of the heart (Ephesians 1:18), to see, trust, and obey.

In surveying and reviewing the recorded words of the Messiah in the Gospel accounts, one discovers that very early in His ministry, Yeshua offered a fundamental choice to His listeners during His Sermon on the Mount, setting the stage for the more difficult words that follow later. After a lengthy recitation of many of the elementary principles of the Kingdom of God—and without referencing the above listed servants of the Lord, Abraham, Moses, and Joshua—Yeshua simply stated that everyone who wants to engage with the aforementioned Kingdom is given the choice to serve one of two masters:

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and wealth...**For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.** So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:24, 32-34).

Yeshua obviously knew that the flesh and the spirit were the two major battling forces inherent in men and women, which are at war with one another over the choices each person makes. In categorical terms, Yeshua tells His listeners then and His followers today, that it is impossible to serve two masters without serious conflict. So from the early stages of Yeshua’s recorded ministry, He

was presenting a choice to all who desire to follow and/or want to serve Him. For those reading His words today, knowing that the Almighty will require it of them, the same choice remains. So everyone who claims to be a follower of the Messiah is required to choose who or what they will serve, on a moment-by-moment basis, or suffer the consequences of trying to serve both as noted. *Keep "choice" and "serve" in mind, as we consider a few more of Yeshua's "hard" words.*

Further along in His ministry, the requirements to be a servant become even more stringent. Consider Yeshua's own admonition to His Disciples who, when wanting elevated seats in God's Kingdom, were told that to become great in the Kingdom, they needed to serve others and become a servant like Him:

"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28).

In this context, Yeshua spoke of the highest form of service to others, which required one to give his or her life to another, as He ultimately did when dying for the sin of humanity. But in addition to serving one another, multiple times in the Gospel accounts Yeshua stated that His followers must deny themselves—or literally die to themselves—in order to take up their cross and follow Him:

"And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels'" (Mark 8:34-38).

In fact, one must not only choose to lose his or her life and hate the world, but faithfully serve Him with the eventual promised reward that the Father God will honor their wise choices:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:24-26).

In considering some of these "hard" words and the choice each one has to make, do not fool yourself into believing that you are His servant, until you adamantly know that you consistently and willingly choose to serve Him regardless of the circumstances of life. After all, the concepts of "dying to self" or "total surrender"—or all of the other descriptions theologians have used in an attempt to define what Yeshua requires—may be more theoretical than practical, unless given real life experiences that force a person to choose between God and wealth.

Nevertheless, for those of us living today with the benefit of the entire counsel of God, as revealed to His chosen servants, who faithfully recorded it for

future generations—there are some more difficult challenges that can be contemplated now, knowing that in just a matter of time, they will come to pass. Of course, no one knows when the events found in the Book of Revelation, or other prophetic texts, will occur. *But Believers do know that the things described will eventually take place.* It is our personal responsibility to not only be ready to choose wisely, or at the very least, train up our children and grandchildren to each know the correct choice when the time does come. This is because at the End of the Age, during the time known as Jacob's Trouble or the Tribulation period (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1), a "beast system" will be implemented, and people living then will be given a choice as to how they will conduct commerce (buying and selling). And, just like the challenge made by Yeshua to His listeners in His Sermon on the Mount as to who or what they will serve, a choice on how to buy and sell is going to be presented to all of humanity:

"Then I saw **another beast** coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the **first beast** in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to **worship the first beast**, whose fatal wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he **deceives those who dwell on the earth** because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. **And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name**" (Revelation 13:11-17).

Thankfully, these prophesied days, that are going to require a choice, have not yet arrived. But it is becoming more readily apparent, almost daily as technological advances race forward, that the fulfillment of these events are rapidly approaching. This reality should bring to each and everyone a sober reminder that if we are not continually training our hearts and minds to make wise choices, that there is the possibility that we will be duped into making an unwise choice. After all, there is going to come a time when a great falling away from the faith is going to take place, and it is quite possible that if people are not faithfully making the right choice about who or what they are serving, they just might get swept up in the apostasy:

"**But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron...In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Messiah Yeshua, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following**" (1 Timothy 4:1-2, 6).

Note how in Paul's writing to Timothy, he admonished him to be a good

servant who would be constantly nourished by the words of faith and sound doctrine. In a somewhat parallel passage referencing the apostasy, that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, more detail is included about the return of the Messiah—but not until after the falling away. This is promulgated by the help of a “deluding influence” that is constantly being orchestrated by the man and mystery of lawlessness, the one and same coordinator of the “beast system” of Revelation:

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. **Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness”** (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

From the above passages, Believers should be fully aware of the current challenges that are impacting choices, but also, some of the future events that will influence wise or unwise choices. Interestingly, there are some additional places which describe some of the results of the choices that are going to be made when the beast system is implemented. People either take the mark of the beast in order to buy and sell *and* suffer the consequences of God’s wrath described (Revelation 14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20), *or* refuse the mark of the beast and the possible ensuing death, yet with the stated opportunity to return with the Messiah to rule and reign with Him for a thousand years:

“Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. **And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Messiah and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Messiah for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Messiah and will reign with Him for a thousand years”** (Revelation 20:4-6).

This eventual prophesied “choice” to followers of the Messiah, who will be alive when the “beast system” has been established, will be a crucial “test” of a person’s faith and belief in the recorded warnings found in the Holy Scriptures. In this scenario, Believers are going to have to have so much faith in the Word of God that they will freely choose to physically lose their life, in order to return and rule with the Messiah for a thousand years at the first resurrection. **Take a moment and reflect on this possibility.** Can you honestly say that you would be willing to be beheaded rather than take the mark of the beast? It might be easier for people in their senior years to say yes, because they have already lived the majority of their lives. But what about twenty to fifty year olds, who have been modeled by their parents and grandparents to sit on the proverbial fence and attempt to serve **both** God and wealth with the attendant consequences? What do you think they are going to choose if they are around when the required choice is mandatory for all who want to buy or sell?

While one might have prominently displayed in his or her home the convicting Scripture from Joshua, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15b), children and grandchildren will *know* if that was just a rhetorical display of conviction, or whether a sincere choice to serve the Lord God through the course of life, and to live it. Take this to prayer and meditation, and let the Spirit of the Most High confirm or deny just what choice you have made in the inner recesses of your heart.

Let me conclude with a visual image that has come to mind a few times during the course of thinking about serving the Lord and the heartfelt desire to choose wisely. It comes from the 1989 movie produced by Steven Spielberg, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. In one of the final scenes, Indiana’s father Dr. Jones has been shot and is dying with only one solution to prevent his death. He must drink some water from the Holy Grail (a chalice supposedly used by Yeshua at His Last Supper with supernatural healing powers). An antiquated knight, who has for seven centuries been protecting the Holy Grail, turns to Indy pointing to a table laden with various cups and dishes that might each be the cherished cup and says, “**You must choose, but choose wisely!**” Indy fretfully surveys the table, and chooses the most humble of cups which just happens to be the right one, and his father is healed.

In a like manner, every person must choose, not only moment-by-moment, but whether to serve wealth or God. The key is to humble our hearts and choose to serve Him, not only today, but every day we remain prior to His coming, or our terminal departure. Oddly enough, the Father has given us all a free will to chose. *It is highly recommended that we each choose wisely!*