



The Center for Messianic Learning

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"Torah will go forth
out of Tziyon, the
Word of ADONAI
from Yerushalayim."
(Isaiah 2:3)

If you don't believe that Genesis 1 through 11 is *literally* true, how can you believe that John 3:16 is *literally* true?

Created in the Image of God

A message from Rev. Dr. Rickard L. Sawyer

to

Congregation Beth Israel

Ripley, West Virginia

Rev. Dr. Harold "Hal" Workman, Rabbi

June 4, 2016

Rabbi Hal has asked me to teach from time to time, and I think it's only fair that I share a little bit about myself with you, because whenever I sit under the teaching of someone, I certainly want to know about who they are, where they come from, and how they came to think and believe the way they do.

I'm only going to bore you with all this just this one time, in hopes that it will help you know me better and understand why I believe the way I do. I have a dear friend who studied with me for almost ten years, and she had a very good way of keeping me on my toes. Almost every time I taught something she had not heard before, she would ask me, "Where did you get that from?" I expect the same from you.

You will eventually notice it so I may as well tell you right up front that when I teach, I generally write out a complete manuscript of what I want to say. This is because I probably have a touch of ADD and I easily get distracted, lose my train of thought, get off topic, or sometimes

Oh look! There's a coffee pot back there.

I wonder if there is any coffee in it!

Oh, where was I? ... Oh yeah ...

Rav Sha'ul admonished us to "test everything and hold onto what is good" (1Thess 5:21). That implies very strongly that when we hear a teaching, no matter who the teacher is, we are to compare that teaching with the written Word like the Believers at Berea did, ask Ruach HaKodesh to confirm truth to us, and promptly throw away everything that doesn't fit with God's Word.



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So, whenever I teach, that is exactly what I want you to do. When I teach I will always teach what I believe to be the revealed Truth, but sometimes — and I know you're going to find this hard to believe — sometimes I get it wrong. For over 35 years as a Baptist pastor, I got it wrong a lot. For example, I taught that Yeshua nailed the Torah to the cross. I taught that stuffed pork chops, shrimp, and scallops are great for Sunday dinner and ham is an appropriate dish for Easter. I taught that Israel and the Church are two separate entities. I taught dispensational theology and a pre-Trib Rapture. And I taught a form of replacement theology. And I pray every day that God will be merciful when he holds me accountable for my teaching.

I will never ask you to agree with me or with my theology. Every single believer has their own theology, and personal theologies are as unique as snowflakes. No two are exactly alike.

Oops ... stop a minute. What is a theology? That's just a fancy three-dollar word. It is made up of two Greek words: Theos is the Greek for God, and -ology is a Greek suffix that means to think or study. So, theology just means what you think about God. And no two people in the world think the same thing about God. The entire 22-volume Babylonian Talmud exists because devout men of God did not agree on what the Mishnah said about what the Torah means. I say there are 22 volumes — of course, that depends on what company prints it. Although the folks in any given assembly usually come close to agreeing with each other on the majors, there's usually a wide range of opinions on the minors. That's why there are now over 43,000 Christian denominations worldwide. Every time I disagree with you I'm going to take my toys and go start a new playground.

And why is that? Our beliefs about God are formed from what we read, what we hear, what we experience, and what God reveals to each of us — and no two people share a lifetime of identical experiences. That's one of the main reasons that it's important for us to know about the experiences of anyone who would presume teaching us.

So — what should you know about me?

I was born, raised, and spent the first 50 or so years of my life in the Church. I was born in 1946 in Parkersburg, and I grew up in the church that my second great-grandfather planted in the mid-1800s. He was one of the first missionaries to what was then western Virginia from the Campbell-Stone Restoration Movement, which would later become the Church of Christ. I made my public confession of faith in the Messiah and was immersed in His name in March of 1952, just a few weeks before my sixth birthday.

My father was an elder in that congregation and served as a lay-pastor of numerous churches throughout the Mid-Ohio Valley before going to Bible college at the age of 52 and then being formally ordained upon graduation. At 10 years old, as the “preacher's kid,” it became my responsibility to teach “little kids Sunday school,” and I have been an active Bible teacher over the 60 years since that time.

My first “official” pastoral ministry was from 1965 to 1967 when I served as the youth pastor in the chapel at the Naval Hospital on Guam. Since then, I have held teaching, administrative, or pastoral responsibilities at nine churches in California, Tennessee, and

West Virginia, taught in something like 35 or 40 other churches, and was on the staff of three Bible schools and seminaries.

I have held about every position that is possible to hold in a Protestant church: youth leader, junior high minister, youth pastor, choir director, director of Christian education, deacon, elder, church chairman, associate or assistant pastor, and senior pastor/teacher. I have never received a salary for ministry, but like Rav-Sha'ul, I have always worked at a secular occupation to pay my own way.

After completing my seminary training, I was licensed as a minister of the Gospel in March of 1988 and was ordained in 1991 at a Conservative Baptist Church by a multi-denominational Ordination Council that included Pastors from Conservative Baptist, American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Independent Baptist, Assemblies of God, and several Independent non-denominational congregations.

My formal education includes an Associate of Arts degree in Criminal Justice, a Bachelor Arts degree in Business, a Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in Congregational Management, a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies, a Master of Theology in Systematic Theology, a Doctor of Theology in Cults and Comparative Religion, a Doctor of Ministry in Bible School Administration and Curriculum Development, and three years of study toward a Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine. I am also a Certified Natural Health Professional.

As a Christian educator I served Grace School of Theology and Ministry in Pleasant Hill, California, as School Administrator, Cataloging Librarian, and Information Services Director.

At Sun Valley Bible College and Seminary and Golden State School of Theology in Alameda and Oakland, California, I served as Instructor of English Grammar and Composition, Professor of Theology and Comparative Religion, Assistant Dean of Directed Individualized Studies, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Chairman of the Curriculum Development and Academic Committees.

Please understand that I'm not telling you this to boast in any way. All that and a couple of dollars will still buy me a cup of coffee. But as I said before, our personal theology is slowly formed over the years by what we read, what we hear, and what we experience. All these experiences went into what I now believe and why I believe it.

By the mid-80s I had a strong educational background in Systematic Theology and over 20 years of bi-vocational pastoral ministry in a somewhat diverse group of denominations, but I was left with the inescapable feeling that somehow there had to be "more" to true Biblical "religion" than is being taught in the churches and seminaries.

For nearly as long as I had been studying the Bible, I had felt that there was something terribly wrong with the rift between Christians and Jews. I simply could not understand why it is so difficult for Jews to understand that their Messiah has already come, just as the prophets said He would. I also found it very strange that Christians should have difficulty understanding that "Jesus" was a Torah-observant Jewish Rabbi who did not come to start a new religion, but to show His Jewish brothers and sisters the correct way to

have a relationship with God, and that Christianity, when correctly understood, is a truly a branch of Judaism. It was also extremely difficult for me to clearly understand for many years why it was that the more I studied the Scriptures, the more I found myself thinking and feeling “Jewish.”

In 1985 my family was privileged to participate in a tour of Israel, and to my total amazement I found that for the first time in my memory, I felt truly at home — as though I had finally returned to the place for which I had been homesick my whole life. Even with the ever-present threat of terrorism, I felt more at peace and much safer on the streets of Jerusalem at two o’clock in the morning than I ever felt on the streets of San Francisco at two o’clock in the afternoon.

It was about that time that my mother, our family historian, discovered genealogical records of my father’s ancestors through his mother. My paternal grandmother had died while my father was in his early teens, and neither my father nor my grandfather had any detailed knowledge of her family roots. What my mother’s research uncovered was that my grandmother was probably a Jew whose ancestors all bore traditional Jewish names like Joseph, the son of Issachar, the son of Joseph, the son of Jacob, the son of Solomon, the son of John, the son of Israel, the son of John, and so on back to 1474. Their family name Levitt (or the Hebrew pronunciation, *Luh-VEET*) traces back to various spellings, all very similar in form to the name Levite, which was the name for the descendants of Levi who served in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. Unfortunately, documentation for my paternal grandfather’s lineage is traceable only to his grandfather, who was adopted with no other family records.

I began to wonder if it could be mere coincidence that I had for so long felt Jewish to the very depths of my soul? Was there some deep-rooted “racial memory” struggling to surface into my conscious mind? Could it be (God forbid!) that I was becoming “mystical” in my old age? Was this how people feel who believe they have been abducted by UFOs? Had the crew of a UFO abducted me in the middle of some starless night, and had little gray (or perhaps green) men implanted these feelings into my mind? Were there others somewhere in the world who shared these same feelings, or were they mine alone? Or was I simply “weird”?

Or can it be that in these Last Days the LORD is calling out the remnant from the ten so-called “Lost Tribes” of Israel — those of Jewish heritage who, like me, have not known their ancestry and have thus been separated from their birthright — in preparation for the final restoration of His Kingdom on earth?

Now, a word of caution; it is extremely important to be very careful when going down this road of inquiry, because there are several non-Biblical cults who call themselves “Messianic” who teach the heresy that every person who has ever come into a saving relationship with Yeshua has had at least a drop or two of Jewish blood. In their theology it is impossible for Gentiles to be “saved.”

I needed to find out if there any Bible evidence to support the notion that HaShem is calling out a Jewish remnant from the Gentile Church. If so, was I one of those being called out? It became my burning desire to find answers to those questions that started

me on the quest for my “Jewish Roots.” How could I hang on to those beliefs I had developed over years of study, prayer, and meditation on God’s Word, and yet be able to experience the “Jewishness” that my soul craved? I began searching the Internet for answers, looking for someone — *anyone* — who felt as I did.

I contacted Jews for Jesus seeking information on how I could learn about my lost Jewish heritage without giving up my Messiah. They told me that I should simply be satisfied that I was a Christian and let it go; I already had Jesus and didn’t need to know any of that Jewish stuff.

I contacted the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (I was a Southern Baptist at the time) because they have a website on which they talk about the necessity of “planting Messianic synagogues.” They told me that they couldn’t be bothered to help me in my personal quest, because —quote— “there aren’t enough Jews in West Virginia to make it worth our time” — end quote.

I contacted several other so-called “Jewish outreach ministries” and they all seemed to be interested in only one thing: converting Jews into Gentile Christians. I didn’t feel like that would do me much good, because I had spent my whole life living totally assimilated as one of those!

In 1997 the church in which I was serving as associate pastor experienced a severe rebellion at the hands of its chief contributor. Since, in his mind, most of the church’s finances came from him, he felt he should oversee the church that he financed. He formed a “Pastor Oversight Committee” which would tell the three Pastors what to teach and how to teach it and demanded that a complete manuscript of every sermon be presented to them for review and approval before it could be presented to the congregation. Needless to say, the morning service the following Sunday consisted solely of three pastors reading their letters of resignation.

By that time, I had totally given up hope of ever finding a church that teaches only what the Scriptures *actually* say instead of what some Bible school or seminary teacher says they say, or what the pastor wishes they would say, or what the denomination says to teach. Or one in which the congregants actually submit to the teachings of Scripture. So, with two families from the rebellious congregation, I started Family Bible Church with the intent of teaching — to the very best of my understanding — only what the Scriptures actually say.

In early 2000 I came across an organization called “Messianic Bureau International,” which seemed to be exactly what I was looking for. The Director of the organization (now deceased) was a very personable gentleman who had a background very similar to my own. He was then a Messianic Rabbi but had formerly been a pastor with the Assemblies of God (I was a member of an Assemblies of God church for over 10 years), and his grandparents were Jewish, and my grandmother had been Jewish. He proved to be most helpful, and the materials from his ministry were excellent sources of information for what I was seeking. About a year later I was credentialled by Messianic Bureau International as a Messianic Minister.

I began very carefully studying and sharing with my little congregation the message of the Messianic Restoration. After just a few weeks, I was told, “We are Gentiles, not Jews. Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, so we only accept his teaching as authoritative” — meaning they rejected the authority of the entire body of Scriptures except Paul’s few letters. The following week I began seeking people who were interested in learning what the Bible — the *whole* Bible — teaches and made the Internet the primary focus of my teaching. After about nine years of meeting in our home, I had never found more than seven or eight people who were even remotely interested in the message of the Messianic Restoration, and they were only interested in learning the Hebrew roots of Christianity as an intellectual exercise — certainly nothing that should change the way they live. The only remaining family from that home group moved to North Carolina two years ago, but I have continued to write articles for my website as quickly as I can learn and write.

So, in summary, what is my current set of core beliefs? The easiest place to start this discussion is to say that I am in general agreement with the beliefs of the United Messianic Jewish Assembly (this congregation’s “covering” organization). I need to clarify what I mean by “in general agreement.” I have read the statement of Beliefs and Convictions that are on the UMJA website, and I agree with *what I understand* those words to mean. However, I have been previously affiliated with a Messianic organization and agreed with my understanding of their written doctrinal position statement, only later to find that the rabbi under whose teaching I was sitting (and who had been the one who drafted that position statement) had a significantly different interpretation of those what words meant than I had. I was told that my understanding of the nature of God was incompatible with that organization’s belief and that I would have to comply or leave.

I am also in general agreement with the Statement of Faith of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America and that of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, *as I understand them*. As to the rest of what I believe, I have written well over 2,000 pages on my website exploring the details of the various aspects of what I believe.

What about the diversity within the larger Messianic Jewish Restoration Movement? I have met a number of leaders in the “Messianic Movement,” of both Jewish and non-Jewish ancestry, and there seems to be a common trend among most of those with whom I have had contact: those who have come to Messianic Judaism out of “the Church” have brought most of their denominational “sacred cows” into the Movement with them; and those who have come to Messianic Judaism out of traditional or rabbinical Judaism have brought with the distinctives of that branch of Judaism. The result is that within the Messianic Restoration Movement there seem to be approximately the same number of interpretations of Messianic Judaism as there are Christian Denominations and Jewish sects from which these men came.

However, there are literally hundreds of thousands, or perhaps even millions, of people just like me in their desire to worship Yeshua HaMashiach as He was worshipped in the first century, remembering that there were almost no Gentile believers in Messiah until well into the second century.

I now believe that HaShem is in the process of uniting all of His people, both Jew and non-Jew, into a united Kingdom under Yeshua HaMashiach, and that the united Commonwealth of Israel will include all the physical descendants of all the Twelve Tribes, plus all the Elect Gentiles who serve the God of Avraham, Yitz'chak, and Ya'akov, and are therefore “adopted” or “grafted” into that Commonwealth.

I believe that this Movement is in direct fulfillment of the beginning of “the restoration of all things spoken by the prophets,” and that Hashem is even now preparing Jew and Gentile alike to serve Him as a united people.

As it is written:

Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; and it will come about that, in the place where it is said to them, “You are not My people,” it will be said to them, “you are the sons of the living God.” And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one leader, and they will go up from the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel. (Hosea 1:10-11 NAS)

And again:

“And it will come about in that day,” declares ADONAI, “That you will call me *Ishi* [a man, as a male person; Yeshua??] and will no longer call me *Ba'al* [“my Master”]. ... And I will sow her for myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they will say, ‘[You are] my God!’” (Hosea 2:16, 23 NAS)

And yet again:

And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. As He says also in Hosea, “I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ And her who was not beloved, ‘beloved.’ And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, ‘you are not My people,’ There they shall be called sons of the living God.” And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; for ADONAI will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly.” (Rom 9:23-28 NAS)

Hopefully this introduction will provide you with information about where I came from, how I got here, and how all those life experiences have shaped my personal theology.

Now I'd like to expand a bit on what Rabbi Hal was teaching about the nature of HaShem at our last meeting. Again, I want to emphasize, as I will every time I teach here, that the opinions expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of any other person or organization. I have no intention of getting you to agree with me. I want you to agree with HaShem. Listen to what I have to say, weigh it carefully against your understanding of the Scriptures, ask Ruach HaKodesh to help you sort it through, retain what you may find of some value to you, and discard the rest.

Beresheet (Genesis) 1:26-31

²⁶Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; ³⁰and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to everything that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. ³¹God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Beresheet (Genesis) 2:15-27

¹⁵Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. ¹⁶The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷but 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." ¹⁸Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; ¹⁹I will make him a helper suitable for him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. ²²The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ²³The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

What does it mean to be created in the image and likeness of God? This cannot possibly mean that God is a bipedal humanoid. First Timothy 1:10 tells us that God is invisible, but He is able to take any form He desires: a burning bush, a humanoid (the Angel of Adonai, certainly Yeshua, perhaps Melchizedek — but I believe that Melchizedek was actually Shem, but that's a lesson for another time), a pillar of fire, a pillar of cloud, the visible shekinah, etc. Also, because men and women do not share the same details of their physical form, His "image and likeness" cannot be referring to visible, physical attributes.

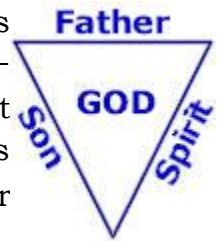
But God is sentient; He has intellect, will, and emotion. Mankind is sentient: we have intellect, will, and emotion.

God is tri-partite: He exists invisibly as the Father; He manifests visibly and physically as the Son; His Spirit interacts directly with His creation.

Man is tri-partite: we exist invisibly as soul (which includes our mind, will, and emotion); we exist visibly in a physical body of muscle, bone, and blood; we exist spiritually

as that part of us which interacts directly with our Creator. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews (4:12) tells us that “the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit ...” So, the soul and spirit are clearly not the same thing.

We may use an equilateral triangle to demonstrate the Tri-Unity of God as revealed in the Tanakh. The Scriptures teach us with absolutely no uncertainty that “Adonai is **one**.” *Echad* is the Hebrew word used — though not exclusively — to describe a compound unity, such as one bunch of grapes which consists of many individual grapes but is yet *echad* (one) bunch, or one school of fish that consists of thousands of fish yet is *echad* (one) school. And Yeshua Himself stressed that the “first and greatest commandment” is that HaShem is *echad*. B’resheet 2:24 says that when man and woman are joined they become *echad* flesh, but they are obviously not the *same* flesh.



Mark 12:28-30 says:

“One of the Torah-teachers came up and heard them engaged in this discussion. Seeing that Yeshua answered them well, he asked Him, ‘Which is the most important mitzvah of them all?’ Yeshua answered, ‘The most important is, “*Sh'ma Yisra'el, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad* [Hear, O Isra'el, the LORD our God, the LORD is one], and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your understanding and with all your strength.’”

The Scriptures reveal that there are three divine “Persons” (for lack of a better word; it does *not* mean three different “people” or three different Gods); *all* are called God, and *all* are named יהוה (YHVH, *yod-hey-vav-hey*). The Father (Abba) is all the fullness of God invisible; Yeshua the Son (HaBen) is all the fullness of God made visible; the Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) is all the fullness of God as He acts upon creation.

The Father (Abba) is *yod-hey-vav-hey* God; Yeshua the Son (HaBen) is *yod-hey-vav-hey* God; the Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) is *yod-hey-vav-hey* God. All three are *yod-hey-vav-hey* God. Yet the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit; the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit; and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Yet the Scriptures clearly teach that *each* is the **one and only** *yod-hey-vav-hey* God.

B’resheet 1:26-27 tells us that God created mankind in His own image. Man is also, therefore, a tri-unity. Mankind is a soul, but he is not *just* that soul; mankind is a spirit, but he is not *just* that spirit; mankind is a body, but he is not *just* that body. He is all three: body, soul, and spirit. Yet the body, soul, and spirit make *echad* man or woman.



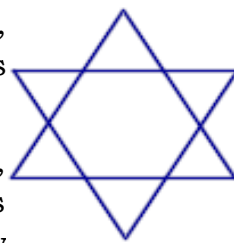
The body is all the fullness of the man that is visible; the soul (which is our mind or intellect, our will or volition, and our emotion or sensibility) is all the fullness of a man that is invisible; the spirit is all the fullness of man as he relates to and communicates with his Creator.

Yet the body is neither the soul nor the spirit; the soul is neither the body nor the spirit; the spirit is neither the body nor the soul. Yet all three are “man.” So, mankind is a tri-unity of mind, will, and emotion living within a tri-unity of body, soul, and spirit.

Created in the Image of God

When we superimpose the symbol for God over the symbol for mankind, we now have a perfect symbol for God reaching downward for mankind as mankind reaches upward for God.

If this illustration helps you to better understand the nature of God, that's great. Hang on to it, use it, share it if you wish. But if it confuses you, or if you have trouble accepting it, or if you flat out disagree, then by all means, flush it out of your memory.



Since this is an election year, I'm Ari ben-Levi, and I approve this message.