

Shifting Sands

An Initial Response to the Spring/Summer 2008 Issue of “Keshet”

Tim Hegg • TorahResource • July 2008

Some years ago, when my daughters were much younger, I built a small “Play House” for them. It still stands in our backyard, and now has become the center of activity when our granddaughters come to “Papa’s house.” The nicer summer weather prompted us to clean it up a bit, and I noticed that the floor was uneven. Upon further investigation, I realized that one of the side gutters had been removed, and that as a result, a large pool of water from the winter rains had caused the pier blocks on one side of the house to sink. Our little “Play House” is going the way of the “house built upon the sand” in the parable of Yeshua. Fortunately, it won’t take much work to put it back on the plumb and make sure the foundations are well secured again. Of course, I’ll need to fix that gutter or the same problem will occur again.

When Yeshua gave His parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock and the foolish man who built his house on the sand (Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:47–49), He began like this: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man....” The words to which He refers are those commonly called “The Sermon on the Mount.” Many interpretations have been offered for Yeshua’s parable, but all agree that primarily the issue He is emphasizing is living one’s life according to God’s wisdom. It is clear that a wise man not only recognizes that today’s actions impact tomorrow’s consequences, but knowing this to be the case, he does what is right today in order to be ready for tomorrow.

What caught my attention as I pondered this parable, however, was Yeshua’s emphasis upon His “words” – “everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them....” In our postmodern era, we are being told that one can never be certain about exactly what an author meant when he or she communicated via words. “Language,” we are being told, “is a container for meaning which must be filled up in some measure by the listener.” In other words, what the author meant to convey in his or her words is mostly lost because the language container itself gets emptied during the communication process. Thus, the postmodern hermeneutic (method of interpreting language) insists that the listener, or the reader, must imbue the language of the author with meaning. This also means that there is a very possible disconnect between the author and the reader. Or to say it simply: one can never be sure that the words he or she is hearing or reading actually convey the author’s original intention. In such a hermeneutic, the best we can hope for is: “what does it mean for me?” Moreover, “what it means for me” may be somewhat different (or even entirely different) than “what it means for you.” In short, the postmodern hermeneutic has determined that “meaning” conveyed by verbal communication is constantly changing—it’s like the shifting sands upon which the foolish man built his house.

Now when such a hermeneutic is applied to the Scriptures, the result is that one’s house falls, and its fall is very great. Some of you might think I have in mind liberal, neo-orthodox theology or mainline Christian denominations that have found a way for the Bible to mean exactly opposite of what it says. No one, for instance, could think that Moses or Paul approved of homosexuality, but we’re being told that they did. Surely liberal, neo-orthodoxy has easily evolved into the postmodern theology. But that actually is not my present concern. What has saddened me is the obvious state of hermeneutical and thus theological demise that is quite apparent within Messianic Judaism.

I recently received the Spring/Summer 2008 issue of *Keshet*, a Journal of Messianic Judaism. This issue is devoted entirely to the doctrine of Soteriology, or the manner in which God saves sinners. The current Journal is entitled *בְּשׂוֹרָה*, *B’Sorah*, the Hebrew term denoting “good tidings, or good news,” which in biblical terms means the “Gospel.” I took it along with me as I traveled to Canada recently, and the hours on the airplane both going and returning afforded me time to read its pages. Usually articles in

Kesher affect me in a number of ways: sometimes they pique my interest and offer interesting insights. Other times they disgust me and leave me shaking my head. But that was not my reaction as I read the current issue: this time I wanted to weep. Sadness was the result, a deep weariness of soul, almost a feeling of despair. As I read a number of the articles, written by some of the primary leaders in Messianic Judaism, I realized that in some very significant ways, the theological foundation upon which they are seeking to build a lasting legacy for the truth is not rock but sand. They may succeed in convincing many that the edifice they are building will last, but when the storm winds come, it will topple. They are being swept away by the currents of postmodern theology along with many others, and being part of the crowd probably makes them feel all the more secure in their evolving theology.

It is not my purpose in this short Newsletter essay to give a thorough response to the various articles in the recent issue of *Kesher*. That will have to await a future endeavor. But I would like to make a quick response to several of the articles and to express why the statements and conclusion contained within them saddens me.

Daniel Juster – “The Narrow Wider Hope”

The Journal opens with a short but very good essay on how to “listen” while engaged in theological dialog written by Dr. David Rudolph. My only comment on this very important issue of theological dialog is simply that the goal is not to embrace some Hegelian dialectic, but to find the truth. Rudolph agrees because his ultimate exhortation is a call to humility. By its very nature, humility involves submission, not to error, but to truth. Submission to error is not humility but subjugation and slavery. So when Rudolph admonishes us all to dialog in the spirit of humility, he is ultimately calling us to submit to God and His truth. In so doing, we will aid each other in discovering and embracing that truth.

The first essay on topic is one by Daniel Juster entitled, “The Narrow Wider Hope.” In this article Juster seeks to convince the reader that the Scriptures are not as clear as one might have thought on the issue of whether or not conscious, deliberate faith in Yeshua is the only means of eternal salvation. Briefly explaining the theological options under the headings 1) Narrow Hope, 2) Wider Hope (including Universalism), 3) Wider Wider Hope (excluding Universalism), and 4) Narrow Wider Hope, he adopts the Narrow Wider Hope as his own position. If you're a little bewildered by this nomenclature, let me explain: “Hope” stands for confidence that one will abide in the shalom of the world to come. The Narrow Hope view offers such confidence only to those who have definitely and consciously placed their faith in the person and work of Yeshua. The Wider Hope view holds that not only those who have definite and conscious faith in Yeshua will be saved, but also those who strive for and accept a “God-consciousness” or a “consciousness of ultimate Good.” This viewpoint conveniently overcomes the thorny theological problem regarding the eternal destiny of people who have never heard the Gospel. Even though they have never heard the Good News, they may still be saved if they respond positively to the revelation of God in nature, or even in their own culture. Thus, the Wider Hope means that there will be far more saved than have confessed faith in the person of Yeshua. Some who hold this view would even opt for Universalism, i.e., that eventually everyone will enjoy shalom in the world to come (even if they spend sometime in Purgatory paying for their sins). Juster rightly rejects the Wider Hope.

The Wider Wider Hope is much like the Wider Hope, but excludes Universalism. This view teaches that many more will enjoy shalom in the world to come than simply the relatively few who place their faith in Yeshua. Still, there will be those who reject the natural revelation of God in the created world, and will therefore be excluded. The Narrow Wider Hope (which is Juster's view) holds that only those who have put their faith in Yeshua can be *assured* of shalom in the world to come, but the possibility exists that many more than these will be eternally saved. In Juster's own words:

“I put forth the case for the importance of both Jew and Gentile explicitly embracing Yeshua for assurance concerning their eternal destiny after [t]his life, yet holding to the possibility of God's wider mercy (which may in fact include others in his grace who have not made an explicit confession of faith).” (p. 40)

One of the reasons that Juster holds this view is because he considers the Scriptures to be less than explicit about exactly who is saved and who is not. While seeking to avoid the Barthian embrace of a contradictory paradox, he believes that the Scriptures give no clear answer as to whether explicit faith in Yeshua of Natzeret is necessary for eternal salvation:

Though some with a more Greek philosophical orientation would like to see all fuzzy edges disappear in all our theological definitions; some matters of Scriptural presentation do leave us with possibilities and with some uncertainty. Humility in the face of those aspects of Scripture is important. That Yeshua rose from the dead is clear. That Yeshua is deity is very clear. Resolving God's sovereignty and the openness of history due to human choice is one of those unresolved mysteries. (p. 33)

Ultimately, as C. S. Lewis said, God has been clear on the destiny of those who sincerely embrace Yeshua, but he has not clearly told us concerning others. (p. 41)

Juster seems to be unaware of the obvious fact that mystery does not equate with uncertainty. We need not know something exhaustively in order to know what we know with certainty. One wonders how Juster understands a text like 2Tim 1:8–9:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Messiah Yeshua from all eternity...

“...according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Messiah Yeshua from all eternity?” Can we be certain of that or not? Does not this text make explicit that God, of His own sovereign will, chose to save us before time began? It appears that Juster is willing to view salvation only from the grandstands at the finish line, while the Scriptures give us revelation of what God was doing at the starting blocks. Of course there is mystery—the unexplainable—in seeking to understand why God would want to save sinners in the first place. Who can fathom the depths of His love? But that God intended from all eternity to save a host of people that no one can number is no mystery. We may stagger under the immensity of *why* He would desire to do this, but we may be certain that He has always purposed to do it. Moreover, it is clear that Paul intends the recipients of his epistle to Timothy to know with certainty that God's grace finds its locus in Yeshua Who is the Messiah, because the grace granted to those who are saved is given “in Messiah Yeshua.”

Now Juster would agree that those who embrace Yeshua have just such certainty and assurance of their salvation. But why is he unwilling to emphasize a tenet of soteriology found throughout the Scriptures, namely, that salvation is always and in every case initiated by God, not by man? Surely we had nothing to do with the fact that grace was granted to us in Yeshua from all eternity! Does the preaching of the Gospel have as its primary purpose the giving of assurance to some or does it actually embody the “power of God resulting in salvation to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16)? Does “faith come by hearing and hearing by the word of Messiah” (Rom 10:17)?

It amazed me that in an article on the overall scope of salvation, the eternal, sovereign divine choosing of those who would be saved went entirely unmentioned. Surely of all people, Jewish believers should be able to affirm the sovereign election of God, for His choosing of Israel from among all the nations is amply clear throughout the Tanach. If Juster claims that the deity of Yeshua is “very clear” in

the Scriptures, one wonders why the doctrine of election does not rank as equally clear. In fact, if we accept with certainty the mystery of God's divine election, then why do we need to find the possibility of salvation outside of the Gospel? Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, claimed that he endured "all things for the sake of those who are chosen" (2Tim 2:10), which means that as far as he was concerned, God's choosing preceded his proclaiming of the gospel. This accords with Luke's account of the salvation of the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch, many of whom came to faith after hearing the message of Paul and Barnabas. Luke concludes his retelling of the events this way:

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

The order of Luke's words reveals his understanding of how the Gentiles were saved. He did not write "and as many as believed were appointed to eternal life." That's backwards! Rather, "...and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." The salvation of these Gentiles, as far as Luke was concerned, began in eternity past with God's sovereign appointment to eternal life. Grace was given to them in Yeshua Messiah from all eternity.

Now if God has chosen those who will be saved, is He not able to bring the Gospel to them as the means of accomplishing that salvation? The reason modern theology is so taken up with finding a way to save the masses is because modern theology has all but denied the sovereignty of God in the process. No one who claims to believe the Scriptures would deny God's utter sovereignty in the creation of the universe. But it has become increasingly unpopular and politically incorrect even to suggest that God is sovereign in the creative process of bringing to life one who is dead in their sins. Rather than building upon the rock of God's word, the edifice is being erected upon the shifting sands of man's theology.

I am not in any way diminishing the mystery of *why* God would even care to save sinners. That goes beyond our ability to comprehend and is, indeed, the grand mystery of it all, for it includes the mystery of the incarnation itself. As the synagogue hymn states: "The love of God is greater far than any tongue or pen can tell." But that He determined in eternity past to do just that; to extend His grace to those He would save; to draw them by His sovereign means to grasp by faith the merits of Yeshua—that is no mystery. It is the heart and soul of what it means to be "in Yeshua."

Stuart Dauermann – "What is the Gospel We Should Be Commending To All Israel In these Times of Transition"

Several of the essays in this issue of *Kesher* were originally given at the "Borough Park Symposium" held in October, 2007. This is the case with Dauermann's article, though it is not so noted in the title. I had occasion to read this article from the Borough Park Symposium website (<http://www.borough-parksymposium.com>) and was given permission by the author to utilize it in my class on Soteriology (Fall, 2008). The article as it appears in *Kesher* appears to be unchanged from that which was delivered at Borough Park.

It has become vogue to say "I don't know." That may be a reaction against the arrogance of fundamentalism that projected itself to the world as though every answer to every question could be nicely fit into a chart stretched across the sanctuary stage. Or it could be a concession to modern existentialism in the garb of postmodernity. In some cases it is probably on the mark for Dauermann to encourage messianics to admit "I don't know" because it bespeaks a measure of humility (cf. p. 70). But I have noticed as I have had occasion to listen to some very renowned scholars offer papers and afterwards field questions, that "I don't know" or "I'll have to give that further thought" is not an uncommon response. Most often, those who are striving to be scholars but truly are not, are those who find it too difficult to admit

ignorance. So I have no problem with Dauermann's call to admit there are plenty of things we do not know. However, like Paul, who claimed to have accurate and certain knowledge of the truth of God's saving acts (e.g., Eph 3:12; Phil 1:6), so we too may affirm with confidence that we know Him because He has known us (cf. Gal 4:9).

Dauermann's essay in the recent issue of *Kesher* is the longest, spanning 37 pages and thus a comprehensive response to his many issues is beyond the scope of this Newsletter. He makes a number of very good points, and gives many insightful and sobering admonitions regarding the goal of salvation as revealed within the overall scope of God's covenant with Israel. Moreover, his strong assertions that the Torah has not been abolished are very welcomed. But the heart of his concerns, and the crux of his argument, is that the Gospel as normally given by Christians and Messianics alike is not "good news" for Israel, but bad news, and it is to that core issue I wish to respond.

Since in his opinion the current gospel message is "bad news" for Israel rather than "good news," he calls for a necessary change in the message itself, though he does not give clear indications of what should be changed and what should remain. Here is an extended quote that might give you the flavor of his argument:

Second, under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism, evangelicals have for too long been too focused on the gospel being true news. We zero in on apologetics and Messianic prophecy, good in their own right. However, when the subtext of our message is the certain perdition of the vast majority of the Jews who ever lived, including the intimate family members of those whom we evangelize, anyone who is reasonably astute, or who has been influenced by those opposing our message, is likely to turn to us a deaf ear. The "truth" of the gospel is not likely to make inroads when the news is unwelcome, oppressive, and when it implies, or even theologically requires, that the evangelized be eternally separated from their people, axiomatically viewed to be lost forever. Nor will it do to try and hide these implications from those we evangelize: Jewish people are not stupid, and, sooner or later, they know when they have been duped. With our prevailing propositions, we have news for the Jew standing before us: God is going to take her away from her family for ever and ever to be in heaven with him, with most if not all of her loved ones tormented eternally in the lake of fire. Not so good. Can we get back to a gospel that is good news for all Israel without betraying the text of Scripture? I believe we can and I believe we must. And I have tried to help point the way. (pp. 74-75)

This sounds very compelling indeed! Many of us who have sought to give witness of our faith in Yeshua as God's Messiah have been confronted with the bottom-line question: "So, you believe that if the Jews don't accept your Yeshua, we're all going to hell!" How nice it would be (we may think) if we could simply answer with an emphatic, "No, I don't believe that." If only there were some way to massage the texts of Scripture to mask or otherwise reinterpret the awful justice of God against sinners so that we could assure our religious brother or sister that somehow their Jewish piety would stand them in good stead before the throne of God's judgment. Or perhaps to plead ignorance and simply say, "I don't know," followed up with "I don't think anyone knows" would suffice.

But apparently Paul himself could neither massage the biblical text nor plead ignorance, for he proclaimed the unthinkable, that he would himself be willing to undergo the terror of God's curse if doing so would secure the eternal salvation of his "brothers according to the flesh" (Rom 9:3). How convenient it would have been for Paul if the "Good News" could have been packaged so as to be non-offensive to his Jewish community! After all, if they earnestly serve God day and night (Acts 26:7) then are they really in need of the Gospel? Was Paul, then, also duped by a misunderstanding of exactly what constituted the "Good News?" Why would he have gone to such extremes to express his own desire to witness the salvation of his Jewish brothers and sisters unless he thoroughly believed that they were living on the precipice of God's own righteous wrath?

The fact of the matter is that Paul understood and proclaimed the offensiveness of the cross. Yes, I

know that the word “cross” has become *lingua non grata* among messianics because it has been so grossly misused by the Christian Church against the Jewish people. But when Paul speaks of the crucifixion of Messiah as a stumbling block to the Jewish person (1Cor 1:23), he does so long before this verse and others were ripped out of their contexts and misused by the Christian Church. Yet he recognized that proclaiming the utter necessity of the death of the Messiah could well be offensive to his own people. Why? Not because he was blaming them for His death, but because by proclaiming the death of the Messiah he was likewise affirming that all sinners, including Jewish people, were in need of being saved from their sin. It was not that the Jewish people in Paul’s day believed that they earned their salvation by their good deeds, at least that is not the dominant theme in the soteriology of the earliest rabbinic literature. Rather, it appears that many Jews of Paul’s day believed they “were in” simply on the basis of their being part of God’s chosen people—they relied upon their lineage and the merits of the fathers. The Gospel Paul proclaimed spoke otherwise, and that was the rub. It still is today.

Dauermann affirms that he does not hold to a “two covenant” form of salvation, one for the Jew and another for the Gentile (p. 52). Yet one wonders how this squares with his bold statement about salvation before and after the arrival of Yeshua on earth’s scene. In seeking to define why he considers the “current paradigm” of the Gospel to be “bad news” rather than “good news” for Israel, he writes:

The year before Yeshua died and rose, faithful Jews needed only seek to live faithful to God, trusting in His faithfulness to Israel and in the provisions he had made through the Temple sacrifices. Under such an arrangement, certainly there must have been tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of Jews whose status with God was assured, in this life and the next. But with the coming of Christ, all that changed. Now, according to the prevailing paradigm, all of these Jews were fundamentally lost, unless and until they accepted Christ as their personal Savior. Is this the kind of gospel we preach? And if so, how is this gospel good news for all Israel rather than for a spiritually enlightened elite minority? It will not do to respond that Yeshua is good news for all Israel, as a medicine might be for seriously ill patients, who must take the medicine if they would recover. To speak thus is to read back into the context something which is not there: the angelic messenger assumes the gospel to be good tidings for Zion for whom the triumphant and vindicating reign of their God is becoming evident in the birth of the Son of David. (p. 48)

What exactly is Dauermann saying here? Was there one way of salvation before the coming of Yeshua and another way after He came? Or is he suggesting that this is the prevailing theological stance of Christian theology? Whatever the case, Paul surely did not affirm two ways of salvation, one pre and one post Messiah! Rather, he chose Abraham and David as examples of what it means to be justified by faith when he wrote his *magnum opus* to the Romans (cf. Rom 4:1ff). If Abraham and David were saved by a different means than were the Roman believers, then Paul’s use of them to illustrate genuine saving faith is a *non sequitur*. But, in fact, Abraham did place his faith in God’s Messiah. Did not Yeshua Himself teach that Abraham longed to see the very day of His appearing, and that he saw it and rejoiced (John 8:56)? Does not Abraham’s rejoicing at seeing the “day of Yeshua” tell us something about his faith? Moreover, Peter tells us in his Shavuot sermon that David, being a prophet, looked ahead and saw the resurrection of the Messiah, which means he also knew of His death (Acts 2:30–32). Could anyone imagine that David would keep such glorious truths a secret? The Psalms of David surely tell us that he openly rejoiced at what had been revealed to him, not privately, but in the congregation of Israel. The author of Hebrews tells us that Moses considered “the reproach of Messiah greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (Heb 11:26). And according to Yeshua’s own words to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to those whose eyes are opened by God’s grace, the Tanach unfolds both the suffering of the Messiah and the glory that would follow (Luke 24:25–27). Indeed, the message that Paul proclaimed to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch was that the “good news proclaimed to the fathers” had been fulfilled in that Yeshua was raised from the dead (Acts 13:32–33).

Surely the angelic proclamation to the shepherds on the night of Yeshua's birth was and is true: the "good news of great joy which will come to all the people" was and is centered in Yeshua. But it is not a new "good news" different than what Moses or Isaiah had proclaimed. Always and in every era, the center of God's revelation to man about how He saves sinners has been the Promised One, the object of true saving faith. The words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30 are claimed by Paul as constituting the very "word of faith which we are preaching" (Rom 10:8). The whole idea that pious Jews before the coming of Yeshua were saved apart from a personal faith in the work of God's Messiah on their behalf is wrong headed and controverted by the message of Yeshua and His Apostles.

Derek Leman – "Those Who Do Not Obey the Good News of Our Lord Yeshua"

In Leman's short essay in this issue of *Kesher* he seeks to show significant problems with the "Wider Hope" position of soteriology. He does so by surveying a work by John Sanders, known as a strong proponent of the "openness of God" theology. Leman focuses specifically upon Sander's book, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (IVP, 1995). He does a nice job of summarizing Sander's views, and then gives several critiques. He also looks briefly at a number of the texts used by "inclusivists" (those who hold some version of the "Wider Hope"), showing how their interpretations of these texts are lacking. In the end, Leman stresses his belief in God's justice, that He would never condemn anyone arbitrarily. If we cannot give satisfying answers to the nagging question of what will happen to those who have never heard the Gospel, we can rest securely that God will do what is right.

Still, he is not willing to affirm a so-called "Narrow Hope" view. He concludes the essay this way:

Can I say for certain that persuading people to believe in Yeshua now is their only chance? I have to admit a little uncertainty here. I know of no other hope. The New Testament does not present one. Yet there are possible scenarios. Might God reveal himself to people at the moment of death, or at least to people who responded to general revelation? Might God have other ways? Who am I to say?

But I can say that wholesale inclusivism is an unbalanced reading of the New Testament. I trust God to handle the cases not explained in its sacred pages. I trust God to be merciful and I know he will not disappoint. (p. 86)

When I read these final paragraphs of the essay, I had to admit that Leman was being consistent with his view of how God saves sinners. For at the beginning of the article he makes it clear that the sinner does have some part in his own salvation, and if this is the case, perhaps the sinner can do more for his own salvation than one might think. Here's how Leman begins:

The way I see the New Testament doctrine of salvation is simple. There is something separating us from God, something Yeshua did make it possible to reverse the separation, and something we do makes Yeshua's sacrifice effective for us. I think we must believe in the person and work of Yeshua for his sacrifice to be effective for us. (p. 79)

It is not that such a theological position is uncommon. Many Christians are taught and believe that "God did His part, and I must do mine." Or to say it another way, "God made salvation possible; the sinner's acceptance is what makes it effectual." But that view of salvation has always baffled me. How can someone who is dead "add his part" to the whole matter of being saved? Perhaps we are too taken with the well known picture of Jesus knocking at the sinner's door, and we forget that the one inside is dead and can't hear the knocking. In fact, that whole picture, based as it is on Revelation 3:20, is theological wrong. The door upon which Yeshua is knocking in Revelation 3:20 is not the heart-door of the unbeliever, but the door of the *ekklesia* in Laodicea.

The story of Yeshua raising Lazarus is a better illustration (John 11). Yeshua is notified that His good friend Lazarus was sick. But instead of hurrying to heal him, Yeshua tarried for two days. When He finally did arrive, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days, one day beyond the traditional span in which, by early Jewish tradition, the spirit remained in the tomb. In other words, there was no doubt that Lazarus was dead—already his body was decaying. Then Yeshua does what most of the people must have thought absurd—He gives a command to a dead man. “Lazarus, come forth!” Consider that carefully. How can a dead man respond to a command? He cannot. And what do we learn from this? That the word of Messiah carries with it the power of life which it commands. This is precisely what Paul means when he writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God resulting in salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom 1:16)

Even as Lazarus added nothing to the command of Yeshua in order to make it effectual, so the sinner adds nothing to the command of the Gospel. The faith by which a sinner lays hold of Yeshua’s work on his or her behalf is itself a gift of God (Eph 2:8–10). Thus believing is not a work:

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.... (Rom 4:4–5)

“To the one who does not work but believes....” That is the reality. We do not add our faith to the “mix” of God’s salvation in order to “activate it” for our personal benefit as though salvation is some kind of “two-part epoxy.” Rather, we are “reborn,” “recreated,” and “resurrected,” all metaphors that emphasize God’s monergistic work in bringing a sinner to repentance and faith in His Messiah.

Mark S. Kinzer – “Final Destinies: Qualifications for Receiving an Eschatological Inheritance”

Kinzer’s article, like that of Dauermann’s, was originally delivered at the Borough Park Symposium. And like Dauermann’s article, it too is substantial (32 pages). Having already read Kinzer’s *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (Brazos, 2005), I knew in advance what direction Kinzer would take in this article.

He begins by noting that a misunderstanding of salvation is endemic in the evangelical world. This misunderstanding is the portrayal of salvation in primarily negative terms (what a person is saved *from*) and as “forensic, individualistic, private and pietistic, and spiritualized” (p. 87). Kinzer would seek to correct this misunderstanding by showing that salvation is the message of what a person is saved *to* and that salvation is primarily “positive, transformative, communal, relational, cosmic, and embodied” (p. 87). All of this is put at the beginning of the article because Kinzer wants to de-emphasize personal salvation in favor of a more corporate soteriology. This does not mean that he denies the importance of personal salvation—he does not. But he would like his readers to focus on a much broader understanding of salvation than they have normally done within the typical evangelical paradigm. This is all well and good—we should see both the corporate and individual aspects of salvation because this is how God reveals it to us in the Scriptures. The fear one has, however, is that the corporate or even “cosmic” aspect of salvation (the final “consummation”) will be pressed to such an extent that the individual’s need to seek personal forgiveness from God through faith in His Messiah Yeshua will be diminished.

Kinzer sets forth in clear terms what the goal of the current essay is. He seeks to answer this question: “What qualifications must individual human beings possess to inherit life in the world to come?” And there is a sub-question to this main one: “Do we have grounds for hope that some who do not explicitly acknowledge Yeshua before death will be among those who inherit life in the world to come?”

(p. 88). After stating the questions and mentioning other important questions beyond the scope of the current essay, Kinzer serves up his chosen *Traditionsgeschichte*, namely, that the Apostolic message of salvation may be grouped into three categories or “traditions.” These are 1) the Peter/James tradition, 2) the Pauline tradition, and 3) the Johannine tradition. But who decided what characterizes each group? And how were such decisions made? What were the criteria? Kinzer gives us no indication of just how he came to group the texts the way he does. The reader is expected simply to accept his conclusions. In some ways, this makes it impossible to critique what he is asserting.

For instance, the primary emphasis assigned to the Peter/James tradition is a warning against presumption, “the misplaced confidence that *we* will be rewarded at the end, while *others* (who do not possess our qualifications) will be punished” (p. 90). The texts that Kinzer marshals as representative of this “tradition” are all found in Matthew, Luke, 1Peter (only 1:17 is cited), and James. So why does he lump Matthew and Luke into the Peter/James “tradition?” What about Matt 1:21, the first reference to salvation in Matthew’s Gospel: “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Yeshua, for He will save His people from their sins”? Why does this Matthew text go unmentioned when 37 others in Matthew are referenced? I mention this only to give an example of how grouping texts under some supposed “traditions” criteria can very well become a subjective methodology.

Investigating Kinzer’s Three Traditions

1) The Peter/James Tradition

Does a thorough investigation of the supposed “Peter/James” tradition actually substantiate that the primary characteristic of their soteriological statements is a warning against presumption? Note the following statements of Peter in his first epistle:

1Peter 1:3–12

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Yeshua Messiah from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yeshua Messiah; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. 10 As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, 11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Messiah within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Messiah and the glories to follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

What are the primary emphases in this opening, strongly soteriological, statement of Peter?

1. the one who is *born again* has a *living hope* grounded upon the *resurrection of Yeshua Messiah*
2. those who have this *living hope* also have an *inheritance...reserved in heaven*, one that is eternal (*imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away*)
3. those who have this *living hope* are *protected by the power of God through faith*
4. the inheritance is defined as a *salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*

5. those who have this *living hope* also *greatly rejoice* in spite of the fact that they *have been distressed by various trials*
6. the trials which those who have a *living hope* undergo only serve to be *the proof of your faith*
7. even though some who have this *living hope* have never seen Yeshua, they nonetheless *love Him and believe in Him* which yields *joy inexpressible and full of glory*
8. they are certain that the *outcome of their faith* will be *the salvation of their souls*
9. This salvation, which they experience and possess now but which promises an eternal inheritance is not something newly formed or recently known, but was revealed to the prophets of old
10. The *Spirit of Messiah* revealed to the prophets a) *the suffering of the Messiah and the glories to follow*, and b) *that they* (the prophets) *were not serving themselves but you*, that is, those people who would live at the time of Messiah's arrival and afterwards

Note: no warnings against being presumptuous. Rather, in this text, Peter speaks of salvation as something about which believers may be certain, a certainty that evokes much joy and praise. Apparently Sören Kierkegaard does not fall into the "Peter/James tradition" after all (cf. p. 116 of Kinzer's article).

1Peter 2:1–3

1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

1. The life of faith is one of holiness unto God, in which *all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander* are put aside
2. The characteristic of those who have *tasted the kindness of the Lord* is that they *long for the pure milk of the word*
3. It is by being nourished by the *pure milk of the word* that they will *grow in respect to salvation*

Once again, no warnings against being presumptuous.

1Peter 3:21–25

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Messiah also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

1. Those who have *come to Yeshua as to a living stone* (cf. v. 4) are called to following in the footsteps of Messiah, that is, to suffer as He suffered, for righteousness
2. Victory is gained in suffering by committing oneself to God as Yeshua Himself *entrusted Himself to Him who judges righteously*
3. Yeshua *bore our sins in His body on the cross*, and the fruit of His suffering for us results in our ability to *die to sin and live to righteousness* because *by His wounds we were healed*
4. Before believing in Yeshua and His work for us, *we were continually straying like sheep*, but

having come to Yeshua in faith, we *have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls*.

No warnings about being presumptuous.

1Peter 3:18–22

18 For Messiah also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Yeshua Messiah, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

1. *Messiah died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust*, meaning that He suffered the punishment of sin due to those for whom He died
2. the purpose of Yeshua's death was so *that He might bring us to God*
3. Yeshua did not stay dead but was *made alive in [by] the Spirit*
4. The Spirit of Messiah (cf. 1Pet 1:11) revealed to Noah the message of God, which was proclaimed to the people of Noah's day. Yet they did not heed the prophetic message and were destroyed in the flood. Their spirits are *now in prison*
5. Still, eight were saved in the ark, and this is a fitting illustration of the *mikveh* which demonstrates dying to sin and being made alive unto God. Even as Noah and his family were kept safe in the ark but went *through the water*, so the one who undergoes a *mikveh* goes through the water and emerges with life.
6. the ultimate message of the *mikveh*, then, is not the removal of physical uncleanness but rather *an appeal to God for a good conscience* because being resurrected to newness of life (which the *mikveh* illustrates) is based upon *the resurrection of Yeshua Messiah*
7. Since Yeshua is now *at the right hand of God*, it is clear that *angels and authorities and powers have been subjected to Him*.

Again, no warning about being presumptuous in regard to our salvation.

Surely Peter does warn about being presumptuous, that is, failing to take seriously the call to genuine holiness in living out one's faith in Yeshua (cf. 1Pet 1:17 [the only Petrine text Kinzer mentions]; 3:10–12; 4:17–19). But is this a dominant theme when one studies what Peter has to say about salvation? It surely does not appear so.

What about James? It is clear that he speaks against “faith without works,” and therefore warns those who would presumptuously claim hope for shalom in the world to come that faith and faithfulness are two sides of the salvation coin (cf. 1:22f; 2:1ff). But what else does James have to teach us about salvation?

James 1:18–21

18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. 19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

1. Salvation is portrayed as a birth or an exodus (*brought us forth*) energized by *the word of truth*
2. Those who believe are *a kind of first fruits* which envision a future, full harvest
3. One's life, particularly seen in the arena of one's speech, must be lived in concert with God's righteousness. *The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God*
4. The life of righteousness consists in a negative and a positive: *put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness and in humility receive the word implanted*
5. It is by the *word implanted* that one's soul is saved

While there is a sense that James here warns about presuming that salvation can be possessed without a changed life, his perspective is that his readers will, in fact, live holy lives since they have actually been brought forth by the word of truth. Moreover, v. 19 makes it clear that his readers knew that about themselves: *This you know, my beloved brethren.*

The epistle of James surely is replete with warnings about the life of holiness that befits the one who has confessed Yeshua as Master and Savior, and does fit Kinzer's idea that a predominant theme is a warning against being presumptuous. But the fact that this theme is predominant in James does not negate other important aspects of his soteriology, namely that salvation is the sovereign work of God and that the word of God is central to His saving acts.

2) *The Pauline Tradition*

Kinzer understands Pauline soteriology as having a strong eschatological element. No one, I think, could rightly disagree with this assessment. Paul not infrequently portrays salvation in terms of the whole creation (Rom 8:18f; 1Cor 15:22f; Eph 1:9–10; etc). Kinzer also notes that Paul has much to say about "individual destinies" and also warns against someone presuming that salvation is theirs because of their "physical descent, the covenant sign of circumcision, or possession and knowledge of the Torah" (p. 101). All of this seems right on target.

Kinzer next mentions the admonition of Paul to Gentile believers who have been grafted into Israel's tree that they not be arrogant, for such arrogance could result in their being cut off (Rom 11:17–22). To this he adds Paul's strong exhortation to Gentile believers that they not

revert to their past Gentile life of idolatry and sexual immorality, thinking that their immersion in the Messiah and their participation in his covenant meal will ensure their final redemption... (p. 101)

It appears that Kinzer takes the view, that Gentiles could on the one hand be genuine believers in Yeshua and then forfeit their salvation by means of their sinful practices. This is clearly the case if he understands the Olive Tree metaphor of Rom 11 to symbolize eternal salvation. But such an interpretation is fraught with grave theological difficulties, not the least of which is that this section of Romans (chapters 9–11) follows immediately upon Paul's soteriological explanation in chapter 8, in which He makes it clear that all who are foreknown by God are likewise predestined to be conformed to the image of Yeshua (v. 29), and all who are so predestined are called, and all who are called are justified, and all who are justified are glorified (v. 30). In this grand conclusion of the first section of Romans, Paul never once mentions the faith or faithfulness of those who are saved. This is because "God is the One Who justifies" (v. 33). When he sends forth the challenge "Who is the one who condemns?", he answers with the fourfold work of Messiah: "Messiah Yeshua is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at

the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (v. 34). He then ends with his triumphant doxology which proclaims in no uncertain terms that no one or no thing “will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Messiah Yeshua our Lord.” It is therefore absurd to suggest that in the very next section of the epistle (chapters 9–11), Paul would teach that Gentiles who are genuinely saved could be cast away by God on account of their arrogance toward the natural (=Jewish) branches! Rather, the Olive Tree is not a metaphor of eternal salvation, but of the visible, physical people of Israel viewed as the locus of God’s covenant. Gentiles who are “grafted in” would obviously seek to become part of the synagogue community, for this was the only community in which the God of Israel was revered and His word taught. But if the Gentile believers evidenced a spurious faith by acting in arrogance, or by reverting to the worship of idols, they would be cut off from the community. What is clear in Rom 11 is that branches are broken off because of unbelief (ἀπιστία), v. 20. Those who remain (“stand”) do so by faith (πίστις).

It is in this same context that Kinzer makes an incredible statement:

Paul makes clear that even he, an apostle of Messiah, cannot presume a favorable judgment, but must persevere in faithfulness to his calling (1Cor 4:4–5; 9:24–27; Phil 3:11–14) (p. 101)

Can this be so? How is it possible that the same Apostle who penned Romans 8 could, at the same time, be unsure that he would receive a “favorable judgment” in the eschaton? Is this actually what the references listed by Kinzer imply? Let’s examine them a bit closer.

1Cor. 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Messiah and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.

Paul is not talking about eternal salvation here! He is talking about his authority as an Apostle of Yeshua and the manner in which he would be received by the Corinthians as such. The examination spoken of is not in regard to his standing in grace, but in regard to his qualifications as an Apostle.

1Cor. 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Once again, Paul is referring to his duties as an Apostle of Yeshua. He exhorts the Corinthians as well to fulfill their own calling as those who confess Yeshua as Lord. In using the metaphor of an athlete, he pictures his Apostolic duties as the race he is running or the match he is fighting. To be “disqualified” (ἀδόκιμος) for Paul means to have taught one thing and to have lived another. But the bottom-line is clear: He is not here talking about matters of his eternal salvation.

Phil. 3:7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Messiah, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Torah, but that which is through faith in Messiah, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I

may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Messiah Yeshua. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Yeshua.

In this magnificent personal testimony of the Apostle Paul, he has noted (in the verses previous to those given above) that if anyone could have thought his pedigree was sufficient to be righteous before God, it was he. He lists 1) circumcised the eighth day, 2) belonging to the nation of Israel, 3) belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, 4) a Hebrew of Hebrews, 5) a strict Pharisee in regard to Torah observance, 6) one who demonstrated his zeal by persecuting the followers of Yeshua, and 7) by all current standards, fully observant and blameless when it came to maintaining the recognized *halachah*.

But then he confesses that all of these things, as it pertains to a righteous position before God, he counted as nothing. Moreover, he reiterates that in terms of trusting in these things for his own salvation, he counted them as rubbish—as entirely unable to afford him right-standing before the Almighty. As he cast his eye to the eschaton and envisioned himself standing before God, he had no desire to enumerate who he was or what he had done as a means of persuading God to count him as righteous. (Did Paul know of Yeshua’s words recorded in Matt 7:22 in which those who are condemned plead their case with “did we not do...did we not do...did we not do”?) Rather than standing (in the sense of pleading his case) “in his flesh,” he desired to be found “in Messiah”; not listing what he had done or who he is but rather presenting Messiah and His merits.

Moreover, Paul makes it clear that his full and unwavering faith in Messiah, demonstrated by his complete rejection of self-righteousness, moved him to know Yeshua in the most intimate of ways, to understand and even experience the full submission to the Father that characterized the Incarnate One, even to the point of death.

It is, most likely, that v. 11 forms the basis for Kinzer’s proposal that even Paul had no sure confidence of a favorable judgment before God. The phrase, “in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” appears at first reading to contain some contingency. Note the Greek: εἴ πως καταστήσω εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν, literally, “if somehow I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” Yet we know from the further context of this very chapter that Paul had no doubt that he would, in fact, be raised to dwell with Messiah. Note vv. 20–21,

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua Messiah; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

This conforms to his words earlier in this same epistle (1:21), “For to me, to live is Messiah and to die is gain.” “To die is gain?” Paul states plainly that his life was fully enveloped in Messiah, but that to die would be even better! Surely such a statement is based upon Paul’s confidence that God would be faithful to His promises in Messiah Yeshua, and that he would, in fact, have a favorable judgment before Him, because it was not his own righteousness that would be judged but the righteousness of Messiah in which he was clothed by faith.

But then why would he write v. 11 in a form that bespeaks some measure of contingency? I think Hawthorne (*Word Bible Commentary, Philippians*, pp. 200-201) gives us good insight on this question:

These words seem to convey an element of doubt or uncertainty, however slight. But if there is any doubt in Paul’s mind, it is not about the reality of the resurrection to come, or about the trustworthiness of God (Rom 8:38–39), or about the way in which he will attain the resurrection, i.e., by martyrdom, or by some

other way, or about himself as to whether he might be rejected for his own defects (1 Cor 9:27; but see Phil 3:9; Rom 5:17–18, 21). Rather, it would appear that Paul uses such an unexpected hypothetical construction simply because of humility on his part, a humility that recognizes that salvation is the gift of God from start to finish and that as a consequence he dare not presume on this divine mercy. A translation such as Goodspeed's "in the hope of attaining" adequately and accurately expresses Paul's feeling of awe and wonder as he wrote the phrase. Such an attitude of humility is not in any way weakened by the active voice of the verb κατατήσω, "I might attain" (akin to 3:12–14), as though Paul were thinking that by himself and his own efforts he could attain the resurrection. His expression as it stands implies the following modification: "If by the grace and goodness of God I might be privileged to participate in the resurrection."

Even as we pray at the beginning of our Torah service, "As for me, may my prayer to You, Adonai, be at an acceptable time," all the while knowing that God is always ready to hear our prayers (cf. Heb 4:16), so Paul, with full confidence of faith, speaks of attaining to the resurrection in words that portray humility before the God Who alone is able to raise the dead.

So what have we found? Kinzer's assertion, that Paul was himself not certain of a favorable judgment before God, is clearly not supported by the texts he offers, and is rather controverted by other clear statements of the Apostle himself.

Next, Kinzer turns to Rom 2:14–16 to show that even those "outside the community of God's manifest covenantal action in Israel and in Yeshua" may be counted as righteous in the eyes of God.

14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Torah do instinctively the things of the Torah, these, not having the Torah, are Torah to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Torah written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Messiah Yeshua.

Once again, it appears that Kinzer has lost sight of the larger context in which this text resides. Has not Paul, in the first chapter of Romans, described Gentiles in general as taking the revelation of God in nature and turning it upon its head? How then does he speak of them here as having the Torah written upon their hearts? The best answer is that Paul is referring to believing Gentiles in this case. Though they did not grow up being taught the Torah, when they came to faith in Yeshua the indwelling Spirit wrote the Torah upon their hearts (the connection to Jer 31:33 is obvious), meaning that as they were taught God's word, they readily received and obeyed it. Interpreting this passage as teaching that unbelieving Gentiles will be judged as righteous based upon their righteous actions disregards the flow of the epistle and goes contrary to everything Paul has stated in the opening chapter. Moreover, when Paul, in chapter three concludes that "both Jews and Greeks are under sin" (v. 9), he substantiates this by quoting a string of texts from the Tanach (vv. 10–18) that could hardly sustain Kinzer's interpretation of 2:14–16.

Furthermore, Kinzer's reference to the Noachide laws (pp. 103, 107) is grossly anachronistic. As I have shown in a paper written on the subject,¹ the Noachide laws were clearly not recognized as a minimum standard in the Apostolic era. The idea that the Gentiles who "show the work of the Torah written on their hearts" are instinctively abiding by the Noachide Laws has no basis, either in cultural history or in the Scriptures.

Kinzer ends his description of the "Paul tradition" by describing "faith" as a key element in the Apostle's soteriology. He summarizes what Paul means by faith in four headings: 1) faith involves belief in certain key truths; 2) faith is more than belief in a set of key truths, it also incorporates faithfulness or obedience; 3) faith is often associated with water-immersion, which emphasizes a communal aspect of

¹ "Do the Seven, Go to Heaven?" An Investigation into the History of the Noachide Laws," delivered at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington D.C., 2006, and available at TorahResource.com

faith; 4) faith involves “union with the Messiah” through the Spirit, meaning union with Him in His death and resurrection (pp. 104–106).

What is missing in this brief summation of the Pauline understanding of faith is the fact that very often in Paul’s writings, the object of faith that saves is Yeshua (cf. Rom 3:22, 25; 9:33; Gal 2:16; 3:25; Eph 1:15; Phil 3:9; Col 1:4; 1Tim 1:16; 3:13, 16; 2Tim 3:15). Kinzer includes Paul’s association of faith with water-immersion in his summation, which is referenced six times in the Pauline corpus (Rom 6:3; 1Cor 1:13; 12:13; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:12) yet he fails to note that for Paul, Yeshua is the object of true saving faith, even though this is found twice as many times in his writings. This surely calls into question Kinzer’s objectivity in the study he has undertaken.

In concluding his overview of the “Paul tradition” in soteriology, Kinzer suggests that while “faith—signifying a bond of union with the Messiah—leads to a happy final destiny,” it is not a lack of faith that leads to a tragic ending but acts of unrighteousness (pp. 106–107). He references Paul’s sin lists as proof (1Cor 6:9–10; Gal 3:5–6; 5:19–21; Eph 5:5–6) in which those who practice such things will not “inherit the kingdom of God” but fall under His wrath. Kinzer writes:

Paul stresses the link between Yeshua-faith and the eschatological inheritance of God’s kingdom. However, when speaking about those who are excluded from that inheritance, Paul lists types of behavior that are in fundamental violation of the universally applicable norms of the Torah (in Rabbinic terms, the Noachide commandments. He does not include in the list “unbelief” (i.e., lack of explicit Yeshua-faith). As we inferred earlier from our reading of Romans 2, Paul does not divide the world neatly between Yeshua-believers (who are “saved”) and those who lack explicit faith in Yeshua (who are “damned”). Judgment for all will be according to deeds rather than beliefs or experiences, though beliefs and experiences shape deeds. Just as the deeds of the “righteous Gentiles” of Romans 2 demonstrate an implicit Torah inscribed on their hearts, so the deeds of some outside the visible walls of the *ekklessia* [sic] may bear witness to their implicit faith in the crucified and risen Messiah. (p. 107)

As noted above, the only consistent interpretation of the Gentiles mentioned in Romans 2:14f is that they are Gentiles who have come to faith in Yeshua.

But in stating that Paul only teaches “types of behavior” and not “unbelief” as the grounds for eschatological judgment, Kinzer has apparently forgotten a text such as Rom 5:8–11,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Yeshua Messiah, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Here, those who are “justified by His blood” are those who are “saved from the wrath of God through Him.” And in the context of this chapter Paul makes it clear that he has the widest scope in mind (note the inclusive language beginning in v. 12), not just those who have heard the Gospel. Moreover, salvation is not merely the application of the death of Messiah to the sinner, but “we shall be saved by His life.” This means that the life of Yeshua, the “power of His resurrection,” is the transforming reality that brings the necessary salvific component of sanctification. Further, such a reconciliation to God experienced by the redeemed sinner produces an exultation in God through Yeshua. This could hardly be describing an “implicit faith.”

If Kinzer is correct, one wonders why Paul was so animated about “another Gospel” that was being taught by the Influencers at Galatia. What really would be the problem for some Gentiles to trust in their Jewish status gained by becoming a proselyte? As proselytes, would not their Torah piety mold their be-

havior to conform to righteousness and avoid the sins listed by Paul that forfeited an eschatological inheritance? Why would Paul use such strong language of condemnation toward those who were teaching the necessity of Gentile conversion? After all, they were not denying the necessity of Yeshua's saving acts, they were just teaching that Jewish status was also required.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal 1:8–9)

Given Kinzer's viewpoint, those who never hear the Gospel at all are better off than those who might hear and receive "a message of good news" different than what Paul had taught. The reality, however, is that Paul's excessively strong language here bespeaks the fact that in his perspective, the Gospel he was delivering was the only message that could result in eternal salvation. Had Paul been a proponent of the "Wider Hope," he surely would not have pronounced such a damning judgment upon those who had essentially received what he had taught but simply wanted to add something to it.

In the final paragraph of Kinzer's description of the "Paul tradition," he states that "Paul addresses a different audience than the tradition of Peter and James, and develops a new concept of "faith" (p. 107). That, I'm sure, would have been news to Paul! As far as he was concerned, the message of faith which he proclaimed to Jew and Gentile alike was the very message of faith demonstrated by Abraham and preached by Moses (cf. Gen 15:6 || Rom 4:1f; Deut 30:11f || Rom 10:6–8). Paul had developed no "new concept of faith" but was proclaiming the very Gospel preached to Abraham (cf. Gal 3:8), namely, that in his seed (who is ultimately Yeshua) all the families of the earth would be blessed.

3) *The Johannine Tradition*

In describing John's perspective on salvation, Kinzer rightly notes that faith is viewed, not as a confession to a creedal formula or certain propositional truths, but as "life in His name," which is possessed now, in this world, and which also anticipates eternal life in the world to come. Thus, this new life which comes to those who are saved is grounded in Yeshua's presence with them and within them. Kinzer also emphasizes that for John, "the central truth affirmed by faith is the deity of Yeshua" (p. 108). He notes that in John, "disbelief in Yeshua brings condemnation," which he describes as a "novel linkage." He interprets such condemnation "primarily as present realized conditions rather than future destinies (though they have definite implications for the world to come)" (p. 111). This kind of "double-speak" is difficult to decipher. If disbelief brings condemnation in our world, and has "definite implications for the world to come," what are these implications?

Kinzer seeks to explain his position by referencing two verses from John 3:

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36)

From these he reasons that those who are condemned are those who have knowledge of the Son of God and what He requires of people. Since v. 36 speaks of "obeying the Son," Kinzer concludes that these verses apply only to people who have been confronted with the Gospel and have rejected it. He goes on to buttress his argument by showing that John uses phrases such as "you have seen Me and yet do not believe" (John 5:24; 6:36, 40) or "anyone who hears My words and does not keep them" (John 12:47–

48), indicating that as far as John is concerned, eschatological judgment comes upon those who have received the Gospel but have rejected it. In other words, John's soteriological perspective does not include condemnation upon those who have never heard the Gospel:

Thus, the Gospel of John says little about *non*-believers, but much about *dis*-believers. It deals harshly with those who see the light, recognize it as light, and then turn their backs and run away from the light. It speaks of the condition of those who have encountered Yeshua and rejected him, not of those who have never encountered him at all. (p. 112)

He then applies this concept directly to the Jewish people. For Kinzer, "seeing the light" in a Johannine way is far more than merely reading a tract, watching a movie, or being confronted with a memorized speech from a missionary on the street. Since what we actually perceive in such situations is shaped by our communal commitments and our personal and family history, no one can rightly judge that Jewish people who have rejected the Gospel have actually rejected "the light." While the Jewish people who rejected Yeshua during His earthly life clearly did see and reject "the light,"

...we cannot assume that all future generations of Jews who lack explicit belief in him have encountered him and given that same negative response. Only God can distinguish between a dis-believer and a non-believer; however, even if the distinction were evident to human eyes, the extraordinary circumstances of Jewish history would incline one to extreme caution in assessing the destinies of individual Jews. (p. 113)

Once again, the uncertainty of postmodernity comes through. But at the core of such a statement is the implicit theology of a man-centered soteriology. Does not John himself record the words of Yeshua, that "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (Jn 6:44)? And are not all who come to Yeshua endowed by the Spirit to confess Him? "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (1John 4:13). Moreover, does not John teach in this very context that every spirit that comes from God confesses Yeshua? "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua Messiah has come in the flesh is from God..." (1John 4:2).

My point is this: if the whole enterprise of salvation is initiated by God; if only those He sovereignly draws come to faith in Yeshua; if faith itself is a gift of God; then should we not affirm that all whom He intends to save will be given the Gospel and faith to accept it? Kinzer's whole argument rests upon a kind of deistic approach to the Gospel in which God provided a way of salvation and then walked away to see what mankind would do with it. But that is not how the Apostles, including John, present the matter. From the very outset of John's Gospel he affirms:

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:10-13)

Salvation is therefore not mankind's effort or even the result of mankind's self-determination. Salvation is the sovereign work of God Who has the right to save those whom He will save. Indeed, in attempting to rescue mankind from the wrath of God, the "Wider Hope" has neglected the only real hope mankind has ever had—the sovereign will of God to bring to life those who are dead in their sins and to forgive them of their sins through the full payment made for them by Yeshua. The mystery in all of this is *why* God has not chosen all peoples who have ever lived to be recipients of His saving love. But if we cannot answer the question "why," we must not shrink back from affirming what the Scriptures declare. Indeed, His election of Israel without a similar election of all other nations stands as a macrocosm of the mystery

of His having chosen some individuals for salvation. In each case, whether of the national election of Israel or the individual election to eternal salvation, the only answer to the question “why” is that God desired to do so.

Kinzer concludes by giving short remarks on Mark 16:9–16 and summarizing his conclusions on Final Destinies. He appears to agree with Kierkegaard that no one should presume to offer reasons why God would judge anyone but oneself, offering a quote from *Fear and Trembling*. But I think a different quote from *Fear and Trembling* actually captures far better the theological struggle being waged in this essay. It is Kierkegaard’s own confession of how he would have responded, had he walked in the sandals of Abraham and been required to sacrifice his son:

Now if I, in the capacity of a tragic hero—for a higher flight I am unable to take—if I had been summoned to such an extraordinary royal progress as was the one to Mount Moriah, I know very well what I would have done. I would not have been craven enough to remain at home; neither would I have dawdled on the way; nor would I have forgot my knife—just to draw out the end a bit. But I am rather sure that I would have been promptly on the spot, with every thing in order—in fact, would probably have been there before the appointed time, so as to have the business soon over with. But I know also what I would have done besides. In the moment I mounted my horse I would have said to myself: “Now all is lost, God demands Isaac, I shall sacrifice him, and with him all my joy—but for all that, God is love and will remain so for me; for in this world God and I cannot speak together, we have no language in common.” (from the section “Preliminary Expectoration,” pp. 45-6 in *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, Walter Lowrie, trans. [Princeton, 1945]).

Here is the central issue, whether or not God and man can speak the same language, whether the words of Scripture can bring certainty in the meaning they convey, the meaning of the authors who, by the Spirit of God, were borne along so as to convey the very heart and thoughts of the Almighty. Kierkegaard did not think they could, and thus the only way left for him was to become that “knight of resignation” who lays his “hope” upon that which is utter absurdity.

Job had a different perspective: “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth” (Job 19:25), and so did Paul:

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. (2Tim 1:12)

In the final pages of Kinzer’s essay, he discloses his own understanding of eternal punishment. He does so by quoting C. S. Lewis who essentially believed that “threats of hell” did not affirm that such a place actually exists, but that the idea of it was proffered in order to rouse us into action. Kinzer apparently agrees. Given that scenario, is not the entire argument he has presented moot? If there is, in fact, no hell to shun, do “final destinies” really matter? There is no need to concern ourselves about those who have never heard the Gospel, for whatever their lot in the world to come, it will not be damnation. Surely with hell out of the picture, one could imagine that God’s mercy will prevail and that all (including those who rejected Yeshua during His earthly life) will find some measure of good in the world to come.

Kinzer hopes that the apostolic promises as he has set them forth will “rouse us to action, not by alerting us to ‘a terrible possibility’ but by setting before us a glorious hope” (p. 118). Unfortunately, such a “glorious hope,” as far as Kinzer is concerned, rests in the hands of fallen mankind, which is, after all, not much hope at all.

The remaining four essays in this issue of *Kesher* interact only secondarily with the major essays of Juster, Dauermann, and Kinzer. Fruchtenbaum's article thoroughly expresses his view of what the Scriptures teach regarding salvation, but does not directly critique nor interact with the "Wider Hope" controversy. As such, I will make only very brief comments about each of these.

Scott Nassau – "Shavuot and Its Impact on a Messianic Soteriology"

In this article, Nassau outlines the giving of the Spirit at Shavuot as described by Luke in Acts 2. He makes the connection between the giving of the Spirit at Shavuot and the work of the Spirit as anticipated in the Tanach, noting specifically the parallels to Jeremiah's new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). He then surveys the work of the Spirit in connection with the salvation of sinners, emphasizing that salvation is far more than simply hope for the world to come but involves redemption both now and in the future, corporate, individual, and cosmic.

In detailing the implications of his study, Nassau suggests that the giving of the Spirit at Shavuot "was the culmination of Messiah's redemptive work and the inauguration of the new covenant" (p. 127). His second implication is that "exterior obligations to the Torah are not as important as interior obedience to the Spirit" (p. 127). One immediately wonders how the two differ! Does not the Spirit act in accordance with God's will, moving and encouraging the believer to obey God? The bifurcation between "interior" and "exterior" is, in my opinion, something more akin to neo-Platonism than a perspective derived from the Scriptures. "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov 4:23).

The third implication offered from Nassau's study is that "when God poured out his Spirit on Shavuot, he created a unique community composed of both Jews and Gentiles (1Cor 12:12–14)" (p. 128). Was not this always the case, however, in ancient Israel? Were not the *gerim* who attached themselves to the God of Israel part of the larger Jewish community, who benefited from God's grace to Israel and participated in her worship?

Finally, Nassau emphasizes that the presence of the Spirit transforms the life of a believer so that he or she provides a testimony to the community. In a postmodern world in which experience is more important than truth, Nassau emphasizes that the transformed lives of those who are empowered by the Spirit will have the greater impact upon a watching world. I would only add that the Spirit transforms the life of a believer through the truth of the Scriptures. It is the truth that sets us free, not merely experience. The postmodern person may be drawn in by what he or she sees by way of life experience, but they will have to give up their postmodern view of "truth" if they are to accept the Gospel that such experiences are expressing.

There is only one major question I would ask of this author: what comprised the work of the Spirit in the salvation of individuals before the Shavuot of Acts 2? I get the clear impression that Nassau holds a view commonly taught in some Christian theologies, that the Spirit was relatively inactive in the whole enterprise of individual salvation before Acts 2. I personally find that impossible to believe, unless God had a different pre-Acts 2 salvation plan than He did post-Acts 2. But if Paul utilized Abraham and David as his examples to the Romans of how a person is saved by faith, it would appear that he considered the salvation of Abraham and David to be ever as much dependent upon the work of the Spirit as he considered his own salvation experience.

David Sedacca – "Salvation and the People of Israel: Harmonizing a Soteriological Dilemma"

Sedacca begins by discussing what "soteriology" is, and noting that no such word appears in ancient Jewish literature. But this should not surprise us since the ancient rabbis were not concerned with a systematic theology, which is the basis for a category like "soteriology." Sedacca does go on to describe

how Judaism interprets the concept of salvation, and shows that this is envisioned as primarily corporate rather than individualistic. He interacts a bit with Kinzer and with John Hagee's recent book, *In Defense of Israel: The Biblical Mandate for Supporting the Jewish State* (Frontline: 2007).

In outlining the dilemma that exists between a traditional, evangelical understanding of salvation and the "Wider Hope" perspective, he offers the concept of "atonement" as a "covering" for sin, and suggests that while Yom Kippur in the eras of the Temple accomplished this covering, the destruction of the Temple might signal the fact that God had another means for atonement that did not require the Temple. This means was, of course, the death of Yeshua:

It is my conviction that there was a need for sacrifice and although today there is no Temple to fulfill these requirements, in order to be saved from the consequences of sin there has to be a sacrifice. Was God capable of stopping the Romans from destroying the Temple, or did He have another means that did not need the Temple while preserving the significance of sacrifices? It is my conviction that in Jesus the Messiah the sacrificial requirements were met: an innocent dying for the guilty, a blameless lamb accepted by God and the severity of sin erased by the shedding of blood. (p. 135)

This paragraph is replete with theological problems. First, it would be helpful to note the article by Richard Averbeck on כַּפַּר (*kafar*) in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Zondervan, 1997) in which he makes a very strong case that *kafar* means "to wipe clean," not "to cover." This has significant implications for any study of atonement in the Scriptures. Secondly, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4), so when Nassau writes that "did He have another means that did not need the Temple?", he implies that the former means, i.e., sacrifice in the Temple (and specifically the sacrifices on Yom Kippur) actually did remove sin. Such a perspective demands that God has more than one way of salvation, which the Scriptures deny.

In his conclusion, Nassau offers the two options: either one "stands firm with the principles of salvation as expressed in the Scriptures" and affirms "Jesus the Messiah provider (*soter*) of salvation" or one deviates "from biblical principles" and replaces "them with man-made systems." Nassau strongly affirms the former and denies the latter, ending with his own commitment to take as his own the words of Peter in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

I applaud Nassau's conclusion and his commitment to the Apostolic message. My only comment would be that Yeshua is not primarily presented as the One who *provides* salvation, but as the One Who accomplished salvation. He did not make salvation possible, He made it inevitable. He did not provide a cleansing for sin, He nailed our debt to the cross (Col 2:14).

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum – "The Condition of Salvation for Jews and Gentiles in this Age"

This lengthy article (13 pages) reads more like an excerpt from a course in systematic theology than a contribution to the current debate outlined by the previous essays, especially those by Juster, Dauermann, and Kinzer. Fruchtenbaum explains and defends what has been generally taught by dispensational fundamentalists about how a sinner is saved. He notes that there have always been three fundamental truths relative to God's salvation of sinners:

1) the basis of salvation was always Messiah's death in the sense that from the divine viewpoint, God was always saving people based upon what Messiah either will do or did do; 2) the means was always faith; one had to actually believe in order to receive eternal life; 3) the object of faith was always God, was was the case with Abraham who believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness (Gen 15:6). (p. 139)

He goes on to note, however, that the content of this saving faith changes as God progressively reveals

more and more about His method of salvation. Each person who is saved must believe what God has revealed up to the point in time in which he or she lives. Thus, “under the Law” one had to believe two things for salvation: 1) that the God of Israel was the only God (ruling out polytheism and idolatry), and 2) this God of Israel is the only Savior (ruling out works as a means of salvation). However, with the coming of Messiah and His death and resurrection, what one is required to believe is expanded, as noted in 1Cor 15:1–4.

Fruchtenbaum next asks the question about salvation for the Jewish people of our times, including Orthodox Jews:

Can they not obtain salvation by means of the practice of their own Judaisms? After all, Jews did not need to believe in Yeshua prior to his coming and were still able by grace through faith to receive salvation. Is that now still possible for Jews today? (p. 140)

He answers by quoting Acts 4:12, meaning he affirms the Narrow Hope and denies that the Wider Hope has any biblical basis.

He then tackles the question of whether the Scriptures remain silent about Jews and Gentiles who do not consciously believe in Yeshua and the eternal judgment that they face. He answers directly by referencing John 3:18, 36; Matt 3:11–12; Jn 5:25–29; 46–47; 6:40; 10:7–18; 22–39; 11:26; Gal 2:21, all of which he takes clearly to affirm that salvation is only by faith in Yeshua and all who do not believe in Him await God’s wrath and punishment in the eschaton. He does not interact with the interpretations of these very verses set forth in the previous essays (interpretations which often took a much different approach and derived contrary meaning and application) nor does he give his own explanation for what the destiny is of those who have never heard the Gospel. To use Kinzer’s terms, Fruchtenbaum affirms the condemnation of *dis*-believers but says nothing about *non*-believers. It is, of course, possible that Fruchtenbaum wrote his article without intending to interact with the conclusions of the other authors.

Finally, Fruchtenbaum discusses five false additions to salvation which have been added throughout Church history. These are: 1) that repentance is necessary for salvation; 2) that public confession of Yeshua is necessary for salvation; 3) that confession of one’s sin is necessary for salvation; 4) that one must implore God for salvation; and 5) that one must surrender his or her life to Yeshua as Lord. Thus, he adopts the position that simply confessing Yeshua as Savior, who died for sin and rose again, is sufficient for salvation. Substantiation for these assertions is often based upon words studies and selected texts, but these are not convincing.

He concludes his article with a brief note about whether baptism is necessary for salvation, concluding that it is not, though being baptized is an act of obedience for the one who has been saved.

While I have a number of problems with what this author is teaching (not the least of which is that he appears to equate the whole of salvation with faith as an act of confession of Yeshua as Savior), I would only offer three hermeneutical axioms:

1. Words do not have meaning; meaning has words.
2. Language has no meaning apart from its cultural milieu
3. The context, not the lexicon, is the primary interpretive base of any biblical text

Avram Aumick, Ralph E. Finley, Elliot Klayman, Howard Silverman – “The Essential Need for Salvation through Messiah Yeshua

The final article in this issue of *Kesher* is co-authored by four writers. The first footnote also gives credit to 11 other individuals who contributed “helpful comments in the construction of the article.” So

this article purports to be more of a “community” effort than simply the thoughts of a single author.

It opens with a summary:

Sin separates humanity from God and the world to come. The mystery of salvation lies solely with God who has revealed only one way to enjoy right-relationship with God now and in the world to come. That way is personal, conscious faith (in this lifetime) in Messiah Yeshua as Lord and Redeemer. God is a righteous judge and will judge no one unjustly. (p. 150)

They begin by affirming that the Scriptures are the basis for God’s revelation about man’s fallen condition and God’s gracious remedy. They also state, however, that “since the time of Messiah’s death, burial and resurrection, people receive that atonement only through personal repentance for sin, and faith in Him” (p. 150). The fact that they specifically note “since the time of Messiah’s death, burial and resurrection” makes it clear that they are not addressing what constituted “saving faith” before Yeshua’s appearance. It would have been helpful if they had tackled this question because it bears significantly upon the current debate.

The primary issues these authors affirm are: **1)** that mankind is fallen, and that in their fallen state, empirical evidence fails miserably in determining metaphysical truth. Further, mankind’s fallen state makes them choose their own reason over God’s revelation, so that rationalism likewise fails to gain an accurate knowledge about God and His truth. **2)** This is because all of mankind has inherited a sinful nature and is therefore in rebellion against God. As such, all of mankind is under God’s just condemnation. Genesis 6:5 speaks to the fact that mankind, who were destroyed in the flood (save the eight spared in the ark), were deserving of God’s wrath. Even post-flood humanity was no different (Gen 8:21). “With graphic clarity God reveals to us through the flood that all of humanity is “in sin” and stands condemned before Him. This sorry condition of humanity continued throughout history as noted by the prophets (Is 1:2–4) and Paul (Rom 3:9–10) and is affirmed throughout the Scriptures (p. 152). “Thus, regardless of age, piety, or sincerity of one’s spiritual aspirations, no one is exempt from God’s judgments, or somehow worthy of God’s gracious intervention, all are without hope of deliverance” (p. 152). **3)** God has revealed His righteous, loving, and gracious provision of Messiah Yeshua as a once-for-all atoning sacrifice that pays the penalty of sin, frees from sin’s bondage, and provides abundant and eternal life. When the question is asked, “Who therefore will enter life through the narrow door?”, the answer is “who ever believes.” This was Yeshua’s answer (Matt 7:13–14; Lk 13:23-24) based upon Numbers 21. **4)** The need to take the message of God’s provision in Yeshua to everyone everywhere is affirmed by Paul in Rom 10:14–17 because it is only by conscious faith in Yeshua that salvation is possible.

The authors end their short essay by addressing the question of the

“eternal destiny of infants, the unborn, those, who by God’s sovereign design (Ex 4:11) cannot hear, understand or respond in faith to God’s promise and provision. Is there hope for those who have never heard the good news of Messiah, or those who cannot hear and respond?” (p. 154)

They respond by quoting Gen 18:25, “Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?” In other words, they plead ignorance of what God will do with this class of people, but they affirm that whatever God does will be just. They end by quoting Deut 29:29, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this Torah.”

This short essay is worthy and brings up a number of issues left untouched by the previous articles, chief among which is the sinful nature of mankind. In the arguments set forth by some of the previous authors, it is evident that they presume an ability for mankind to discern righteousness from unrighteousness, and to piece together the natural revelation of God in such a way so as to derive ultimate truth.

This article brings forward the Scriptural stance on the issue, namely, that left to himself, mankind is not only unable to find such truth but is also blatantly unwilling. That, it seems to me, is a key factor in the “Wider Hope” controversy.

It is also refreshing to see that these men have a forthright position on the centrality of the Scriptures as the word of God, and that they hold these Scriptures to accurately reveal to us what God has said about the salvation of sinners.

My only fear is that after readers of this journal have slogged their way through the very involved and lengthy articles of Juster, Dauermann, and Kinzer, they may consider the few pages of this article as hardly audible in the drone of much louder voices. I hope, however, that the significant points made in this compact essay will challenge and encourage readers to see and accept the necessity of a thorough reliance upon Scripture as the only means of knowing what God has declared regarding the salvation He has accomplished.

Conclusion

After reading this current issue of *Kesher*, I spent time contemplating what I had read, and, as I mentioned at the outset of this essay, rehashed why it had brought such sadness of soul. Then I sat down at my computer to write out a few thoughts to share with others. I expected to compose five or six pages, and here I am on page 24. To some of you who loathe long essays, I apologize. Some of you, however, will feel that I have not done enough, and some of the authors of the essays I critique will doubtlessly think that I have missed much of what they wrote, or misunderstood their arguments, or failed to grasp what they really meant.

I realize now that my initial sadness that came over me at my first reading stemmed from the fact that what I saw in many (not all) of the articles was a drift into a very modern and liberal approach to Scripture. Instead of starting with the presupposition that there exists within Scripture a unified “biblical theology” based upon the sovereign work of God by His Spirit in the act of superintending and inspiring the sacred text, I saw authors pitting this “tradition” against that “tradition,” making subjective decisions about how the text is to be understood and then basing their conclusions (some of which seem outlandish to me) on these subjective conclusions. I am convinced that to whatever extent we give up a strong view of the sacred nature of Scripture, to that extent we are building on shifting sand. Every generation of scholars has had those who seek to diminish the idea that the Scriptures are ultimately the work of God and therefore read and interpret them along very humanistic lines. My perspective is that the Scriptures (the word of God) are parallel to the Incarnate One (the Word of God), for as He is at once divine and human, and His humanity is common, like ours, so the Scriptures are at once divine and human, being written in common, human language by human authors. It is, in fact, this reality that makes the Scriptures accessible to us. Contrary to Kierkegaard, God and man speak the same language because God humbled Himself to reveal His thoughts in human words. To give into liberal notions of the bible as a collective menagerie of various religious movements is to deplete the Scriptures of their ability to inform us and reshape us into the people God intends us to be.

But my sadness also stemmed from the fact that the Messianic movement seems fraught with theological naivety. Notable cracks in the foundation of the edifice can be seen in the areas of Christology and Bibliology. This journal has now shown significant fractures in the core issue of Soteriology. And for what? So that we can be more widely accepted? So that we can join modernity or postmodernity and no longer be viewed as throwbacks to a Christianity that we ourselves have found wanting?

It is not at all that I felt discouraged over the venue of dialog and discussion. I greatly appreciate that. Nor is there any personal fear to open up the question of salvation to its widest extent, and to entertain the very difficult questions of eternal destinies. But my despair came when I saw that the methods by which answers were being sought were ill equipped for the task at hand. If we begin with presupposi-

tions about the Scriptures that have been handed to us by those who deny any divine activity in their origins, we are left manipulating the text to say what we want it to say, or what we need it to say. Modern critical methods often tell us more about the scholar than about the text.

What I envisioned after I finished reading this issue of *Kesher* was that many leaders who affirm some form of the “Wider Hope” will be strengthened in their view, and will begin to teach this doctrine in their respective synagogues and congregations. I can only imagine how bewildered many will be to realize that what they thought were the core truths about salvation are actually not in the Scriptures at all. I can hear them reasoning, “surely such renowned scholars with such sophisticated articles must know what they’re talking about!”

So my whole purpose in writing this response article is simply to call us all back to a Berean approach to this issue (salvation) and all other core or foundational issues: “is this what the Scriptures teach?” You may feel ill-equipped to study the Scriptures and to use them to critique what is being taught, but you must still ask this fundamental question and seek to know the answer. I am confident that if we remain steadfastly grounded upon the Scriptures as the basis for what we know, believe and practice, the house we are seeking to build will remain stable in our generation and in the generations to come. If not, the house is already tilting and more storms are surely on the way.