

# Christian Scholars

## Why does today's Messianic movement generally frown on the works of Christian Biblical scholarship?

Today's Messianic movement can have a significant challenge when it comes to considering the theological contributions made by Christian Biblical scholarship. The reasons for this are varied and complex, but a major factor, among others, relates to perceived Christian animosity toward the Torah. It is very true that many Christian theologians have a negative and pessimistic attitude when it comes to the Torah or Law of Moses and how it is talked about in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament). But this is certainly not all Christian theologians, and theological works and commentaries from the past thirty to fifty years (1960s-present) have become increasingly more Jewish-sensitive and cognizant of Jewish theological views of Scripture. The problem with this is not that there are theologians who are writing commentaries with more Jewish opinions in mind; it is that your average pastor and/or layperson is unaware or uninformed of these resources.

Ignorance of knowing about important trends such as the New Perspective in Pauline studies—a renaissance of understanding Paul as a First Century rabbi—even carries over into the Messianic movement. While it is true that New Perspective advocates are not going to teach that today's Christians should follow the Torah, approaching its importance as Messianics do, they will teach that Paul had a much more moderate view on the Torah than is perceived by much of today's Christianity. This is certainly a step in the right direction! The rise of so-called "Karaites" interpretations of the Torah in the independent Hebrew Roots movement comes as a direct result of not recognizing and interpreting Paul as a First Century Pharisee—something that many Christian theologians are beginning to recognize.

One of the things that Messianics today are often not aware of is the fact that Jewish Biblical scholarship—which often is consulted by Messianic teachers—is **largely polarized between the extreme-Right and extreme-Left**. If one reads the Orthodox Jewish *ArtScroll Chumash*, and then compares it to the *Jewish Study Bible*, he or she will see two largely different points of view on an issue. One will advocate that Moses wrote every single letter of the Torah, and then the other will tell you that Moses may not have existed. One will advocate that the Israelites' conquest of Canaan included more than is mentioned in the Biblical text, and the other will say that it never took place. Consequently, many Messianics today will only examine Orthodox and/or Chassidic Jewish opinions on certain subjects that often disregard ancient history and criticism from skeptics.

Conservative, evangelical Protestant scholars often compose the middle position between the Right and the Left on these issues. While affirming the historicity of a key event like the Exodus, evangelicals are willing to place the Exodus in the context of Ancient Egypt. Evangelicals are willing to engage with liberal criticism, and place a much higher value on historical and linguistic studies of the Scriptures than most in the Orthodox Jewish community. Interestingly enough, there are more Christian commentaries on the books of the Torah than there are Jewish commentaries. Casting these aside as though they have no value is ill-advised in a movement that will have to increasingly deal with more criticism against the Scriptures—particularly the Torah or Pentateuch because of the "modern age" in which we live. Furthermore, these same commentaries will point out Messianic symbolism that is fulfilled in the life of Yeshua, whereas most Jewish commentaries—if not ignoring them—will discredit the life of Yeshua.

Our ongoing challenge as the Messianic community and our own Biblical scholarship relates to how we can incorporate the best of Jewish and Protestant scholarship and make it our own. We have a shared theological heritage with both the Synagogue *and* the Church. We cannot disregard either one, but have to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of both. Doing this properly will admittedly take time.