

Messy Expectations: Dealing with Division

Part 3

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NOTE: The following thoughts have been “brewing” for some time, and should be understood as an ongoing thought process rather than the “final word.” I suppose, in today’s terms, it is more of a blog than a finished statement.

It is a sad and acknowledged issue with the Messianic body in America that there is great division and struggle in many ways. One that is indeed awkward as we are also seeing more people newly interested and hearing the call to return to the ancient paths. Just exactly where are these paths? An organization that previously welcomed gentiles as grafted-in Israelites determined gentiles do not need to keep Torah. The question of Messiah’s deity has again reared its head, an age old controversy in new garments and new voices. Recognition of the “grass roots” nature of the work of the Ruach has been thrown overboard in exchange for obtaining order through organizational structure no matter whether that structure is found in a synagogue or a Christian church. The question of how much weight to give to ancient rabbinic writings as opposed to the written Torah continues in debate. The very identity of Israel is contested, with a hot question being whether the “Jews” alone represent all of Israel. The question of how much “like Judah” Israelites need to be in order to find salvation is a highly debated issue. “The Jews” or “Judah” is, itself, an impossible term as there is no one definitive body. Calculated calendar or sighted moon, not to mention the “lunar Sabbath” method of counting; each method has its adherents, some more vocal than others. The correct way to count the Jubilee year cycles is still contested with one author so certain of his interpretation writing that anyone who teaches otherwise is clearly a false prophet. The pronunciation of the Name is as big of an issue as is the “correct” transliteration while none alive today can possibly know how it was sounded in antiquity. And dare I mention that even vocalization of the Name we have been given divides?

Should we be surprised at this? One outgrowth of thematic study is the understanding of the 7 Spirits of YHWH and their relationship to the 7’s of days of creation, moedim and assemblies but also of the age. In the list of the 7 things that YHWH hates, provided for us in Proverbs 6:16-19, the final age would then be associated with strife and division among brothers. So, as we understand that we are nearing or in the 7th millennium wouldn’t it stand to reason that a great assault of this age would be in strife and division? Let it be known here, too, that strife and division are not necessarily synonymous. Strife, Strong’s #4090, *medan*, appears to be mostly associated with lies, hatred, and untruths. **Difference of understanding, in itself, is not truly strife, but the manner of dealing with the differences certainly can be that.** I would also add that this final age is seeing a battle that is Luciferian in nature as well: a blatant form of opposition is seen in things most Torah believers would recognize but there is also a deeper, more subtle form of deception and deceit operating in the guise of light and goodness. **If a different understanding of issues leads to division it may be through strife or it may be through discernment and the need to be “set apart” for YHWH as one best understands this to mean.**

Seems everyone has their idea of what is wrong and how to fix it. Of course, each vision of correction is based in that person's perspective and experience. Since each local perspective is by necessity, limited, many years ago, we conducted a survey among Messianic fellowship leaders to determine their status, concerns and needs. That information was compiled into a report with recommendations as to possible ways to address unmet needs and submitted to the organization that requested it. They have since carried out some of those recommendations.

We are now in our 11th year of the same fellowship community and have witnessed a number of "national trends" through the years as we talk and work with other individuals and groups, as well as growing through our own stability challenges. I would like to broadly summarize here what I have understood to be the various ideas of the cause of division, the proposed solutions, and then bring our perspective into the discussion. Perhaps it is time, too, to put out another survey. For now, let's start here.

1. Too many independent, Gentile "leaders." Follow Judah and all will come into line.
2. Home fellowship groups too unstable. Join either a synagogue or a church and order will be re-established.
3. Too much disorder and argumentativeness. Just decide to get along.
4. Lack of knowledge of Scripture. Take advantage of wide array of teachers now available through various media.

Is it possible that it all boils down into just four problems and recommendations? Hmm, four, a number having much to do with the world: four seasons, four winds, four rivers, four kingdoms, ... Though this may well be an oversimplification, it certainly represents enough of the ongoing dilemma to be a starting point toward greater understanding.

1. Too many independent, Gentile "leaders." Follow Judah and all will come into line.

This seems to be reasonable on the surface, yet difficulties abound. Though it can well be understood that Judah/Jews are concerned that they will again suffer the onslaught of Gentiles that characterized the first century assemblies, and lose their identity, it is also true that there never has been one clear identity and the infighting among Jews is in itself, legendary. Nor do I think that there is any validity that our unity could ever come in man-made, man-led or man-centered ways. Our unity will be found in Messiah Yeshua and in Him alone. Though there may well be a leadership role for the tribe of Judah, until that tribe recognizes and yields to Messiah Yeshua, our eyes must be on THE Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Messiah Yeshua, not on His followers. See article: [Becoming as Judah?](#)

2. Home fellowship groups too unstable. Join either a synagogue or a church and order will be re-established.

This concept is apparently quite true, as there is a great deal of instability in home fellowships. I have addressed this issue in several articles available on our [main website](#) and our [mini site](#) about establishing new Messianic fellowships. When the original survey was done some years ago, the vast majority of fellowship groups, out of the 100+ respondents, were in the 3-5 year range of longevity. It would be interesting to find out now, some years later whether those same bodies have continued or broken apart and re-organized. We know that some people think that this fragmentation may be part of how the seed is spread but we take exception to that thought. It seems to us that there is a vast difference between a **sending out** and a **falling out**. If a new group is formed because the leaders have been equipped in their former association and blessed to go out and multiply there will be good seed. If the new group is formed out of the unresolved issues between members of a former group, the new group will have roots in dissension and will most likely see that dissension spring up once the proverbial “bloom is off the rose.” Perhaps this is one reason why there is so much fragmentation going on, and so much difficulty for people to trust leadership of any group....or it may be both reason and outcome.

The solution of joining either an established synagogue or a church we take exception to. When one has come to understand that Messiah Yeshua represents the Living Torah and that He doesn't change, briefly stated, to go back under the umbrella of either type of organization would involve accepting headship of someone who doesn't understand this. To join a church body and return to the tree and egg festivals or to join a synagogue, most of which would reject Yeshua as Messiah, are equally objectionable to us, and we believe to YHWH. To join such a body but retain one's own position, trying to keep Torah while in a church, or trying to keep Messiah while in a non-believing synagogue, would by definition, mean that the person hasn't really joined or submitted to the leadership of that organization, another dangerous thing.

Appearance of unity is NOT the same thing as genuine unity. Certainly some people are in proximity to a believing assembly and may be able to accomplish both but many people are isolated. To advise them to indiscriminately join an assembly just so that they are under their authority is not wise.

When one is yielded to the Ruach and a group of such people come together, they have little issue with joining together in appropriate ways. As the focus or internal motivation of a group falters or moves away from that internal heart motivation, the behaviors of the group change and become less than Messiah centered. When that happens, all too often, the “easiest” answer seems to be to impose order from the outside, or “up stream” so that people know what is expected of them by their leadership. At this point, individuals and even entire groups can move from a heart motivation of love to a performance motivated by fear. Such [fear bonds](#) are not honoring or productive for YHWH or anyone else, though they may look orderly.

3. Too much disorder and argumentativeness. Just decide to get along.

It cannot be argued that there is disorder and argumentativeness among Messianic believers. The lack of stability is not a healthy or functional thing for anyone: members or leaders. Yet to just tell people to get along and expect that they will be able to do so just through being told, or perhaps reading a book or attending a seminar is beyond reason.

I have spoken with many leaders over the past 11 years, and especially recall one speaking of how much they have been drained by people who expect everything of them, then complain all the way out the door, “kicking” the leader every step of the way. I have experienced this as well. Sometimes it is even with people who have been trusted members or even leaders with a group. Recently one leader lamented that they thought that the people YHWH brought to build up their ministry would all be “fluffy white sheep” who had already resolved any of their personal issues so as to be ready to step unhindered into ministry. This did not prove to be the case. It is hard for us not to laugh when someone expresses this expectation as we have seen so much over the years of working with both severe trauma survivors and those who think they have no such trauma. When really working together in community, all the rough edges will be exposed and will need to be addressed in order to reach maturity and unity, both individually and corporately. An individual and corporate yieldedness to the Presence of the Ruach haKodesh is essential in all of this. Nearly everything I have written and we have lived through these last 11 years addresses these issues.

We see it as an issue of maturity, individual and corporate, in all areas: emotional, relational, developmental and spiritual. As much as we may want it to be true that simple education is enough to correct interpersonal problems, it is not the case. How then to go about addressing such issues? There are many piecemeal efforts as people recognize the need but even here, the approach is often fragmented and differentiated. Our understanding has been greatly informed through understanding the way our Abba created us to function; both in the physical and spiritual senses. Any effort to help must be rooted in Torah, YHWH’s righteous teachings, Genesis to Revelation as we see it. It may be helpful to address different sub groups such as teens, or parents or marital partners but we have found that a concerted approach to the development of growth and maturity and recovery from emotional wounding for all in the context of community will also inevitably address these other matters. Again, most of the material on our sites is provided with the goal of individual and corporate maturity in Messiah in mind; for both members and leaders, men and women.

4. Lack of knowledge of Scripture. Take advantage of wide array of teachers now available through various media.

I don’t think it can be argued that more people are Biblically illiterate than not. I have seen documentation of this fact in many sources over the years as well as personal experience with members of many different church affiliations. So knowledge is indeed a key issue.

Yet, I am seeing something happen that disturbs me a great deal. I believe it contributes to the fragmentation and division in “Messianic circles” though it is NOT the intention, I am quite certain.

The pursuit of scriptural knowledge is a good thing. But even a good thing when taken out of balance can become bad. There has been a flood of Bible teachers teaching a Hebraic context and many of them are quite excellent, though of course, not all meet the same standard. As we are aware that the Ruach ha Kodesh is a 7-fold spirit, with knowledge being one aspect, so are we aware that **the pursuit of knowledge alone without balance is unwise**. Seeking knowledge without also seeking the other aspects of the Spirit will cause harm to an individual and people near them.

It is good that there is much material available now however there is danger as well. I keep hearing of people who seem to go from one teacher to another, gleaning a little here and a little there; assembling their understanding from a patchwork quilt of sources. While it is good, and we agree that one should NOT focus and follow one teacher alone, without some structure, this gathering of information can present another challenge entirely. Doing so entirely independently does not foster development and maturity in relationship, as well as learning to work within the bounds of authority; and knowing how to help hold those in authority accountable as well. These are things that so many people have found just “too difficult” and they are happy to maintain their “neutrality” by just taking their teachings through media, without all those complications.

In the last few years, there seems to have been almost a rush of resources available online and otherwise. I have seen many of the well-established teachers begin to develop more technically savvy materials. There have also been many “new” teachers in the past 2-3 years who demonstrate enviable technological skills at packaging and promoting their teachings, often appearing to be providing “new understanding” which isn’t really original with them.

The positive side:

- 1) the availability of material from a Hebraic perspective has improved.
- 2) the material to teach people how to study for themselves is much more visible.
- 3) Even those isolated by geography can grow in knowledge and understanding.

The negative side:

- 1) the material available makes it possible for people at large to gain Scriptural knowledge out of balance with their need for personal and corporate relationships and accountability.
- 2) The material available makes it possible for people to remain aloof from others while experiencing a “cyber” connection only, thus encouraging independence far more than the interdependence characteristic of Torah pursuant community. This kind of distance relationship is strongly encouraged in a world characterized by Facebook, Twitter and social networking but it is far easier to just ‘disconnect’ and distance one’s self if difficulties arise,

rather than working through conflicts or differences to mutual restoration and growth; thus losing the opportunity for “iron sharpening iron.”

- 3) Many nationally and internationally known teachers no longer have time to be actively involved in local fellowship, endangering their own stability and susceptibility to pride. This does not mean dropping in to see their community from time to time, nor is visiting other communities a substitute for ongoing refinement of established relationship communities. Yes, we know that YHWH can work in all of their circumstances to maintain humility yet no longer having an on-going accountability relationship within community, to us, appears to be a set up for trouble.
- 4) Often, such national/international teachers can be “known” only by what they present, without the opportunity for students to observe how they “walk the talk.” And thus removing a prime factor in accountability and maturity for all. How does the student know that the teacher they are listening to actually believes and lives what they teach? Should we be encouraging anyone to teach without such clear accountability?
- 5) The packaged material tends to lend itself to a “star” mentality characteristic of the world; in which people now rush to see and hear the latest teaching from their favorite one(s). This can happen locally, too, as many fellowship groups have formed around a charismatic, knowledgeable leader. Sometimes this works well, but sometimes it contributes to the tendency of people to rely on someone else to do the hard work and feed them spiritually.
- 6) Focus on taking in all the material that is now available can far **too easily become a substitute for the development of one’s own ability to be a good Berean, and study to show one’s self approved.** This is a form of idolatry, the basic essence of all the 7 things our YHWH hates.

In brief, the magnitude of material now available from a Messianic perspective can be both positive and negative, depending on the status of the people who seek and provide it.

I am concerned that in our desire to equip people with our understanding of His word, and I count myself here, we are inadvertently contributing to the very fragmentation and division that we lament. If a “pseudo community/teacher” is available, how much easier it is to just disengage from one community if something unpleasant happens, and just retreat alone.

While we have benefited from many conference gatherings and would not want to discourage anyone from finding like-minded people and teachers in this way, I remain concerned when such conferences are centered on feast days. This seems to me to be a form of “kingdom-building” in which allegiance to a larger ministry is encouraged, rather than supporting the development of local community. We actively encourage people to meet locally with others, especially for the Feasts, and encourage their leadership to be with their community, not off at a conference. How we all long for the day when we will be in

Israel and there will no longer be that difficult choice of building relationships and understanding locally or in the larger arena.

When an individual does not have a community locally, it is of course, wonderful to be able to encourage and include them in a gathering, and we too, provide teleconferences and Skype from our Shabbat gatherings for isolated people. BUT we do recognize that this is NOT a replacement for local growing Torah pursuant community; just a supplement until such a community develops.

It may also be that individuals will relocate so as to be a part of an established community which could be a YHWH honoring thing if they really do know enough about the character and maturity of that community before they do so. Otherwise, they may just be entering even more confusion and end up in a cycle of relocating again and again as it is so often true that it is difficult to accurately assess a situation until you are within it. I have written several articles on the call to and commitment needed to form such community which can be found among our [articles on the site](#).

It seems to me that this large volume of media material can be made to serve the community or detract from it. This, too, will depend on the maturity of the people involved.

There isn't one perfect solution that I can see, but it does seem obvious that the form of discipleship which involves one person reaching others in a more personal mentoring relationship which then equips them to go out and reach/teach more would be a **quality standard**; more like what we saw Yeshua and His followers doing most often in the Word.

Less showy, yes-- less efficient in reaching larger numbers, yes-- perhaps more effective in building committed followers of Yeshua within stable communities, not just interested observers?