

OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries
and MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS



JULY 2023

THE REAL WORLD

Why Does the Messianic Movement Not Engage?

OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries
and MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS

Cover imagery: Louis Maniquet / Unsplash

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

*Outreach Israel Ministries
and Messianic Apologetics*

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts

All Believers in Israel's Messiah are to be regarded as a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to respect one another in mutual love as brothers and sisters, and are to work together for the salvation of the Jewish people and return of Israel's Messiah.

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be studied and heeded by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the Believers after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

For a fuller Statement of Faith, consult the OIM website

Outreach Israel News is the monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries, a non-profit organization with an emphasis on reaching, teaching, and encouraging the Messianic community. Subscription to **Outreach Israel News** is without cost and supported only by donation.

Members of the Board:

Mark Huey
Margaret McKee Huey
Mark and Lynn Davis
Heather Wood
Lionel and Lori Stuber
John McKee
Jane McKee

Mark Huey
director

Margaret McKee Huey
office manager

J.K. McKee
Messianic Apologetics

Taylor and Maggie Willetts

Outreach Israel Ministries
P.O. Box 516
McKinney, TX 75070

Phone: (407) 933-2002

Web: outreachisrael.net / outreachisrael.blog
messianicapologetics.net / messianicapologetics.blog

© 2023 Outreach Israel Ministries
OIM is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational ministry

OIM UPDATE

July 2023

J.K. McKee

It is an uncomfortable and inconvenient reality, that apologetics has to deal with many topics which many would prefer not to have to engage with, in any significant way. The classic Bible passage, detailing the importance of apologetics, is 1 Peter 3:15: "but sanctify Messiah as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope

that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (NASU). **There is to be a proper way to communicate and defend Biblical truth.** At the same time, though, while apologetics involves defense of the faith, it hardly involves just maintaining the status quo. Within apologetics, new information and perspectives do have to frequently be accounted for—and with that, various theologies or beliefs may have to be adjusted.

A significant, hypothetical question I have been asking myself over the past several months, has been: **If our family had been called into evangelical Church ministry, and not Messianic ministry, what would be different?** Having now served in full-time Messianic ministry and theology for the past twenty years, the timing cannot be coincidental, as two decades is a long time. The one clear, consistent answer I have received in my spirit to this question, has simply been: **You would have had to deal with issues of the real world, far more frequently than the Messianic movement presently chooses to.** A great number of those uncomfortable and inconvenient topics, which many in the Messianic community choose to put aside "for another day," could *never* have been avoided or put aside.

It hardly takes a theologian or scholar to recognize that the world in which we live is not a nice place. There are many people who are suffering physically and economically, and all of us are affected in some (substantial) way by the influence of sin and God-lessness. There are billions of people who reject the Holy Bible as the Word of God, and they often have their reasons for rejecting those who declare it. For sure, there are many people in today's

THE REAL WORLD

Why Does the Messianic
Movement Not Engage?

Messianic community who recognize the maladies of the age, but in my ministry experience, an insufficient number of Messianic people engage with the real world and its issues. To be sure, the Messianic movement is still an emerging and developing move of the Holy Spirit, and the Lord's timing is not our timing for its emergence. Yet, if we believe that in the Last Days, Israel will come to be the head and not the tail of the operation (Deuteronomy 28:13), then we have to consciously recognize a number of the things taking place in our time *in the real world*. This is especially true, given how social media is seeing progressive and hyper-liberal perspectives on God and the Bible, have a much greater hearing and influence.

What has your Messianic experience been?

Each one of us has had a different Messianic experience, in a different part of the world. My Messianic experience, since 1995 to the present, comes from someone originally raised in a North American evangelical Protestant environment, later called into the Messianic movement. I have been reluctant to admit this until now, but I have frequently compared and contrasted my evangelical experience to my ongoing Messianic experience. There are things which I have given up from an established Protestant tradition, to join into a Messianic movement which has not always known what it is going to emerge into in the future. There still remain things which I experienced in evangelicalism, going back to my late father's Sunday school class in the 1980s, which I have yet to see manifest themselves in the Messianic community. While I fully affirm that the Messianic movement is the end-time move of God, and that it has some significant work to achieve for the Kingdom in the future—**too much of the Messianic movement has a very difficult time dealing with the real world, and issues of modernity and post-modernity**. In fact, in my experience at least, I have witnessed much of the Messianic movement purposefully go out of its way to avoid dealing with matters of the real world.

I sincerely hope I am entirely wrong in my assessment, and that your experience in terms of Messianic people and the real world is entirely different. Yet, I suspect that when some major, contemporary issue has arisen in your Messianic congregation or fellowship, a less-than-mature approach was more likely to be witnessed, than a cool and rational approach. For years, I grew up hearing the example of the Issacharites appealed to: "men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32, NASU) or "those who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (NRSV). Each of us within the Messianic community was supposed to be paying attention to things in our larger world—both spiritual and sociological—and be ably ready to deal with challenges when encountering them. Instead, when encountering matters of progressive spirituality or

critical theology, I have witnessed far too many Messianic people respond back with very fundamentalist and overly-simplistic approaches. Alternatively, rather than wanting to conduct some lengthy and difficult Bible studies—there have been emotional appeals for a greater outpouring of God’s Spirit, and with it some highly subjective experiences at that.

In the tenor of 1 Chronicles 12:32, “know how to interpret the signs of the times to determine what Israel should do” (TLV), I have been seeking the Lord over the past several months, asking Him to show me why too much of the Messianic movement is under-prepared to deal with matters of the real world. *I have twenty years of full-time Messianic ministry experience behind me.* And while I absolutely believe that we can indeed solve some of the systemic challenges—it is nevertheless quite uncomfortable to be honest with ourselves in having to identify them. They affect Jewish Believers who have received Yeshua into their lives, and have had to make significant life changes and adjustments as a result. And, they affect the non-Jewish Believers called by God into this movement, at the present phase of development, and how they have adapted to being involved with it. While no one can or should downplay how there are unique difficulties faced by people who are involved in today’s Messianic movement (which are not necessarily faced by those in the wider Body of Messiah), it is also true that our faith community has some of its own unique, homespun difficulties.

1. **Today’s generation of Messianic Jewish Believers has faced significant rejection and difficulty in acknowledging Yeshua has Israel’s Messiah.** Today’s Jewish Believers rightfully have a burden for the salvation of their non-believing Jewish family, and the greater Jewish community. Yet, the significant majority of such a Jewish community is hyper-liberal and progressive. For some reason or another, while still dealing with the trauma of rejection from non-believing Jewish family and friends, many Messianic Jewish Believers have used sorting through matters of their Messianic Jewish identity as a convenient excuse to ignore and disregard many difficult issues pertaining to Biblical reliability and modernity/post-modernity. And sadly, by often reverting to many fundamentalist Christian approaches to a number of issues, they actually deter the Messianic movement’s relevance to the Jewish community.
2. **Many non-Jewish Believers in today’s Messianic movement have experienced a major paradigm shift, by embracing a Torah foundation for their faith.** In interacting with Messianic Jewish Believers on a regular basis, and associating with things associated with Israel and Judaism, many of their former pas-

tors, Sunday school teachers, Christian friends, and even extended family members, have thought that they have gone insane. To be sure, following the call to be a part of the Messianic movement as a non-Jewish Believer, is not easy. But one's Torah study cannot and must not result in a fundamentalist approach to modernity/post-modernity being permitted, either. There are difficult matters of Biblical reliability to be reviewed, which a straightforward English reading of the text is not going to answer.

I believe the Lord has shown me that many people, across the Messianic spectrum, have used the difficulties and rejections they have faced, as an excuse not to confront the matters of the real world—which are increasing in intensity as I write this article. I do sincerely hope I am wrong! But to be perfectly honest, if your Messianic rabbi, congregational leader, or elder board went on a scouting trip to a local Jewish synagogue or Protestant church—simply attending the main service and whatever classes were being held—what would the response be to the questions and issues being talked about? I would dare say that many of the issues and subjects being addressed would be completely different than what was being talked about at your Messianic congregation's *Shabbat* service or Torah study. And, many of the issues discussed at such a local synagogue or church would be very much involved with the matters of the real world. You may quickly see that much of the Messianic movement sits in a bubble of its own making—something which cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely, if we are indeed to be the end-time move of God.

What was the vocation of Ancient Israel?

In much of the contemporary Messianic movement, assessing the original vocation of Ancient Israel can sometimes get mired in debates over the uniqueness and distinction of today's Jewish people—often in an effort to combat replacement theology or supersessionism. That today's Jewish people, and Messianic Jewish Believers in particular, have a highly valued, special place, and unique purpose in the intentions of God, should certainly be acknowledged. For centuries, much of historic Christianity has been in gross error at declaring that Jewish people who come to faith in Yeshua (Jesus) as Messiah, need to give up on their Jewish heritage, and see themselves assimilated away into the nations. And in wanting to reassert the importance of being a Believer in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel, and maintaining a noticeable level of Jewish distinction, it should hardly be a surprise why this continues to be something witnessed in various levels of development and progress in the lives of Messianic Jewish people. Still, it does need to be recognized

that on a macro level, the original vocation and calling of Ancient Israel, is something which affects all followers of the Messiah of Israel, and not just Messianic Jewish Believers.

What was the original, vocational calling upon Ancient Israel? In Deuteronomy 7:6, the Lord decree, "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (NASU). Concurrent with this, Exodus 19:5-6 asserts, "'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel" (NASU). While often approached Messianically, Isaiah 42:6 is seen to round out the vocational calling of Ancient Israel as a light to the nations: "I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations" (NASU).

The statements of Deuteronomy 7:6; Exodus 19:5-6; and Isaiah 42:6 all surround the priestly calling of Ancient Israel, to testify of the One God of Israel's goodness and love to the nations of the world at large. No matter what any human being might say, this vocation is to be rightly regarded as something which can never be taken away from the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29, NASU). Yet, because of their integration into the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) or Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) via Messiah faith, Believers from the nations do get to be co-participants in the vocation of being a light to the world. Written to a mixed audience of First Century Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, the Apostle Peter indicates how all Messiah followers are to be co-participants in the priestly vocation of proclaiming the goodness of Israel's God and Messiah to a world in darkness:

"But you are A CHOSEN RACE [Isaiah 43:20, LXX; Deuteronomy 7:6; 10:15], A royal PRIESTHOOD [Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 61:6], A HOLY NATION [Exodus 19:6], A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION [Isaiah 43:21, LXX; Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 4:20; 7:6; 14:2], so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY [Hosea 2:23]" (1 Peter 2:9-10, NASU).

The main issue communicated to Bible readers is that Israel, and by extension all who are consciously connected to Israel, is to bear the goodness of Israel's God to a hurting world. Non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah are

especially to be vessels of grace to Jewish people who need to know Him, "because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy" (Romans 11:31, NASU). Within the redemption of Israel proper, it plays a very distinct salvation-historical trajectory (Romans 11:26-27ff). The reestablishment of the State of Israel in 1948 (Isaiah 66:8), the salvation of the Jewish people, and restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), are noticeably different than the salvation of people from the nations generally—**because it is directly connected to the return of the Messiah and His reign from Jerusalem over Planet Earth.**

How often have we been hearing about our collective participation in these goals? I think it is fair to deduce that much, of the salvation historical importance of the Messianic movement, has been lost on too many of us, in recent days. This is quite sad, given the world dramas of the past three to four years.

Does it not bother us, that a majority of today's Messianic assemblies, are likely attracting more fundamentalist Christians, than anyone else? In such a demographic pool, it is quite easy to focus more on teaching non-Jewish Believers about their faith heritage in the Scriptures of Israel—than on being better equipped to perform the original Messianic mission of Jewish outreach and evangelism. In fact, within such a demographic pool, it is frequently witnessed that issues of importance to much of the contemporary Jewish community and people, do not get discussed. Even more mind boggling, is how within such a demographic pool, many of today's Messianic congregations cannot easily attract evangelical Protestants, from more mainline denominational settings. (Families like mine are few and far between, in many cases.) And, these are actually the people who tend to have the resources which can take the Messianic movement to the next proverbial "level"!

The hard truth is that in order for any of us to best accomplish the missional calling of being a light to our darkened world, we have to be willing to engage with the real world. The Holy Scriptures are replete with examples of the God of Israel and His people not only engaging with the world, but with taking the message of God and being subversive to the ideas, philosophies, and false gods of the world. A further examination of the Exodus 15 *shirat ha'yam* or Song of the Sea, reveals how specific Semitic terms were taken up to directly confront concepts appearing in the Canaanite Baal Cycle. (For a further discussion, consult this writer's article, "**The Song of Moses and God's Mission for His People.**") In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul, at the Areopagus in Athens, is seen debating philosophy with the Epicureans and the Stoics, emphasizing the reality of the resurrection.

A huge part of accomplishing the priestly vocation of being a light to the nations of Planet Earth at large—and indeed the many lost souls of the Jewish

community—is being able to discuss real world issues. How often do we ask our Eternal God to give us not only transformed hearts, but transformed minds, so that we might deal with the questions and concerns of the real world?

Tough Questions

Hebrews 3:13 admonishes, “But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (NASU). The main point taken, is that growth in faith is a continuing process—and along with this, the war against the forces of sin and darkness is also ongoing. If a man or woman does not take notice of what it means to live “today,” then will the influence of sin and God-lessness get the better of them? By extension, if the people of God, or Body of Messiah, does not address the issues and questions being raised by the world around it—will it be at all able to perform its priestly vocation, serving as a representative of the One God of Israel? Jewish history, for certain, is replete with examples of how the Rabbis have had to address many ideological and philosophical threats posed by the wider world, in order to maintain the integrity of the Torah and Jewish people. Today’s Messianic movement, inheritors of much of that tradition, should not be afraid to discuss some of the big, contemporary questions being posed right now to persons of faith.

The most significant tension which comes, from being involved in Messianic-focused apologetics, originates from what I consider to be one of the most logical things we need to integrate as a faith community: **topical parity with the institutional Synagogue and Church (in North America)**. Any issue which can be discussed at a Reform or Conservative Jewish synagogue, or any mainstream Protestant church, should be able to be discussed in any Messianic congregation or fellowship. *I do not see how anyone would, or could, consider this to be unreasonable*. Today’s Messianic movement should be operating via the Jewish principle of **any question can be asked**. Likewise, today’s Messianic movement should be operating via the Protestant principle of how **God has given human beings reasoning skills to process difficult matters from the Bible**.

How difficult is it to have parity? What are some of the issues, which doubtlessly get discussed and sorted through—at most synagogues and churches—which far too much of today’s Messianic community, can demonstrate various (high) levels of immaturity?

To the Messianic movement’s **great credit**, the main controversy presently splitting a wide number of Protestant denominations, is something which has never split our community. I do not see the Messianic movement ever splitting over homosexual ordination issues. I commend the various Mes-

sianic leaders and rabbis I know and interact with, for standing in favor of traditional marriage (one man and one woman) and against the LGBTQ+ agenda.

Yet at the same time, while affirming Biblical truths regarding sexuality, how many of us attend congregations or Bible studies, where we can best understand and respond to some of the arguments posed by progressive theology? It is frequently argued, for example, that Leviticus 18; Romans 1; and 1 Corinthians 6 only forbid forced homosexual penetration and/or pedasty, or ancient homosexual prostitution; progressives do not argue that two men or two women in a committed relationship is being condemned. While we would likely counter this with a huge bevy of ancient Jewish and classical materials, sorting through ancient terms and sentiments—theology has to give way to actual ministry. What would your congregation do if two homosexual men were holding hands during a worship service? Would they be asked to leave, when a heterosexual couple in known fornication might not be asked to leave? How do you help a young man or young woman, who has biological attraction to a member of the same-sex, but knows it is wrong? Honestly, much of the Messianic movement I have interacted with over the years, has wanted to avoid some of these on-the-ground questions—**which I would had to have actively dealt with, if the Lord had made me an evangelical pastor and not a Messianic Teacher.**

I think that far too many of the Messianic people I know, if they encountered a gay couple holding hands during their *Shabbat* service (a couple not making a scene, engaged in rabid physical passion), would be inclined to ask them to leave. But if this is the preference of a Messianic congregation's leadership, then what does it say about the mission of God? Are not sinners supposed to be welcome to an assembly, so that they might encounter the goodness and grace of the One God of Israel, and come to repentance in Messiah Yeshua? What if a homosexual couple attending your congregation, indeed was Jewish? What would that say about your understanding of the Messianic mission of Jewish outreach and evangelism?

Many I know are of the opinion that today's Messianic movement, Jewish and non-Jewish Believers as one in Israel's Messiah, is repeating a First Century experience. The Roman Empire was also a part of the First Century!

The Real World

While I have had many frustrations over the years, in wanting to see our collective Messianic culture move to some parity with the Synagogue and Church—it is not as though all hope is lost! Things are definitely beginning to shift. While I would have liked to see various discussions take place five to ten years ago, some of the classic evangelical discussions over Genesis 1-11

perspectives, and women in ministry, have started to take place within sectors of the Messianic movement, as younger leaders emerge onto the scene. (Be sure to watch this writer's video from 12 July, 2023, "**Ask the Messianic Teacher: Women in Ministry.**") Some people are starting to realize that we need to have more open discussions on non-salvation issues, lest younger people get frustrated with some older leaders, too inflexible and set in their ways, and leave the Messianic community for places where their concerns will be taken more seriously.

Earlier this month, our ministry and family attended the Messiah 2023 conference in Grantham, PA. (I trust that some of you saw the 53 McKee Moment Shorts posted on our YouTube channel throughout the conference.) This was an excellent time for me to get a good feel for the pulse of much of the Messianic movement. By far, my best interactions during the conference, were talking to two older Messianic Jewish rabbis from Upstate New York. They were very appreciative of me for addressing issues of Woke, Deconstruction, Ex-vangelical, and Affirming. I was told how throughout the past several decades of Messianic Judaism, leaders have often stressed that they need to stay away from controversial issues. Yet, given how these two rabbis were right in the thick of all of the hyper-progressive matters, in their geographic region—their congregations have no choice now, but to stand strong and bold for Biblical truth! *They have to engage with the real world.* I had to tell them that in North Texas, too many of the Messianic people I know are in a conservative bubble, hoping that Wokeism will just blow over. I also told them that I do not live in an idealistic world, where all endings are happy endings—but instead where the presence of sin and God-lessness needs to be confronted, and inconvenient and uncomfortable topics need to be discussed.

In too much of my experience, over the past twenty years, far too many Messianic people think that they are somehow entitled to dismiss with the matters of the real world, acting like insecure fundamentalists. And in so doing, the Messianic community has been attracting Christian fundamentalists, more than anyone else—and matters of Jewish outreach and evangelism, and our long-term purpose, have too often being overlooked. We have not been fulfilling the priestly calling upon our faith community, the way we should have. Today, however, with substantial social and religious changes taking place—we now have an opportunity to begin our own transition from a *Messianic movement*, into a *Messianic force* for holiness and righteousness. With many, the necessary changes and adjustments to our spiritual and theological culture, will be very painful. Others, who have kept their mouth shut for many years, will need to lovingly begin to explain why they have been careful with their words. All of us need to recognize the significant potential we possess as part of the Messianic movement, and see that our faith community remains alive and well up to the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah!