JANUARY 2024 VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

MACON CONNEXIONS

BRINGING SHALOMIES TOGETHER



WELCOME TO MACON CONNEXIONS

THE OFFICAL NEWSLETTER OF SHALOM MACON

We are thrilled to present the first issue of Macon ConneXions, YOUR very own newsletter! This is where the entire Shalom Macon community, spread throughout the US and around the globe, comes together.

Imagine Macon ConneXions as a letter from a dear relative or friend, filled with updates and stories. Our community is vast and diverse, comprising about 50 local families, 150 families joining us via livestream on Shabbat, nearly 700 members on Shalom@Home, and a robust following of 3,700 on our YouTube channel. Affectionately known as "Shalomies", we are indeed a diverse and dynamic group with a wealth of experiences and stories!

We are eager to hear from you; so share your personal stories with us — achievements, questions, ideas, or anything you would like to talk about!

Are you involved in a Shalom Macon group? Let us know how it has touched your life. Share a humorous incident, a challenge you've overcome, a spiritual breakthrough, or a decision you are wrestling with. Your shared experiences are what knit us closer together.

Please send your contributions to news@shalomacon.org. We are looking forward to filling our inbox with your Shalomie stories from around the world!



DR. DAVID'S DRASH

TEACHING BY DR. DAVID HIGGENBOTHAM

HASHEM'S WAR AGAINST THE GODS OF EGYPT AKA "THE TEN PLAGUES"

In Parashas Shemos, the first Torah portion in the book of Exodus, Moses confronted Pharaoh and ordered him in the name of the G-d of Israel "Let my people go!". Pharaoh responded, mocking HaShem and the religious beliefs of the children of Israel, stating "Who is this G-d that I should heed his voice to let Israel go? I do not know this G-d, nor will I let Israel go!" Thus, by Pharaoh's arrogance, he initiated HaShem's war against the gods of Egypt that Pharoah knew and trusted in. It was a war we know better by the name of "The Ten Plagues". The Ten Plagues are described in the second and third portions of the Book of Exodus. Parashot Valera and Bo.

First Plague: Nile turned to blood—began in the month of Tammuz. This is the time that the Nile River began its flooding or inundation. The Egyptian god of the Nile River inundation and also of fish was known as Hapi. The Egyptians quickly discovered that Hapi had no real power to protect the purity of the Nile River or the river's fish from the power of HaShem.

Second Plague: Frogs—began in the month of Av. Heqet was the goddess of frogs, fertility, the latter stages of the Nile inundation, and the germination of wheat and corn. The Egyptians believed that Heqet was the one who caused the frogs to come forth from the river and the more frogs there were, the better the harvest would be. This was such a strong belief that the Egyptians had made it a crime to kill frogs. HaShem gave the Egyptians too much of a good thing—it was impossible to walk without fear of killing a frog!

Third Plague: Lice—began in the month of Elul. It was at this time that the Egyptians would begin to plow their new fields for planting. The Egyptian god Geb was the god of earth, soil, and the dust of the ground. Geb was also the god who protected the plowing of the ground. Imagine the horror of the Egyptians when, in the process of plowing the fields, they became contaminated along with their animals with severe biting lice.

Fourth Plague: Wild beasts—began in the month of Tishri. At this time the Egyptians would need to be working steadily in the fields tending to the newly sprouting plants which would be hard to do if lions, African buffaloes, and baboons were running amok in the fields. It was the responsibility of the goddess of the harvest time, Renenutet, wife of the god Geb, to protect this period of the harvest. It was also the job of goddess Bastet to protect the Egyptians from wild beasts.

Fifth Plague: Death of the livestock—began in the month of Cheshvan. The gods for livestock included Hesat, Hathor, Apis Bull, and several minor gods. These gods controlled the agricultural aspect of the herd, insuring numerous animals for meat, milk, and transportation. In addition, the goddess Serket was responsible for the protection of health of livestock as well as that of man.

Sixth Plague: Boils—began in the month of Kislev. As noted in plague five, the goddess Serket was responsible for the protection of health of the Egyptian people. The god Thoth was the Egyptian god of healing.

Seventh Plague: Hail—began in the month of Tevet. The hail destroyed the barley and flax, the livestock in the field not killed in the fifth plague, and the various religious temples and buildings throughout Egypt.



The goddess Nut was in control of the sky and the weather. Neper was the god of grains and the harvest. Sefkhet-Abwy was the goddess of temples and their protection.

Eighth Plague: Locusts—began in the month of Shevat. As noted in plague seven, Neper was the god of grains and the harvest.

Ninth Plague: Three days of darkness—began in the month of Adar. Ra was the god of the sun and light, and it was presumed Pharaoh was the earthly personification of Ra. It was believed in ancient Egypt that as long as Pharaoh was in the favor of Ra, the sun would rise each day, so when there were three days of darkness without sunrise, HaShem carried the fight directly to Pharaoh.

Tenth Plague: Death of the firstborn occurred on the 15th of Nisan. The firstborn sons of the Egyptians were not considered to be gods, but they did have the responsibility of serving as the household priest and upholding the worship of the gods of Egypt. The children of Israel also observed a similar custom for their firstborn prior to the giving of the Torah and establishment of the Levitical priesthood. In the end it was the firstborn sons of Israel who upheld the worship of HaShem instead of the firstborn sons of Egypt who upheld the worship of the gods of Egypt that survived.

Conclusion: Pharaoh, who claimed not to know the G-d of Israel, did get to know him well over the ten months that the plagues occurred as he watched HaShem devastate his country because of the hardness of his heart. Pharaoh had believed in gods that had eyes but could not see, ears but could not hear, and mouths but could not speak. In the end even Pharaoh, upon releasing the children of Israel in Exodus 12:32, requested that Moses pray to his G-d to bless him.



About the Author

Dr. David Higgenbotham was raised in the Southern Baptist Church and became interested in the Old Testament and Judaism when he was about seventeen years old. His grandmother then told him that his family was originally Jewish but some had converted to Christianity in the 1920s. He describes himself as an Orthodox Messianic Jew who loves studying the Torah and has taught Torah classes for more than 30 years.



EXPERIENCE ISRAEL 2025

In April 2023, Rabbi Damian and Kelli led a memorable trip to Israel. Over the next few months, various travelers from this journey will share their highlights in our newsletter. Enjoy these shared memories and get inspired to join the next Shalom Macon Israel trip planned for 2025!

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE BY LINDA PLOWDEN

My journey to Israel with Shalom Macon in April, 2023, marked my second visit to this historic land. My first trip was in March, 2022, with a different group, led by a Palestinian Christian guide whose anti-Jewish remarks marred the experience. The destinations we visited also differed significantly.

However, the Shalom Macon trip felt more intimate and personal, thanks largely to our guide, Shlomo. He did more than just guide us; he welcomed us into his world! A memorable moment was visiting his neighborhood where he introduced us to his wife and neighbors. This personal touch deeply enriched our experience.

A standout memory from the trip was Rabbi Damian's guitar, which he brought from home. Its presence transformed meaningful excursions into deeply moving experiences. For instance, in a private garden on the Mount of Olives, Rabbi Damian's songs set the stage for a reflective time of prayer and meditation overlooking Jerusalem. We also sang in a boat on the Sea of Galilee and on Mount Carmel.

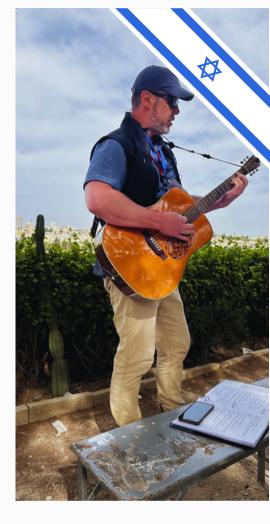
Perhaps the most poignant moment occurred in the Valley of the Communities. As Shlomo shared his family's WWII experiences, Rabbi Damian sang a song he had written about the Holocaust. The emotional impact was profound, capturing the attention of even strangers who stumbled upon our group, leaving no dry eyes in sight.

While carrying the guitar throughout Israel was no small feat, it undoubtedly enhanced our extraordinary journey in a way that words alone cannot express.



Rabbi Damian's
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AN ANTHOLOGY

Shalom Macon is truly blessed with a worldwide congregation. The community includes locals from Macon and its surrounding areas who frequently visit the synagogue, those from farther away who engage with us through live streaming and make special in-person visits once or twice a year, and dedicated online members who join us virtually from around the world.

In recent years, we have witnessed a heartwarming trend: many of our distant families have felt a calling to deepen their connection with our community. Embracing a significant life change, they have relocated to Macon, transforming from virtual Shalomies to active, inperson members of our vibrant congregation. They are not just attending services; they're actively serving and enriching Shalom Macon with their presence and contributions.

Over the upcoming months, we are excited to share their stories with you. We will spotlight these families, giving them a platform to share their unique experiences and the journeys that led them to become integral parts of our local community.

Darren and Sabrina Huckey were the pioneers - the first family who pulled up roots and moved half-way across the US to become a part of the inperson Shalom Macon community. Here is their story in their own words.

Our souls became restless. That is the only way I can describe what happened back in 2009 when my wife and I started feeling that we were in a state of limbo and needed to make a desperate move on behalf of our family.

Oddly enough and without our knowledge, this was also when Nachamu Ami, now called Shalom Macon, was born. Although we had built many dear and life-long relationships during our forty-plus years in Arkansas, our radar was on high alert for a Messianic community in another state that we could pour ourselves into since there were not any on our own native soil that were on the same path we were. The Messianic home fellowship that we had helped lead for several years was at a crossroads, and there wasn't agreement on the direction it should head. We were longing for a place that we could pour our lives into as we raised our five children.

By Divine Providence, I was contacted in 2012 out of the blue by a Messianic Rabbi named Damian Eisner from Macon, Georgia, requesting the use of some of my artwork. Intrigued by this Messianic Rabbi I had never met, I could not let him off the hook that easy, so I began interrogating him about his congregation. From there we developed a relationship and realized we were kindred spirits with several things in common including the fact that he lived in Arkansas for several years! Although Rabbi Damian and I spoke nearly weekly over the next three years, my wife and I never actually considered Macon an option for relocation. Then everything changed when we were making the fifteen-hour drive back home from the FFOZ Shavuot conference in

Every year that we made the long trek up to Hudson, Wisconsin, for the Shavuot conference, we experienced a glimpse of what we were seeking: a community of Jews and Gentiles working together for the Kingdom revolving around the synagogue experience.

As we were driving home, Sabrina and I began discussing the need to make a change, however drastic, in order to be a part of something like what we had experienced year after year at the conferences.

Our initial thought was to move to Hudson; however, we felt they were already equipped with anything we could offer. We needed some place that would be mutually beneficial for both our family and the congregation. We had also just come to realize the importance of Jewish leadership and wanted to play a supporting role for that as Messianic Gentiles. This is when we thought of Macon. So, we began praying.

In August of that year, we made the long trip to Macon to meet with Rabbi Damian and Rebbetzin Kelli to discuss our decision thoroughly and make sure that it would be a win-win situation for everyone. On the way home, we asked our children their thoughts. I will never forget the response from our quiet, reserved, twelve-year-old son, "I really don't want to, but I think it is God's will." So. on April 3. 2016—after a series of miracles that the Lord did to enable us to make the transition, including selling our house—we were Macon the Move! We drove nearly a thousand miles away from everything we had ever known to another state where we literally only knew two other families.

I cannot say it has always been easy. Within our first two weeks of being here, Sabrina's father went into the hospital with a heart condition. The first year or so was extremely stressful, especially dealing with family situations like this back home. However, through the difficulties, we have experienced the Shalom of Macon since day one. Shalom Macon is our heart and soul, and we are so thankful to be under Jewish leadership that we know is balanced, has integrity, and that we can trust. We are forever grateful to HaShem for the opportunity He has afforded us to serve and be a part of this amazing community!



BY CHARLES WHITE

Meet Pastor Kumie Kanai, pastor of a small Messianic congregation, New Wine Skin Church, in Gunma, Japan, located northwest of Tokyo. Her desire is to know God, to seek His face, to hear and heed His voice. and to share Him with others.

In 2005, Kumie completed her seminary studies and began to pastor a church in her own home in Gunma. As her church and studies grew, Kumie began to doubt popular church teachings, but she never doubted her ministry, so she had a building constructed adjacent to her home to house the independent church!

In 2016, Kumie found a Messianic congregation in Tokyo. To her, Messianic Judaism made sense, and she decided to become a Sabbatarian. Announcing the change to her own congregation, only one stood by her. She was shunned by local pastors, but, undaunted, she stayed the course. Today she has fourteen adults and eight children regularly attending Shabbat Services weekly.

Something special happened at the FFOZ Malchut Conference in 2023. Joi White, a Shalomie from Florida and a Torah Club leader, approached Daniel Lancaster at the conference and asked his permission, which was readily given, to translate his works into Japanese. Daniel shared his father's unfulfilled desire to return to Japan after the war to work and minister to the Japanese people and felt this would complete his father's dream!

To her, Messianic Judaism made sense, and she decided to become a Sabbatarian.

Joi met two other Japanese-speaking Torah Club members, Junko and Hiroko, at the conference. When they learned of the translation plan and Lancaster's support, both offered to help. Regular zoom meetings were set up from their homes in Florida, California, and Ohio. Last summer, Junko traveled to Japan and through him, Kumie met Joi and joined the translation team! Since August Kumie and Joi meet via zoom to study and work.

On October 14, 2023, the first Japanese-speaking Torah Club held its first meeting! The seed was planted. In addition to Kumie's in-church Torah Club in Gunma, there are also an additional two English-speaking inhouse/online Torah Clubs led by Americans living in Japan (one in Tokyo and one in Kyushu) and two Japanesespeaking online Torah Clubs (one based in California and one in Florida).

Kumie now regularly attends Shabbat Shacharit Prayers (11 pm for her) with Shalom Macon. You will see her greetings (in Japanese) in the comment section of the live stream. Though she speaks neither Hebrew nor English, she is learning how to worship Shalom Macon style. Welcome to the family, Pastor Kumie! Baruch HaShem!





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SHALOMIES IN THE STATES

THE TADLOCKS

Each month you will be introduced to fellow Shalomies. This month we are spotlighting Brett and Josephine Tadlock. Here is their story:

We are both Tennessee natives who lived on opposite sides of the state but were brought together when we attended Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville, Tennessee, where we currently live. Brett is a Director of Admissions for South University for the online degree programs while Josephine, after successfully completing homeschooling our son and daughter, is enjoying time to pursue her interests. Our two children are grown now. Our daughter worships with Shalom Macon while attending college in Macon; our son is still part of our full-time household along with our dog and two cats.



We feel like we have a spiritual home there, if not a physical one!

We grew up in Baptist churches, but it was while attending a Church of Christ that we were surrounded by believers that were students of the Word. The teaching there mentioned a goal of imitating the First Century Church. After reading about the Restoration movement of the 19th century which sought 'the unification of all Christians in a single body patterned after the church of the New Testament', we began to consider what this would look like.



Our natural love for study and the desire for discussion with fellow believers who have similar views led us to Torah Club and FFOZ.
This naturally led to learning about Shalom Macon.

We discovered Torah Class with Tom Bradford and subsequently Love Israel with Dr. Baruch Korman. Our natural love for study and the desire for discussion with fellow believers who have similar views led us to Torah Club and FFOZ. This naturally led to learning about Shalom Macon. Both the creation of Shalom@Home and our daughter's college attendance in Macon have really helped strengthen our connection to Shalom Macon. We feel we have a spiritual home there if not a physical one!

A few Fun Facts about the Tadlocks

Brett is a talented artist (painter, potter, sculptor) who has an art YouTube channel, and Josephine is a fantastic cook who is also actively learning Hebrew with a small study group she loves being a part of. Both have super varied interests from rugby to martial arts to historical re-enacting to science fiction/fantasy books and movies.



MAKIN' CHANGES

COLLEGE & CAREER

Are you a young adult navigating the twists and turns of spirituality, college, work, and the big leap into adulthood? You are invited to join Shalom Macon's College and Career group – a vibrant group of young, like-minded individuals who are tackling life and "makin' changes!" Together, you will learn, grow, and embrace life in all its facets, regardless of where each member is in the world.

Members recently had an exhilarating experience at FFOZ's inaugural young adult conference, Tzadi Advance. The weekend had meaningful connections with fellow believers, and powerful talks (featuring our very own Rabbi Damian!).



Tzadi Advance Campers

Tzadi Advance - Testimonies

"My highlight was seeing my daughter play with the kids of my friends, bringing our families together for the first time. The last night, enjoying time with friends, was unforgettable."

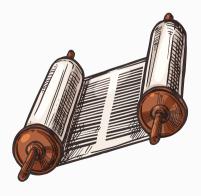
Bethanni Lancaster, 23, Orlando, FL

"Reuniting with old friends at Tzadi Advance was incredible. The speakers brilliantly discussed the current events in Israel and their global impact. I loved the activities and meeting new people from across the globe. I'm already excited for the next one!"

Lydia Turner, 22, Savannah, GA

"Mixing with so many peers who share my views was refreshing.
Gaining insights into global happenings, especially regarding Israel, was enlightening. I'm definitely looking forward to attending again!"

Tobias Rogers, 22, Grand Junction, CO



Join Us for the Next College and Career Meetup!

January 20th at 4pm EST Shalom@Home

If you're aged 18-25, come along!

We'll soon dive into "Children of Light" – with separate groups for guys and gals. Grab your copy through FFOZ today, and let's embark on this enlightening journey together. Can't wait to see you there!



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TEENS2LIFE

LOOKING FOR A NURTURING, SECURE ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOUR TEENS (AGES 12-18) CAN FLOURISH?



Introducing Teens2Life, a dynamic and engaging youth group at Shalom Macon, accessible through our innovative online platform, Shalom@Home.

Teens2Life is a relatively new initiative, thoughtfully co-led by Nicholas and Brittney Tinney, Shalomies from Indiana. The group meets every other Shabbat, offering a perfect blend of engaging activities and meaningful dialogue

What sets Teens2Life apart?

It is a space where young individuals in the Messianic community can delve into profound teachings, confront the real challenges they face in today's world, and foster deep connections with their peers. Our focus is not just on imparting knowledge, but on creating a supportive community where every teen feels heard, valued, and understood. In each session, topics that resonate with today's youth are tackled, addressing the complexities of living as young people within the Messianic tradition. But it's not all serious – there's plenty of room for fun, laughter, and creating lasting memories

Join us at Teens2Life, where we are not just building a youth group; we are nurturing the next generation of thoughtful, compassionate, and connected individuals in the Messianic community.

Meet us at **Shalom@Home** every other Shabbat and be a part of this exciting journey.



TO KIDDOS

How blessed we are to have so many kiddos! Whether your children attend physically or remotely, or just have family that attend, we want to showcase their accomplishments. Please send information about your child's or teen's achievements so that we can celebrate with them!



Christian, age 11, grandson of the Bracheys, has sung with a professional opera company in North Carolina for three years. He had a solo part in, 'LaBoheme' on his eighth birthday! This year he was selected to share his experiences with the Opera in its fund raising advertisements (both live and recorded) for the upcoming '24-'25 season.



SHALOM KIDS

SHALOM MACON OFFERS A VARIETY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR FOR CHILDREN AGES 3-13.

These programs are designed to help our kids learn, grow in their faith, develop meaningful relationships with other like-minded children, and enjoy a lot of fun along the way. Here are what we offer for children at Shalom Macon

Shabbat School:

Every Shabbat, we teach biblical and life lessons to our next generation. We have three age groups (Note: 'Kita' means 'class' in Hebrew)



Kita Aleph for ages 3-5



Kita Bet for ages 6-8



Kita Gimmel for ages 9-12/13

Shalom Kids Hebrew Class:

This class is offered weekly during the school year (in person and online) for children aged 5-12/13. Exceptions may be made for children under 5 if they are interested and their parents feel they are ready.

Camp Dorot:

Our Messianic Jewish VBS! This summer program is specially designed for kids 12 and under. Watch for more details about the dates and this year's theme.



Shalom Kids Library:

An extensive library for our young ones to explore and learn about prayers, holidays, and the Bible from a Messianic Jewish perspective.





We offer these during holidays and festivals to enhance their learning and enjoyment.







SHALOM@HOME

YOUR VIRTUAL GATEWAY TO THE SHALOM MACON COMMUNITY!

Shalom@Home is Shalom Macon's exclusive private social media platform where the heart of our community beats online. It is more than just a platform; it is a vibrant, thriving hub where Shalomies from near and far gather to stay connected, share, and grow together.



What Can You Find on Shalom@Home?

Events & Classes:

Stay updated with our calendar of events. From lively Shabbat services to engaging classes, you will not miss a beat. Whether you are looking for spiritual growth or educational enrichment, Shalom@Home keeps you in the loop.

Building New Friendships:

Make meaningful connections. Find and connect with new friends who share your faith and values. Shalom@Home is a place to form lasting relationships, enriching your spiritual journey and social life.

Access to Vital Information:

From synagogue news to updates about members, stay informed about all aspects of our community life. Shalom@Home is your one-stop source for all things Shalom Macon.

Special Interest Groups:

Join groups that resonate with your interests. Whether it is Torah study, youth activities, Mussar, various classes, or cultural discussions, there is a group for everyone. These spaces offer a wonderful opportunity to dive deeper into your passions and connect with like-minded members.

Prayer Support:

Share and receive prayer needs. In times of joy or challenge, our community comes together to support each other. Post your prayer requests or offer prayers for others, fostering a sense of solidarity and spiritual support.



Joining Shalom@Home

If you haven't joined Shalom@Home yet, you're missing out on a key part of the Shalom Macon experience! Getting access is easy. Simply email kristen@shalomacon.org, and you will be on your way to being an active part of our dynamic online community.

Whether you're local and cannot make it to every event or you are part of our extended global family, Shalom@Home brings the warmth and spirit of Shalom Macon right to your fingertips. Dive into this digital community space where faith, friendship, and learning flourish together.



SAFETY AT THE SYNAGOGUE

BY WESLEY JONES - SAFETY TEAM DIRECTOR

I have had the privilege and honor to work with the Safety Team and its members for the past six years. Though my wife and I have worn many hats here at the synagogue over the years, safety has been our top priority. The mission for the Safety Team is to be behind the scenes, and always present and aware. Keeping our community safe includes keeping an eye on weather, assisting with medical problems, as well as addressing any potential threats.

Something you may have noticed recently is that we have a deputy on site for our services. With the recent world and domestic events, I, with the counsel of our elders, felt that augmenting our safety strategy would be beneficial. Sargent W. Kendrick with the Monroe County Sheriff's Office has been our Deputy for most weekends and events for the past four years. As such, he has met and connected with many people in our community. His presence gives peace of mind for those attending.



How can you help keep Shalom Macon safe?



Whether it's on grounds or online, see something, say something.





Familiarize yourself with the Policy and Procedures put in place by our board of elders and help us implement them when you're here.





Above all, Pray! Pray for the peace and protection of those here at Shalom Macon and, of course, all of those in Israel.



EXCITING TIMES AHEAD!

EVENTS AT SHALOM MACON

There's always something happening at Shalom Macon, and we would love for you to be a part of it! Of course, joining in person offers the best experience, but we also try to provide live streaming for our extended online family. Feel free to celebrate with us, whether you are with us in person or joining in the festivities from the comfort of your home.

Purim Party: A Festive Celebration!



MARCH 23RD, 2024



Mark your calendars for Shalom Macon's annual Purim Party!



It is going to be an unforgettable celebration filled with joy, community, and festive fun. More details are on the way, so watch this space!



COMMUNITY WISH LIST

SHAPE THE FUTURE AT SHALOM MACON WITH YOUR IDEAS

Welcome to the Shalom Macon "Community Wish List," where your ideas can lead to new, exciting initiatives! This is your chance to suggest and create activities and groups that reflect our diverse community.

Senior Adult Programs: Interested in studies, prayer groups, or meetups for seniors? *Share your thoughts!*

Home School Support: Need resources or teachers for advanced subjects? *Let's collaborate!*

Special Interest Groups: Passionate about sports, hobbies, or other interests? *Propose a group!* Get Involved!

Get Involved!

Excited about an idea? Want to help make it happen?

Email your suggestions to news@shalomacon.org, and let us connect you with like-minded members.

Your involvement can turn these wishes into reality at Shalom Macon!

