

FAQ

FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES (2000-2018)

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MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Frequently Asked Questions

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: *Complete Jewish Bible* (1998)
CJSB: *Complete Jewish Study Bible* (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: *English Standard Version* (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: *Greek New Testament*
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: *New Jerusalem Bible-Koren* (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: *King James Version*
Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: *Septuagint*
m. Mishnah
MT: *Masoretic Text*
NASB: *New American Standard Bible* (1977)
NASU: *New American Standard Update* (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: *New English Bible* (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: *New International Version* (1984)
NJB: *New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic* (1985)
NJSB: *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1999)
NKJV: *New King James Version* (1982)
NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version* (1989)
NLT: *New Living Translation* (1996)
NT: *New Testament*
OT: *Old Testament*
REB: *Revised English Bible* (1989)
RSV: *Revised Standard Version* (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (2014)
TNIV: *Today's New International Version* (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: *United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition*
v(s). *verse(s)*
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: *Latin Vulgate*
YLT: *Young's Literal Translation* (1862/1898)
WMB: *World Messianic Bible* (2020)

Rabbi, Title

Why are there so many leaders in the Messianic movement who call themselves “rabbi”? Yeshua explicitly forbade this in Matthew 23:8.

Yeshua’s overall words in Matthew ch. 23, have certainly provoked a wide number of emotional responses, from people all across the Messianic spectrum. This especially pertains to the issue of authority and respect to be afforded to the ancient Pharisees, and by extension various Jewish authorities today. Within the wider context of Matthew 22:23-23:36, it is fair for readers to recognize a wide level of theological agreement which Yeshua had with the Pharisees, particularly in terms of the doctrine of resurrection (Matthew 22:23-32), and that Yeshua recognized a legitimate role of leadership which the Pharisees had. Yeshua also, though, warned His followers not to emulate their behavior and attitudes.¹

Many leaders in contemporary Messianic Judaism, obviously in conjunction with their non-Messianic Jewish counterparts, do go by the title of “rabbi,” as opposed to customary Protestant Christian titles like “pastor” or “reverend.” Yeshua’s word of Matthew 23:6-10 has been commonly invoked, by many people, when encountering Messianic leaders who refer to themselves as “Rabbi XYZ”:

“They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Messiah” (Matthew 23:6-10, NASU).

Yeshua’s word, “you are not to let yourselves be called ‘Rabbi’” (CJSB), has been widely and unfairly cast at many diligently serving and sincere Messianic Jewish leaders, who widely use the title “rabbi” as an alternative to “pastor.”

Aside from some of the specific context issues to be considered regarding Matthew 23:6-10, is how most individuals who see Yeshua’s word as being a uniform moratorium on using the title “rabbi”—**have not made any attempt to insist that there be a similar moratorium on calling human fathers by the title “father.”** Yeshua did say after all, “do not call anyone on earth ‘Father’” (CJSB).

There is little doubting how many of the First Century Pharisaical leaders, whose hypocrisy Yeshua was describing, made being called *rabbi* an intense source of personal pride, arrogance, and condescension: “they love being greeted deferentially in the marketplaces and being called ‘Rabbi’” (Matthew 23:7, CJSB). Yeshua’s answer to this was not just “do not be called Rabbi,” but also, “for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers” (Matthew 23:8, NASU). This One is easily recognized to be God the Father and/or Yeshua Himself. And, there is no doubting from any survey of the Gospels, that Yeshua did go by the title “rabbi.”

To this Yeshua further stated, “Do not call *anyone* on earth your father,” which was specified to mean, “for One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Matthew 23:9, NASU). If one holds to a overly-literal meaning of Matthew 23:8, then one’s Earthly fathers, even as a legitimate parent, should never be called “father,” and the title “mother” should likewise be considered off limits. But again, there has been no upswell by any Christian person, looking with some disdain at Messianic Jewish leaders employing the title “rabbi,” to demand that people not call their parents by terms like “father” or “mother.”

¹ Consult the author’s article on Matthew 23:2-3, “Who Sits in the Seat of Moses?” (appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*).

Yeshua's words about neither being called "rabbi" or "father," must have related to the position of significance which many in His First Century audience often ascribed to those who served in such capacities. Many people in religious history have looked to human teachers, "rabbis," as being the ultimate authority from which to receive instruction. Obviously, this is wrong, as the only Ultimate Teacher is the Lord Himself. Similarly—and this is certainly borne out in much of Jewish history—the students of many rabbis may be seen to have come to think of their teachers as being a sort of "father," not only superior to their natural parent, but also in many ways superior to God. *Yeshua obviously wanted this sort of misunderstanding to be corrected.* There is only One Ultimate Leader for the assembly: the Messiah alone (Matthew 23:10).

Matthew 23:8 tends to be quoted by Christian critics of the Messianic movement isolated, with only a demand for Messianic Jewish leaders to not be called "rabbi"—without a similar demand for Earthly fathers to never be called "father," or even the term "leader" to never be used (Matthew 23:9, 10). Recognizing this, it is fair to deduce that Yeshua's intention concerned the arrogance of those allowing themselves to be called "rabbi" and thinking that they had authority at the level of, or superior to, God. Such individuals were to be dismissed, with the attention of Messiah followers focused exclusively on the Lord. Yeshua wanted His disciples and followers to be especially focused on the needs of service of one to another (Matthew 23:11-12), which those presumed "rabbis," "fathers," and "leaders" of Matthew 23:8-10 were not doing. Yeshua did not issue a blanket prohibition on religious leaders possessing the title, or occupying the office of "rabbi," any more than He issued a blanket prohibition on Earthly fathers being called "father."

For the future, today's Messianic community will witness many, many people say—either directly to a leader, or at least under their breath—"*call no man rabbi...*" without a greater consideration for the wider context of statements made by the Messiah. While there will always be those in leadership, whether they call themselves "rabbi" or not, who will have issues with hypocrisy and arrogance—we should not think that Yeshua was forbidding contemporary Messianic Jewish leaders from possessing the title "rabbi." Yet at the same time, it is rather safe to conclude that a significant number of the Messianic Jewish leaders who go by the title "rabbi," who might be meek and able servants of the Lord, do not possess the training or credentials to really possess or employ this title. In his short article, "The Title 'Messianic Rabbi' Carries Heavy Expectations," Sean Emslie makes some valid observations:

"[An] important issue of 'Messianic rabbis' is the majority of 'Messianic rabbis' in our movement who are using this title without having taken a rigorous course of study in Torah, Rabbinics, Hebrew and Jewish studies.

"In the larger Jewish world, the training for the rabbinate involves many years of study—either a graduate level of study in Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism or in Orthodox Judaism—and a lifetime of study capped by intense Talmudic studies in yeshiva. With this rigor comes the title of 'rabbi.' The need to make our congregational leaders of the future knowledgeable in the Bible, in Hebrew and in Jewish studies is not an option but a mandate....

"If our 'rabbis' are merely those individuals who self-apply the title or those who receive ordination without a solid background in Hebrew, Rabbinics, Torah and Jewish studies, then we are misusing a title with great meaning in the Jewish world and we are also allowing for the Messianic community to be open to disrespect before the larger Jewish world..."²

The sad truth is that a wide number of Messianic Jewish congregational leaders, who go by the title "rabbi," while not possessing the type of training or credentials to go by this title in Conservative or Reform Judaism—do not often have the minimum training or credentials required of an evangelical Protestant pastor in a major denomination. And Emslie did leave out more important disciplines which Messianic "rabbis" must possess, including knowledge of: Ancient Near Eastern and classical history, Christian history, and Greek language studies.

² Sean Emslie. (2013). *The Title 'Messianic Rabbi' Carries Heavy Expectations*. *Charisma Magazine*. Retrieved 29 May, 2013, from <<http://charismamag.com>>.