

## THE GREAT APOSTASY

Thinking about or contemplating the topic of apostasy is not necessarily the most positive thing that someone could be doing. The Biblical and historical record both indicate that apostasy against God—a denial of Him and His ways—has been present with us since the very beginning (which should hopefully relieve at least some of the anxiety we may have about this). Yet, sometimes we need to have our consciences pricked regarding what the apostasy is, especially as we survey some of the things going on in the religious world today, both Christian and Messianic. *Now* is an excellent time for us to review once again what the prophesied great apostasy is, so that rather than being impartial to it—or worse somehow being a part of it—we can all stand up as men and women of God who warn others against the torrent that is coming! Let us be those in a position to offer answers to people lost in sin, being all the things that Yeshua calls us to be.

### WHAT IS THE APOSTASY?

There are many passages of the Bible, both in the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures, which address the subject of apostasy. In the broadest sense, apostasy is a denial of God’s authority and His ways, perhaps involving a revolt. Joshua 22:22 refers to a *mered* (מִרְדָּה) or “rebellion, revolt, against” (*BDB*)<sup>1</sup> the Lord, and how He would not come to save His people were they involved in such action:

“The Mighty One, God, the LORD, the Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows, and may Israel itself know. If *it was* in rebellion,<sup>2</sup> or if in an unfaithful act against the LORD do not save us this day!”

The Greek Septuagint renders *mered* as *apostasía* (ἀποστασία), which in an entirely secular context would mean “*defection*” (*LS*).<sup>3</sup> We see that “It is used by Plutarch of political revolt.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *BDB*, 597.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. *im-b'mered* (אִם-בְּמִרְדָּה).

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In the Apocrypha, *apostasia* is used to refer to Antiochus Epiphanes' forced conversion of the Jewish people to Greek religion:

“Then the king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy<sup>5</sup> came to the city of Modein to make them offer sacrifice” (1 Maccabees 2:15).

We likewise see in the Book of Acts a false charge made against the Apostle Paul, as it was being claimed of him that he taught apostasy against the Torah:

“[A]nd they are instructed concerning thee, that apostasy from Moses thou dost teach to all Jews among the nations, saying—Not to circumcise the children, nor after the customs to walk” (Acts 21:21, YLT).

The false charge against Paul was *apostasian didaskeis apo Mōuseōs* (ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως), “apostasy you teach from Moses” (my translation). Paul would defend himself later, firmly attesting that these were false charges against him. To counter the libel, Paul affirmed, “having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place” (Acts 26:22). Likewise, at the end of Acts we see Paul at a synagogue in Rome, and Luke records “he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Yeshua, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening” (Acts 28:23). Surely, if Paul did deride the authority of the Torah and the Prophets, he would not have expelled the effort to proclaim the gospel message from these texts!

The Apostle Paul himself talks about apostasy in the Epistle of 2 Thessalonians, a letter written to specifically calm down a group of people who thought that the Day of the LORD was imminently forthcoming. The apostasy is listed among a series of events that must occur prior to the return of Yeshua:

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, **for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first**, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of

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<sup>3</sup> LS, 107.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Winston Ross, “Apostasy,” in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 57.

<sup>5</sup> Grk. *hoi katanagkazontes tēn apostasian* (οἱ καταναγκάζοντες τὴν ἀποστασίαν).

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worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Paul lists a number of things that are to take place before the coming of the Lord, and he makes the specific point to tell his audience, “Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?” (NIV). Perhaps due to the denseness of his audience and their inability to hear, Paul must repeat himself yet again. As mundane as such a clause may appear to us some two millennia later, let us not be those who have to hear this over and over again so as to not get the point of what Paul communicates. A summary of what will take place includes:

1. The apostasy
2. The revealing of the man of lawlessness
3. The man of lawlessness will exalt himself, taking a seat in God’s Temple
4. The removal of the restraining influence
5. The *present* (for then and for now) activity of the mystery of lawlessness
6. The end of the man of lawlessness’ rule
7. The sending of a deluding influence by God upon the world

Each one of these phenomena could be expanded into a book chapter, or at least their own article or research paper. But there are some specific things, particularly as they concern *hē apoastasia* (ἡ ἀποστασία), “the apostasy” with *the* definite article, of which Paul speaks that need to be considered.

Undeniably, as consistent with some of the previous examples of “apostasy” seen, this end-time apostasy is related to lawlessness. The significant end-time apostasy is joined in v. 3 with the unveiling of *ho anthrōpos tēs anomias* (ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας) or “the man of

lawlessness.”<sup>6</sup> The CJB renders this with “the man who separates himself from *Torah*.” Revelation 13:6 describes him as one who “opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven.” Certainly, it would not be a far stretch to suggest that these blasphemies also include deriding God’s *Torah* and its commandments. Indeed, as Daniel 7:25 says,

“He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.”

The Aramaic clause of importance is *l’hash’nayah zimmin v’dat* (רְחַן לְהַשְׁנִיָּה וְזִמְנִין דַּת), “shall think to change the times and the law” (ESV). *Dat* (דַּת) is an important term to consider, because in Scripture (particularly in the Book of Esther) it is largely seen regarding secular state laws, as opposed to the *Torah* of Moses.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it could be said that the man of lawlessness will be responsible for instituting laws that will curtail and make it difficult for God’s people to keep His *Torah* in the Last Days.

A key feature of this apostasy is seen in Paul’s assertion, “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work” (NIV). What *to mustērion tēs anomias* (τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας) actually is, has confounded even the best interpreters, because it regards a mystery. While many proposals regarding “mystery” have been made, I personally think that it is best for us not to read too much into Paul’s words, and simply regard the manifestation of such lawlessness as simply boggling the mind of those who remain faithful. Yeshua Himself prophesied, “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). Certainly, if one denies the continued authority or relevance of God’s *Torah*, then denial of the command to love Him and one’s neighbor can definitely follow (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28). It may be that “the mystery of lawlessness” is a mystery—because it is actually practiced by those who would be the last ones a person would expect: those who claim faith in God.<sup>8</sup>

The Apostle Paul states something very significant about the man of lawlessness which cannot be downplayed. He says “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders”

<sup>6</sup> “lawless one” (NRSV).

<sup>7</sup> Consult Herbert Wolf, “רְחַן,” in *TWOT*, 1:458-459.

<sup>8</sup> Consult the chapter of the author’s book *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, “The Mystery of Lawlessness,” for a further discussion of this.

(NIV). This fully concurs with Yeshua's words, "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24, NRSV). Supernatural signs—*demonic supernatural signs*—will attend the arrival of the antimessiah/antichrist (cf. Revelation 13:13-15). And in the event that we think that such warnings are only consigned to the final days with *the* antimessiah, the Apostle John said "just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared" (1 John 2:18). Many antimessiah prototypes, all the way back to the Pharaoh of the Exodus, and forward to Haman, Antiochus Epiphanes, various Roman emperors, various popes, Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin—have been seen throughout history displaying the characteristics that *the* antimessiah will display in abundance. **To say that we have been given ample warning would be an understatement.**

Why are these warnings given by Paul? Are they given to discourage lawlessness and discourage people from denying the relevancy of God's Torah? *Surely they are.* The type of lawlessness inaugurated by the antimessiah will be a complete dismissal of our Father's high standard of morality and ethics. There will be no family loyalties, as is clearly seen in Yeshua's word, "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death" (Mark 13:12). No one will respect the sanctity and value of human life, as Revelation 13:4 asks, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" with many dying under his reign of despotism. Far be it from this lawlessness being people who fail to see the relevance of kosher or the appointed times, it will go beyond denying "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). It will be a time not unlike the days of Noah where "the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11).<sup>9</sup>

But as bad as this kind of lawlessness is—a complete derision and denial of *Heilsgesetz*—or sacred and saving Law,<sup>10</sup> **Paul gives one of the most sobering words that I have ever seen in the Bible.** He says "God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false" (2 Thessalonians 2:11, RSV). Can you believe it? God Himself is the Agent which will actively send (Grk. *pempei*, πέμπει) the *energeian planēs* (ἐνέργειαν πλάνης) or "working of delusion" (YLT)! The Lord is

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<sup>9</sup> Consult the author's article "Encountering Mythology: A Case Study from the Flood Narratives" for an analysis of the meaning of the Noahdic Flood, particularly in contrast to other ANE flood accounts (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

<sup>10</sup> Consult the author's entry for the Book of Leviticus in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

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going to make sure that those who are His are completely loyal to Him, in order that there might be a clear distinction between His people and those who are not His.

And do take notice of the reason of why this strong delusion is going to be sent: “they refused to love the truth and so be saved<sup>11</sup>” (2 Thessalonians 2:10, RSV). The text is clear that the cause of the apostasy is lawlessness, or a denial of God’s Torah. But here, because of rejecting God’s truth those who apostatize are unable to be saved. By no means is Paul suggesting that keeping the Torah will result in salvation. On the contrary, a redeemed person is not saved by works but is instead called to good works *following* salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10), and the Torah itself *never* suggests that by keeping it eternal life will result.<sup>12</sup> **It is in the rejection of what the Torah points to that salvation will be lost.**

The apostasy is to be attended with false signs and wonders, and a *false messiah*. Those who fall prey to this are those who “took pleasure in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2:12). Paul had false claims issued against him that he taught apostasy from the Torah, and he refuted it by affirming that the Messianic expectation he held was consistent with what the Law and the Prophets proclaim. It is not by any means inappropriate to suggest that the end-time apostasy, and its accompanying lawlessness, is an outright denial of what the Apostolic Scriptures affirm concerning Yeshua:

“These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 22:44).

“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Yeshua of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’” (John 1:45).

“But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked” (Acts 24:14-15).

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<sup>11</sup> Grk. *tēn agapēn tēs alētheias ouk edēxanto eis to sōthēnai autous* (τὴν ἀγάπην τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἐδέξαντο εἰς τὸ σωθῆναι αὐτούς).

<sup>12</sup> Consult the FAQ, “Leviticus 18:5.”

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By being engulfed in gross lawlessness, denying God's Torah, such people will deny the quintessential message that it proclaims: **the Messiah who was sent to save them from their sins!** The beginnings of the gospel are witnessed in the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8) and move forward throughout the unfolding of salvation history (Hebrews 1:1). While a definite consequence of rejecting God's Torah is practicing lawlessness and falling into gross immorality and licentiousness—an even more definite consequence is rejecting the One who is spoken of by the Torah and Prophets, the One who will enact immediate judgment upon the antimessiah when He returns (2 Thessalonians 2:8)!

### APOSTASY IN CHRISTIANITY

Apostasy has been with us since the very beginning, and examples of it are certainly seen throughout the Apostolic Scriptures. There are many evangelical Christians today who look at a passage like 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and are absolutely horrified at many of the things that are taking place in today's Church.

Through the advent of much of the charismatic movement, so-called signs and wonders are taking place which have absolutely no precedent in the Bible, or for that same matter most of Church history. Many of you can no doubt remember some of the "moves of the Spirit" as seen in the 1990s via holy laughing or people falling down backward or even people barking like dogs to the Lord. I might be able to believe that God wants us to laugh from time to time from the joy in our hearts, but the only people I see in Scripture who fall down backward are the Roman soldiers who arrested Yeshua (John 18:6). At the Transfiguration of Yeshua, "When the disciples heard *this*, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified" (Matthew 17:6). But I am sorry, people barking like dogs, thinking that they are worshipping God, belong in straight jackets and in a lunatic asylum.

I do not want to be perceived as someone who believes that "the gifts are dead"; I am not one of these people, as I do believe that the *legitimate* gifts of the Holy Spirit are accessible today. But the charismatic movement has made a very easy target of itself, often devoid of much of a Biblical foundation. Some would accuse me of not expecting much from God, but all too frequently we miss out on the great signs and wonders that come by experiencing God's love, peace, and joy. After all, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Can we at all be content when we have these things manifest in our lives and in the *ekklēsia* as a whole? For some,

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this is not enough. The Holy Spirit has to be a yelping junkyard dog, rather than a quiet voice that requires sensitivity and patience.

A much more significant issue in evangelical Christianity today concerns the rise of lawlessness. Many Christians today do not know what to do about the “Old Testament Law.” Many believe that it has been superseded and replaced by a so-called “law of Christ” (cf. Galatians 6:2) that is simply akin to loving others. Many believe that the Torah has important Biblical history, even accurate history, but that it was just for Ancient Israel and thus the Jews today. And, there are many who believe that the weightier matters of God’s Torah, primarily its teachings on ethics and morality, are as true for today as they have been since Mount Sinai. It is mostly among this third group, even while not particularly emphasizing the finer points of the Torah as Messianics, that is absolutely incensed by some of the debates that are occurring in the Church today. These Christians do speak out against other Christians who seek to deride the importance of God’s revelation in the Pentateuch. Consider the response of Walter C. Kaiser in *Five Views on Law and Gospel* to one who believes that the Torah has been abolished:

“Ultimately, [this teacher] is bound only by what is clearly repeated in New Testament teaching. What advice will he give on marriage to close relatives (cf. Lev. 18), involvement with forms of witchcraft and various forms of the occult (cf. Lev. 19), the case for capital punishment (cf. Gen. 9), or the proscription against abortion (cf. Ex. 21)? Did Americans not learn in 1973 that a New Testament exclusivistic ethic landed us squarely in one of the largest legalized murdering ventures in recent times—now exceeding Hitler’s six million Jews sent up a chimney by four times over with some twenty-four million babies going in a bucket? What will it take to wake us up to the narrowness of our views?”<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, abortion is just one of the most significant issues that causes many of today’s evangelical Christians to turn to the Old Testament and recapture a Torah ethic. The homosexual agenda, and the debate over whether or not this lifestyle is acceptable in the eyes of God, also drives many to turn to the Torah. And with the propagation of both of these things, many people are being driven away from God’s Law and toward lives where there are no boundaries. We need only look at all of the sexual scandals in today’s Church, a direct result of what happens when we deride the Bible’s instruction and fail to discuss critical issues.

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<sup>13</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “Response to Douglas Moo,” in Wayne G. Strickland, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 400.

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When a person surveys some of the lawless activities in today's Church, are they not aware that the Church of one hundred-fifty, or even fifty years ago, had a much higher view of the Old Testament Law? While many Christian theologians held to the artificial view that God's commandments were subdivided between those that were moral or ceremonial, the integrity of the ethical and moral commandments were certainly upheld as a high standard to which Believers were to strive to maintain! This has always been an emphasis of holiness movements throughout the ages.

With the advent of dispensationalism, and later German Higher Criticism, both in the Nineteenth Century, the relevance of the Torah's moral commandments came into question. The Torah, including the Ten Commandments, was surely given by God, but given only to the Jews so say the dispensationalists. The new crop of liberal theologians would ask how we can even be sure of the accuracy of the Old Testament, when there are so many contradictions within it and with the historical and the scientific record. *Both have inflicted damage* across the spectrum. One, even if accepting its Divine origin, pigeonholes the Torah to just the Jewish people. And the other does not only deny the Divine origins of the Torah, but even its Mosaic origins.

A kind of apostasy that we are likely to begin to see occurring as we move more into the Twenty-First Century regards the overall erosion of the integrity of the Scriptures. Liberalism and atheism have always existed. There are always people who have crises of faith and deny their Creator as a result. Yet, with the advent of the Internet, cable television, and even the mega bookstore, people have access to information today that they did not have access to in the past. This information may be over one-hundred fifty years old in some cases, but it still challenges the Bible's teachings and accuracy. The pressure that is upon Christian clergy today is to be aware as these things intensify every day with new websites popping up, and new and strange ideas circulating around the world. And with criticism against the historical reliability of the Bible, will undeniably come criticism against its scientific reliability as well...

## **APOSTASY IN THE MESSIANIC MOVEMENT?**

It would be entirely inappropriate for us as Messianic Believers to only look at some of the negative things going on in the Christian Church today, without also taking a look at ourselves. We should not be so naïve so as to think that apostasy against God *only affects* the Christian world. Surely, if Christian leaders today have to be on top of their game so as to know the latest criticisms against the Bible,

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particularly the Tanach—why when you ask such questions of many Messianic “leaders,” do they often draw a blank stare? Some of the criticisms against the Tanach in today’s Christian Church are the very same criticisms present in the Jewish Synagogue! And, they concern the trustworthiness of the Tanach, and whether or not the events it records actually did take place in real history. Anything that affects both the Church *and* Synagogue affects us, and cannot be avoided.

One of the most significant admonitions that is frequently overlooked by the Messianic community today is seen in Paul’s instructions to Timothy. He tells Timothy, “For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions” (1 Timothy 1:6-7). Why these persons cannot be proper teachers of the Torah is clear: they have forgotten that “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). These are the clear imperatives of God’s Torah, and as such Paul places a significant burden of proof on those who think they can teach from it. The good Apostle says, “we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully” (1 Timothy 1:8) or “legitimately” (NRSV), a major part of which is adhering to what it clearly teaches about appropriate human behavior.

Have you ever asked yourself the question, “Can there ever be people who keep the Torah, and yet are considered lawless?” **I know I am asking this question more and more today as I survey the current Messianic movement.** Yeshua said to the Pharisaical leaders, “For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27), precisely because they forgot the greater imperatives of the Torah (Matthew 23:23). We have many Messianic leaders today who focus on small issues of the Torah, yet who forget or even deride the greater issues. Is it possible that they could be practicing an oxymoronic form of *Torah lawlessness*? Not emphasizing the great ethical and moral imperatives of the Torah, yet being hyper-worried about whether one’s bag of potato chips has a K or U on it, certainly causes me to wonder. Why do we get incensed when something does not have a Rabbinically kosher seal of approval on it, but perhaps tolerate immoral and ungodly attitudes that are disrespectful to the basic humanity of every person?

Let us just consider for a moment how many in our faith community have interpreted Yeshua’s words, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of

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heaven” (Matthew 5:19). I agree that *all* of the commandments in the Torah have something important to teach us. But notice what Yeshua says about those who teach others not to consider the least of the commandments; they will be “least in the kingdom of heaven.” *Elachistos* (ἐλάχιστος) “**pert. to being the lowest in status**” (BDAG).<sup>14</sup> It pertains to a status in the Kingdom of God—that **only God** gets to determine. Yeshua says, “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness” (Matthew 13:41)—something that **only He** gets to do.

Even though the Lord is the only One who determines who gets into His Kingdom or not—why are there Messianics who seem to appropriate His job and place themselves as the judge, jury, and executioner of Christians? Will all Christians be “least” in the Kingdom? What do such people do about Christian teachers and theologians who appeal for the Church to return to the high morality of the Torah? What makes any of us think that we can make the final judgment on a person’s soul? Can we really judge a person’s eternal salvation with our own limited human abilities? Is it possible that there might be Messianic Believers—even though they kept things like kosher and the Sabbath—who will be least in God’s Kingdom because they ignored its weightier commandments? I sincerely hope not.

Too much of the Messianic movement today finds itself in a predicament of not understanding “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3). We are not going to be the effective movement that we think we are until we get our own house in order first. In the Messianic community, we have certainly seen apostasy from the trustworthiness of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), faith in Yeshua the Messiah, and belief in God Himself. We have seen people deny the Lord for a variety of reasons, which often are related to the following that occur when someone enters in:

1. Some people who enter into the Messianic movement feel unwelcome and unloved, particularly among non-Jewish Believers and especially women.
2. Some people who enter into the Messianic movement are taught to feel hatred and vehemence toward others who do not share their convictions about the Torah.
3. Some people who enter into the Messianic movement are taught to reject *anything* that Christianity teaches,

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<sup>14</sup> BDAG, 314.

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and so they later deny Yeshua's Divinity and His Messiahship.

4. Not having a firm Biblical foundation, not a few of those who deny Yeshua later deny the very existence of God.<sup>15</sup>

Some of these things directly relate to the motives, attitudes, and behavior of some leaders in various sectors in today's Messianic movement, and the traits that they foster in those whom they teach. Likewise, the Messianic world has much to answer for in regard to being very much *behind the curve* in terms of its Biblical Studies. Yeshua says some very blunt things to many of our leaders: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea" (Mark 9:42). Interesting times do lie ahead for the Messianic community, because in the future new leaders with sound spiritual motives and attitudes will have to emerge who will help people in faith, and **no door will remain closed** in how we examine the Scriptures and what topics can be discussed.

I am very sorry to have to say this, but in this season of our development, one of the worst things that could ever have taken place in the Messianic movement has now taken place. We commonly refer to ourselves as a "fully Biblical movement," and many deride most of the Christian Church because it only focuses on the "New Testament." Yet the majority of the Messianic world—probably well over 70%—now practices the reverse error. We only focus on the Torah, and largely ignore the Prophets and Writings of the Tanach. (And we wonder why Jewish anti-missionaries often seem to understand the Messianic prophecies better than we do?) Even worse than that, when we do address the Torah, we often only address bits and pieces of it, and most of us consistently fail to interpret the Torah's instruction against its legitimate Ancient Near Eastern historical context. We have so much work ahead of us to get us back on the right track it is not even funny!

## AN ANSWER TO APOSTATE TRENDS

Per some of the activities that are occurring in today's Christian Church, many evangelical Believers are desiring to see change brought to their communities. Whether you realize it or not, Christian interest in the Old Testament is right now at an all time high. Christians today who are true to the Scriptures want to know more about the Tanach beyond that of the prophecies that speak of Jesus.

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<sup>15</sup> For a further discussion of this, consult the author's article "Answering the 'Frequently Avoided Questions' About the Messiahship of Yeshua" (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

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They want to know about the foundational stories and commandments which make up the Biblical revelation. Many even want a hands on and interactive faith, learning about God's salvation history via things like the Passover. They want to take on more in regard to their faith. *These things all work in the Messianic movement's favor.*

But how can we see the Messianic movement transition into something useful for the Lord, putting to rest some of the negative trends we currently witness? Whether you are aware of it or not, many Messianic Believers are aware of the problems present in our faith community, and are desiring to see a different style of Messianic expression emerge in the days ahead. This will be a Messianic movement that is far more mission oriented, one that has a greater appreciation for all of the Scriptures, and one in which no person is made to feel excluded. It is a Messianic movement that will be all of the things Ancient Israel was commissioned to be: a light to the nations and a kingdom of priests (Isaiah 42:6; Exodus 19:5-6).

In order to see this new kind of Messianic movement come forth, we do need to be careful in the coming days to make it clear that we are **not** opposed to the Messianic lifestyle and things like keeping *Shabbat* or the appointed times or kosher. What we are opposed to, rather, is the way that the current Messianic movement is being run by some of its "leaders"—*being run into the ground*. We desire to see a Messianic movement come forth that is fixed and rectified of its various problems. Yet in order to see this happen, difficult and self-critical things have got to be said. We have got to recapture what it means to be a people who can testify to others of our good works and God's wisdom inside of us (Deuteronomy 4:6).

Yeshua says in His Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). His teaching that follows in Matthew chs. 5-7 then lists an entire series of issues that have a firm foundation in the Torah. Many of these issues are things that today's Messianic movement has forgotten, yet are things that many faithful Christians have observed for centuries. **We will be considered least** in God's Kingdom if we forget these things, if we have yet to apostatize from belief in Him. I would suggest that we begin with understanding those words, and imploring our Father to mold us into an effective people that can have a positive testimony to the world. But we will have to leave that discussion for another time....

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