



The Center for Messianic Learning Unapologetically Pro-Torah Unashamedly Pro-Israel Irrevocably Zionist

ב"ה

“... out of Tziyon will go
forth Torah, the word of
ADONAI from
Yerushalayim.”
(Isaiah 2:3)

Jew and Gentile (Synagogue and Church), one in Messiah. (Ephesians 2:14)

“For He is our peace, Who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, ...”

If your life is not in jeopardy for what you believe, you're probably on the wrong side.

Please Note: It is *not* my intent to nitpick or to be unduly critical. However, it is abundantly clear to anyone who will consider the issue with an open mind, that the primary message of the Church in America today is simply *not* the same as the simple nine-word message of John the Baptizer, Yeshua of Nazareth, and Yeshua's Emissaries (Apostles): “Repent [i.e., turn away from sin and return to God and His Torah], because the Kingdom of God is imminently near.”

The True Gospel

Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. (1 Timothy 4:1-2, HCSB)

I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you by the grace of Christ, [and are turning] to a different gospel — not that there is another [gospel], but there are some who are troubling you and want to change the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-7 HCSB)

For if a person comes and preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you had not received, or a different gospel, which you had not accepted, you put up with it splendidly! (2 Corinthians 11:4, HCSB)

The “Individual Salvation” Gospel

I am an ordained Christian pastor, the son of an evangelical pastor, now a Torah-teacher and follower of *HaDerek* (The Way¹), essentially as practiced in the Messianic Jewish Restoration movement. I was raised in an evangelical church and served in various pastoral and other leadership roles in numerous evangelical churches for well over 35 years. In *every one* of those churches, the “Gospel” was faithfully and regularly proclaimed in nearly every worship service. However, it wasn't until the mid-1990's that I began to question my understanding of the Gospel message. In fact, the so-called “Gospel” as it is being taught in nearly all churches is simply this: believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin so you can have a personal relationship with Him and go to heaven when you die.

While this may very well be true, it is only the “*individual salvation* gospel” and not the *full* gospel; actually, it is only a small part of the *True Gospel*. It is missing some especially

¹ “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way (Hebrew, *HaDerek*) which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14, NASB).

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The *True* Gospel

important parts, like radical repentance, discipleship, redemption from exile, the restoration of Israel, and the Kingdom of Heaven.² What this means is that hundreds of millions, perhaps billions, of professing Christians do not know — have never heard — the *True* Gospel message. As Messianic Pastor and Theologian D. Thomas Lancaster points out:

They know parts of it. A piece here. A piece there. But the same anti-Jewish theology that severed Christianity from Judaism in the second century has severed Christians today from the full message of the gospel.

A gospel that does not preach repentance is not the full gospel. A gospel message that does not preach immersion is not a full gospel message. A gospel message that does not preach discipleship to Jesus is not a full gospel message. A gospel message that does not preach the kingship of Jesus, including subjection to his lordship, is not a full gospel message. A gospel message that does not teach the restoration of Israel and of the Jewish people is not a full gospel message. A gospel message that does not teach the coming kingdom of heaven on earth is not a full gospel message. A gospel message that does not teach the physical, literal resurrection of the dead is not a full gospel message.

Ironically, when the gospel is reduced to merely the salvation message, it becomes so neutered that one wonders if it even has the power to save. It calls people to ask Jesus to forgive their sins, but does it call for people to renounce those same sins and surrender their lives to the King? A partial proclamation of the gospel produces partial converts, not disciples. The church is full of lukewarm Christians, neither hot nor cold, who love to sing and worship and go through the religious motions on a Sunday morning but have never experienced life-changing conversion to which the gospel calls us. They have never really surrendered the authority over their lives to our Master. Does such a gospel save?³

So, the question absolutely *must* be asked, how many professing Christians are actually “saved” and how many are going to spend eternity regretting they did not make the effort to find out on their own (since their pastors did not teach them) what the Scriptures *really* say? How many Christian pastors (like I was) who teach only the partial gospel, the “individual salvation gospel,” are going to stand before the Master one day and hear Him say to them, “You evil and lazy servant!” (Matthew 25:26)

What is being taught in churches today is simply *not* what Yeshua or *any* of the Apostles taught as “the Gospel.” As Lancaster explains, at no place in the four Gospel accounts is it ever recorded that “Yeshua went up on a hill, and He sat down, and began to teach His disciples, ‘believe in Me for the forgiveness of your sins, so that you can have a personal relationship with Me and go to heaven when you die.’” Nor is that message *ever* taught by *any* of the Apostles in the entire collection of Apostolic Writings (identified as the “New Testament” in Christian Bibles).

The Church has collectively simply lost sight of what the word “gospel” means. The word *gospel* derives from the Old English *gōd-spell* (rarely *godspel*), meaning “good news” or “glad tidings.” The word use in the Christian version of the Apostolic Writings comes from the Greek *εὐαγγέλιον* (*euangelion*), or “good news.” But the term “gospel” is not unique to the Apostolic Writings. In the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) the word frequently used by the Prophets is *בשר* (*basar*). For example:

Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news [*basar*], Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news [*basar*]; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” (Isaiah 40:9, NAS)

² Lancaster, Daniel Thomas. *Elementary Principles: Six Foundational Principles of Ancient Jewish Christianity*. Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2014, p. 25. 1-800-775-4807 www.ffoz.org

³ Lancaster, pp. 25-26.

Formerly I said to Zion, "Behold, here they are." And to Jerusalem, "I will give a messenger of good news [basar]." (Isaiah 41:27, NAS)

How lovely on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news [basar], Who announces peace And brings good news [basar] of happiness, Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7, NAS)

A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news [basar] of the praises of the Lord. (Isaiah 60:6, NAS)

Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news [basar], Who announces peace! Celebrate your feasts, O Judah; Pay your vows. For never again will the wicked one pass through you; He is cut off completely. (Nahum 1:15, NAS)

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news [basar] to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; (Isaiah 61:1, NAS)

In fact, please notice that Yeshua said that He was *specifically* anointed to "announce the basar."

Now when he went to Natzeret, where he had been brought up, on Shabbat he went to the synagogue as usual. He stood up to read, and he was given the scroll of the prophet Yesha'yahu. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of ADONAI is upon me; therefore, He has anointed me to announce Good News [basar] to the poor; He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the imprisoned and renewed sight for the blind, to release those who have been crushed, to proclaim a year of the favor of ADONAI." After closing the scroll and returning it to the *shammash* [assistant], he sat down; and the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. He started to speak to them: "Today, as you heard it read, this passage of the Tanakh was fulfilled!" (Luke 4:14-37, CJB)

Through the Prophet Yesha'yahu (Isaiah), God promised to send Israel a bearer of good news [basar] who would bring His message, "Here is your God!" The "good news" that he was to bring is defined in Isaiah chapters 40 to 66. This prophecy pointed to — and was begun to be fulfilled in — the ministry of Yochanan the Immerser (John the Baptist) and his nine-word sermon that he preached over, and over, and over again: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

It is unfortunate that the original Hebrew text of most of the Apostolic Writings have been lost to us, because in Greek, the word for "repent" is μετανοεο, (*metanoeo*), which means to change one's mind. However, the Jewish people in Israel during the first century, according to the historian Flavius Josephus, ferociously clung to their own language, which was *Hebrew*, not Greek. Yochanan was speaking *Hebrew*, not Greek, and the word he used for "repent" was שׁוּב (*shuwb*), which means to turn around, turn back, return, or restore (as a relationship). If he were admonishing the people to turn back or return, there had to be someone or something to which they were to return. Without someone or something to return to, there was no point in telling them to turn back.

They had wandered away from God and from His Torah! So, the message of John was, "Turn away from sin and return to God and to His Torah, because His kingdom will be appearing at any time now!"

When Yochanan was imprisoned, Yeshua began to preach the same nine-word sermon, which is the Good News (or Gospel) as defined by Isaiah:

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17, NAS)

The True Gospel

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23, NAS)

When Yeshua sent His disciples out to preach, He instructed them:

And as you go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 10:7, NAS)

He did *not* tell them to present the "four spiritual laws." He did *not* instruct them to ask, "If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would be when you wake up?" He did not tell them to ask, "Are you saved?" He did *not* have them ask people to invite Jesus into their hearts. They had one message, and one message only: *the good news of the Kingdom*.

When His disciples asked Him what would be the sign of His returning, He replied:

This *gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14, NAS)

It is obvious that His intent was for those who follow Him to faithfully continue to preach "the gospel of the kingdom" until His return. The "gospel of the kingdom" is now as it has always been: "Repent (turn back to God and His Torah), for the Kingdom of Heaven [alternately translated as "kingdom of God"] is at hand!"

This "repentance" is clearly a call to turn away from sin and to return to God and obedience to His Torah.⁴ His Torah clearly sets forth God's absolute standard of righteousness. As the Creator, He has declared wrong to be wrong and right to be right, and He has the right to the expectation that His creation will submit, not to their own opinion of right and wrong, but to the absolute standard of right and wrong that He has determined.

The True Gospel message assumes that the repentance being called for is a return to God and to Torah! The Gospel and Torah are inseparable! The gospel message automatically assumes the Torah, for without Torah there is nothing to return to!

Is "Heaven" for Real?

The teaching of the Church that that the righteous go to "heaven" when they die has absolutely nothing at all to do with the Kingdom of Heaven (Kingdom of God) as taught by Yeshua and documented in the Apostolic Writings. Because the Church has lost contact with its Hebrew origins, modern Christian teachers are, by and large, unaware that the Scriptures never speak of "heaven" as a place to which the righteous dead are transported.

The writers of *all* the Scriptures had a concept of three "heavens." The "first heaven" speaks of the atmosphere in which the birds fly. The "second heaven" is the created cosmos, all the planets, suns, moons, and galaxies that God has created. Since the Creator must, by definition, exist beyond and outside of that which He has created, the "third heaven" is the realm outside of all created space and time, the dwelling place of HaShem Himself. The Scripture writers had absolutely no concept of "heaven" as it is taught by the Church. There is only the *Olam Hazeah*, the world which now exists, and the *Olam Haba*, the world which is to come, or the re-created "new earth" after "the first heaven and the first earth passed away" (Revelation 21:1, NAS).

Those who understand the Hebrew origins of the Church understand that the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" is a *circumlocution*, a way of speaking about the sovereign kingship of HaShem without referring directly to Him. Since well before the time of Yeshua, Judaism has had a tradition of avoiding direct reference to "the Name that is too sacred to pronounce" for

⁴ Obedience to Torah is not "Galatianism" or some onerous thing to be studiously avoided. In the simplest terms, obedience to Torah is to simply love what God loves and to hate what God hates. All else, as they say, is commentary.

fear of speaking it “in vain” as prohibited by the Third Commandment. HaShem revealed His “memorial name” to Moshe (Moses) in a four-letter word called the Tetragrammaton (four letters), יהוה (*yud-hey-vav-hey*, or YEHOVAH). Wherever this Name appears in the Hebrew Tanakh, the one reading aloud or translating substitutes for it the word *ADONAI* (written or printed in all capitals or small capitals), the Hebrew word for “Lord.” Most English translations have followed this example by substituting LORD or Lord. Most religious Jews will not even write His title (“God” is not His name, it is His title); they write it as G-d or Gd. Another circumlocution that I use very frequently is HaShem, which simply means “the Name” (referring to the Name that is too sacred to be spoken).

Another example of substitution of the word “heaven” for reference to HaShem is as common, or perhaps more common, in English as in Hebrew. “For heaven’s sake,” “Oh, my heavens,” and similar outbursts are substitutes for “For God’s sake,” “Oh, my God,” and so forth. Thus, in Hebrew (and translated into English), “the Kingdom of Heaven” is a circumlocution for “Kingdom of God.” Dr. Luke, writing to a greater Gentile readership, understood that non-Jewish readers might misinterpret what he meant, so he just came right out and wrote “the Kingdom of God.”

So what, then, is the Kingdom of Heaven if it’s not the home of the Pearly Gates, somewhere off in the sweet bye-and-bye? The Kingdom of Heaven, or Kingdom of God, is the rule of God *on earth* over his creation as promised through Moshe and the Prophets. It is the Messianic rule promised in Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, and others of the Prophets. All the tribes of Israel will be gathered back into the Land where they will dwell in universal peace and prosperity, the Temple and Levitical worship will be restored, the city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt as the eternal capital city of Israel and of the world, the throne of David will be restored, and the Messiah, the Anointed Son of David, will sit on His Father’s throne to reign over the entire earth, all nature will be restored to an Edenic state that Judaism calls *Gan Eden* (Paradise, or literally *Garden of Eden*), and HaShem will enter into a new covenant in which He writes the Torah on all hearts, and all humanity will know God.⁵

But as for us, the disciples of Yeshua, we have the privilege of participating in the Kingdom in the here and now. We don’t have to wait until His return. We participate in spreading the Good News of this Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and in preparing the world to receive Him when He returns to reign. Those of us who surrender to the King and submit to the authority of His Torah, are now living under the King. *We are already in the Kingdom!*

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, *the kingdom of God is in your midst.*” (Luke 17:20-21, NAS)

This promise is for the Jewish people, and for their children, and for their children’s children, and for “all who are afar off” (Gentiles who identify themselves with the Messiah, the People, the Land, and the Torah of Israel), even as many as the Lord our God shall call. (Acts 2:39) And the amazing *new* good news is that now *even Gentiles* can be a part of what was once a “Jews-only” Kingdom!

⁵ The Hebrew word for “Paradise” is *Gan Eden*, or literally, Garden of Eden. When Yeshua told the thief on the cross next to Him, “Today you will be with me in Paradise,” what He *literally* said was “Today you will be with Me in the Garden of Eden” (Luke 23:43).