

The Quest for Credibility²⁰⁰⁴

In the history of our faith, whenever the Lord has revealed something new to His people, or a forgotten truth has been restored, the enemy has always been present to derail or deter it. This is true from the early movement of Believers in Yeshua the Messiah all the way to the present time. When the Apostle Peter proclaimed at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36), you can be rest assured that the forces of darkness were there watching and waiting to take action. Satan had tried to kill the Son of God, but in trying to destroy Him he actually ended up creating even more of a problem for himself, as Yeshua was resurrected from the dead and His followers multiplied. But instead of giving up, the enemy only altered his tactics. The enemy was likely thinking: “Well, if people are now going to receive Him in massive numbers, the least I can do is get this new movement off course.”

How many of us consciously realize that if we are all in the process of returning to the faith practices of the First Century Disciples and Apostles, that we will be returning to some of the *exact same problems* that they faced? If you want an idea about the kinds of problems we will be facing as the emerging Messianic movement, just read through the Book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. They are rife with the sorts of situations and controversies, which are going to become all too commonplace in the future for us—especially as we get closer and closer to the return of the Messiah.

Many Messianics today are greatly disturbed, and rightfully so, that many in our faith community are getting themselves involved with examining things from Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. While this is something that needs to be spoken against, it is not something new in the least. Mystical nonsense was going on in the First Century. Consider the example of Simon the magician, also called Simon Magus, in Acts 8:9-11:

“Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, ‘This man is what is called the Great Power of God.’ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.”

Simon Magus apparently welcomed the good news of Yeshua the Messiah and accepted Him (Acts 8:12-14). But, when Peter and John entered into Samaria and encountered him, Simon offered them money to purchase the Holy Spirit. Simon told them, “Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:19). He wanted to purchase the Holy Spirit so that he could use the Spirit to promote his own self-serving ends. The Apostle Peter rebuked him, “May your silver perish with you, because

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you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:20-21). The Holy Spirit was freely available to all who would acknowledge Yeshua as the Redeemer.

The Biblical account does not say that much more about Simon Magus. But the Christian writers of the Second and Third Centuries wrote extensively about him,¹ as he gained a substantial following and the *ekklesia* had to deal with many of his heresies. *ISBE* offers the following summary of his ancient followers, the Simoinai or the Simonians:

"It is a matter of scholarly debate...whether the historical Simon was actually a Gnostic. His followers and adherents, called Simonians, were both active and influential for several centuries after the death of their founder. The later Simonians were an eclectic sect of Christian Gnostics who were frequently attacked by Christian apologists and heresiologists....In fact, some Christian apologists stated that Simon claimed to be the son of God...plausibly suggested that 'the Great Power' was the high God invoked by Simon in his magical spells, and that in the style of many incantations found in Greco-Egyptian magical papyri, Simon identified himself with this deity using the 'I am' formula."²

The Fourth Century Christian historian Eusebius describes Simon Magus in his *Ecclesiastical History*, stating, "Coming to the aid of his insidious artifices, he attached many of the inhabitants of Rome to himself in order to deceive them. This is attested by Justin...where he wrote thus: 'And after the ascension of our Lord into heaven, certain men were suborned by demons as their agents, who said they were gods...Simon, a certain Samaritan of the village called Githon, was one of the number, who, in the reign of Claudius Caesar, performed many magic rites by the operation of demons, was considered a god in your imperial city of Rome, and was honored by you with a statue as a god, in the river Tiber, (on an island) between the two brides, having the superscription in Latin, Simoni Deo Sancto, which is, To Simon the Holy God" (2.13.2-3).³

Practice or study of anything mystical or quasi-Gnostic is not new.

There are other problems that were going on in the First Century as well. Consider all of the frustration that Paul demonstrated in his two epistles to the Corinthians. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:1, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife" (RSV). There was incest going on in Corinth! Later on he warns the men in Corinth, "Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, 'THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH' [Genesis 2:24]" (1 Corinthians 6:16), implying that some men who were purportedly Believers in the Corinthian assembly still frequented the many bordellos in town. And this is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the many problems we see in the Pauline Epistles, which the good rabbi from Tarsus had to address.⁴

Why are there Problems?

We could go on and on for many more pages discussing how there were problems in the First Century and how many of those problems are now manifesting themselves, in various forms today, in distinct sectors of the broad Messianic movement. But this would only stir up

¹ Cf. David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 614-616.

² D.E. Aune, "Simon Magus," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:516-517.

³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C.F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 47-48.

⁴ For a further review, consult the author's commentaries *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic* and *2 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.

negative emotions. We have to understand *why there are problems*, so that we might properly counter them.

The Torah admonishes, “So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong *your* days in the land which you will possess” (Deuteronomy 5:32-33). Followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are to strive to walk a straight and narrow path, because if they deviate from that path, then they are likely to find themselves going off on tangents. They will likely find themselves to be cursed, not blessed—or at the very least that they will have placed barriers between themselves and God. Most importantly, if God’s Instruction has not been heeded, then His people will find themselves rather ineffective in His service.

As Believers, Yeshua admonishes His followers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Above all else, as the good news is proclaimed in the world and people come to faith, we are to see that new Believers are properly trained and disciplined. They must be properly raised up in the faith.

We have many new people entering into the Messianic community today. Jewish people are coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and many non-Jewish Believers are embracing their Hebraic Roots. Many of these men and women are looking for an appropriate example to emulate, so they can be deeply rooted in the Lord. *Sadly, there are too few people setting the appropriate example.*

Today’s Messianic leaders and teachers have to empower these new people to change for the better, and not only grow in their knowledge of God—but also grow in their knowing God more intimately. The responsibility that is upon a teacher like myself *is immense*. If a teacher purposefully leads any person astray, Yeshua says, “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). James the Just too warns, “Let not many of *you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

A Lack of Credibility

I am in a unique position as a Messianic teacher and researcher, because I get to deal with information and teachings from all across the theological spectrum. A great deal of what I do, and I enjoy it quite a bit, is helping new people come into the Messianic movement, and tell them about what the Lord has done in my life as I have pursued Him, have embraced my Hebraic Roots as a non-Jewish Believer, and have adopted a lifestyle of Torah obedience. I get to tell them how much of a blessing it is to be led by the Spirit and obey the Lord more fully, because I love Him (cf. Romans 8:1-4). I get to help these people examine the Scriptures from a Messianic perspective, and discover new things that will enrich their faith and relationship with God.⁵

Many of the other things I have to do are not as fun. Research of any kind, of course, takes time and a great deal of energy expelled. The kind of research I do not like to be involved with, is in having to answer false and errant teachings that circulate around the Messianic community. I have to write theological summaries on teachings that are damaging people, and

⁵ Consult the author’s books *Introduction to Things Messianic* and *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

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exegetical papers on various Biblical passages, all pertaining to various issues that have the capacity to lead others away from faith in Yeshua. While I do not allow myself to be intimidated by anyone, it is not necessarily something one would wish for. Not enough of today's Messianic leaders and teachers, are guided by holding up the value of the Biblical text as they should be.

The challenge between these two aspects of ministry, is how am I to encourage new people in a Messianic walk, but at the same time see that they are protected and warned of the dangerous teachings that are encountered. And, they have to be protected from these dangerous things, while at the same time *not being turned off* to the Messianic movement and what the Holy Spirit has convicted them about.

The crisis that we are facing today is one of credibility.

Allow me to emphasize that credibility is not the same thing as popularity. The English word "credible" is defined by *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* as something "that can be believed, reliable."⁶ "Popular" is, "commonly accepted; prevalent," and "liked by many people."⁷ There are many credible things that people do not necessarily like, and would prefer to just disregard.

The tactic that the enemy has used in recent days, and sadly has been quite successful with—in order to deter the prophesied "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) and what many are convicted that the Lord wants to accomplish through the Messianic movement—has been **to bring various levels of discredit to our faith community and perspective**. Satan has done this in any number of ways, and through many eager, opportunistic vessels, who are trying to promote themselves rather than help other people grow in the knowledge and grace of Yeshua. Satan has done this through many different avenues, three of which we will examine in this article.

How has the enemy brought discredit to much of the Messianic movement? Consider the Torah principle "on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed" (Deuteronomy 19:15).⁸ This means more than anything else that in order for something to be true, it must be verified by some kind of evidence. How many Messianic people have you heard say something, without substantiating it with evidence or some outside proof? If a person does not have any proof for a case, then at the very least what he or she is teaching is *an opinion*, and it is not a fact. Sometimes, our ministry has encountered teachings that not only do not have two or three witnesses confirming what is being said, *but sometimes do not even have one witness!*

Another way the enemy has been able to discredit today's Messianic movement, sometimes combined with lack of evidence, is the attitude in which a teacher approaches a subject. You always have to question the motives of someone, to see if he or she has honorable intentions. Is what is coming out of a person's mouth edifying to the Body of Messiah? Does it draw people closer to the Lord and help them in their spiritual walk?

There are three areas which have seriously damaged the credibility of the Messianic movement in recent days. Many evangelical Christian outsiders who are truly convicted by the Holy Spirit about Torah observance and the Messianic lifestyle, are turned off because they see the widescale proliferation of these phenomena occurring in the Messianic community, without enough people standing up for the truth, issuing a clear response, and setting the proper example. What are these three areas?

⁶ *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus*, second edition (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc, 2002), 146.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 492.

⁸ Cf. Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; Mathew 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28.

1. Denial of the Divinity of Yeshua the Messiah
2. Denial of the inspiration of the Greek New Testament or Apostolic Scriptures
3. Treating Christians and the Christian Church with utter contempt and hatred

I believe that these three areas will largely form the “make-it or break-it” point for the current Messianic movement. If an outsider sees that we deny Yeshua as God in the flesh, that we deny the inspiration of the Apostolic Scriptures, and that we treat Christians like the proverbial “scum of the Earth”—I believe that such a person is fully justified in being suspect of the Messianic movement. I would be turned off by the Messianic movement too—if this is what is truly going on. I would be turned off by any movement that draws people *away from Yeshua*, and not toward Him.

Fortunately, however, I am pleased to report that these problems are not being caused by a majority of us. However, the Scriptural word, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough” (1 Corinthians 5:6), remains absolutely true. Some people who talk a bit too loudly, may present themselves as speaking for *all* of us, if what they say is not challenged on a significant level.

It is time for some self-examination on our part, so that we might learn to be more effective for the task that God has for us. Yeshua says, “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? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (Matthew 7:3-5). If we can see that some of our own internal problems and challenges are resolved first, then we can get to the Father’s business of helping others.

If you are new to the Messianic movement, and you have concerns, many of those concerns are no doubt warranted. They are legitimate, and there are others like us who have been in the Messianic community for some time who are willing to speak up. We do not want the Messianic movement to be considered un-credible. Rather, we want it to be credible and believable, especially as we see many Christian Believers turning toward their Hebraic Roots and are truly being convicted by the Lord that this is of Him. Yet, it will *only* be considered of God if it draws others into a closer relationship with Him.

#1 Denial of the Divinity of Yeshua the Messiah

The first credibility problem we are facing in the Messianic movement today is very serious. It is sad, but there are people in the Messianic community today who are denying the Divinity of Yeshua. It is a fact that most of those who deny Yeshua as being God in the flesh, later deny Yeshua as being the Messiah. Why people deny Yeshua’s Divinity varies from person to person and group to group, but it is not in compliance with Holy Scripture. Oftentimes, you run into people who are trying to “figure out God,” and because in their human brains they are incapable of understanding the co-existence of the Father and Son, they denigrate the Son as being something less than God.

Why must we believe that Yeshua is God? How many times are we told in the Tanach (Old Testament) that God, the LORD, is our only Savior or Redeemer?

“My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My **savior**, You save me from violence” (2 Samuel 22:3).

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"I have called upon You, for You will answer me, O God; incline Your ear to me, hear my speech. Wondrously show Your lovingkindness, O **Savior** of those who take refuge at Your right hand from those who rise up *against them*" (Psalm 17:6-7).

"For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your **Savior**; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place" (Isaiah 43:3).

"I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no **savior** besides Me" (Isaiah 43:11).

"Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a **Savior**; there is none except Me" (Isaiah 45:21).

"You will also suck the milk of nations and suck the breast of kings; then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (Isaiah 60:16).

"Yet *I have been* the LORD your God since the land of Egypt; and you were not to know any god except Me, for there is no **savior** besides Me" (Hosea 13:4).

The Psalmist declares that "No man can by any means redeem *his* brother or give to God a ransom for him" (Psalm 49:7). No human being can redeem another human being. We are told instead, "God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me" (Psalm 49:15). The Hebrew Scriptures make it clear that only an Eternal Being can save a mortal being from sin, and that only He can redeem people from the realm of death.

The angels proclaimed at the birth of Yeshua, "for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord" (Luke 2:11). How many times do the Apostolic Scriptures tell us that Yeshua is our Savior?

"For the husband is the head of the wife, as Messiah also is the head of the [assembly], He Himself *being* the **Savior** of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

"Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua according to the commandment of God our **Savior**, and of Messiah Yeshua, *who is* our hope" (1 Timothy 1:1).

"[B]ut now has been revealed by the appearing of our **Savior** Messiah Yeshua, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

"To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Messiah Yeshua our **Savior**" (Titus 1:4).

"[L]ooking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and **Savior**, Messiah Yeshua" (Titus 2:13).

"Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Yeshua the Messiah, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and **Savior**, Yeshua the Messiah" (2 Peter 1:1).

"[T]hat you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and **Savior** *spoken* by your apostles" (2 Peter 3:2).

"We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the **Savior** of the world" (1 John 4:14).

Yeshua can only be our Savior if He is God in the flesh. If the Scriptures are clear that only the LORD, God, is our Savior—and Yeshua is not God—then by all means who is He? If He was just a human man, then how can He redeem us from the power of Sheol, and consequently eternal punishment? Can a human agent sent by God be an adequate substitute for God? Can a supernatural, but ultimately created being, genuinely redeem human sinners, who are themselves created beings?

Some at the time of Yeshua believed that He was blaspheming, because His actions demonstrated Him to be God. Yeshua forgave the sins of others, and being able to forgive sins was something that only God could accomplish. It was not something that any human being could do:

“But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?’” (Mark 2:6-7).

“The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, ‘Who is this *man* who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?’” (Luke 5:21).

Is the issue of Yeshua’s Divinity is a **salvation issue**? If God is the only One who can save us from our sins, then *yes!*

Some say the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 makes it impossible for God to be a plurality, and thus for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to co-exist. This declaration of Biblical monotheism states, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” But what the *Shema* is more than anything else it is a declaration of the primacy of the Holy One of Israel in the lives of His people. It is a declaration and commitment of His people to obey Him, and place Him above all other gods or objects of worship. The *Shema* bids God’s people to be exclusively loyal to Him, and to worship Him alone.⁹

The fact that God, or *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), is a plurality, is demonstrated from the very beginning of the Book of Genesis, when He says, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (1:26). He later says when Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us” (Genesis 3:22). When God scatters the nations at the Tower of Babel, He says, “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech” (Genesis 11:7). Speaking to Isaiah, the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” (Isaiah 6:8). In each of these instances, God speaks to Himself, and it is evident as a *plurality*.

This plurality is also evident in the Psalmist’s declaration, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (Psalm 110:1), something repeated or alluded to numerous times throughout the Apostolic Scriptures in regard to Yeshua the Messiah.¹⁰ Here, the Hebrew text reads *ne’um YHWH l’Adonai* (נְאֻם יְהוָה לַאֲדֹנָי), and God is speaking to Himself in this passage. Psalm 110:1 is notably referred to when Yeshua speaks before the Sanhedrin at His trial:

“And Yeshua said, ‘I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, AND COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN’ [Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13]. Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses?’” (Mark 14:62-63; cf. Matthew 26:64-65).

⁹ For a further examination of Deuteronomy 6:4, consult the author’s article, “What Does the Shema Really Mean?”

¹⁰ Matthew 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42, 43; Acts 2:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20, 22; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2.

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The high priest considered Yeshua to be committing blasphemy here, because He associated Himself with being that Power by saying "I AM." This was a very direct way of Yeshua identifying Himself as God.

In the Hebrew Tanach when the Lord appeared to Moses at the burning bush, we are told, "Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.'" Now they may say to me, "What is His name?" What shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13-14). God specifically told Moses that He is *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), "I Shall Be As I Shall Be" (ATS). It is from the Hebrew verb *hayah* (הָיָה) or "to be" that God's proper name of יהוה or YHWH/YHVH is derived, a loose meaning of which would be "Eternal One." In the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew phrase *ehyeh asher ehyeh* was rendered as *egō eimi ho ōn* (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὄν), "I am THE BEING" (LXE) or "The One Who Is" (NETS). *Egō eimi* or "I AM" is used numerous times in the Apostolic Scriptures by Yeshua, each instance being a proof of His Divinity.

In Matthew 14:24-27, the Disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, and were being swayed to-and-fro by a storm. They saw Yeshua walking on the water, and they were frightened, believing Him to be a ghost. The Messiah comforted them by speaking forth "I AM":

"But the boat was now in *the* middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. But in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went out to them, walking on the sea. And seeing Him walking on the sea, the disciples were troubled, saying, It is a phantom! And they cried out from the fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Be comforted! **I AM** [*egō eimi*]! Do not fear" (LITV).

Peter went out to meet Yeshua on the lake, but began to sink because of his lack of belief. The two of them entered into the boat together. "When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" (Matthew 14:32-33). The Disciples asked themselves, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:41). Notice that the Disciples all worshipped Yeshua, and they recognized that as God among them He had the power and authority over the weather.

In John 8:56-59, Yeshua talked to a group of Jews who asked Him about Abraham. Yeshua responded to them, telling them that Abraham rejoiced over His day. These Jews asked Him how He could possibly have known this, considering the fact that Yeshua was not even fifty years old, and Abraham was long since dead:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.' So the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Yeshua said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, **I am** [*egō eimi*].' Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Yeshua hid Himself and went out of the temple."

Notice the reaction of the Jews here. Yeshua made the quintessential remark, "before Abraham was born, I am." This speaks to Yeshua's preexistence as God, because He did not say, "before Abraham was, I was." These Jews picked up stones to stone Yeshua because He was identifying Himself as God or "I AM." They considered this to be blasphemy.

In John 18:4-6, Judas Iscariot and a mob of Roman soldiers came to arrest Yeshua. They asked Him who He was, and He responded by telling them that He was Yeshua of Nazareth and with "I AM":

"So Yeshua, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Yeshua the Nazarene.' He said to them, '**I am** He.' And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, '**I am** [*egō eimi*] He,' they drew back and fell to the ground."

What happened to those whose intent was to violently seize Yeshua when He told them “I am He” (NASU)? “Then when He said to them, **I AM**, they departed into the rear and fell to the ground” (LITV). These Roman soldiers, total pagans, had no choice but to be overwhelmed by the Divine power of Yeshua, falling back when He spoke the word *ehyeh*.

We then see Yeshua using “I AM” at His trial before the Sanhedrin:

“But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, ‘Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’ And Yeshua said, ‘**I am** [egō eimi]; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.’ Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses?’” (Mark 14:61-63).

“And they all said, ‘Are You the Son of God, then?’ And He said to them, ‘Yes, **I am** [egō eimi].’ Then they said, ‘What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth’” (Luke 22:70-71).

At the trial before the Sanhedrin, Yeshua was asked if He was the Messiah. Yeshua responded to His accusers with *ehyeh*, which has been transcribed for us in the Apostolic Scriptures as *egō eimi*. He did not just say “I am,” but He said “I AM,” with a connection back to Moses at the burning bush where the Almighty God revealed Himself. Yeshua did not just say “I am He” in the context of Him being the Messiah as some would like to say. Ancient history demonstrates that there were many people in the milieu of First Century Judaism who believed themselves to be some kind of messiah, or at least a deliverer figure (cf. Acts 5:36-38). But the difference between those others who believed themselves to be a messiah, is that Yeshua said He was God, which He asserted very clearly by saying “I AM.” The Sanhedrin court considered this blasphemy, and so Yeshua was condemned to be executed.

Yeshua the Messiah is God in the flesh. He can only be our Savior if He is the LORD God. People in the Messianic movement denying the Divinity of Yeshua have brought discredit to us all. People in the Messianic movement denying the Divinity of Yeshua will cause Christian heresy-busters and cult-hunters to significantly target our faith community as a dangerous group of people. Even more importantly, though, those people who may deny the Divinity of Yeshua, deny the very Source of salvation. Yet only God can determine if they are truly saved, and that is not our job. Thankfully, however, there are people standing up in our day and defending Yeshua’s Divinity.¹¹

#2 Denial of the Inspiration of the Greek New Testament or Apostolic Scriptures

The second credibility issue we are facing in the Messianic movement today is serious, because it derides the message of the gospel that has been historically transcribed and preserved for us for almost two millennia. Many in the Messianic community believe that the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament were written in Hebrew. In fact, many believe that it is incumbent upon themselves to forcibly call the Apostolic Scriptures the “*B’rit Chadashah*,” when in fact this is widely a misnomer as the *b’rit chadashah* (בְּרִית הַדָּשָׁה) is not any portion of new Scripture, but rather is the promise that the Lord will write His Torah onto the hearts of His

¹¹ This subject is examined further in the author’s article, “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Divinity of Yeshua.”

Also highly recommended is Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007).

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people (Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27).¹² What we often call the “New Testament” comprises the Spirit-inspired writings of the First Century Apostles, thus the neutral terms Apostolic Scriptures/Writings or Messianic Scriptures/Writings are more appropriate. To ask the question, though, “Was the *B’rit Chadashah* originally written in Hebrew?”, can be a bit manipulative because it presupposes that there was a Hebrew original.

The problem with believing that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew is multi-faceted. First of all, what you are suggesting is that not only were the Gospels and the Book of Acts written in Hebrew, but that the General Epistles and Pauline Epistles were written in Hebrew as well. This means that not only did Paul write to a half-Jewish person like Timothy in Hebrew, but that he also wrote to Greeks like Titus and Philemon in Hebrew as well. While it is historically valid to say that most of Yeshua’s spoken dialogue was in Hebrew or Aramaic, presupposing that the Apostolic Scriptures were written in Hebrew suggests that the vast majority of all of the dialogue in the missionary journeys undertaken by the Apostles into the Mediterranean basin was likewise in Hebrew, and that Paul, for example, spoke in Hebrew to the Athenians at the Areopagus (Mars Hill).

Many in the Messianic community rightfully emphasize that we need to think of Yeshua as a First Century Jewish Rabbi living in the Land of Israel, and understand the Jewish culture in which He interacted and conducted His ministry. While it is rightfully said that we need to think of Him as Yeshua HaMashiach (יֵשׁוּעַ הַמָּשִׁיחַ), we cannot divorce Yeshua from the larger Mediterranean world in which He lived. Whether you like it or not, Judea was a province of the Roman Empire, and First Century Judaism was a part of the greater Roman world. Yeshua and the Apostles had interactions with those who did not speak Hebrew as their native language, and to say that they exclusively spoke Hebrew is historically invalid. It is to say that Pontius Pilate, the Roman centurion, and the Syrophoenician woman, among others, all spoke to Him in Hebrew. The Hebrew New Testament advocates cannot explain why two of the Gospels, Mark (*Markos*, Μάρκος/מַרְקוֹס) and Luke (*Loukas*, Λουκάς/לּוּקᾶς), have names of Latin and Greek origin, respectively, and why two of Yeshua’s Disciples were named Andrew (*Andreas*, Ἀνδρέας) and Phillip (*Philippos*, Φίλιππος). Whether you like it or not, these were names that were not of Hebrew origin.

Before we go any further addressing this problem, allow me to state that there is validity to understanding the Hebraic background of the sayings of Yeshua, and the fact that if you do not understand that there are idiomatic Hebraic expressions in the Gospels, you are likely to misinterpret some of the things that Yeshua teaches. Yeshua said, for example, “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matthew 6:22-23). The “eye” being spoken of here is not necessarily a person’s physical eye, but rather it speaks to the nerve center of a person’s thoughts and motivations, possibly the mind. In this vein, Yeshua said, “The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness” (Luke 11:34). When a person commits himself to good deeds internally, these good deeds will be evident in one’s whole body and in the actions performed. This is one of many examples that could be given of an Hebraism in the Gospels. Not understanding them properly has nothing to do with the written Greek text we have today, though. It has everything to do with understanding the culture and times in which Yeshua lived.

¹² Consult the author’s article “What is the New Covenant?” appearing in his book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

There are several inherent problems with people who advocate an original “Hebrew New Testament.” First of all, a huge burden of proof is on these people to demonstrate what has happened to this Hebrew New Testament that supposedly still exists. *Where is their text?* Secondly, can it be determined based on ancient history, taking into account where the authors of the Apostolic Scriptures were when they wrote, and the audience to whom they wrote, that the Messianic Writings were composed in Hebrew? And third, is our God completely incapable of inspiring His Word in languages other than Hebrew?

Most often, when you ask people who believe that the Apostolic Scriptures were written in Hebrew where this text is today, they will tell you something along the lines of, “It was destroyed.” The preface to one Bible version that has been produced from the premise that the Apostolic Scriptures were written in Hebrew, actually says, “the original Hebrew Messianic Scriptures...were possibly destroyed in those early days by anti-Jewish gentiles, or else set aside or decayed, for they were probably written on papyrus which is a perishable substance.”¹³ What is being said here is that the original “Hebrew New Testament” was destroyed and that “There was no other choice [for us] but to resort to the existing Greek manuscripts.”¹⁴ Christian theologians and scholars legitimately have problems with various sectors of the Messianic community, because there are those who cannot conduct reasonable exegesis from the Greek New Testament, and engage with available Greek language resources. (Some, sadly, cannot even tell the difference between an *alpha*, Α and an *omega*, Ω.)

But where is the proof that these texts were destroyed? Where is the proof that these texts ever existed in the first place? And if...if they did exist, why did God, in His omniscience and sovereignty, have them destroyed? Those advocating an original “Hebrew New Testament” cannot answer the question of why God in His infinite wisdom would have had these texts destroyed. Of course, *these texts never existed*, and that is why we have no extant evidence to their existence.

Even those of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research, an organization largely touted as promoting a “Hebrew New Testament,” have to admit that the Apostolic Scriptures we have today were transcribed in the Greek language. David Bivin states, “From time to time, one hears reports of the discovery of a portion of the New Testament written in Hebrew or Aramaic. To date, such reports have proven false. Readers of *JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE* should realize that there is not a single extant Hebrew-language manuscript from the early Christian era of any of the New Testament books.” He also states that “The scholars of the Jerusalem School do not claim that the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke were originally written in Hebrew,” and even that “Contrary to what one might expect, however, the book of Hebrews is written in the purest Greek of any book in the New Testament.”¹⁵ It may be that some Messianic people misinterpret conclusions made by the Jerusalem School. They advocate (perhaps in spite of various limitations) as do many in the wide world of Biblical Studies, that it is important to understand the culture and times of Yeshua to understand what He is saying in the Gospels—not that the Greek text of the Apostolic Scriptures that we have today is invalid.

The second issue pertains to the historical background of each of the books of the Apostolic canon. This is something that I have never seen anyone, who advocates that the Apostolic Scriptures were all written in Hebrew, address in any substantial capacity. How many people take into account the fact that the first Gospels were not written until around three decades or

¹³ *The Scriptures*, first edition (Randburg, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 1993), xii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ David Bivin. *A Gospel Written in Hebrew?. Jerusalem Perspective Online*. Retrieved 03 August, 2004, from <<http://articles.jerusalemerspective.com/>>.

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so after the ascension of Yeshua into Heaven? It is widely agreed that the Gospel of Mark was written first, and according to tradition it was written by John Mark as Peter had traveled to minister in Rome. Mark was a companion of Peter, and Mark's Gospel comes from Peter's perspective on the life of Yeshua. The material in Mark's Gospel was expanded by Matthew and Luke for writing their Gospels.

However, before any of the Gospels were written, the epistles or letters were written to the various communities and assemblies in the Mediterranean basin. Almost all of the congregations outside the Land of Israel, be they in Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, or Thessalonica, spoke Greek as their primary language. The only exception would have been Rome, because Latin was spoken in the Italian peninsula. But even Rome had a Greek quarter. Greek was spoken as the international language of the Eastern Mediterranean, just like English is the dominant language of international diplomacy and commerce today.

No one advocating a written Hebrew New Testament has ever conducted a book-by-book analysis of the Apostolic Scriptures, and explained why—from a legitimate historical perspective, and at least engaged with one or two conservative New Testament introduction books (i.e., Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990]; D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005])—how and why each of the books was written in Hebrew. ***This is because they cannot do it.*** The historical case will prove that the Apostolic Scriptures were transcribed in Greek, although it was surely a Jewish style of Greek commonplace to the Mediterranean Diaspora.

But what about the Gospel of Matthew? There are some historical references given in the writings of early Christian leaders that would seem to suggest that at least it was originally written in Hebrew. Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, referencing the writings of Papias, a Second Century Christian, says that he wrote **“Matthew composed his history [or, ‘Matthew compiled the Sayings’]¹⁶ in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able”** (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16).¹⁷

This one statement by Papias, which appears to have been repeated by some of the other Church Fathers and made its way to Eusebius by the Fourth Century, has been interpreted in various ways—some ways being rather misleading. D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo advise examiners how these words are “notoriously difficult to translate,”¹⁸ noting the different options for us:

“Matthew συντάξετο (*synetaxeto*, ‘composed’? ‘compiled’? ‘arranged [in an orderly form]’?) τὰ λόγια (*ta logia*, ‘the sayings’? ‘the gospel’?) in Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ (*Hebraïdi dialektō*, ‘the Hebrew [Aramaic] language’? ‘Hebrew [Aramaic] style’?) and each ἡερμήνευσεν (*hērmēneusen*, ‘interpreted’? ‘translated’? ‘transmitted’?) them as best he could.”¹⁹

Controversy over the composition of Matthew's Gospel ensues over what Papias meant by saying that Matthew either compiled or assembled *ta logia* (τὰ λόγια), as *logion* (λόγιον) is generally a Greek term for “sayings” or “oracles.”²⁰ Noted with the further description “in the

¹⁶ Eusebius: *The History of the Church*, trans. G.A. Williamson and Andrew Louth (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 104.

¹⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, 106.

¹⁸ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 143.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 476.

Hebrew dialect," *Hebraïdi dialektō*, there are four basic ways that Eusebius' words can be viewed:

1. A complete Gospel text was written by Matthew in Hebrew or Aramaic
2. Matthew put together notes of the sayings of Yeshua in Hebrew or Aramaic, possibly what scholars propose as being the Q or Source document (abbreviated from the German *Quelle*), later to be incorporated into our final and complete Greek Gospel
3. The description *Hebraïdi dialektō* is to be regarded as being a Jewish style of composition/writing
4. *Logia* could mean various proof texts from the Tanach Scriptures that support Yeshua's Messiahship

How strong is the evidence that the canonical Greek text of Matthew that we have today is a translation of a complete text originally *written* in Hebrew or Aramaic? There are a few modern Christian scholars who hold that the canonical Greek Matthew is an essentially accurate and early translation of an original non-extant Hebrew version, but such claims have been contested. More concerning to be certain, though, are how many in today's Messianic movement feel that the canonical Greek Matthew could be a less-than-authoritative translation of an original Hebrew or Aramaic text, to be approached with a (high) degree of suspicion.

Textually speaking, any advocate of an original Hebrew or Aramaic written text for the Gospel of Matthew has a huge uphill mountain to climb. No ancient Hebrew or Aramaic Matthew from the Biblical period, or fragment of such a text, has surfaced that pre-dates our present Greek Matthew. Anthony J. Saldarini tells us, "No Hebrew or Aramaic collection of Jesus' sayings has survived, so its existence must remain hypothetical."²¹ While there are various editions of a so-called Hebrew Gospel of Matthew floating around, they all date from the Middle Ages.²² The most popular of these is the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew edited and translated into English by George Howard. This eclectic version is acknowledged in its introduction as being put together from a Jewish anti-missionary work entitled *Even Bohan* (בְּרִיית אֵבֶן בֹּחַן) from the Fourteenth Century C.E.,²³ originally intended to refute "Christian claims" about Yeshua being the Messiah. Among its various theological problems,²⁴ it is also significantly tarnished by using the derogatory form *Yeshu* for the name of the Messiah.²⁵

But some, rather than making the claim that the Apostolic Scriptures were written in Hebrew, will say that they were written in Aramaic, a Semitic relative of Hebrew. Portions of the Books of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were actually written in Aramaic. However, **Aramaic**

²¹ Anthony J. Saldarini, "Matthew," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1000.

²² These include the Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew (1380), the Sebastian Münster edition (1537), and the duTillet manuscript (1555).

A history of these editions is summarized by Tim Hegg, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: Chapters 1-7* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007), pp 2-4. Regarding these versions he concludes, "[T]he Hebrew Matthews do not present 'a different Matthew' than what we know from the Greek textual witnesses," further concluding how they "do not bear greater weight than the extant Greek manuscripts" (Ibid., 4).

²³ George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), xi.

He later acknowledges how his text "does not preserve the original in a pure form. It reflects contamination by Jewish scribes during the Middle Ages" (Ibid., 178).

²⁴ These problems include, but are not limited to: the exclusion of the nations from the Kingdom in Matthew 10:5-6 (Ibid., 214), the preaching of the good news to the nations as being the antichrist and Abomination of Desolation in Matthew 24:14-15 (Ibid., 215), and most especially how "With the possible exception of [Matthew] 16:16...the author of Shem-Tob's Hebrew Matthew never identifies Jesus with the Christ" (Ibid., 216).

²⁵ The derogatory acronym *Yeshu* (ישו), *yimach sh'mo u'zikro* (יָמוּחַ שְׁמוֹ וְזִכְרוֹ), means "may his name and memory be blotted out" (Ibid., 207).

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is not Hebrew. While Aramaic was a widely used language in First Century Judea, and indeed Yeshua spoke Aramaic along with Hebrew, Aramaic is not Hebrew and any claim that Aramaic is Hebrew is false. Aramaic is also called Chaldee in many lexicons and dictionaries, and was in fact a Semitic language used by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Those who believe that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Aramaic think they have a case because of the existence of the Peshitta New Testament. The Peshitta is the canonical Scripture of the Syrian Orthodox Church, which according to its traditions is the originally written Scriptures of the Apostles. The Peshitta New Testament is often consulted in textual criticism by many Christian scholars and theologians today, and is considered to be a valuable resource from ancient times. But the Peshitta New Testament is younger than the Greek New Testament that we have today, although it was one of the first languages into which the Apostolic Writings were translated, being completed by the Fourth to Fifth Centuries C.E.:

"[T]he origin of the version must antedate Rabbula. This dating is required by the version's canon, which lacks 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and the Apocalypse. This is the same canon used in the patriarchate of Antioch in the 4th cent. before books were added—so it would seem—just prior to the 5th century....Further indications for a late-fourth-century date come from intrinsic evidence. Unevenness in textual character, a vocabulary that is not consistently employed, and varying mannerisms and techniques of revision all suggest that several hands were at work on it" (ISBE).²⁶

It was not until the Fifth Century C.E. that the Peshitta reached its present form, and the Peshitta New Testament today still excludes the five texts of 2 Peter, 2&3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Any claim that the Peshitta New Testament is the original must take into consideration that these five books are not canonical Scripture for the Syrian Orthodox Church.

What are we saying here, that in spite of the fact that a written Hebrew New Testament did not historically exist, there is no Hebraic connection at all to the Apostolic Scriptures? *No*. There is a rather well-known and frequently employed way, that you can determine what the Hebraic meanings of terms are, which the Apostolic writers were likely trying to convey, demonstrated in many works of theologians and Bible scholars today.

Three centuries before the time of Yeshua, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanach was produced. This translation, which we call the Septuagint (LXX), was largely put together for Greek-speaking Jews in Northern Egypt. Later, it would be widely disseminated throughout the Mediterranean basin as Diaspora Judaism became established, and Jewish synagogues were established throughout Greek-speaking areas. The LXX became the canonical Scriptures of Greek-speaking Jews, and it was influential in seeing many Greeks and Romans come to a knowledge of the God of Israel. The LXX was in existence at the time of Yeshua, and it is quoted prolifically throughout the Messianic Scriptures.

There are Greek words used in the Apostolic Writings which correspond to Greek words used in the Septuagint, which have Hebrew meanings behind them. A notable word is *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), which in most English Bibles is rendered as "church." *Ekklēsia* in the Septuagint is widely used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* (קהל), a word meaning "assembly" almost exclusively used to refer to Israel. When the Apostolic writers use the term *ekklēsia*, they do not refer to a separate group of elect called "the Church." They use it refer readers back to the assembly or *qahal* of Israel.²⁷

²⁶ A. Vööbus, "Versions, Syriac," in ISBE, 4:975.

²⁷ Cf. K.L. Schmidt, "ekklēsia," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397; Jack P. Lewis, "qāhāl," in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:790; Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's*

Another prominent Greek term with a substantial Hebraic meaning behind it is *eirēnē* (εἰρήνη) or “peace.” Widely in a classical context, *eirēnē* “For the Greeks...primarily denotes a state, not a relationship or attitude. It is the opposite of *polemos* [πόλεμος] (‘war’). It is linked with treaties of peace or the conclusion of peace. It is also the opposite of disturbance” (TDNT).²⁸ As important as absence of war obviously is for human undertakings, every good reader of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures and Septuagint is aware of how *eirēnē* communicates the fuller concepts present in the Hebrew term *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם). The term *shalom* “means much more than mere absence of war. Rather, the root meaning of the verb *shālēm* better expresses the true concept of *shālôm*. Completeness, wholeness, harmony, fulfillment, are closer to the meaning. Implicit in *shālôm* is the idea of unimpaired relationships with others and fulfillment in one’s undertakings” (TWOT).²⁹

The Septuagint is an important bridge to use when understanding the deeper meaning of words in the Apostolic Scriptures. We in the Messianic community need to learn to use this bridge when we examine the Apostolic Scriptures, as the Septuagint was a very important part of the Jewish world of the First Century.³⁰

Ultimately, the debate over the inspiration of the Greek Scriptures comes down to *ideology*. Many people treat the Hebrew language as though it is some kind of “holy tongue,” which means that every other language is unholy or even dirty. Many people in the Messianic movement misapply the words of Zephaniah 3:9, where the Prophet says “I will give to the peoples purified lips” or *safar beruah* (שָׂפָה בְּרוּרָה). To assume that this means that the peoples will be given an ability to speak the Hebrew language is not an honest assessment of the Book of Zephaniah, as the previous verses tell us exactly what the problem of Ancient Israel has been:

“Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the tyrannical city! She heeded no voice, she accepted no instruction. She did not trust in the LORD, she did not draw near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions, her judges are wolves at evening; they leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law. The LORD is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail. But the unjust knows no shame. I have cut off nations; their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, with no one passing by; their cities are laid waste, without a man, without an inhabitant. I said, ‘Surely you will revere Me, accept instruction.’ So her dwelling will not be cut off according to all that I have appointed concerning her. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds” (Zephaniah 3:1-7).

Being given “purified lips” is undoubtedly connected with moving from a state of sinfulness to a state of holiness—from a state of profanity to a state of purity. Zephaniah’s prophecy of “I will make the peoples pure of speech” (NJPS) is akin to the Apostle Paul’s later instruction, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who

Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), pp 195-196; Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp 303-304.

For a further discussion, consult the section, “The Term Ekklēsia,” in the author’s publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*

²⁸ W. Foerster, “*eirēnē*,” in TDNT, 210.

²⁹ G. Lloyd Carr, “*shālôm*,” in TWOT, 2:931.

³⁰ For a further review, consult R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

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hear” (Ephesians 4:29). The “purified lips” pertains to *a manner of speech* by which the Father’s people will be able to serve Him.³¹

Ultimately, the Messianic debate over whether or not the Greek New Testament is the inspired Word of God is going to regard God’s character and immutable abilities. Speaking for myself, I believe that the Lord is capable of inspiring His Word in Hebrew, Greek, or whatever language He wants. I especially believe that He is capable of causing the Messianic movement to grow, primarily through usage of the English language today. Because of this, in the First Century the Lord was fully capable of inspiring the message of His Son in Greek, albeit the Hebraist and Jewish-influenced Greek of the Septuagint.

A ministry like Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics fully affirms the inspiration of the Greek New Testament or Apostolic Scriptures, and we know that it upholds our beliefs. It is a sad, documented fact, though, that people who deny the inspiration of the Apostolic Scriptures often later deny Yeshua. Once you deny the inspiration of the message, it is not that far until you deny the Messenger. We have a responsibility to stand firm, and against the errant and unsupportable *opinion* that the Apostolic Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew.³² We also have the responsibility to demonstrate how our unique Messianic convictions and Torah obedient lifestyle, are not at all derided by the Greek source text of the Apostolic Scriptures, engaging directly with theologians and commentators who errantly claim that God’s Law has been totally abolished.³³

#3 Treating Christians and the Christian Church with Utter Contempt and Hatred

The third area that has been discrediting much of the Messianic community is different than the first two. It is different because it does not deal with theology, nor academic Biblical history, but instead our attitude as Believers. We all need to be aware of the fact that a principal part of Torah observance is the command to love one another. Our Heavenly Father says, “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18). Yeshua considered this to be one of the two greatest commandments in the Torah.³⁴ God’s people are required to love others, *and* recognize that it is the Lord, and only He, who can take vengeance and perform ultimate justice for us.

Yeshua emphasizes this important concept by saying, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). We each have to remember this in all of our dealings with others. As I have had to remind people numerous times in different teachings: “*If you treat others with respect, you will be treated with respect in return. But if you treat others like dirt, don’t be surprised when you get treated like dirt back.*” This is especially true when you deal with people from contemporary Christianity, who you may have fellowshiped with in a church setting, or who may have even been your close friends.

In my years of ministry service, I have become absolutely tired of those people in the Messianic movement who just hate mainstream Christianity. When I say “hate” here, I am not

³¹ For some further thoughts, consult the sub-section “The Proper Name of God, and Titles Issued Toward the Creator,” in Chapter 4 of the author’s book *Israel in Future Prophecy*, “Anti-Semitism in the Two-House Movement.”

³² For a further discussion of this issue, consult the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, and the material in Chapter 11, “The Hebrew New Testament Misunderstanding.”

³³ Consult the author’s book *The New Testament Validates Torah: Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?*

³⁴ Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; cf. Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8.

talking about those who have theological disagreements and legitimate criticisms of the Church institution(s). *I have disagreements with mainstream Christianity*, and people within mainstream Christianity have disagreements among themselves. I believe that much of today's Church, on the whole, can be rather shallow and incomplete in its view of the Scriptures. I believe that many in Christianity today have lost their way because they have decided that the Torah or Law of Moses has little or no relevance for their lives. I believe that, sadly, the Church institution is steadily going downhill, and that there are many who are being led astray. But in spite of this, **I do not hate the Church, nor do I hate Christians.**

The problem that exists is not with Messianics who have theological disagreements with mainstream Christianity. The problem is with those who make it their "duty" to continually harp, berate, and harass the Church. They will not think twice about saying things like, "*The Church is pagan and worthless. Christians are servants of Satan.*" If you have said something like this, do not be surprised when a Christian says something similar about Messianics. Who knows, some of the criticisms of the Messianic movement based on our collective attitudes may even be right at times? Shame on us if what they say about us is right!

I know what it is like to unfairly criticize Christianity, because I once did it myself. In my Spring 2003 semester at the University of Oklahoma, my last semester of college, I was spurned by all of my Christian friends. There were some rumors going around about me on campus that I was a legalist or perhaps that I had even left the faith and was becoming "Jewish." My Christian friends would not talk to me about it, and I admit that I harbored some unforgiveness and held onto it for much of 2003. Thankfully, in early 2004, and through the Lord bringing some new and very sincere Messianic friends into my life, I was able to put the past behind me, and I do not dwell on any bad memories any more. I concentrate on the future, and what I can do to help others.

My criticism of the Church never got as bad as many of the people you have probably encountered. I never believed that all Christians were condemned, and neither did I believe that the Church was "utterly pagan." I was just apathetic about the whole thing, and basically believed that mainstream Christianity was not being used by God in any way, shape, or form. Then in the Fall of 2003, God began to convict me as I began to encounter the bad attitudes of some other Messianics in action. At one Messianic Bible study I attended, someone actually got up and made the comment, "*That is a bunch of Christian bulls***.*" I knew then in my spirit that something was going to have to change. And as 2004 began, I knew I had to be very careful with what I wrote, because other people were reading my articles and making life-decisions and formulating opinions on what I was saying.

I do have issues with mainstream Christianity. Many of us from evangelical backgrounds would not be in the Messianic movement today if we did not have some problems with today's Church. But as I have had problems with mainstream Christianity, I look back on my past, and I look at all of the sincere, truly born again Christians, who invested time in my spiritual growth and maturity, and who truly helped me in my walk of faith. *They invested things in my life that I will always be thankful for.* I am grateful for the example of my late father, Kimball McKee, who was a lay minister, and who was bringing the Passover into our local Methodist Church. I remember our former pastor and his best friend at the end, Bill Hughes, who was there to minister to our family when he died.³⁵ I have been told great things about my great-grandfather, Bishop Marvin A. Franklin, who was one of the youngest bishops ever in the Methodist Church, serving as president of the Council of Bishops in 1959-1960. And I could go on with many more people who were Christians who helped me. **I feel that it is my duty that I**

³⁵ Consult the relevant sections of the author's publication *To Be Absent From the Body*.

Confronting Critical Issues

respect those who have preceded me in faith, building on their positive legacy of achievements for the Lord in their respective eras. People such as these have, to their great credit, have informed me via their example, far more about love and service to others, than most contemporary leaders in Messianic Judaism or the independent Messianic community.

Yet in spite of all the fond memories that we have of our Church experience, the time came for our family when we were not being spiritually fed or fulfilled in the Church anymore. We knew that there was more out there, and the Messianic movement has widely fulfilled our spiritual hunger and thirst. We do recognize where we came from, and that there are sincere Believers who are where we once were. We do not condemn or damn them, because that will not encourage them to change. We have to show these people that by adopting a Messianic lifestyle, that we have changed for the better in our walk of faith, and are truly being led by the Spirit. We have to show them that we are becoming *more like the Messiah*, not less like Him. Yeshua tells us, "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). **We are to lead by a positive example of faith in action!**

It is a significant problem that some people in the Messianic movement harbor a great amount of hatred and animosity toward their Christian brothers and sisters. This is not Yeshua, **and it is certainly not the Torah that so many claim to uphold!** Having hatred for mainstream Christianity is ultimately what drives people into apostasy and denying Yeshua. And sadly, many outsiders, because unfair criticism of Christianity is often not spoken against in the Messianic movement, Christians who are sincerely convicted about the message of Torah validity and want to embrace their Hebraic Roots, can be turned off to the message. *It is our job to make sure that it stops.*

If we disagree with some of today's Christians, then we need to disagree with them while still maintaining some level of civility and respect. It is not our job to judge any Christian's salvation; that job is for God Himself. But we can diagnose another person's spiritual maturity, and the need for Messianic Believers to show their Christian brothers and sisters a better way is getting bigger. Rather than insulting them as is the pattern of too many Messianics, we need to let the Word of God speak for itself, and allow the Holy Spirit to woo them toward truth.³⁶

What are we to do to be a Credible Movement?

How is the Messianic community today to become credible and believable? Aside from all the issues relating to theology and examination of Biblical history and Scriptural exegesis—it always comes back to who we are as Believers and what we are doing. It all comes back to our motivations and how we share our faith with others. *Are we helping people, or are we hurting them?* Are we at all concerned with human wholeness?

I do not know what you do in the morning when you wake up, but the first thing that I do is pray. I believe that prayer is extremely important when you start your day, because it is that special one-on-one time with the Heavenly Father, where we can each tell Him about our thoughts, our desires, our hurts, and ask Him questions. When I pray, I thank the Lord for what He has done in my life, the salvation I have in Yeshua, the course that He has me on, the people that He has put in my life, and the great things that I know are coming in the future. I ask God to forgive me of sin, specifically to forgive me for doubting Him and being impatient. I ask Him to convict me of areas of my life that need to change, so that I may serve Him better. I then pray for my family and my friends, and whatever situations they are facing. I pray especially for my

³⁶ This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 16, "Ephesians 4:29: How Are Messianics to Properly Communicate?"

Messianic friends my own age, because they face the exact same problems I face, and have the same unanswered life questions that I have. As I conclude my prayers, I pray for myself. I let my requests be made known to God. I ask the Father to continue to mold me into a man of principle and spiritual integrity, who can continue to perform the tasks that He has for me, and so that I can lead by a positive example. I have many unanswered life questions that are not of a theological nature. But, I have the internal spiritual assurance that as I abide in His service, these questions will be answered, and they will be answered properly by Him and in their appropriate time. *Faith is all about things expected and hoped for that cannot be seen (Hebrews 11:1)*. Yet in order for these questions to be answered, I cannot be selfish, and in ministry I have to be in a position where I am always helping others.

I do not know what other Messianic Bible teachers do in the morning. I share this with you to show you that I am a human being like any other. I have faults and weaknesses. In spite of these faults and weaknesses, I pray every day that the Lord would give me the desire to have honorable intentions, and that these honorable intentions would be evident in all that I do. I have no interest in fleeing the flock or promoting myself. My only agenda is to be as Scripturally sound as possible. I want people to draw closer to the Lord and be more like Yeshua. I want people to experience the blessings that I have partaken of through becoming Messianic and Torah obedient.

Having proper motivations will be the ultimate test of whether or not the Messianic movement is credible or non-credible. If Yeshua is not at the focus of what we are doing, then what we are doing will fail—*and rightfully so!* I do not know if those who have brought error and discord into the camp are true Believers, and thankfully it is not my job to find out. But I can say that there are teachings circulating around here and there, which are causing significant damage both inside and outside our ranks, and it needs to stop.

We need to be taken seriously and get beyond some of the childish games being played. We need to allow proper Biblical scholarship and handling of Biblical history to prevail. We need to affirm the Divinity of Yeshua, the inspiration of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, and treat those in today's evangelical Christianity with respect, so that they may be drawn to the truth. We need to be humble servants of the Lord, and always be asking Him how we can help others. As the Apostle Paul admonished his friend Timothy, "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). Each one of us has some kind of important labor to perform in the Kingdom of God—**so let us perform it with skill, precision, and excellence!**