

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)

Torah, command not to “Add to”

In Deuteronomy 4:2 it is directed not to add commandments to those of the Torah. But in Judaism and much of the Messianic movement today, we have many people who follow traditions of men some claim are “commanded,” or at least authorized by God. I am confused.

Why do many—especially various non-Jewish people within the Messianic sphere of influence—think that they can widely reject a majority of Jewish interpretations of the Torah, and associated tradition?

Much of what one encounters in the views of many in today’s Hebrew Roots movement, is a great deal of significance given to a passage of the Torah like Deuteronomy 4:2. Moses told the Ancient Israelites, “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (NASU). The primary emphasis of this direction, more than anything else, was how God Himself was the only One who had the authority tell the people of Israel what to do and not to do. This was most serious given the overall message of Deuteronomy opposing idolatry and sexual immorality in the Promised Land, which the people were preparing to enter.¹ A majority of those in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, also think that Deuteronomy 4:2 quantitatively rules out **any** Jewish tradition from being recognized as a legitimate expression of Torah observance.

However, if one were to hold to a strict interpretation of Deuteronomy 4:2, then this likely means that when situations arise which require the faith community to make judgments on various issues or circumstances which are not directly or indirectly addressed in the Torah, or any part of Scripture—that *any decision* could possibly be acceptable. Among Hebrew Roots groups, this has led to many interpretations of the Torah which are foreign to mainline Judaism, and can be quite offensive to the Jewish community. It can lead to everyone doing what he or she feels is right (cf. Judges 17:6; 21:25), with confusion about what to do often abounding. (Even various evangelical Protestants on the outside wonder about what they witness.)

It can be irresponsible to strongly assert that traditions are not at all commanded by God, when the Torah itself later directed that if a matter arose within Israel, that His people were to follow the rulings of the priests and judges who He had recognized as occupying positions of authority:

“If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is *in office* in those days, and you shall inquire *of them* and they will declare to you the verdict in the case. You shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the LORD chooses; **and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left**” (Deuteronomy 17:8-11, NASU).

The clause of interest is *al-pi ha’Torah*, “According to the tenor of the law” (YLT),² which was given to those needing a definite judgment issued regarding a matter.

¹ Consult the author’s article “The Message of Deuteronomy” (appearing in the *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper*).

² “according to the mouth of the law” (LITV); “According to the sentence of the law” (KJV).

Some would make the argument that *every, or a majority, of Rabbinical rulings* made in Orthodox Judaism today need to be considered authoritative by the Messianic community—but this definitely goes too far. At the same time, though, Deuteronomy 17:11 does give a wide degree of authority to those in religious leadership which needs to be considered—as at least with what we should consider to be a **consultative authority**. Many within today’s Messianic Judaism believe that its Torah observance should parallel the major *halachic* matters which bind the broad Jewish community together (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform). This would include when it celebrates the appointed times, including *Chanukah* and *Purim*, how one might dress in a congregational environment, how one generally eats kosher, and other traditions which are beneficial to the community. Of course, there is internal variance witnessed in Messianic Judaism, just as there is variance among Jewish sects today.

If a person in the Hebrew Roots movement has never been exposed to Messianic Judaism, or if someone is naturally predisposed to “do his own thing” (or even worse, “buck the system”) and not respect an established order—then it should not be surprising to see a strong impetus to develop applications of the Torah broadly foreign to Judaism.

The instruction in Deuteronomy 17:11 was that God’s people were to “Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left” (NIV). We should not believe that what is implied here is a blind obedience to the ancient rulings left by all of the Sages and Rabbis of Judaism. Messianic Believers have to ultimately evaluate their rulings against the canonical Word of God, to see if something aligns with the spirit of the Word—as most major rulings relate to ethical value judgments the Scriptures may not directly address. With all things, we have to see whether it parallels God’s written Word, and enhances our relationship and walk with Yeshua. There are clearly things which have come down through history which can deter our walk with Him, but then there are many things which can enhance it. Each of us must use proper discernment and consideration.

What is perhaps most important more than anything else, is that the rulings anticipated by Deuteronomy 17:8-11 had to be made by recognized, qualified spiritual leaders of the community. The Torah was designed to be lived out in a community, as opposed to an exclusive “one-on-one” basis between oneself and God. A prime example of this witnessed today, is how when you see kosher-for-Passover food items, they often say “consult your rabbi” on the packaging. This indicates that in some way there is debate over whether or not an item is kosher for Passover, and that the ultimate determination should go to your local rabbi, who can evaluate what your personal or family circumstances are.

This can be a difficult concept for many who come from evangelical Protestant backgrounds to process, because many are often not used to their pastor making “rulings” on what Believers should do or not do concerning God’s commandments. Many non-Jewish Believers are taught in church that one relationship with God is just an individual one, between a person and Him. While this is *ultimately* true, each of us is also in covenant with other members of the faith community. Just like many probably went to a pastor for spiritual guidance, prayer, counseling, or just help regarding an issue, and took his advice and followed it—so can the rulings of the Rabbis apply. Just as we would expect a pastor to be guided by the Lord and for his words to carry authoritative weight, so can the rulings of the Rabbis.

Of course, as with all things, we should never follow the opinions of a Christian pastor blindly, nor should we ever follow the rulings of the Jewish Rabbis blindly, either. We have to test everything against God’s Word, to make sure that it aligns with the character of our Heavenly Father, and we have to see if it is something which enhances our walk with Him, rather than takes us away from Him. More than anything else, we have to deal with things on a case-by-case basis, and recognize the fact that there can be some “grey” when it comes to interpretation and application. In today’s Messianic community, hopefully we can find a proper balance between Scripture and tradition, where neither is considered unimportant. We should also pray to have good local Messianic leaders be raised up by the Lord, who can issue sound decisions for their own communities and the issues they face (cf. Matthew 16:19).