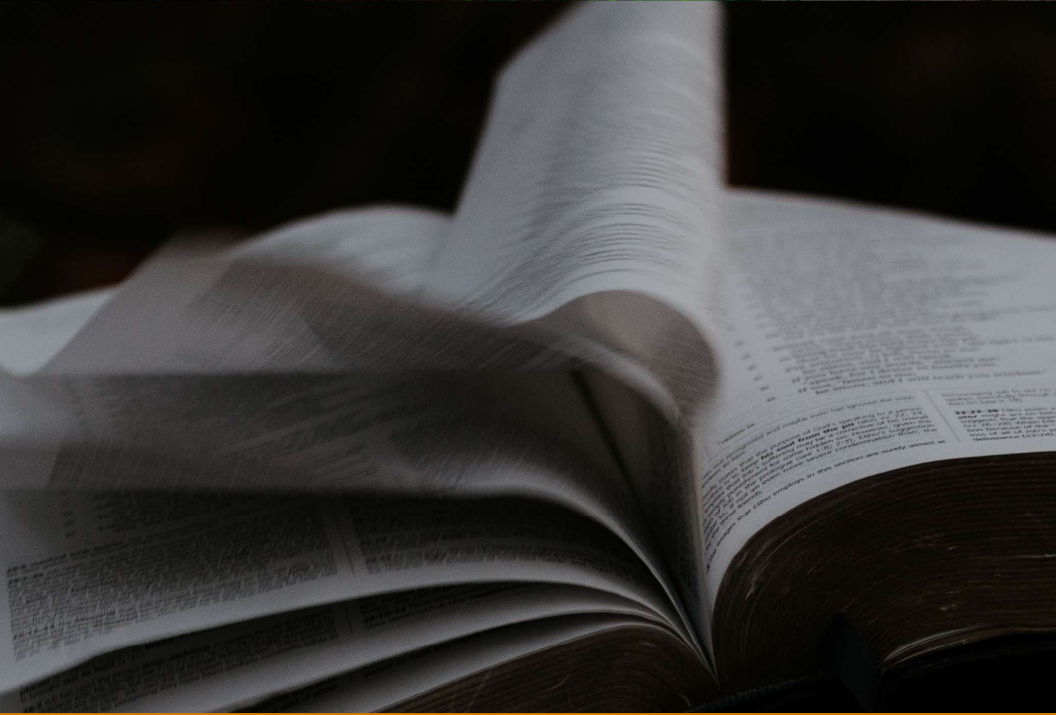




OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries
and MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS



NOVEMBER 2023
APPROACHING SCRIPTURE
AS A WARNING

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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.

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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

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OIM UPDATE

November 2023

J.K. McKee

As men and women of faith, all of us should have a profound appreciation for, and indeed reverence of, the Holy Scriptures. The famed word of Psalm 119:105 exclaims, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (TLV). Also

quite important is the admonition of 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for restoration, and for training in righteousness" (TLV). Mature persons of faith look to the record of the Holy Scriptures, and encounter God's workings through history, to not only find answers to the deep meaning of human existence—but also so that they might find a word of hope, encouragement, comfort, and solace during difficult times. Each of us submits ourselves to a lifelong, detailed study of the Holy Scriptures, so that we can be *that much more effective* in our service to the Kingdom of God, during our time on Earth.

In my annual Messianic experience, usually sometime in the weeks leading up to the Fall High Holidays *and/or* in the weeks following, the Lord usually draws my attention to important theological themes and lessons, to be explored during the next year or so. We are, as I write this, less than two months from Calendar Year 2024, and with it the mid-2020s. *If you are asking yourself how we got here, you are not alone!* With this, the questions the Lord is asking us, and the lessons we are to learn, are going to get increasingly more difficult. This past Fall High Holiday season, itself looking back on my personal interactions in the larger Messianic world from 2023, I was seriously impressed regarding how **we are presently engaged in a battle for the heart and soul of the Messianic movement**. I know that in the world of apologetics, this is something you have heard me speak about before—but one of the major things I was directed to consider, on a recent episode of Messianic Insider (27 September, 2023), was how we approach the Holy Scriptures.

APPROACHING SCRIPTURE AS A WARNING

In the contemporary development of Messianic theology and spirituality, we have yet to see some of *the main controversies of Torah* really come into view. These involve matters of the Torah as given to Ancient Israel in the Ancient Near East, and original audience circumstances, which often elude today's Messianic people.

The Holy Scriptures are hardly to be approached as dull and boring history. The Holy Scriptures speak of our Creator's plan of redemption! But is there anything we have possibly missed in our reading of the Holy Scriptures as Believers, which we now need to be more conscious of than ever?

How do people read Scripture?

How have any of us been taught to read the Holy Scriptures? We know that today in 2023, there is a huge battle raging—particularly as many who were raised as conservative evangelicals, are going through deconstruction and becoming ex-vangelical. Many young people, while being raised in a conservative environment, were not adequately taught how to read the Bible, make intelligent observations about passages or even whole books—and were often presented with a version of Scripture, which only took into consideration sound-byte verses here or there. And then, when asking a Sunday school teacher or pastor about what the Bible said about an important issue facing society, a small window of cherry picked verses may have only been provided.

Many people, not only in a great deal of popular Christianity but even in much of the Messianic movement, have been taught to approach the Holy Scripture as God's love letter, written to them personally. This frequently manifests itself in persons who read the Bible from the perspective that it was written *directly to them in the Twenty-First Century*, and then from that perspective *passages in English* can often be interpreted subjectively, to fit whatever someone is possibly "feeling." The simple yet responsible rule of Bible interpretation is to (1) try to interpret a text for what it meant to its original audience first, and (2) deduce an appropriate meaning or application for today. There are many principles elucidated in the Holy Scriptures—ranging from loving God and one's neighbor, to resisting sin and temptation—which often do not require a huge amount of effort to process. But, there are many historical accounts witnessed in the Bible, terms and phrases used, and dilemmas present, where a deeper level of engagement is required.

Beyond this, as students of God's Word start to read His Word at deeper levels, important theological themes will often jump out at them. Frequently, as has been the case of many of us throughout our lives, we will read through the Word, with the specific intent of trying to search or probe a particular topic or idea. While many have been known to do this on their own—with notebook, concordance, and encyclopedia on hand—a great number of study Bibles have been produced, highlighting significant themes or concepts from the Word, and how Scripture is often relevant for a particular audience.

How do people read Scripture? What are some of the major Biblical themes you have likely tried to read in your time as a Believer? Do these possibly include: history, faith, salvation, holiness, love, marriage, sexuality, Messianic prophecy, Israel, the end-times? These are all pretty standard themes, which many of us have sought instruction about, as we have read the Word, either systematically or in devotions, and we have likely even journaled about. But there is one vitally important theme, which has often gone not only unaddressed—but unnoticed—by far too many of us in our various times of Bible reading and discipleship: **warning**. While we have all read and probed the Word for what it might tell us about faith or love, have any of us ever really probed the Word for the warning it contains?

It really is not that difficult to recognize how a major theme of the Holy Scriptures is **warning**. When we see the mistakes made by human beings, and God having to rectify and sort through the consequences of those mistakes—the Holy Scriptures record messages to His people today, of difficult lessons other people had to learn, so that those encountering them do not repeat them! As obvious as it may be, people who often commit terrible and heinous sins against the Lord and against others today, have not learned the lessons of Scripture and heeded the warning.

What happened in the wilderness...

One of the most beloved passages of the Apostolic Writings, for people across the broad Messianic movement, tends to be 1 Corinthians 10:1-11. Its opening statement affirms that the Ancient Israelites are to be regarded as the spiritual forbearers of non-Jewish Believers, every bit as much as they were the genetic forbearers of the Jewish people: "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were

all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1, NRSV). Yet, in affirming that the Ancient Israelites were the forbearers of all of the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul did not just urge them to consider the mighty acts of God demonstrated toward the Exodus generation. The Apostle Paul also urged the Corinthians to consider the significant chastisement and punishment of the Lord toward His own:

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Messiah. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, ‘THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY’ [Exodus 32:6]. Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:1-11, NASU).

I am greatly pleased, when I see my Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters, recognize non-Jewish Believers such as myself, as a fellow heir of this spiritual heritage (Ephesians 3:6). Throughout a great deal of my Messianic experience, I have seen 1 Corinthians 10:11 specifically appealed to, regarding the fact that the Torah contains important instruction for the people of God who will be living in the Last Days. Thusly, understanding the Torah’s important themes, prophecies, and directions for human living—will be vital as we get closer and closer to the Messiah’s return. *I could not agree more.* Yet I remember many years ago, as I was first getting acclimated to Bible software and using multiple versions on my screen, the personal shock I received when I saw how 1 Corinthians 10:11 was rendered in the RSV:

"Now these things happened to them as a **warning**, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11, RSV).

Here, the Greek term of interest is *tupikōs*, "by way of example, as a warning" (Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Revised Edition [Stuttgart: United Bible Societies/Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010], 187). And indeed, in Paul's writing which immediately follows, the Tanach Scriptures absolutely included warnings which the Corinthians were to take heed of—per some of their own First Century problems, involving idolatry and sexual immorality, among other things:

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say" (1 Corinthians 10:12-15, NASU).

1 Corinthians 10 makes light of how the Tanach, or Old Testament Scriptures, were to serve as a warning to the Corinthians who were engrossed in a great number of ungodly activities. *If God saw to it that the Ancient Israelites were largely judged for their sin in the wilderness, then the Corinthians mired in sin could face a similar end.* Many of us, in wanting to appeal to 1 Corinthians 10:1 at our congregational Passover *seders*, and stress the great value that the Hebrew Tanach has for Jewish and non-Jewish Believers alike, perhaps only want to focus on the positive aspects of God's mercy and grace toward His people, and His deliverance of and care for them. But 1 Corinthians 10 also speaks of the rebelliousness of Ancient Israel, and His judgment for their sin of abandoning Him. Many of us, in turning to the Instruction of God's Torah, often do not want to consciously remember that the Holy Scriptures, as stated by the Holy Scriptures, contain warnings for the people of God. *This can be very difficult for many sincere Believers to fully process.*

Consider, for example, the vocational calling which God decreed upon Ancient Israel. While the Lord's fidelity to His promises to Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob are seen—also noticed is the Lord’s own observation about who Israel was:

“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. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:6-9, NASU).

Israel was not chosen by the Lord because it was somehow great and mighty; Israel was chosen by the Lord because it was small, insignificant, and weak. And the statement of Deuteronomy 7:7 about Israel being the smallest, when sandwiched in between passages about taking the Promised Land and not becoming engulfed by idolatry—can be viewed with some ethical and moral undertones to it, because we know from the story of Joshua-Kings following, how Israel quickly disobeyed God’s admonitions.

The Human Mistakes in Scripture

Readers of the Holy Scriptures should be able to easily recognize how the accounts of Ancient Israel in the Tanach, very much epitomize the human story. The people of Israel were one of the smallest, God is faithful to deliver Israel, the people fluctuate in their obedience to this One God, but God is still merciful and redemptive to the people of Israel, even though He is often seen to issue punishment. **Israel epitomizes much of the common human story.** In Yeshua’s day, a number of the Pharisaical leaders claimed that had they been living in the time of the Prophets, they would not have contributed to their death—something rebutted by the Messiah (Matthew 23:30-31). While many people in the Twenty-First Century, reading the record of the Holy Scriptures, may claim that they would never have committed the offenses against God that the Ancient Israelites did—the fact of the matter remains that for a majority of people, their mistakes are still repeated by many of us, in various ways. *Yet, God is still merciful and redemptive.*

One of the things which I recall from taking Old Testament Introduction at Asbury Theological Seminary (Fall 2006), is how the Hebrew Tanach is very unique, compared to most of the religious literature of the Ancient Near East. What is most different about the Hebrew Tanach is **that it is most candid and revealing about the failures of its own chosen people.** In Ancient Egypt, one seldom sees the Pharaoh ever defeated in battle—but in the Tanach, one sees the defeats of Israel and Judah's kings most definitely recorded for posterity. One sees the failures, the idolatry, sexual debauchery, and child sacrifice of the population also recorded—but God never completely wipes them out. It is fair to conclude, that much of the record of the Tanach is given to us, to encounter examples **not to be repeated ever again.** The Tanach Scriptures are a warning to all followers of the God of Israel!

But while we may quickly associate the warning the Scriptures contain, to the incidents of rebellion against God in the wilderness, or the corruption of different monarchs of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms—it also cannot go unnoticed how many esteemed figures of the Tanach, had their own moments of faithlessness. Frequently, many of us in our personal Bible reading and studies, have turned to the commonly labeled Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith. It is fair enough to recognize that each of the figures listed in Hebrews 11, and lauded for a particular action of faith, will be in the Kingdom. It is a significant mistake, however, for us to have a selective reading of a number of those we often regard as “Biblical heroes.” Their humanity, their being influenced by outside forces or paganism, and perhaps the volitional mistakes they made—are to inform us every bit as much as their examples of being true to the promises of the Lord.

What are some inconvenient matters, regarding your possible “Biblical heroes,” which you may need to be reminded of? Consider how **Abraham** and Sarah, had Abraham father a child via her handmaiden Hagar (Genesis 16). While Abraham was given the promise by God of great progeny (Genesis 15:1-5), Abraham joining with Hagar was not only a pagan custom of the Ancient Near East, but it is regarded by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:22-23ff as a rash act of the flesh. Continuing, **Jacob** was caught in the entanglements of Ancient Near Eastern paganism as well, given how he had worked seven years for Rachel, was given Leah instead, and then had to work another seven years for Rachel, while also taking their handmaidens Zilpah and Bilhah (Genesis 29-30).

David, as king of Israel, abused his executive privileges, and took advantage of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), with fierce theological debates abounding today regarding whether or not he actually raped her. His own son **Solomon**, while having great wisdom and wealth, is ultimately seen to have been engulfed in excessive polygamy and idolatry (1 Kings 11), with it definitely debated throughout history as to whether he will even be in the Kingdom, or whether he was an apostate against the God of Israel.

At times in our reading of the Torah, we often wonder what had gotten into **Moses** for striking the rock, and forfeiting his entry into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:8-13). Yet, when you recognize the great frustrations the population of Ancient Israel must have caused him—Moses' momentary rashness was actually quite small. The incident of **Paul confronting Peter** in Antioch, over table fellowship between the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, while important for unity, is pretty miniscule as just a social schism (Galatians 2:11-21).

I recognize how some of you may have a selective, or even white-washed reading, of various Biblical figures. *I have actually been accused by a number of Hebrew Roots teachers of "disparaging the fathers,"* by pointing out some of the shortcomings of those like Abraham, Jacob, or David. But the fact is, too many of us in our reading of the Holy Scriptures often refuse to acknowledge human mistakes of those who ultimately will be in the Kingdom, but not without some difficulty left to us in their varied legacies. **And what will it mean if we fail to read the Bible through a thematic lens of warning?**

The Scriptures Show Us the Need for Salvation

As I have gotten older, into my mid-forties, and have read the Holy Scriptures over and over again—and have become innately familiar with some of the major theological and spiritual debates facing us—I have to be honest and say that I probably approach what the Bible actually is, much differently than many of you. **I absolutely believe that the Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired Word of God and are to be the place we turn to for instruction.** Yet today, a great number of the current controversies—and some of the deconstruction and liberal trends we are witnessing—originate from how people from my generation, are attempting to understand the Word from an original audience first perspective. This is something which many conservatives did not offer them, and now they think they have discovered lost truths.

The Holy Scriptures do contain the answers to the problems, and the growing apostasy, which we are witnessing firsthand. But we are required to reorient ourselves to a more realistic view of what the Holy Scriptures actually represent. While the living and active Word of God—the Holy Scriptures deal more with the failures of humanity and Ancient Israel, and the Lord having to redeem the mistakes of others, than anything else. The Holy Scriptures, *when approached as a warning*, record all of the great sins, punishments, and consequences, **so that those in Messiah today do not have to repeat such errors**. This is hardly the “Bible as God’s love letter” approach too many have been affected by. It is instead, when one surveys God’s Word, the reality that there are far more negative things than positive things, which one will have to sort through and process. The Bible undoubtedly records God’s plan of redemption, leading all the way to the New Creation. But the Bible also records why such a plan of redemption has had to be enacted.

Many of us have, and I believe rightfully so, approached Galatians 3:24 from the perspective of the Torah revealing the sin nature of a person, and then showing him or her the need for salvation in Yeshua: “Therefore the *Torah* became our guardian to lead us to Messiah, so that we might be made right based on trusting” (TLV). We often consider Galatians 3:24 regarding how our common, human limitations, will cause us to break God’s commandments and be condemned by our sin. Because there is no sacrifice in the Torah available for volitional sin, this requires us to seek the final sacrifice offered by Yeshua on the tree.

Another serious dimension to this needs to be remembered. When we read and survey the Holy Scriptures honestly—and we see repeating patterns of sin, rebellion, punishment, destruction, and death—and with it many topics we do not often want to discuss, *what is the remedy to the story of human tragedy?* **The Bible itself does not hold anything back, although we frequently skip over those uncomfortable sections**. Mind you, many things do need to be read from the perspective of an original audience first, and the original participants. But the overall human tragedy, and the repeating cycles of disobedience, cannot be easily skipped over. **Does the Bible’s account of human failure and disaster, something which leads you to the redemption in the Messiah and His future Kingdom?** How much might you need to begin to (re) consider, in your study of God’s Word, and your relationship with the Lord, as you approach Scripture as a warning? We each have a great opportunity to see how powerful the Scriptures truly are, if we do this!