

# Guest Blog: You're In God's Army Now!



So, my second official Guest Blog, I hope you are as excited about it as I am. About a month or so ago, I got this awesome idea of comparing the concept of being the image-bearers of God to the real life context of how soldiers represent their country. I just had a small problem – I have never been in

the military and would be forced to fake an article, which I was not willing to do. Fortunately, I have this amazing colleague who actually is military, and who studies with the Wisdom in Torah Talmidim teachers – so when I told him that I wanted and asked politely (begged might be more accurate), he said yes! So, without further ado – here is Matt Nappier of Beit Shalom congregation in Monroe, La.

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I often like to take inventory of my personal space and the interactions around my small slice of this world to see God wherever it is I happen to find myself. Over time and as I've grown, like all of us, I've found Him within many different experiences. When my wife and I decided to start a farm, our sole focus in the beginning, and hopefully still, was to learn to see God in a deeper way through His creation, digging our hands into the most basic aspect of it. Before that, we became parents, and our prayer was that God would not only show to us how to be great parents but also reveal to us a deeper understanding of Him as Father. Going even further back, as we were married, our prayer was that God not only would teach us to be fruitful spouses to each other but also

that he would guide us in showing the world that relationship He desires to have with all of creation.

One other identity I hold is that of an Army soldier over the last 15 years. Having just graduated from another leadership course, I find myself also looking for God in those experiences. As the Army has trained me over the years to be a leader within its ranks, I have prayed God that God will continue to show me how to use those tools to be a leader within the ranks of His Kingdom on earth. While I was away, one emerging area of contemplation for me has been that of the ancient concept of humans as the image-bearers of God; as a result, a physical picture of what that means has presented itself, as so many other times, in the experiences around me.

I'd like to offer somewhat of an analogy, a physical comparison of something we may relate to today to help illustrate what it means to be the image-bearers of God on earth. I'd like to paint this picture through the palette of my career in the US Army. Let me be clear that I'm not suggesting that the Army of the United States is a good or equal comparison to God's Kingdom and reiterate that this is simply an analogy in the physical world around us.

Although my focus for this comparison is our current worldview and responsibilities as image-bearers in the Kingdom of God here on earth, carrying the identity we have through Yeshua (Jesus) our Messiah, it wouldn't be correct if I failed to mention the original image-bearers of God – Adam and Eve.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

-Genesis 1:26-27

At the very inception of our existence as human beings, the intention was that we should be the image-bearers of God. Often, we overlook the middle section of those verses that states our image-bearing is in relation to the dominion of the world, bringing God to all creation. Anglican bishop, professor, and theologian N.T. Wright explains that image as being like a mirror one looks into at an angle – seeing a reflection, not of themselves but another that is standing a few feet away. When creation looked to Adam and Eve, they should have been able to see God, but Adam and Eve corrupted that image. Since then, God has been working through His creation to restore the Creation Covenant made with us, humans, to restore us as His proper image-bearers on earth.

Fast forward to the first century, and we are given Yeshua, the incorruptible image of the invisible God, the One Who came to establish order and restore the image-bearers back to the intended image. Through His restorative act of the resurrection, we are no longer captives to sin, nor are we slaves to bearing the burden and image of Egyptian captors, but are instead set free to walk out into the world bearing the true image of our God, King, and Creator. That freedom, however, comes with a heavy responsibility.

When a person joins the military, their very first action as a soldier, sailor, marine, or airman is to raise their right hand and swear to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies. We even call on God to help us do this, and this moment is always a very solemn one. I don't know many brothers or sisters in arms that don't remember that moment of raising their right hand. It's serious. There's a real task at hand, one that can very well include an enemy threat. As I assume anyone reading this would agree, the seriousness of the task we undertook by coming into Covenant and swearing allegiance to the Body of Messiah has often been diminished. Can you imagine the seriousness of God's oath to Abraham when it was promised that his offspring would be a blessing to all

nations? Can you imagine the seriousness of the oath taken at the base of Mt. Sinai, which carried the expectation of being true image-bearers to the nations?

Once the oath is sworn, new recruits are then sent to Basic Training, the discipleship camp that transforms those who have never served into the image of a United States soldier. Through long hours of training and intense study of material, those who once only dreamed of what it looked like to be an Army soldier now embody the role. They've been given a uniform, taught how to stand and walk, and trained rigorously to be fit to fight. The great transformation occurs over a short nine weeks, and it's a remarkable change. Parents and loved ones often have trouble recognizing the new soldiers after they've completed those weeks. They've been transformed into the image that the Army desires.

These exterior changes, however, are not the important ones nor are they the most significant. These changes are merely the simplest and easiest. We throw some clothes on them, give them a haircut, and workout with them for nine weeks; this only accomplishes the external, or physical, changes. The harder task is changing what can't be seen: what's inside the soldier. The greatest change is only evident when we can see that a person has fully embodied the intent of their Army training – to be instilled with the Army Core Values that motivates us not only to be soldiers who can not only win any war but also have the integrity to win that war honorably.

For those who haven't heard of the Army Core Values, they consist of Leadership, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. These are the weightier matters of our service. That's quite a hefty list of characteristics, and so it is readily understandable that Basic Training can only be the beginning of this molding process. For many, it takes years to truly internalize these values, and for some, it never happens. Yet, this is the intent of the Army – to train soldiers that will fight and

fight honorably.

The United States Army has been the leading army in the world for quite some time now, and when we think back on why, it's because we fight the honorable fight. Sure, we may have hiccups along the way, but overall, we have fought to restore justice and righteousness in the world. Being the strongest army isn't all that matters – being the strongest and most honorable is. Think of WWII when we saw the Nazis as enemies, a force that fought hard yet failed to overcome the prowess of the United States. Yet, their strength never matters to anyone today because the world looks back with almost universal disgust at the shameful acts committed. They may have had strength, but no honor.

The Body of Messiah should work in similar fashion. We should be taking new believers through Basic Training, explaining to them in a quick, efficient manner those things which we are not to do at all. Our example is Acts 15 where we see new converts instructed to stop their overtly pagan practices, which was then supplemented with weekly training on how to walk out the task of becoming the image of God on earth. These quick changes, doing away with idolatry and the overt acts of worldliness, are akin to the uniform and haircut given within the first week at Basic Training. Yes, it changed our image a bit, but it wasn't a full transformation. Some may still look as weak and skinny as I did when I left for Basic Training. Others may still need to trim a little fat. Most importantly, they all need to continue to learn the values of how to take on the desired image honorably.

Every Sabbath, at our weekly training session, we should be learning more and more about what our new image in Messiah looks like and, following our Acts 15 example, that learning can and should come through the writings of Moses – the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. This is, functionally, the mission statement of our congregation, Beit Shalom Messianic Congregation. In our beginnings, we made a

decision that, no matter what else was taught, the instructions of Moses would be read in our community every Sabbath. Therefore, every service opens with a reading of the entire weekly Torah portion. This corresponds to the training, the putting on of the uniform, and the resultant trimming down or bulking up.

In the Messianic or Hebrew Roots movement, we've taken this new uniform or realized that maybe we weren't given the full uniform when we became believers in Messiah. Those that led us in giving us a haircut and a brown t-shirt sometimes innocently left us sitting in the barracks. We weren't given the full picture of what it meant to walk in the image of God. Yet, in our current understanding, we've found the uniform and performed those nine weeks of training – only to forget that the original intent was to instill those unseen values within us that would allow us to become members of God's Army fighting the enemies of His Constitution, the Torah, honorably.

We've taken these externals that are definitely part of the image of God, the uniform that anyone who sees us should know us by, and we've made that the end-all focus of our training as image-bearers. We've taken the easier things to change, tying on tzitziyot, taking some days off of work, and changing our diet; we implemented those while forgetting to tackle the tough, internal sins that serve to separate our character from God's character – as displayed in His love, righteousness, mercy, justice, and kindness.

In the Army, we judge those within our ranks to a harder degree, and this is done in the name of maintaining the proper image of an honorable institution. When soldiers get caught doing that which is dishonorable, things that go against the Army Core Values, they aren't allowed to remain in the ranks, and when we release them from the ranks, it's usually done in a manner that publicly shows what we expect in terms of honor.

However, if soldiers simply fail in maintaining the outward appearances, those physical changes that are easy to adjust, we help our brother or sister in arms make the necessary corrections. If we see a deficiency in a uniform, we make a simple on-the-spot correction, and we do so respectfully. We don't rip their uniform off and show everyone in the unit how they had missed a string on their pocket or had their boot laces out. If someone gains a little weight and can't pass the physical requirements, we put them on a program towards success and get them back in right standing, again, doing so respectfully.

I can see our flaws as a movement through these experiences – and how we can improve. We put on these uniforms, get a haircut, lost a little weight, and then we go around kicking in the doors of innocent people – poking our chests out as though wearing medals, yet having earned none. We've put on the easy physical changes, but haven't embraced the deeper changes that come through painful refinement. I see our Core Values plainly laid out in the Scriptures, but are we working diligently to make sure those are our priorities in training?

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.

-Genesis 18:19

We all know that Abraham was blessed for keeping the instructions of God, but Abraham's leadership, his installation as the progenitor (commander) of the Israelite people, is ascribed to his walking in righteousness and justice. He not only kept the instructions of God but kept them honorably. He took the full image of God, inside and out, and went train those others coming after him, the children and his household to do the same.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
For they shall be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
For they shall inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
For they shall obtain mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
For they shall see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,  
For they shall be called sons of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

-Matthew 5:3-12

Are we walking in the deeper image that was shown to us through the perfect image of God made manifest in the flesh? Are we seeking mercy, peace, and righteousness? Are we turning the other cheek when others mock us through the new 1<sup>st</sup> Century world of shame: Facebook and YouTube? Are we putting on the uniform and cutting our hair but forgetting to comfort those around us, humble ourselves, and serve as Yeshua taught us to serve?

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

-Galatians 5:22-23

This list, given to us in Galatians, represents our Core Values. When people look at us, the covenant members of



Israel and God's Army, do they see love, joy, and peace, or do they see a bunch of strife, bitterness, and hatred wrapped in the physical changes of tzitziyot, Sabbath, and Feast Days? I can't tell you how many times in the past I've been involved in arguments full of sarcasm and negative speech towards others on the Sabbath, and I see it going on every week around the world. Are people seeing us and seeing the image of a longsuffering God, or are they seeing short-sightedness that cuts people down if they don't immediately mold to the image of ourselves? Do people see kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness in our walks, or are they seeing harshness and rudeness towards those that don't agree with us? And finally, do they see the image of our God in self-control, or do they see people who can't control their tongues?

Have we become First Century Judaism, a sea of people trying to build others into the image of ourselves rather than the image of God, not hesitating to cut down our brothers and sisters when they don't conform? Have we lost sight of the fact that we are supposed to be the image of a God who is abounding in mercy, goodness, graciousness, and longsuffering?

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

-Exodus 34:6-7

I want to share one more Core Value verse with you, one that has been a focus for me over the past year, one that God keeps bringing back to me.

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord

-Hebrews 12:14

How do we present the image of the one true God to the world, being right and honorable image-bearers for His name's sake? – We pursue peace with all people, as well as holiness. We don't forsake those things that we realized we weren't taught, the holiness in our walk of Sabbath, Kosher, Feasts, Tassels, and more. We most definitely need those physical acts of holiness to point the world around us to the invisible God that desires an intimate relationship with all – but when we pursue holiness without peace, without walking out that holiness honorably, the world cannot and will not see the true image of God.

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## [Guest Blog: The Slippery Slope of Sola Scriptura by Daniel Botkin](#)

You are probably reeling with shock right now as I have never done this before, but as you might know, we are moving to Idaho over the next two weeks and I am up to my eyeballs in alligators. Someone sent Daniel my [Is Standing Your Ground Destroying the Goal of God's Word?](#) blogpost after reading the one I am about to share with you and so he sent his to me and I liked it and wanted to share it with you. It's a long article, but worth your time. He doesn't have a formal blog but instead a newsletter that you can subscribe to – check out his website and especially his comics at [gatesofeden.org](http://gatesofeden.org).

Daniel has a show, [Gates of Eden](#), which airs on HRN and can also be seen on [youtube](#). I hope you will check out his teachings!

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“‘The Slippery Slope of *Sola Scriptura*’? Did I read that right, Daniel? Haven’t you written in favor of *sola scriptura* in the past?”

Yes I have, and I still firmly believe in *sola scriptura*. However, there is a slippery slope that exists when people misunderstand and misuse *sola scriptura*, and you need to be aware of this slippery slope so you can avoid sliding downward into error and making shipwreck of your faith.

Before I discuss the slippery slope, let me briefly explain what *sola scriptura* means, for the benefit of readers who may not be familiar with that term.

*Sola scriptura* is a Latin phrase that means “by Scripture alone” or “only the Scriptures.” It is a concise way of stating that the Holy Bible, in its original languages, is the only infallible, God-inspired written text, and is therefore the highest and supreme and final authority that governs all matters of faith, doctrine, worship, and morality.

*Sola scriptura* was the motto of the 16th-century Protestant Reformers, and it is the one thing that accounts for all the many differences that exist between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. In Matthew 16:19 Christ gave authority to the Church “to bind and to loose” (i.e., to forbid and to permit things), and He said that whatever things church leaders bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven. In other words, heaven will require church members to abide by church leaders’ decisions to forbid and to permit things.

The Roman Catholic Church claims that this authority is absolute. They say that church leaders can decree or repeal any laws whatsoever. Church leaders can even repeal Biblical laws and they can permit things which the Bible forbids.

Roman Catholics are expected to obey the Roman Catholic Church even when the leaders teach things that seem to contradict the written Scriptures.

The Protestant view is that church leaders must exercise their authority within the boundaries of the written Scriptures. This means that Protestant church leaders must not teach doctrines or make decrees that contradict the written Scriptures. The Bible has the final say in determining which doctrines and practices and morals are true and pleasing to the Lord. If church leaders teach or decree things that clearly contradict the Scriptures, they are overstepping their authority and should be rejected or ignored, not obeyed.

Many years ago when I was a young believer and first learned about the Roman Catholic view of church leaders having absolute, unlimited authority from Christ, I asked myself: "Is it possible the Roman Catholic Church is right about this? If so, I'll become a Roman Catholic."

I prayed about this and asked the Lord to show me the answer.

I found my answer by "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." I knew enough Scripture and enough history to know that Jesus lived among religious leaders whose view of authority was virtually identical to the Roman Catholic view. I knew from the Gospels that the rabbis of Yeshua's day, like Roman Catholic priests, sometimes put more weight and emphasis on their traditions than on the written Scriptures. "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men... Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:8f). I knew from the Talmud that the rabbis described their authority thusly: "The sayings of the elders have more weight than those of the prophets" (Jer. Ber. i.7) and "an offense against the sayings of the Scribes is worse than one against those of Scripture" (Sanh. xi.3).

When the doctrines and decrees of religious leaders in Jesus' time contradicted the written Scriptures, Jesus affirmed the Scriptures as the highest and supreme and final authority. He did this not just once but on several occasions. I realized that as a follower of Jesus, I should do likewise. I realized that following Jesus includes viewing

the Scriptures the same way He viewed them. And in Christian terminology this view is summed up in the Latin phrase *sola scriptura*. So I believe in *sola scriptura*.

What then is the "slippery slope" of *sola scriptura*? What's the problem?

The problem is tens of thousands of Protestant denominations and independent churches. Even within many major denominations there are sub-groups. Among Baptists, for example, there are literally hundreds of different types of Baptist denominations. A new Protestant denomination forms, then leaders within that denomination disagree about something, so another new denomination is formed. The same thing happens with independent, non-denominational churches. Someone in the congregation comes to a new understanding of something, and he cannot convince the leadership to see it his way, so he splits and forms another new independent congregation. Believe it or not, this has even happened among Messianic congregations. Really!

The problem is not so much caused by *sola scriptura* itself, but rather by a misunderstanding and misuse of *sola scriptura*. Many Protestants (including Messianics) approach it this way:

A brand new believer is given a Bible. He is told to read it, believe it, and obey it. He is told that he can get help understanding the Bible by going to church meetings and Bible studies, by reading books and magazines, and by listening to teachings on CDs or film. But he is warned to be careful, because there are many false prophets and teachers out there, all claiming to teach Biblical truth, and they are very clever. They know how to twist the Scriptures and they deceive a lot of people, so watch out.

Thus this babe in Christ, armed with a Bible that he has not yet fully read through even in English, let alone in the original languages, is now expected to figure out for himself which Bible teachers are teaching truth and which ones are teaching error. Thus each individual believer eventually becomes an authority unto himself. And even though every individual believer might be doing things the way he sincerely believes is the Bible way, we still have every man doing that which is right in his own eyes. We have a bunch of hyper-independent sheep without shepherds.

I have read some of the Roman Catholic arguments against the concept of *sola scriptura*, and to be honest, some of their arguments are quite compelling. If I did not have the example of Yeshua affirming the Scriptures as the highest and supreme and final authority in matters pertaining to faith, I might be easily persuaded to reject the notion of *sola scriptura*. But of course I *do* have Yeshua's example, as well as the testimony of the Apostles that "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), and Isaiah's proclamation, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). And I know enough Scripture to realize that many things Roman Catholicism teaches are contrary to the law of God and to the testimony of Scripture.

One Roman Catholic writer, Patrick Madrid, calls *sola scriptura* "A Blueprint for Anarchy." And brethren, that is exactly what it is when it is used the way that most non-Catholic believers use it today. Madrid writes:

"Scripture alone, as the tragic history of Protestantism has shown, becomes the private play toy of any self-styled 'exegete' who wishes to interpret God's Word to suit his own views. The history of Protestantism, laboring under 'sola scriptura,' is an unending kaleidoscope of fragmentation and splintering. It cannot provide any sort of doctrinal certitude for the Christian, because it is built on the shifting sand of mere human opinion – what the individual pastor 'thinks' Scripture means."

Roman Catholic writers point out that *sola scriptura* (as practiced by most Protestants today) is not even a Scriptural idea. Where in the Bible, Old Testament or New Testament, do you see each individual person determining for himself what the Bible means, and then splitting off and starting a new denomination because of some minor doctrinal difference, or because the music was too loud, or the children were unruly, or the preacher said something that offended him, or the services lasted too long? God's people surely had their differences in Bible times, but we do not see them using *sola scriptura* in the way that people use it today. Madrid calls *sola scriptura* "unhistorical, unbiblical and unworkable," and he is absolutely right if you are talking about the way *sola scriptura* is used by most non-Catholics today.

One of the most compelling arguments that Roman Catholics have against *sola scriptura* is what James Akin calls "Practical Problems of Sola Scriptura." Akin lists seven problems in the form of seven things that *sola scriptura* presupposes. The most compelling of these practical problems is the presupposition that every individual believer will not only have a Bible but also possess scholarly supporting materials to help him understand the Bible (concordances, lexicons, historical resources, etc.), and have enough spare time to devote to long-term, in-depth, independent study of the Bible and of all the supporting materials, and also be equipped with enough intelligence to understand the scholarly supporting materials, and the ability to think critically.

*Sola scriptura*, as understood by most non-Catholics today, requires every individual believer to become a super-scholar and a deep theologian and to hammer out his own independent theology. The reality is that not everyone has the time, the resources, the opportunity, and the intelligence to become a super-scholar and a theological thinker.

Every believer should read the Bible and become familiar with it and meditate on the Scriptures. But not everyone has the calling and the time and the ability to become a teacher or a prophet or an apostle. This is the reason that "God hath set some [not 'all'] in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers" (1 Cor. 12:28).

The original Protestant Reformers never intended for *sola scriptura* to be used in the way it is used today, in a way that requires every individual believer to become a super-scholar and a theological thinker.

In the Messianic Movement it's even more difficult, because Messianics feel a need to know lots of extra-Biblical historical information about the Jewish roots of the faith, and to know the Hebrew language, and maybe even some Greek and Aramaic.

I certainly do not discourage people from studying history or from learning the Biblical languages if they have the time, the opportunity, and the linguistic aptitude to do so. But the reality is that not everyone has the time, the opportunity, and the ability to become proficient in the original languages of the Bible. Not everyone has the time to devote to long-term, in-depth Bible study. Every believer

should read the Scriptures regularly throughout his entire life, but not every believer can become a super-scholar and a theological thinker. Not every believer can eloquently articulate why certain doctrines are true or false. That is a job for teachers, and not all believers are teachers.

From what I have seen in the church world and in the Messianic world, it seems to me that a typical Messianic disciple usually studies the Scriptures more than a typical non-Messianic disciple does. There are exceptions to this, of course, but based on the overwhelming Biblical illiteracy I have seen among church-going Sunday Christians, I believe my observation is generally true.

It is good that Messianic disciples study the Scriptures, of course, but because of the *sola scriptura* approach as it is used today, many (perhaps most) Messianic disciples study with little or no real in-person guidance from stable teachers who are morally, mentally, and doctrinally sound. Messianics are not taught by mature men of integrity who have a record of producing good fruit for the kingdom. Rather, they are self-taught, because a Messianic disciple is made to feel that he must personally figure things out for himself.

The result of this *sola scriptura* approach is a bunch of hyper-independent disciples who have no real authority in their lives because they each have become an authority unto themselves. As in the days of the Judges, every man does whatever is right in his own eyes.

All Messianics agree that we should follow the Biblical calendar, but Messianics cannot even agree which of the calendars out there is "the right one." As a result, there is calendar chaos.

Among the Jewish people, the calendar has helped unite them with other Jewish communities all over the world. Among Messianics, the calendar has divided congregations and families and individuals from each other. Some Messianic individuals, based on "their study," decide that Passover should be a month earlier or later than the Jewish calendar shows. So some Messianics eat *matzah* for a week while others eat leaven, and the following month the roles are reversed. And since the month of Passover starts the calendar year, this means that all the other annual feast days that year will also be a month off from those of the Jewish calendar. So these



Messianics not only celebrate Passover a month apart from others, they do the same for the Feast of Tabernacles and for all the feasts in between Passover and Tabernacles.

It's bad enough that Messianics cannot agree which month to do Passover. Now some cannot even agree when "the true Sabbath" is.

Until around a decade ago, I had never heard of anyone questioning which day the seventh-day Sabbath was. All knowledgeable believers, even Sunday Christians who did not believe in keeping the seventh day holy, agreed that the seventh-day Sabbath was from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. The Jews have preserved the seven-day weekly cycle since the days of Moses, and until about a decade ago, I had never heard any knowledgeable people question this.

But now some Messianics claim that "the seventh day" really means the seventh day of the lunar month, and not the seventh day of the week, the day commonly called Saturday. So these lunar sabbatarians might keep Thursday as the Sabbath one month, and Monday as the Sabbath the following month, depending on which day of the week they site the new moon.

Other Messianics say the Sabbath is only during the daylight hours, from Saturday morning to Saturday evening.

Another theory I have heard is that the Sabbath begins an instant after noon on Friday and ends at noon on Saturday, because, they claim, the "evening" actually begins the moment the sun starts heading west, and the "morning" ends when the sun is at high noon.

I have even heard of people who claim that the seventh day is on the day commonly called Tuesday, because in Genesis the sun was made on the fourth day of creation, the day now commonly called Wednesday. Therefore, the Tuesday sabbatarians claim, the seven-day count toward Sabbath should begin on Wednesday, the day when the sun first appeared.

There are probably other wacky theories out there in the hyper-

independent Messianic world. The source of all this calendar chaos and confusion is *sola scriptura*.

The *sola scriptura* approach that we see today in the Protestant and Messianic world is not the Scriptural model. Look in the Bible. You do not see lone individuals, or even individual local congregations, making up their own versions

of the calendar. Except for King Jeroboam, who was so wicked that every time he is mentioned in the Bible after his tampering with the calendar, his name is followed by the phrase "who caused Israel to sin." But apart from Jeroboam, everyone mentioned in the Bible followed the calendar that was used by mainstream, normative Judaism. True, the Pharisees and Sadducees differed on some of the minor details, but those differences were tolerated and accommodated.

In the Bible, you do not see the hyper-independence among disciples of Yeshua that you see in today's Messianic world. On the contrary. In Acts 15 you see a council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem establishing *halachah* for all disciples of Yeshua. After "much disputing" (Acts 15:7), the men of this council came to a consensus, confirmed by the written Scriptures, and James pronounced the sentence. For the fledgling Messianic Community, this council of men in Jerusalem was their "Vatican" if you will. These men had authority, they exercised that authority, and disciples of Yeshua were expected to submit to that authority and obey their decrees.

Unfortunately, we do not have an international council of Messianic leaders to establish *halachah* for all Messianic disciples. Even if such a council were to be formed, good luck convincing all the hyper-independent Messianics to submit to the authority of that council!

If things in the Messianic Movement continue as they are, the slippery slope of *sola scriptura* will result in more bizarre and increasingly wackier doctrines and theories, because the Messianic Movement is like a granola bar – full of nuts and fruits and flakes.

"Daniel, if the *sola scriptura* model as currently practiced is unbiblical and unhistorical and unworkable, and if we have no international Messianic council to establish *halachah*, what are we supposed to do?"

I do not have all the answers, but a good way to begin fixing things is to realize that *sola scriptura* does not mean that every single believer is expected to become a super-scholar and a theological thinker and figure everything out for himself. And *sola scriptura* does not bestow upon every individual the right to be an authority unto himself. A good way to begin fixing things is to recognize authority in the

Body of Messiah, at the very least on the local level. God's kingdom is a kingdom of law and order, a kingdom wherein imperfect humans are appointed by God to exercise authority over other imperfect humans until the Lord returns. Authority in the Body is generally age-based ("Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder," 1 Peter 5:5), although younger men may sometimes be appointed to govern the affairs of a local congregation ("These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth," 1 Timothy 4:11f).

Individual believers can establish their own personal boundaries and guidelines for some things that are not specifically addressed in detail in the Bible (when and how often to pray, study, and fast; how to raise and educate their children; whether or not to have a TV in their home, etc.). Individuals can decide for themselves how they want to fulfill some of the commandments (how to tie their *tzitziyot*, how to affix a *mezuzah*, etc.), but there are some things that are not meant to be determined by each individual for himself. Peter wrote: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20). If you prefer a more modern translation: "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (NASB).

This verse in Peter, along with the account of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, tells us that the Scriptures were never intended to be interpreted privately by each and every individual disciple *apart from a community of fellow disciples*. The Holy Scriptures were not given to a bunch of lone, independent individuals. The Scriptures were given to a *community of believers*, a community that had elders occupying positions of authority to establish *halachah* for the entire community.

Every individual disciple can privately study and ponder and arrive at his own conclusions, but those conclusions, especially if they are quite different from what is commonly believed, should not be assumed to be true unless they are first tested. If you study and arrive at some conclusion that seems rather bizarre or even just way outside the norm, I suggest that you present your findings to knowledgeable, stable elders whom you respect, or at least to peers whom you trust, and ask them if they see any way that your conclusion

contradicts the Scriptures. Do this before you go forth to preach your new revelation. Many people have made fools of themselves by prematurely proclaiming some "new revelation" that is nonsense.

Another thing that can be done to help remedy the misuse of *sola scriptura* is in regards to the Biblical calendar. Messianic disciples need to understand that the appointed times (the *mo'adim* or "feasts") of God's calendar *must be proclaimed by somebody*. Until these appointed times are proclaimed (i.e., designated by leaders), they do not yet exist. And after the days for the *mo'adim* are proclaimed, those become the days that are Yahweh's appointed times. Whichever days the proclaimers designate as the *mo'adim*, those become the days that Yahweh will recognize as His appointed times. In other words, the proclaimers have authority from God to determine which days to designate as the appointed times for the whole community, and Yahweh says that those are the days that He will recognize as His *mo'adim*.

In the New Testament Yeshua said, "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). In a similar way in Leviticus 23:2, Yahweh says, in effect, "Whichever days thou shalt proclaim as the *mo'adim* on earth shall be proclaimed as the *mo'adim* in heaven." The actual words "earth" and "heaven" are not in the text in Leviticus, but what *is* in the text is the implication that *heaven will recognize the days that are proclaimed on earth*. This is especially apparent if you can read and understand the Hebrew text:

*Mo'adei YHWH asher-tikreu otam mikra'ei kodesh eleh hem mo'adai.*

The KJV says: "concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My feasts."

The J.H. Hertz Pentateuch says: "The appointed seasons of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My appointed seasons."

The Zondervan English translation of the Septuagint says: "The feasts of the Lord which ye shall call holy assemblies, these are my feasts."

The Stone Tanach says: "HaSHEM's appointed festivals

that you are to designate as holy convocations – these are My appointed festivals.”

The NASB says: “The LORD’s appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations – these are My appointed festivals.”

The DBLV (Daniel Botkin Literal Version), if it existed, would say: “The appointed times of Yahweh, the ones which you shall proclaim them to be holy convocations, these ones, they are My appointed times.” And I would have a footnote to point out that the pronoun “you” here is plural, not singular, which proves that these feasts cannot be proclaimed by just one lone individual.

Regardless of which English translation you prefer, you cannot escape these two facts:

1. A group of people who are authorized to act on behalf of the whole community are supposed to designate and proclaim which days will be the *mo’adim*.

2. Whichever days the proclaimers designate, those will be the days that Yahweh will recognize as His appointed times for the whole community.

Therefore if you want to know on which days the appointed times occur, you simply ask the proclaimers, because whichever days the proclaimers decide to designate as the *mo’adim*, those are the days that Yahweh will recognize as His appointed times.

Simple, right? Well, it would be simple if there was 100% agreement about which people are authorized to proclaim the appointed times.

Personally, I agree with Dean Wheelock, who published a lengthy article titled “Calendar Chaos” in his *Hebrew Roots* magazine in 2005. Dean points out that “there is no record that Y’shua ever objected to the *Sanhedrin*’s announcing the new moons and the New Year” and that “[t]here are no historical records indicating that Y’shua and His disciples kept a different calendar than what was approved by the *Sanhedrin* and observed in the Temple.”

When Paul wrote about the advantages of being a Jew, he said “chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). I do not believe this means that the rabbis have authority to dictate every detail of *halachah* for disciples of Yeshua, but if the oracles of God were

committed to the Jews, then I question how proper it is for a non-Jew to make up a different calendar of his own. Some details of *halachah* affect only the individual disciple (how to tie *tzitziyot*, how to affix a *mezuzah*, etc.), but the calendar affects the entire community.

Dean Wheelock further points out: "Since the *Sanhedrin* had *Y'shua's* tacit authority to establish the calendar in His day, it is our view that the *Sanhedrin* also has the authority to establish the calendar for our day. No one else has been given that authority, whether it be a body of Jews called the *Karaites*, an individual Messianic congregation, or private individuals. To allow anyone (other than the *Sanhedrin*) to have such authority puts the Messianic Community into the same situation in which the children of Israel found themselves during the latter days of the Judges: 'In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (Judges 21:25)."

Dean also points out the need to sometimes consult extra-Biblical sources: "Yes, there are times when we, as Messianic Believers, must rely on the Oral Traditions of the Jews in order to properly understand difficult passages of Scripture. The Calendar is one of the cases where this is true, simply because there is not sufficient information in the Scriptures to come to a definitive conclusion on how the calendar is to be calculated...

"We believe the only time one should deviate from the *Traditional Hebrew Calendar* is when it can be Scripturally proven that what has been established is incorrect. The only place where we find this to be true is in the setting of *Shavu'ot* (Pentecost), which according to Scripture should always fall on the first day of the week...."

Like Dean Wheelock, I believe that this is the one time when *sola scriptura* can be legitimately used to trump the traditional Jewish calendar. The Bible says that *Shavu'ot* is to be on "the morrow after the seventh sabbath" (Lev. 23:16), and since there are no annual sabbaths during that final week leading up to Pentecost, the seventh sabbath is always, without exception, going to be on a normal Saturday Sabbath. Therefore Pentecost must always, without exception, fall on a Sunday. The Pharisaic (and modern Jewish) manner of calculating *Shavu'ot* always places it on Sivan 6, which can

occur on days other than Sunday. The Sadducean reckoning, which most Messianics follow, correctly places *Shavu'ot* on a Sunday. So I keep it according to the Sadducees' reckoning. If I lived in Israel, where the Pharisaic reckoning is used, I would probably celebrate *Shavu'ot* with the greater community of Israel. But here outside the Land, I follow the Sadducees' reckoning, as most Messianics do.

If you want a copy of Dean Wheelock's complete article, or to get on his mailing list, write to him at: Hebrew Roots, PO Box 400, Lakewood WI 54138. The article "Calendar Chaos" is included in *Fellowship Affairs*, a booklet that contains a collection of articles on various topics. If you can enclose a few dollars (or a lot of dollars) to help Dean and his wife Susan with costs of printing and postage, I'm sure they will appreciate it.

Even if you are not persuaded to agree with me and with Dean Wheelock, at least realize that the *mo'adim* must be proclaimed by an authorized body. *Sola scriptura* does not authorize every individual disciple to decide for himself how to follow the calendar. Let's not use *sola scriptura* as a license to do whatever is right in our own eyes.