

# *For the Common Good*

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**M**any years ago—it seems as if it was another lifetime—I was a Jewish Christian attending a very large charismatic conference. In the midst of literally thousands of worshipping men and women, I stood that day enraptured with the presence of God. Then, bowed by his majesty, I prostrated myself on the floor as the singing continued. Suddenly, I felt a hand on my shoulder. I did not look up. After a few moments, a man spoke these words to me: “You will feed on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” I waited for more, but that was it. “You will feed on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” When I finally glanced over my shoulder, the man was already walking away.

I had no idea what he meant. It turned out that his words were a quote from Isaiah 58, but they did not ring a bell for me at that time. And I would have told you that I knew Isaiah 58 pretty well; it is about God’s chosen fast. But I just supposed that the man had seen my face and figured out that I am Jewish. And yet, I was sure that his message to me was at least intended as a prophetic word. Still, “your father Jacob”? It was odd. And then, in one of those “duh” moments, I remembered that my father’s name was Jacob: Jacob Kinbar. But that made no sense to me either, because I was pretty certain that my dad would not leave me much of an inheritance, if anything at all: first, he did not have any money; second, he had rejected me because of my faith in Yeshua.

But I could not get those words entirely out of my mind. Just when I thought I had forgotten them, I would find myself mulling

over them again. As with many powerful prophetic words, it was not possible for me to let them go; or I could say that they would not let me go. To make a long story short, I eventually found the words in Isaiah 58 and realized that the passage had something to do with the land of Israel, the vision of Jacob's ladder, and what God had promised to Jacob and his descendants. With this realization, I began my journey toward the day, not long after this one, when I had what I call my "Jewish awakening"—when I began to understand more fully what it means to be a descendant of Jacob.

Even after I understood the reference, though, the words would not let go of me. I did not understand the full significance of what had been spoken to me until several years later, after my relationship with my dad had been healed and he had passed away. Unexpectedly, some funds came into my father's estate posthumously and eventually passed to me. This sudden windfall enabled me to work only part time for a number of years so that I could devote most of my time to serving in the body of Messiah.

I believe that I would have received the inheritance even if I had never heard the prophecy. But the prophecy made me know that God was with me on my life's journey, just as he had been with Jacob. It made me know on the kishka-level, the gut level, that my whole life is utterly laid bare in God's sight from beginning to end and that I am comfortable with that fact because God is good. Not just because he gave me an unexpected windfall, but because God's knowledge of me is so thorough and reassuring, and because he can use whatever means he chooses—even a stranger at a conference—to communicate that to me.

This story is one of many I could tell of how spiritual gifts have been a meaningful and active force in my life and in the lives of men and women I have known. Many of my forty years as a Yeshua believer have been spent in moderately charismatic congregations—first churches, then Messianic congregations—in which gifts of the Spirit were encouraged and practiced. I believe in the gifts of the Spirit.

My first and longest-lasting charismatic church experience began when I was a new believer and concluded many years later, when I transitioned to the Messianic Jewish movement after several years of leadership service in my church. Our church emphasized worship and teaching. We took Bible study very seriously and did

our best to justify our beliefs and practices by appealing to biblical statements, patterns, and examples. We read 1 Corinthians 12–14 with a quiet confidence that we properly understood and were following Paul’s instructions about the gifts of the Spirit.

For example, we understood a word of knowledge to be a piece of knowledge or insight about a person or situation that one would know only because the Spirit had revealed it to him. A word of wisdom was understood by us to be God’s counsel for a particular person or situation. Prophecy was a word from God intended to edify, exhort, or console; it was usually not predictive and might include a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge. We also taught and spoke frequently about being led by the Spirit; when people began to express the gifts in precisely the ways we had been taught, we felt that they were being led by the Spirit and being biblical at the same time!

The conference I attended those many years ago was a gathering of charismatic Christians like any other. On that occasion, and on some others, I experienced or operated in the gifts of the Spirit. I have reason to believe that these experiences were authentic. To me they were meaningful and sometimes even profound. I saw three different overt miracles, including healings, one of which affected me in a powerful way.

So now, as I present a different understanding of the nature and practice of the gifts, please understand that I have not rejected what I believed and experienced earlier in my life. However, I have realized since then that my church’s understanding of the gifts and our practices were largely shaped by our charismatic culture, a culture that we had inherited from older Pentecostal and charismatic movements and modified over time. In other words, we understood and practiced spiritual gifts according to a tradition that cannot actually be found in 1 Corinthians 12–14. And yet, as with Torah, so with the instructions presented in these chapters, without a tradition or some commonly held rules there is no way to practice spiritual gifts.

My transition from the church to the Messianic Jewish world took several years, during which I was in full-time pastoral and teaching service in the church while also serving as an elder in the Messianic congregation. Over time, my personal practices changed. This included increased observance of the Torah and serious study

of it under the direction of several rabbis, in particular one rabbi who also had a Ph.D. and who was involved in traditional and academic study on the highest levels. I studied the Bible, and especially the Apostolic Writings, on my own, hoping that over time I could shed the cultural lenses through which I had read it for so many years. This would eventually affect the way I read the chapters in 1 Corinthians and understood the gifts of the Spirit.

Spiritual gifts are usually understood and practiced according to charismatic tradition, even within the Messianic movement. While some Messianics are comfortable with this, others do not see how the gifts can be separated from their “Christian trappings” and do not want to have anything to do with them. Yet if we take Paul’s words seriously, the gifts of the Spirit are necessary for the growth and maturity of the body of Messiah.

As the Messianic movement matures, it must develop its own tradition to shape the way spiritual gifts are expressed in our congregations in ways that are appropriate for us. I believe that the Shavu’ot conference that inspired the writing of this book is the first significant effort to understand the gifts of the Spirit in a clearly Messianic perspective and to contribute to an emerging Messianic tradition concerning them. By their very nature, traditions do not form overnight. They take shape over time in communities, and are nurtured in an atmosphere of open discussion among those who are informed and invested in the process. I trust that the conference, and this book, will contribute to that discussion.

## OUR FIRST PRIORITY: KNOWING GOD

Paul’s instruction about the gifts of the Spirit needs to be understood within the context of the circumstances that had arisen in Corinth after he left. At the beginning of 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote of his thankfulness to God that the congregation was enriched in Messiah Yeshua “in all speech and all knowledge” and that they were “not lacking in any gift” (1 Corinthians 1:4–7 NASB). They did not need to be initiated in the gifts of the Spirit; they only needed a refresher course and further instruction in the nature and purposes of the gifts. So his instructions in chapters 12–14

are not complete in themselves; they are meant to correct the Corinthians and to set them on the right path.

Paul writes, “To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7 NASB). In this essay, I hope to explore the meaning of the term “common good” and to investigate its implications for the practice of spiritual gifts in the Messianic community.

Contributing to the common good was a well-known concept in Paul’s time. Although various cultures had different ideas about what actually constituted the common good, the emphasis was always on what would potentially benefit every person in that culture. In Paul’s thinking, gifts such as healing primarily benefit individuals; they point to God’s power and love without necessarily speaking even a word to their recipients. Speaking in an unknown language also benefits individuals, unless what is spoken is interpreted for the benefit of all. So because he prioritized the common good over that of the individual, Paul’s emphasis was on the verbal gifts, which had the greatest potential to benefit the community as a whole. Gifts such as the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and prophecy are profoundly important because they build up the community, call us to holy living, and comfort us in our pain or loss (1 Corinthians 14:3).

The word I received that I would feed on the inheritance of my father Jacob was a personal message. It may have benefitted others indirectly, but it did not reach the level of the common good. Very few of the prophetic words I experienced in the charismatic world, even the ones addressed to communities, seemed to contribute effectively to the common good. There may have been several reasons for this, but I think that the main one was that we were so embedded in our cultural understanding of the gifts that we did not try to deepen our grasp of God’s intention for them.

Paul places a heavy emphasis on knowledge, which the verbal gifts impart. Forms of the word “knowledge” are found forty-two times in 1 Corinthians, twelve of them in chapters 12–14. The verbal gifts of the Spirit are meant to convey not only knowledge, but also the wisdom that enables us to use it well. For Paul, the word “knowledge” has specific connotations. He writes: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known”

(1 Corinthians 13:12 NASB). We do not see God face to face right now. Our knowledge of him is partial, but “then” it will be full. A full knowledge of God means much more than an increase in information about him. The term “face to face” also implies depth of relationship; it implies full intimacy with God.

Paul writes that “when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away” (1 Corinthians 13:10 NASB). We know God now through prayer, study, and various other experiences, and knowing him is central to our individual and community lives. We may even have experienced one or more unique “close encounters” with God. We seek to experience his nearness and cleave to him at all times. But *then*, we will know God face to face, a perfect nearness and a seamless cleaving that we cannot experience in this life.

For Paul, the common good consists, first of all, in knowing God—*now* in part and *then* fully. He is not writing eschatology here; he wants the Corinthians, and us, to understand that while spiritual gifts are essential and *must* be pursued, their goal is not perfection in this life. They are a foretaste of the Messianic Age and of what is in store for us when we are forever face to face with God. It is important for us to keep this in mind, because the perfect can become the enemy of the good. Seeking a perfect union with God in this life—knowing him *fully*—may make us less open to the simpler goodness God has created for us to enjoy here and now.

## THE KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM OF GOD: THE CRUCIFIED MESSIAH

Actually, Paul tells his readers much more about what he means by knowledge and wisdom in the beginning of 1 Corinthians than he does in chapters 12–14. Chapters 1 and 2 in particular are very rich chapters, and I can only touch on a few examples from them.

When Paul first came to Corinth, he had made up his mind to “know nothing among [the Corinthians] except Yeshua the Messiah and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2, my translation). In his preaching and teaching in this city, he kept a laser-like focus on the one who bore the griefs and sorrows, the sins and sicknesses of humanity so that God’s mercy could come to us. In Corinth, Paul articulated this Messiah powerfully, but he did not attempt to use

persuasive arguments to win people over. So at its most fundamental level, “knowledge” is knowledge of the crucified Messiah. This knowledge is meant to draw us to the Messiah; it is meant to incite love for Messiah and devotion to God.

Isaiah described the crucified Messiah this way:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore,  
And our sorrows He carried;  
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten of God, and afflicted.  
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,  
And by His scourging we are healed.  
All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But [HaShem] has caused the iniquity of us all  
To fall on Him. (Isaiah 53:4–6 NASB)

This Messiah, the Messiah crucified, is “the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians 1:24–25 NASB). The weakness of God is found in the disgraced, diseased, beaten, sin-laden, crucified Messiah, who is, paradoxically, the one “by whom all things exist, and we exist through him” (1 Corinthians 8:6, my translation). Apart from the manner of his death, we cannot know him truly as the one who sustains our existence. The mercy of God comes to us not only through the memory of the Messiah’s death but through the living reality of the one whose resurrected body forever bears the wounds he received on our behalf (see John 20:27).

In Judeo-Christian thought, repentance and death atone for one’s personal sins, enabling one to be resurrected to eternal life. Death is the necessary precursor to resurrection. Since Yeshua did not sin, there was no need for him to die. He died bearing our sins and thus paved the way for our resurrection. Our repentance joins us to his death and releases God’s incredible mercy to us. Consequently, our own death is not the result of sin and does not atone for sin; it is the natural end of our mortality.

Christian spirituality, at least in some traditions, tends to emphasize the sufferings of Yeshua in preaching, liturgy, and symbols. Perhaps some Christians overemphasize these aspects of Yeshua's mission at the expense of the full range of what God did in Yeshua; it is not for me to say. But a spirituality that is not permeated with the crucified Messiah lacks what Paul calls "the wisdom of God."

I do not mean to imply that every spiritual gift should overtly point to the Messiah on every occasion. But our practices today should anticipate the Messianic Age as much as possible, when "all things will be brought together in the Messiah" (Ephesians 1:10, my translation), or, as some translations render it, "all things will be summed up in the Messiah." When we are receptive to the Spirit's desire to speak of the Messiah, the gifts will reflect that desire, and the sum total of the gifts over time will direct our mind and heart to the Messiah.

In order not to be misunderstood, I want to state clearly that the crucified Messiah is "the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3 NASB). He is at our Father's right hand, always davening (praying) for us. The crucified Messiah is not a dumbed-down version of the glorious Messiah. They are, of course, one and the same. He retains the marks of crucifixion in his flesh forever as an emblem of the true nature of greatness: bearing others' burdens regardless of the cost. In Galatians 6:2, Paul wrote that bearing one another's burdens fulfills the Torah of Messiah, that is, the Messianic Torah he himself practiced and that has now been given to the entire body of Messiah.

Paul goes on to explain that "we do speak wisdom among those who are mature ... wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:6–7 NASB). This wisdom was incomprehensible to those who crucified the Messiah (1 Corinthians 2:8). These things have never been seen or heard or conceived of except by God, who prepared them "for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9 NASB). So the wisdom of God is the *person* of the crucified Messiah *and* an untold number of hidden things that come to us through him. Paul explains how these hidden things are revealed:

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For



who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (1 Corinthians 2:10–13 NASB)

So the Spirit of God reveals the thoughts of God as well as what God has prepared for us, and then teaches us how to express these thoughts in words. This is the essence of Paul's teaching on the verbal gifts of the Spirit: they are meant to convey these things for the common good.

Paul's reason for emphasizing the verbal gifts was not that he thought healing and miracles are unimportant. Have you ever seen or heard of someone coming to a service on crutches, being healed, and throwing the crutches away? Knowing human nature, and sometimes even the inside story, some of the stories we hear of such healings are simply not genuine. Other times they merely consist of a rush of adrenaline that temporarily makes a person feel healed. But I knew a woman named Joan whose experience of healing was unquestionably genuine. She had been maimed by a motorcycle and two years after her accident was still walking with a knee brace and crutches. One Sunday I watched as she was miraculously healed. She threw those crutches away and never used them or the knee brace again.

In a way, the effect of Joan's healing on our congregation was just as profound as the healing itself. After all, we knew Joan and her situation well; there was no other option for us but to believe that her experience was genuine. For many in the group, it was the only dramatic healing they had ever personally witnessed. I kept Joan's crutches in my office as a reminder of what God had done and what he can do. Healing is one of the most profound expressions of God's mercy as well as of his power. But even healings and miracles do not achieve their broader purpose apart from an environment in which words, given supernaturally, are used to draw our hearts and minds to the one who bore our sicknesses.

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 2, “wisdom” words appear nine times and “knowledge” words five times, in both positive and negative ways. Paul had determined to “know” only the crucified Messiah in Corinth. He reserved some of his teaching for later, as the Corinthian believers matured. His idea was not to keep the depths of God secret; they are not esoteric mysteries that are reserved for a small number of initiates. They are an inheritance that is meant for the entire body of Messiah as it grows in stature.

The verbal gifts of the Spirit relate directly to the wisdom and knowledge that are described in chapters 1 and 2: knowledge of the crucified Messiah, who is the wisdom of God, and knowledge of the wealth that his death released for us. These riches can only be known through the Spirit and expressed in words and ways taught by the Spirit. For us, then, true wealth does not consist of possessions, position, or status. True wealth is only known in giving as the Messiah gave, and true power “is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NASB). Wisdom and knowledge are also not solely the possessions of the gifted; they are meant to contribute to the common good.

The gifts of the Spirit should express the mission of God’s Spirit. Yeshua promised, “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me” (John 15:26 NASB). Paul prayed that God would give the Ephesian believers “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge” of Messiah (Ephesians 1:17 NASB). So the Spirit of God speaks first and foremost about Messiah Yeshua.

However, this knowledge of Yeshua is not the totality of all that we need to learn and experience. The Spirit also plumbs the depths of God and distributes gifts “to each one” (1 Corinthians 12:11 NASB) in order to disclose what “God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9 NASB) through the merit of the crucified Messiah. Furthermore, as we mature, we also learn to know God through Torah study as we are helped by the Spirit to learn what God requires of us and how to respond to his mitzvot.

We can receive verbal gifts at any time: when we are alone or with others, in services, or while we study, daven, or engage in any aspect of daily life. These gifts may begin with a mere suggestion, a word, a verse of Scripture, or an image given by the Spirit. There may be an intermediate period of time during which we weigh the

words and develop them within us. But even as we give shape to these ideas in our minds, we know that they are something more than our own thoughts; they are the supernatural intervention of God's Spirit.

When the time comes, we speak them in an appropriate manner in a setting, such as in a service, where they can serve the common good. Then the next major phase in the "life cycle" of a spiritual gift takes place in the hearts and minds of those who hear. If the words are strong enough, that is, if they are from God and have a certain depth of expression, they will to some extent grip those who hear them and percolate in their lives. When words such as these are spoken in accordance with God's intent in a congregational setting in which the gifts are understood, they do more than serve individuals; their purpose is always to build up the community.

## FOCUSING THE BELIEVERS ON MESSIAH AND HIM CRUCIFIED

But as crucial as all this is for our common good, something is missing from Paul's instruction concerning the spiritual gifts and from 1 Corinthians as a whole. Paul often mentioned Torah or quoted it in connection with specific issues, and his thought was clearly shaped by Torah even when he did not cite it, as in his discussion of incest in 1 Corinthians 5. He assumed that the Colossians recognized the authority of the Tanach, which he cited seventeen times, five of his quotes being from the books of Moses. But to the Corinthians he wrote little about Torah as a coherent body of specific commandments (mitzvot) given by God to Israel, which he calls "the whole Torah" in Galatians 5:3; nor does he introduce Torah observance as the solution to the problems in Corinth. There is nothing in his discussion of the spiritual gifts, or in the letter as a whole, that would overtly connect the gifts to Torah. How do we, who understand that Torah is essential to spiritual life, come to grips with its absence in these chapters?

First of all, we need to keep in mind that the letters of the Apostolic Writings are all written in response to specific situations and are not intended as systematic treatises or complete treatments of any topic. For example, Romans was written due to friction between

Jewish and Gentile groups of Yeshua believers; 1 Timothy was written to guide a young leader in his difficult work. The content and tone of each letter is intentionally chosen to fit its occasion and its purpose. The letters, though, are included in the Bible because they are apostolic teachings. As Yeshua specifically assigned to his apostles the task of teaching the nations (Matthew 28:19), their words are the relevant Word of God for the body of Messiah, despite their limited scope when they are read individually.

Paul wrote that he came to Corinth determined to “know nothing but Messiah Yeshua and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2, my translation). This contrasts sharply with his approach in Athens, the previous stop on his apostolic mission. There, he argued with philosophers. In Corinth, though, he had ordinary people in mind. First Corinthians includes these famous (or notorious) words of Paul:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the [Torah], as under the [Torah] though not being myself under the [Torah], so that I might win those who are under the [Torah]; to those who are without [Torah], as without [Torah], though not being without the [Torah] of God but under the [Torah] of Messiah, so that I might win those who are without [Torah].  
(1 Corinthians 9:20–21 NASB)

Rabbi David J. Rudolph, Ph.D., has published a book-length study of these verses.<sup>1</sup> In it he argues that Paul was not implying that he kept kosher only when he was with Jews and ate unkosher food when he was with “those who are without Torah.” Paul specifically wrote that he was not “without the Torah of God”; he had not rejected Torah. However, he was also “under the Torah of Messiah,” which impelled him to preach the *besorah* (gospel) to Gentiles without an emphasis on the whole Torah.

Paul was simply saying that he did not make the whole Torah an issue with non-Jews when he first came to Corinth because he felt that their specific need was to grasp the most essential and deepest issue of Messianic faith: the crucified Messiah. He introduced them to the Tanach, and the epistles to the Corinthians demonstrate that Paul assumed that they considered it authoritative. But there

is no evidence that he articulated a vision for the whole Torah at that time. This was not intended as a negative judgment on Torah; instead, it was a direct response to the spiritual circumstances and condition of the ordinary people in the assembly there, who were predominantly non-Jews.

At some point after Paul left Corinth, other teachers or their representatives began to arrive and, intentionally or not, caused factions to arise there. When Paul heard about this, his response was different from those in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians. In Rome and Galatia, Torah observance and Jewish and Gentile relations were front-burner issues, so Paul primarily addressed these issues. In Corinth, the congregation was split into factions, and they evidenced a pronounced lack of love. So Paul addressed those issues by refocusing the Corinthians on the Messiah:

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord [Yeshua the Messiah], that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of [Messiah]." Has [Messiah] been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10–13 NASB)

So Paul wrote 1 Corinthians primarily to respond to this situation and to return the Yeshua believers to a purity of devotion to Messiah. He does not address the content of the teaching of Apollos or Peter (or words taught in their names) or of those who *claimed* a greater devotion to Messiah while in fact dividing the congregation. Paul does not analyze the Corinthians' problems in relation to Torah *because he believed that the root issue of their problem lay elsewhere*. The congregation's need was to refocus on Messiah Yeshua and to serve one another rather than themselves. The flaws in their spirituality could only be mended by cleaving to Messiah.

Also, the existence of competing factions created a precarious situation that threatened to fracture the congregation. This time

of instability was not the time to shift the conversation to Torah, a matter so weighty and fraught with controversy that it could shatter the young group. Chances are that bringing the Torah into the conversation would have pitted existing sub-groups against one another on pro- or anti-Torah grounds.

I have made the argument that the verbal gifts of the Spirit are essentially ways to articulate “Messiah Yeshua and him crucified”—this is the wisdom of God. However, there are no similar discussions of spiritual gifts elsewhere in the Apostolic Writings that can help us to connect spiritual gifts as closely with Torah as they are connected with the crucified Messiah. Fortunately, there is another way to show how closely tied the spiritual gifts are to the Torah.

## TORAH AND THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Above, we discussed the meaning of the words “wisdom” and “knowledge” by looking at how Paul uses these words in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians. It was demonstrated that Paul was concerned about knowledge of the crucified Messiah as the wisdom of God. The spiritual gifts were given primarily to establish Yeshua in that preeminent place in the body of Messiah. In order to learn how Torah relates to the spiritual gifts, we have to search the pages of the Tanach in light of the traditions of interpretation that have come down to us. This will reveal crucial things about the gifts of the Spirit that cannot be seen when 1 Corinthians is viewed all by itself.

The first passage, which is examined closely in another essay in this volume, “Tanach and the Gifts of the Spirit,” shows the relationship between Messiah and the Spirit of God:

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,  
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.  
The Spirit of [HaShem] will rest on Him,  
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and strength,  
The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of [HaShem].  
And he will delight in the fear of [HaShem].  
(Isaiah 11:1–3 NASB)

Although the Messianic implications of this passage seem evident, the Apostolic Writings do not clearly identify this as a Messianic prophecy. However, it is explicitly identified as such in rabbinic writings such as the midrash collections *Genesis Rabbah* 85:9 and *Ruth Rabbah* 7:2.

The Spirit of HaShem is described as “resting” on Messiah, with an emphasis on six attributes that are described in three pairs: wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and the fear of HaShem. These remind us of the gifts of the Spirit, even though they are not identical to the lists of gifts in Paul’s epistles. But something greater emerges when these verses are read with rabbinic eyes: all six of these terms are related to Torah.

Of the spiritual attributes listed in the above passage, the one most commonly found in relation to Torah is wisdom. In *Genesis Rabbah* 1:1 and in numerous other places, it is recorded that the early rabbis found Torah in Proverbs 8:22, in which wisdom says, “The Lord made me as the beginning of his way, prior to his works of old” (my translation). In essence, wisdom in this sense does not exist apart from Torah, and, if I can put it this way, the Spirit of wisdom rests on the human Messiah to establish his relationship with Torah.

At the same time, the Spirit of wisdom is involved in putting Torah into practice; it was given to those who made Aaron’s high priestly garments (Exodus 28:3), to the master builders of the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:2–6), and to Joshua as the leader of Israel (Deuteronomy 34:9). In each instance, the Spirit of wisdom enabled the person to whom it was given to fulfill specific aspects of Torah. When the Spirit of wisdom rests on the Messiah, he is not only connected to the pre-existent Torah; he fulfills all its heavier and lighter mitzvot exactly as God intended. This extends, of course, to his Messianic service.

The connection between Torah and wisdom is made explicit in Deuteronomy 4, in which Moses says:

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as HaShem my God commanded me, so that you should do them in the land which you are entering to possess it. So guard them and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will

hear all these statutes and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” (Deuteronomy 4:5–6, *my translation*)

In essence, Israel’s wisdom and understanding derive from Torah. Even “the peoples,” who seemingly have no framework within which to evaluate Torah, will consider Israel wise and understanding for keeping it and for doing what it says: notice that the peoples who make this evaluation “hear all these statutes”—that is, the statutes of Torah. As far as I can tell, the only way they can “hear all these statutes” is if Israel proclaims them or makes them known in some way. This means that the community of Jews is meant to make Torah known to the peoples beyond its borders. Conversely, if Torah is kept under wraps, none of this can happen. The entire process requires a radical transparency. The community of Jews is meant to be an open book of the highest quality. This transparency makes Israel’s behavior understandable to others and reveals her wisdom and understanding.

In these verses in Deuteronomy, wisdom and understanding (*chochmah* and *binah*) are joined just as they are in Isaiah 11. “Understanding” is the ability to comprehend how things relate to one another—how they are alike or harmonious and how they differ or are in conflict. One of the underlying themes of Isaiah’s prophecy is that the Spirit gives Messiah clear insight into the nature of things. He will not rely on appearances to make judgments; he will be fair to the poor and the afflicted, and he will judge oppressors. He will bring about an era of shalom in which predators and prey will be at peace. Mt. Zion will be a safe place and “the earth will be full of the knowledge of HaShem as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14, *my translation*). Finally, “the nations will resort to the root of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:10 NASB). This is the Messianic Age.

In Isaiah’s prophecy, the Spirit rests entirely on one individual, the Messiah, for the common good. In 1 Corinthians, gifts of the Spirit are given to individuals for the common good. Both are necessary. Paul puts it this way in Colossians 1:24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body ... in filling up what is lacking in [Messiah’s] afflictions” (NASB). Messiah suffered as fully as he was supposed to in order to fulfill his Messianic mission. Now we are appointed to extend



that mission, and this involves suffering. Still, it is important for us not to overdramatize our suffering, which is generally far less than Paul's was—and his was much less than Messiah's. But I take Paul at his word: he rejoiced in his apostolic sufferings specifically because they were for the sake of others.

This applies to spiritual gifts as well. They do not operate as smoothly as we would sometimes like to believe. Those with a gift of healing are often highly empathetic individuals who agonize over the sick and, especially, over those who are not healed. Those with a prophetic gift, even a very simple one, often feel their own inadequacies very sharply. Those who teach words of wisdom and knowledge can be compared to an individual who takes the seed grain of wheat through its entire process: planting, growing, harvest, milling, and baking a loaf of bread. In the end, we thank God “who brings forth bread from the earth,” because were it not for the creative act of God, there would be no wheat. Likewise, those who teach words of wisdom and knowledge take the initial word or words given to them by the Spirit and take them through a labor-intensive process of study and preparation that culminates in an actual teaching. It is a process that is filled with opportunities for pride, anxiety, self-doubt, laziness, and the like. Due to the difficulty and the suffering involved in practicing these gifts, it is virtually impossible to rejoice in these things except when they really are for the sake of others, for the sake of the body of Messiah.

The relationship between the Spirit of God and Torah is seen even more vividly in Ezekiel 36, in which God promises to bring back the exiles of Israel to their land:

For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:24–26 NASB)

Being regathered to the land, cleansed from sin, and given a brand new heart and spirit—these are all amazing and wonderful, but they do not go far enough to ensure that our return is per-

manent. The framework and fabric of Torah—its worldview and its mitzvot—must be impressed upon us. And so the prophecy continues, “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Ezekiel 36:27 NASB). The same Spirit that rested on Messiah will be placed within Israel to ensure that we obey the mitzvot. Torah cannot be fulfilled as God intends apart from the Spirit of God.

When Paul wrote that “the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10 NASB), it meant one thing for the Corinthians, but it means something more in the context of the whole Bible. For we understand that Messiah and Torah exist in the depths of God, each of them expressing the reality of God in a unique way. These things are disclosed to us “in words taught ... by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” (1 Corinthians 2:13 NASB). While Torah, Messiah, and the Spirit can be *spoken about* separately at times, they cannot be separated in reality. When Paul wrote about the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, he did not mention Torah because of the specific circumstances in Corinth, but neither he nor God ever intended for Torah to be left out of the picture permanently. Where Yeshua believers understand the unique and essential roles of Torah as well as the crucified Messiah, they recognize that neither one can be left out. The verbal gifts of the Spirit must include both.

As I mentioned before, during my time in the charismatic church and later in the Messianic movement, we did not understand spiritual gifts in the way I am arguing that they should be understood. However, I am not arguing against the positive aspects of that tradition; I would be arguing against my own experience! Our services were sometimes electric with the sense that God was speaking to us and was acting in our behalf. God is gracious: he worked within the limitations of our tradition to impact lives on very deep levels.

But the traditional charismatic framework is not adequate for a fully Messianic Jewish expression of the gifts of the Spirit. A Messianic Jewish tradition of the spiritual gifts must covet the gifts of power such as healing, but must also “seek the greater gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31, my translation) because they contribute to the common good by articulating the crucified Messiah, touching

on the depths of Torah, and explaining all that is prepared for us  
in the heart of God.

ENDNOTES

- 1 David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).