OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries
and MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS



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HOW FAR CAN YOU BE BIBLICALLY CHALLENGED?





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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

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HOW FAR CAN YOU BE BIBLICALLY CHALLENGED?

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A Messianic Faith Episode

How far can you be Biblically challenged?[1]
Of course, being challenged is a major part of each and every one of us having faith. None of us would be here—hopefully as maturing Believers—if we had not been challenged at some point or another, and considered some of the challenges the Lord has seen us through. We have each experienced victories, but I am sorry to say we have also experienced various levels of defeat. But that is part of what it means to grow in the Lord, mature as human beings, mature into adulthood.

So before we get started, let us pray and turn this time over to Him:

> *Heavenly Father, we are thankful once again to be with You and to contemplate these different subjects, these different topics, as it involves our faith in You—and especially our Messianic faith and the uniqueness of what it means to be part of the emerging, still-maturing Messianic movement, and the significant purpose You have in store for it. As we contemplate the future, be with us as we sort through this question of how far can one be Biblically challenged.*
>
> *Many of us are aware that a lot of the issues which we need to be able to discuss, as mature adults in today's Messianic community, are not often easily addressed. Evangelicalism and the Synagogue are a little more mature in some of these areas, than we are. But Lord, we need to be solution focused. We need to be about Your Kingdom's work, and we need to be about making a difference as best as we can.*
>
> *So be with us today. Help us with everything we have got going on. Allow my words to be a blessing to each and everyone who watches or listens to this message.*
>
> *In Yeshua's name, Amen.*

How far can you be Biblically challenged? Today I will be discussing how far any of us can be pushed in terms of our theology, and the subjects we can engage with. There is no doubting, I am sorry to say, that in the mid-to-late 2020s right now, too many Messianic people are behind the curve in too many areas. **I mean, that is just a flat uncomfortable diagnosis.** How can we be better equipped to better navigate some of the external controversies, and internal plurality, which we will be witnessing? These are some of the things we are going to be sorting through today.

The Holy Scriptures are very clear, as we discussed last week **("Growing Into Maturity,"** 13 May, 2026), that born again Believers are to be moving into greater maturity. We are not to remain as spiritual infants, spiritual babies. We are to be advancing toward adulthood. This does involve the spiritual

acumen of Believers: the ability for each and every one of us to grow in our ability to love God and neighbor, more profoundly and more deeply. The ability for each and every one of us to have better discernment, and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit more clearly, to better know what the will of God is in certain situations.

It also involves what we are going to be discussing now. It involves a better handle on various theological matters, particularly those which do intersect with contemporary trends and debates in society at large. Maturity demands that we be able to discuss theological matters, issues which directly involve society at large, and how able today's Messianic community is in this regard.

There are doubtlessly individuals, families, congregations, synagogues, and groups which can do this pretty well. Others, not so much. Some of this is because of those wanting to have a kind of a closed community, live-in-a-bubble mentality. And to be sure, there are churches, synagogues, and various other religious groups who act the same way.

For many in the Messianic movement, it is controversial enough to be a Messianic Jewish Believer who has received Yeshua. And the criticism they can get from family, from the Jewish community, from the Christian community, is just enough. They do not necessarily want to go into any other things. Some people have that mindset.

Likewise, when you get into the more independent Hebrew Roots and non-Jewish Torah movements, doing Torah is controversial enough. Many wonder why they should even have to engage with contemporary matters.

Well, the Holy Scriptures require God's people to engage directly with the world. In the field of apologetics—because we are Messianic Apologetics after all—apologetics is defense of the faith. If you have never heard the term apologetics, the term *apologia* means defense. So, apologetics is defense of the faith. **Messianic apologetics focuses on defending the faith with matters of the contemporary Messianic movement, Israel, Judaism, and the Messianic mission in mind,** among other things. And of course, the famed text from the Holy Scriptures on apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15-16:

> "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; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Messiah will be put to shame" (1 Peter 3:15-16, NASU).

There are a number of admonitions given here, particularly as they would have involved the original, First Century situation of Peter's audience. But the situation of sanctifying Messiah as Lord in your hearts, always being able to give a defense, anyone who asks you, keeping a good conscience in the event that you are slandered (other versions might have "blasphemed," "spoken evil against"), is how Believers, God's people, are going to have questions, criticisms, bad things said about them. **We have to be able to give a defense for our beliefs.**

And how do we do that? We do that in a way which brings honor and glory to Him, and reflects on our superb character as God's people. And believe me, there are people, certainly in evangelical apologetics, who are able to do this pretty well. Others, though, have been met with various levels of controversy. Some people get, as you probably know, a little too hot under the collar, as it were. We have all had those moments. But Messianic apologetics is a unique animal, because of its focus on matters of the contemporary Messianic community.

Now for myself in our ministry service, I am able to function out there in the broader Messianic community, in the field of apologetics, with very, very few restrictions. When going to a Messianic

conference level event, or visiting a Messianic congregation or synagogue, I actually have very, very few restrictions out there I need to be aware of. But few restrictions does not mean that there are no restrictions.

For example, when you go to another location—which could be your local congregation, but more likely another congregation, synagogue, a conference level event—you have to know who your audience is. You have to respect your host. You have to know or discern what the strengths, weaknesses, limitations of some people who are there—because there are some things which you have to be aware of, in order to better communicate what you believe is important. Also, you have to know what the different needs are, of the people who are going to come up to you with questions and criticisms.

"It's Not a Salvation Issue"

It is fair to say that there are many things **which are legitimately not salvation issues.** When you come across a controversial topic, some things are just not at the level of an individual's salvation; they do not have a direct bearing on where a person is going to be spending eternity. But, I also know how many of us in different religious settings, whether it be Bible studies or group discussions, when we have heard somebody say something controversial—many have responded with that line of "It's not a salvation issue," and then the conversation concluded. Unfortunately, though, "It's not a salvation issue" has been used to keep some important discussions from taking place. Right?

Have you ever seen "It's not a salvation issue" retorted back, in order to say, "Hey, we're not going to talk about that today. We're going to put it off to the side for another day." And of course, that day never comes… "It's not a salvation issue" has been used to keep some important discussions from taking place, and varied perspectives from being able or permitted to have a hearing. ***Perspectives which are actually pretty important to have a hearing!***

This is an excellent place to start: "It's not a salvation issue" affects a number of the Messianic groups in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex where I live. "It's not a salvation issue," has been used to prevent various aspects of eschatology from being discussed, debates on the Second Coming, pre/post-trib, the rapture.

Well, it is not a salvation issue, **but it still needs to be discussed.** "It's not a salvation issue" has been used to say, "Hey, we're not going to talk about it here." And, often it is because of our close proximity to Dallas Theological Seminary, which is a major hub of dispensationalism and the pre-trib rapture. And whether you like it or not, there is a huge sector which exists in the Messianic community, today in 2026—if you can believe it—which is strongly dispensational and pre-trib. So if you have a alternative, which in all probability is going to be some post-trib scenario, "It's not a salvation issue. Oh, you can be saved, but we're not going to talk about it because we might have division or we might have strife." But yet, when you see what's going on today in the world at large, we actually do have to have some discussions about this. And it actually is important that we interject some alternative points of view, because what if pre-trib is wrong?

One of the reasons why our family has our own independent ministry, is precisely so we can have our own venue of being able to discuss important issues—which others might like to see shuffled off to the side, and never mentioned again. We have our own ministry, so we can discuss issues which in other congregations, synagogues, might be put off to the side.

My Time Since Seminary

Let's walk down memory lane a little bit. I cannot believe this, but it has been almost twenty-one years now, since I started at Asbury Theological Seminary. I started in January, the Winter of 2005, and I had an experience there in the first semester, the first six months or so. I quickly discovered that in my first nine

years or so of being involved in the Messianic community, which we entered into 1995-1996, that I had been exposed to a very fundamentalist approach to Biblical interpretation and far too many other issues of significance. Mind you, I was in high school, college, and was young. But so many of the teachers, leaders, and persons of influence, the first nine years or so of being Messianic, would classify as fundamentalist, people who had an overly-simplistic approach to the Bible and matters of theology.

Now, I was blessed 2005-2009 at seminary, because I got my education during the Bush years, when George W. Bush was still in office. It was before a lot of what would come later, the woke hyper-liberal things, which of course we are still having to sort through today.

One of the first matters which I experienced in seminary, and some of the first changes I had to go through, involved employing more scholarly and academic lexicons for Hebrew and Greek. I was learning Hebrew and Greek as formal languages for Bible study, and guess what? I am sorry to say this, but a lot of Messianic teachers do not have sufficient skills for both Hebrew and Greek. The first semester of seminary involved the acquisition of many books, lexicons, Bible dictionaries, and I also started acquiring different commentaries. And, of course, behind me you see a number of those resources. In other broadcasts, I have shown other bookshelves. I have got a lot of books here in my office.

I actually did go through a phase, 2005-2006, I am sorry, of questioning the competency of many Messianic leaders and teachers. I was getting into a lot of detail, regarding not only Hebrew, Greek, points of grammar, but no more Strong's Concordance. Also I was exploring how one accesses academic lexicons, Bible encyclopedias, dictionaries, technical commentaries, journal articles, etc. Many of these are things which a wide number of Messianic leaders, congregational leaders, and rabbis, do not employ, even today. So, I indeed went through a phase of questioning their competency, and I just knew that far too many were overly-simplistic in their approach to the issues of the day. *And this was twenty years ago. So how do you think it is now?*

Many did not know how to do good exegesis of the Scriptures, and document their conclusions. But above all, more than anything else, **they did not permit themselves to ever be challenged sometimes.** So as a new seminary student, I often found myself going up to different Messianic leaders and teachers, and saying, "Hey, I heard you say this. Where did you get this from?" There were some resources I had acquired, as a result of my studies, contradicting their conclusions. These were resources which had references to Jewish literature, Christian literature, Hebrew, and Greek matters. With a number of people, I made enemies very quickly, because I challenged their points of view, and I asked them where they got some of their things from.

Yet, as we should all know as Believers, as we grow in faith, we mature in faith. It is only when our beliefs are challenged, that we are able to grow spiritually, theologically. We learn how to rely more on the Lord. We learn the skills we need to better understand His Word. And if we are never able to be challenged, if we never permit ourselves to be challenged, what does that say about us?

Why do you think our ministry has as many publications as we do? Some of it is because these are topics I think are important, we think are important, which you need to know about. You need to have a good understanding of them. But some of these resources were produced entirely because of a situation out there in the world of ideas, which needed to be addressed.

And, I know as someone who is a Messianic Teacher, someone who is in leadership, that I am not the only one who has gone through something like this. You get a little more information, a little more formal training than many of the people out there—and all of a sudden, you begin to question where something actually comes from. You know how there is something more you have to consider, and that others need to be more fully informed. You also expect people to eagerly welcome many of the new things you have been learning, and appreciate some of the new experiences you have had.

But more frequently than not, this is not what takes place. More frequently than not, there are people who consider you a threat, and they want to see you removed from the scene or discredited in some way.

Fast forward twenty years or so to today, to the Messianic community of 2026. There are definitely still issues out there! We do not corporately tend to let ourselves be challenged, and frequently we will use the "It's not a salvation issue" line, in order to avoid addressing them. Or, we will see people say "The Scriptures are just so clear and so straightforward." Yet, how difficult can it be to recognize how, "If the Scriptures are so clear and so straightforward, then you wouldn't mind if we consider what some of those alternative approaches might be—which we will then easily discredit, and then we will be able to understand why our position is so valid and so true." Conducting some kind of theological exploration, to confirm the validity of one's beliefs, is not something the Messianic community tends to permit.

There are issues out there. Today's Messianic community, sorry to say, does not tend to let itself be challenged that much. *And guess what? Younger people know this.* Those who are in their late teens, 20s, into their 30s, and certainly somebody like me, knows this. When they are not permitted to ask a certain question, or investigate certain things—because it may be inconvenient for the leadership or it makes them feel uncomfortable—are those young people going to stay in the Messianic community, or are they going to find another community where the issues which matter to them will be addressed? Is the Messianic community going to be seen as the place where their questions will be respected, and some kind of dialogue can take place? Or will such questions and issues be better served by another venue?

Frequently, the questions and issues raised by the younger generation, do not concern high level matters like whether or not Yeshua is God, or whether Yeshua is the Messiah. Instead, they are likely going to be over an entire array of second and third tier issues. Certainly in Protestantism, many second and third tier issues might be the making of a denomination or a particular sect. In the Messianic community, which is so small and so pluralistic on so many different issues, we have not often learned how to best navigate all of these situations as they arrive. But, by possibly preventing some things from being discussed, it is possible that some Messianic congregations and synagogues are not often acting as Jewish as they might think they are.

I remember when I was going through the IAMCS Messianic Teacher ordination program, how one of the classes I took was on Jewish philosophy.[2] In particular, the Jewish community in the Second Temple era, the post-Second Temple era—and even up into the more modern time, the Nineteenth Century—had to be able to be robustly adaptable to the questions being posed by greater society. Those questions could have come from classical Hellenistic philosophy, figures such as Plato, Aristotle. Questions posted by Christianity, the Catholic Church, and later questions of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. How would the Jewish community survive, or make it with these broader groups? These bigger, more powerful more influential groups out there. And so, a big part of the Jewish experience has definitely been asking questions. *Aristotle is asking questions. Here's what we think the Torah and the Prophets say about them.*

We definitely know in the Messianic community, from Jewish-Christian dialogue over the years, areas where the two religions disagree more than agree sometimes. But we also know that the Jewish community has not been able to just ignore the Christian community, and the Messianic claims of Jesus of Nazareth. *That is a big reason why the Messianic community is here.* But even more to the modern period, as Jews of Central and Eastern Europe started being emancipated, receiving more rights, being able to own property, and occupy certain professions—the Jewish community went through a period of significant change. Consider how there were sons and grandsons of prominent Rabbis, Torah scholars, Talmudic scholars, later able to receive a university education.

In the Nineteenth Century, a German university education was widely considered to be the standard of sophistication. One would be trained in the subjects of mathematics, science, chemistry, physics, engineering, astronomy—all of the main disciplines, which would contribute to the Industrial Age. There are many examples of Jews who succeeded very well in those various fields! The Jewish experience is not one of ignoring the questions which the world at large is asking. *Should Judaism or one's Jewish heritage be challenged or threatened by it?* No. *But we will adapt where we need to.* But frequently the Messianic community—although I know there are many exceptions—does not often do that. We tend to retreat to a bubble; we do not want to talk about significant matters of the day.

How many of the young people, because different leaders and teachers are made nervous by matters of our contemporary world, do not stay in the Messianic movement because it does not answer their needs? How many later find an evangelical church environment, or even a non-Messianic Jewish environment, which can better respond to the questions being asked about our modern world?

We are now in the mid-to-late 2020s, with the 2030s three-and-a-half years or so away! *We really have to think about some of this in a better way.* Far too many I have encountered, in my Messianic experience, are seen to not push well-polished, well-thought out doctrine—but instead push rigid dogma: believe this or else.

So we are going to have a nice little friendly chat. And as we have a nice little friendly chat, there are three issues which I am going to mention briefly. I have mentioned them in different broadcasts, different teachings before. We are going to have a friendly little chat, on issues which we will all be challenged by at some point or another in our faith experience.

If all you do is have a study Bible, one of the newer study Bibles, and you crack it open, there will be some kind of an introduction, annotation, article. Your response may be, "I've never heard this before. What are we going to do about this?" These are typically the areas you are going to be challenged by, at some point or another. We do not need to react, but we do need to be a little more mature, act a little more like adults when they come up—because these are matters which the younger you are, the more likely you are going to have a different perspective than older people. *And believe me, I have gone through some of these things myself over the past 20 years…*

The Genesis 1-11 Materials

Issue Number One (and we have definitely talked about this as a ministry before): **What do you do when you encounter the Genesis 1-11 materials?** What do you do with all of that material from the Creation to the Garden of Eden to the Flood and to the Tower of Babel? This is the mother of all Biblical controversies, right? For me—and your experience might be different—most of my time in the Messianic movement, I have only heard teachers and leaders promote a strict, literal, six 24-hour day Creation, approximately 6,000 years ago, reading of Genesis 1-11. This is what is commonly called the Young Earth Creation perspective. And for sure, if that is the position people want to take, that's fine. But we definitely live in a world—all you have to do is go visit a local church, a local synagogue—where you are quickly going to find how there are religious people, who absolutely believe in God, but who have some different approaches to early Genesis.

I remember what happened when I came home one day in 1997. I had a Summer job at Movies 14 in McKinney, Texas. I had been talking to one of my coworkers, who had also been in chemistry class with me at McKinney High School. He attended First Baptist McKinney, and he said, "Look, I want you all to know that yes I believe in God, obviously, and I believe in Jesus. But I believe that God used evolution to bring about humans." My response at the time was, "I know everyone has to work through this material

on their own, and as new evidence comes forth, I have absolute confidence because you're smart, you'll come to the right conclusion." That's what I said, as a 16-year-old at a Summer job.

Now, coming home and telling my parents this, their initial response was, "Well, is your friend even saved? Does he even believe in the Bible?" This was a total knee-jerk reaction, because there are scores of people who identify as socially conservative, evangelical Christians, who believe in a God-directed evolution. Likewise, go to a synagogue, go to a Conservative or Reform temple. Overwhelmingly, the people are going to believe in some kind of God-directed evolution. And even if you went to an Orthodox Jewish synagogue, you would probably be surprised about how many people actually might believe in a God-directed evolution, what is commonly called theistic evolution.

Later at seminary, 2005-2009, I would say that as high as perhaps two-thirds of my fellow students, believed in some form of theistic evolution, and the significant majority all rejected a Young Earth Creation view of Planet Earth and the universe. Some of the reasons for this, you cannot just discount off the cuff. You cannot just emotionally respond with, "Oh, they're deceived…"

What were some of the reasons given? Well, the two main reasons which were just common throughout, often involved **(1)** how the universe is just too vast, too ancient, too big. And, many do not find the Young Earth Creation arguments discounting an ancient universe to be all that convincing. To claim that God gave the universe the appearance of age, was concluded to be God playing a proverbial shell game, and perhaps that He was even deceiving people. Another **(2)** major reason provided, was the insupportability of a 6,000-year chronology for human history, notably involving many who would dismiss theistic evolution. What is one to do about different matters of anthropology? Various scientists, various anthropologists, conclude that various discoveries of human culture exceed 20,000 years old. Is one entirely sure that a 6,000-year chronology is present and implied by the Bible? Must a true Believer rigidly hold to it (much less try to predict the return of the Lord on that chronology)?

Likewise, what do you do with other civilizations on Earth, like the Chinese, who definitely claim to be tens of thousands of years old? And what do you do with how various missionaries, who went to China in the mid-to-late Nineteenth Century, who held to a 6,000-year chronology, and were laughed at by the Chinese who showed them the records of their civilization?

This is some of my own personal experience from the turn of the Millennium, how thirty years ago in 1996 end-time speculation was very high. People were trying to make predictions around the turn of the Millennium, and connect it to the so-called 6,000-year doctrine. Way too many of us saw calculations, recalculations, and recalculations of recalculations. And so by 2004, 2005, 2006, I was definitely wanting to consider another point of view regarding chronology, after all these failed predictions came about.

One significant resource I was exposed to, such as this one right here, was *Introduction to the Old Testament* by R.K. Harrison.[3] This is considered to widely be one of the main, conservative defenses in favor of the traditional (for the most part) authorship of the Tanach books. It is definitely a good resource to have when confronting the JEDP Documentary Hypothesis, but it is small "c" conservative, and it does go into detail regarding telescoped genealogies in Genesis 5, Genesis 11.[4] So, the relationship of *A begat B* is not always in every place *A fathered B*, but there might be a great-great-grandfather resulting in the line of a great-great-great-grandson. *A begat the line resulting in B.* Harrison goes into great detail regarding this. Telescoped genealogies in early Genesis was something I definitely had to sort through by 2006.

When I got *Introduction to the Old Testament* by Harrison, I also saw an ad on Amazon.com. (Yes, Amazon.com was around then.) This was for a debate between a prominent Young Earth Creationist and a prominent Old Earth Creationist, which was a position I had never heard before. But, I had my suspicions regarding what this thing labeled "Old Earth Creationism" probably was. So, I purchased the DVD set, later getting into the debate watching (eight or nine parts), and seeing how Old Earth

Creationism advocated that the six *yamim* of Genesis 1 were long periods of time. It was not a position I had ever heard explained before, but it accounted for the vastness and the antiquity of the universe, and also for the uniqueness of human beings and God's Creation. People were created by Divine fiat, maybe a little further back than 6,000 years ago, but without evolution.

Of course, one of the main criticisms of the Old Earth view is, if the Creation "*yamim*" are long periods of time, how does one account for animal death before the Fall of Adam and Eve? Well, it is pretty clear when you look at Romans, that human death and animal death are independent of each other: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind" (Romans 5:12, 2020 NASB). The sin of Adam was not affected by whatever affected the possible death in the Animal Kingdom. We also know from reading the Holy Scriptures, how before Adam was created and placed in the Garden of Eden, there were evil dynamics in place before him, notably with the fall of Satan, and a third of the Heavenly host becoming the demons. (These are some of the mysteries we will all know more about, subsequent to the Second Coming.)

Today, there are three main approaches to early Genesis: the Young Earth Creation approach (six 24-hour days, approximately 6,000 years ago), the Old Earth Creation approach (the six *yamim* being long periods of time; humans were created by Divine fiat, somewhere between 20,000 to 50,000 to 150,000 years ago), theistic evolution (God used evolution to bring about the human species; Genesis 1-2 are poetic depictions of God wanting to dwell with people). Being able to have an open discussion on these views is important, now because of what we could possibly be facing. The world is openly discussing the matter of extra-terrestrial disclosure. If today's Messianic people cannot easily engage on different perspectives of early Genesis—which you would encounter at any evangelical church, and many synagogues—what does that say about our ability to discuss the controversy of extra-terrestrial intelligence? *You see my point.*

We have got to be able to have that open discussion, where we recognize matters of early Genesis as a reliability of the Bible issue, not a salvation issue. If we can fairly reason through these things, then whatever comes in the future, we should be able to reason through as well. I do not think it is impossible that Messianic people can have an open dialogue with fellow Believers, who might adhere to an Old Earth or theistic evolution persuasion. In fact, I think clearly classifying early Genesis as a reliability of the Bible issue, will aid in matters of Jewish outreach and evangelism, as the significant majority of the Jewish community will be seen to adhere to a God-directed evolution.[5]

Men and Women

A Second Major Issue. This is definitely something anybody who receives a theological education today is going to have to sort through. It is something which entire denominations can be divided over. It is something which you are going to encounter at some point or another in your theological investigations. **The issue of men and women.** This is profoundly important, not only as it involves the uniqueness of human beings made in God's image, the respect men are to show women and women are to show men, but also how the right kind of marriage is supposed to operate. It affects leadership in the local congregation or assembly. It also involves recognizing the different sins which can manifest, because of not having the best understanding of one's masculinity or femininity.

This does not often tend to be an issue which my family has often agreed with a majority of the Messianic community about, and it remains a major issue where we have retained our approach, from our previous evangelical Protestant experience. To be fair, though, there are definitely Messianic people who see things the way we do regarding this, and they do appreciate that we are willing to take the risk to discuss this.

I was originally raised within the Wesleyan tradition, which saw both men and women serving side-by-side in the local congregation, the local church. I was raised by parents, Kimball and Margaret McKee, who had a marriage where my father as the husband and my mother as the wife, were co-leaders of our family. They would have read Ephesians ch. 5 from the position of mutual submission. Yes, the wife is to submit to the husband, but also the husband is to submit to the wife. Ephesians 5:20, "submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Messiah" (TLV). And, my parents worked together as a partnership team.

Now, having grown up in that environment, I also attended a fundamentalist Baptist school (Calvary Christian School of Taylor Mill, KY, if you must know). And, because there were different religious traditions present there—Baptists, Methodists, Assemblies of God, Church of God, some charismatics—I was aware of other traditions which only saw men lead, whether that was in positions of religious authority or in the home. I was definitely aware of churches which had an all-male board, and families where there were different levels what it meant to submit. This ranged from how the husband would have been like the president, and the wife like the vice president. But, the husband got the final say in most matters, yet definitely with consultation with the wife. Likewise, I certainly saw some marriages where the husband was an autocrat, and the wife submitting meant that she had to do whatever her husband said—and was likely in various levels of trepidation ever questioning him.

Every Messianic congregation or synagogue is to be evaluated on its own merits. But a fair majority of Messianic congregations, each one I have been involved with at least, has been led almost exclusively by men, and often married men at that.

During the first nine years of getting involved in the Messianic community, 1995-2004, and then going into seminary in 2005, I would say that I veered away from what I was originally raised with by my parents, by my early evangelical experience. I veered away toward what would be called a soft complementarian approach. This would essentially be the belief that in a marriage, for example, the husband is the president and the wife is the vice president. They pretty much work as a team, but the husband or the father gets the final say. I had veered more in that direction, but thanks to seminary, thanks to being exposed to some perspectives which I forgotten from the first fifteen to sixteen years of my life, I returned to the way I was originally raised: an egalitarian approach where you should have men and women in the leadership of the congregation, and where husband and wife lead the family together. And yes, there are significant examples of women in leadership in the New Testament, including Junia the Apostle in Romans 16.

In a proper marriage, husband and wife are to be in submission to each other, looking out for one another, they are supposed to work as a team, and all major decisions for the family have to be made by mutual consensus and agreement. *That is how my parents raised me.* And the number one thing which my late father definitely plowed into his son, which he repeated time and time and time again—and even my maternal grandfather, William Jeffries, who passed away when I was 9 years old—they constantly communicated to me when I was growing up, when I was interacting with females: **always treat women as your equals, and never look at them as inferior.** This is something which is a deeply ingrained trait in me. But, it is not always an engrained trait in the Messianic people you encounter. (To be fair, though, some might believe it.)

Now, there are Messianic people who absolutely agree with a lot of the things I have just said here, either based on different evangelical, egalitarian examples, husband and wife working as a team, a church where you have a coed leadership, and what they may witness or see in different Conservative Jewish or Reform Jewish settings where having men and women working together is more successful than just having men in leadership. But as we enter into the future, of course, this is where we have to recognize that

regardless of what position we take, egalitarian, complementarian, there are things we have to guard against, on both sides. More and more difficult questions have been posed by LGBTQ+. Many people think that if you have women in leadership, you have opened the door wide open to gays and lesbians coming in later. And admittedly, there are people who have gone in that direction. This is something which has to be guarded against. Likewise, there are many examples of situations where only men have been in leadership, and it has opened the door wide open to women being abused. *And we will just leave it at that.*

Unfortunately, and I can definitely say this from over the past two decades or so, getting many people in our faith community, who are just fine with their beliefs, to reevaluate them here and there, has been very difficult. Look, if you want to believe that a complementarian position is the right position, you are free to have that belief. *I do not agree with it.* But I do think you need to be able to better engage with why some people lean in an egalitarian direction. Sadly, getting some people, for example, to read a resource like this, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*,[6] has been quite impossible at times for me. If you want to know some of the things to navigate, why I have come to some of the conclusions I have come to, read a book like this, and you will see different scholars respectfully engage with one another on both the positive and negative side.

My family also knows this is a generational matter. Younger people are more open to ideas, which those who preceded them are not so open to. For our family, my extended family, my mother, my sisters, myself, it is an area in the Messianic community where we have actually experienced various levels of hurt, and in some cases, major hurt. Mothers, sisters, not being able to often express their opinion on different spiritual theological matters, in an open discussion group, because they are female. John McKee, 45, still single (2026). How did that happen? Is it solely because we are in a very small Messianic community? You do not have a lot of choices for a potential wife. Or is it also because you know that you better marry somebody who has the same value system and life expectations, and that you better be equally yoked? (By the way, complementarians believe you have got to be equally yoked too.) That has not been possible. When you come into the McKee family, whether you are a man or a woman, you are expected to pull your own weight. I have never been looking for the kind of wife, only interested in bearing children, cleaning house, and cooking meals. I have been looking for a life partner, who can stand beside me, and be prepared to fight the coming spiritual battles with me. *But as of today, it is far more profitable for me to do that by myself.*

Also, along with that, my egalitarianism forces me to have what? Another point of view when it comes to matters such as Distinction Theology.[7] Because what does the term **egalitarian** mean? It is derived from the French *égal* meaning equal. And look, I have never said that we are all the same! As it involves men and women, men and women are different, but they are also human, and they do not have different levels of brain power. They both have the same brain capacity, the same reasoning capacity, but they have different sexual anatomy and they have got different specializations. They have got to work together, though, not work against each other.

But with my egalitarianism, I have a different point of view when it comes to something like Distinction Theology, Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, Jews and Gentiles. We are not all exactly the same, but we do have more in common than not. But how many Messianic leaders and teachers are going to emphasize commonality, before difference? Far too many are not going to do that. And, it has affected the growth, or lack thereof, of the contemporary Messianic movement.

I have got some different trajectories as they involve God's plan for the ages, Creation, Fall, Redemption, and how men and women are affected by them. Do we believe in more of a gifts-based service, or gender-based service, in the Body of Messiah? And of course, along with that there are different ways of how I look at various passages and scenes in Holy Scripture as they concern men and women. No, I do not believe in LGBTQ+; marriage is one man and one woman. But I also absolutely decry things like

polygamy and concubinage and everything else. Differences do exist, and we are not all exactly the same. But we do need to be focused on common elements of salvation, our shared humanity. And if we can do that, then hopefully we will be able to better access God's will, the Holy Spirit, and we will be able to have more camaraderie rather than rivalry.[8]

Biblical Composition

One of the biggest areas, one of the most difficult areas actually to communicate to Messianic people, is our Third Area: **Biblical Composition.** This is probably the biggest area, that when I went to seminary and started asking questions, I started running into huge conflicts with different people I knew, different Messianic people I interacted with. *I still tend probably to have the biggest conflicts, in this area, more than in anything else.*

Many Messianics have the idea that the Bible just appeared, right? And that the Scriptures were dictated letter-by-letter by God. And, this especially involves the Torah. *The Torah has been preserved perfectly since Mount Sinai, every jot and tittle.* Well, when you start getting religious studies training, you very quickly see that the opposite is probably true. The further and further you go back in time, the less and less evidence you have for something, and the higher levels of criticism you have issued against something. So whether you get standard resources such as *Introduction of the Old Testament* by R.K. Harrison, or *New Testament Introduction* by Donald Guthrie,[9] or other resources I have like this (these are two I am just using as examples), you will be exposed to things which are going to challenge you. Those two resources are relatively conservative, and generally uphold the traditional authorship of most Biblical books—but not hopelessly so.

What is some of the variance of opinion one will find? As it involves the composition of the Torah, there are those who correctly affirm how Moses played a role in the composition of the Torah, meaning of course that he existed and the events in some significant way took place. Conservatives are seen to uphold this, versus those who think Moses was just a literary figure. The critical tradition widely advocates that the Torah was the composition of various documents redacted together after the Babylonian exile. This is not something you tend to hear about in the Messianic community. After over thirty years of being Messianic (1995-2026), a lack of being able to engage with critical or liberal views, does reflect on our theological level of maturity.

In Biblical Studies, you are going to be exposed to things. You will be challenged. For today's Messianic leaders and teachers, what study Bibles have you not been looking at? What resources have you not been looking at?

Conservatives do not, in fact, advocate that Moses wrote every single part of the Torah. That does not mean Moses did not exist. Did Moses actually write he was the most humble person who ever lived (Numbers 12:3)? Did Moses actually write about his own death (Deuteronomy 34)? No. Those are obviously additions from someone in Moses' inner circle. Mosaic authorship of the Torah does not mean that he wrote down every single letter himself. He could have simply delegated it to scribes, or those in his inner circle.

The Prophets' words, for the most part, were often collected by their followers, and then later composed in a narrative form. Most of the Prophets, I believe, did not write down their own prophecies. Their followers collected these prophecies, and then composed them in some kind of narrative.

And of course whether it is the period of the Tanach, and definitely the period of the Apostolic Writings, there were professional secretaries who aided in composition. One, in fact, sees this in the statement "I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord" (Romans 16:22, NASU). There were

professional secretaries (known as an amanuensis) who were used for the composition of the Holy Scriptures, and were often available to correct grammar and correct spelling.

One of the biggest things one encounters, and we still encounter it even in more established, formal Messianic Judaism, is how there are many leaders and teachers who are still searching for an elusive, complete Hebrew New Testament. While one would understand people in the independent Hebrew Roots movement looking for a Hebrew New Testament, Messianic Jewish leaders and rabbis looking for it does not help the credibility of our faith community. **Our family has heard about this for decades, and to be candid: they are never going to find it.**

Now criticizing an elusive and phantom New Testament in Hebrew, is different than affirming how the Apostolic Writings (more commonly called the New Testament) is Second Temple Jewish literature, with a deep Hebraic background, definitely involving the Scriptures of Israel or the Tanach. The Apostolic Writings belong within the milieu of other bodies of Second Temple Jewish literature, but they were written in Greek, no different than the Septuagint or ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanach.

And, apparent claims of an original Hebrew New Testament–then joined with the lack of actually finding it—have indeed caused many people to discount the veracity of the message of the good news, and leave Yeshua. *Sorry to say that.* Those who advocate things like some complete Hebrew New Testament, probably being held by the Vatican in its secret archives—but then who cannot produce an actual, ancient text from the Biblical period—cause more people to doubt the good news and Messiahship of Yeshua, than confirm them. (I do believe the Vatican has things in their archives, just not some "original Hebrew New Testament.")

Some of the major issues, which play into the composition of every Biblical book, by the way—but especially the Apostolic Writings—advocates of an "original Hebrew New Testament" do not tend to want to engage with. These are standard factors regarding a Biblical text, things like: the author, the date, the location of the author, and most especially the identity of the audience. *Original Hebrew New Testament advocates know their goose is cooked, when they have to engage with this.* Those who do not, for example, believe in some kind of original Hebrew New Testament, hardly discount the Jewish background of the Apostolic Scriptures, with its principal Hebraic background going to be the Tanach.

Continuing, I believe that there are some more technical issues, which are known in Biblical Studies, which I have been aware of for quite some time, but still do not register with some leaders and teachers. Here is an easy example: Ephesians 1:1. We are going to look at this from the Revised Standard Version, the RSV. I remember the first time I encountered this, during New Testament Introduction at Asbury Theological Seminary (Spring 2007):

> "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 1:1, RSV).

Do you notice something missing? In technical editions of the Greek New Testament, the clause *en Ephes¶* is missing, meaning that "in Ephesus" is missing from the oldest manuscripts. And, this is something which actually does affect one's interpretation of what is canonically called "Ephesians." Now, I definitely believe that the Believers in Ephesus ultimately received this letter. But many people, including myself, do not believe that what we canonically call "Ephesians" was specifically written to the Ephesians. Rather, various ancient witnesses of what we canonically call "Ephesians," actually have a blank space there. There is a widespread belief that Paul wrote an encyclical, which would have gone out to a variety of congregations in Asia Minor, Ephesus being one of them. The main issue actually pertains to if Paul

indeed wrote the Ephesians proper, specifically in this letter, why did he act like he did not know them, when of course he spent around three years in Ephesus (Acts 18:23-19:41)?

If what we canonically call "Ephesians" was originally a letter written to groups of Believers in Asia Minor—which of course would have ultimately included Ephesus—then no problem. Likewise, examiners have noted the close relationship between what we canonically call "Ephesians," to Colossians. Some conclude that what is canonically called "Ephesians," is an expanded version of Colossians. And at the end of Colossians, you see a reference to how Colossians was to be read also by the Laodiceans, and the letter Paul sent to the Laodiceans should be read by the Colossians (Colossians 4:16). There is a good chance that this elusive "letter to the Laodiceans" was actually what we canonically call "Ephesians," but this is something many people just are not aware of. Yet, this is very well known in conservative New Testament scholarship.

"In Ephesus" missing, or not being included in Ephesians 1:1, tends to only be seen in specialty editions of the New Testament. You do not see it in a big version like New American Standard. You certainly do not see it in the Tree of Life Version. You might see a footnote, but how many people read the footnotes?

If you want to know more about where I stand regarding the composition of the Biblical books, I would recommend that you get a copy of our ministry's workbook A Survey of the Holy Scriptures for the Practical Messianic.

Being Biblically Challenged

We have gone through a lot of of "hot stuff" here. I have reviewed three areas where people can get Biblically challenged: Genesis 1-11, men and women, and Biblical composition. And if you do not get challenged, if you are not informed that there are other points of view out there, how are any of us going to learn? And, how are any of us going to be able to refine our beliefs, for the challenges which are coming? So, as we conclude, let us pose the question:

How does all of this affect the Messianic movement? The development of Messianic faith.

In my estimation, we need to ask God to give us sharper minds. And we have to learn how to ask better questions. It is that simple. We need sharper minds. We need to be able to ask better questions.

And indeed, how do we learn to do that? We get challenged by knowing that there might be people at this congregation, who I fellowship with every week, who do not see things the way I do. And of course, they are over secondary and tertiary issues. Perhaps we need to learn how to communicate better with one another.

Is it possible? It is possible. Is it going to be easy? No.

I have got thirty years of experience behind me in that. In particular, the past twenty years.

We are entering into a very uncertain and unpredictable time. There is going to be a lot of things out there, which go well beyond the controversial level I have just mentioned here today.

But the Lord is with us. We need to learn how to respect one another a little better in these non-essential areas. We need to learn how to listen to one another better, talk **with** *one another—not* **at** *one another—and if we can do that, then hopefully we can make progress and facilitate more stability.*

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we're thankful that we have the freedom to come together, and to discuss a number of these matters. I know that some of the things I've talked about, some of the experiences I've mentioned, that there are brothers and sisters watching or listening to this who can identify. There are others who cannot easily identify, and there are others who might even be a little shaken.

But Lord, You who have given us the salvation available in Your Son Yeshua, You've given us hearts and minds which we confess have been spiritually regenerated. The same Holy Spirit which is in me, is in many other people.

Allow us, as we are challenged by some of these things, to dig into Your Word in a better way. Give us sharper minds. Let us understand some of the experiences people have had, to make the decisions they've made, why they favor this position and not that position. And give us the ability to ask better questions. Questions which are of substance, and which can be reflective of the human condition in 2026 a little more realistically.

We're thankful for this time we've shared with one another. I pray that all of us can continue to be submitted to You, submitted to one another, as we grow in our Messianic faith.

In Yeshua's name, Amen.

NOTES

[1] This has been adapted and edited from the textual transcription provided by YouTube.

[2] Proclaiming the Good News to a Post-Modern Jewish World. Rachel Wolf. IAMCS Yeshiva, 2007; A History of Jewish Thought on the Nature of God. Rachel Wolf. IAMCS Yeshiva, 2012.

[3] R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).

[4] Consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, "Genesis 5, 11 Genealogies."

[5] For a further review, consult the perspectives offered in Hugh Ross, *Navigating Genesis: A Scientist's Journey through Genesis 1-11* (Covina, CA: Reasons to Believe, 2014).

[6] James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg, eds., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

[7] Consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, "Distinction Theology."

[8] For a further review, the author's book *Men and Women in the Body of Messiah: Answering Crucial Questions.*

[9] Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990).