The Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the most overlooked texts in the entire Bible, and is greatly underappreciated by many in today's Christianity, as well as throughout too much of the Messianic movement. A profoundly spiritual and intellectual masterpiece, the theme of this treatise is undeniably Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), and His supremacy over all. The author engaged his audience by describing Yeshua as the Creator, being superior to angels, Moses, Joshua, and as mediator of the New Covenant. The author came to these conclusions using some very unique ways, employing First Century rhetoric and literary devices, which often evade your average reader. The Messiah's sacrifice has provided men and women with permanent atonement for their sins, if they truly choose to accept it.

The Epistle to the Hebrews asked First Century questions for a First Century audience. The Jewish revolt in the Land of Israel was on the horizon, and the Temple was on the verge of being destroyed. Many Jews from all over the Mediterranean world—who had acknowledged Yeshua as Messiah—did not know what to do. Was this the end of their faith? Many were at the possible point of denying the Lord. The author of Hebrews, employing carefully constructed and Scripturally-based arguments, advocated that to not heed the warnings of the past brought Ancient Israel extreme judgment—and so to deny the Messiah would bring even worse judgment. The bulk of his arguments were deeply rooted in the Jewish theology of the First Century attested to in a variety of ancient sources, such as: the Septuagint, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Philo, and traditions later recorded in the Mishnah and Talmud.

In the commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*, Messianic Apologetics editor J.K. McKee tackles some of the difficult hermeneutical questions which are asked when we consider this text for today. Hebrews asks ancient questions which had to be answered by an ancient audience: Hebrews has background issues which cannot be answered solely by a surface reading of the text. Who wrote Hebrews? When was it written? How broad was its original audience? These are some of the many questions which surround Hebrews. The Twenty-First Century questions which Hebrews asks are difficult for many Messianics to consider: What should the role of the Greek Septuagint be in our theology? Do we ever make the mistake of uplifting the Torah over Yeshua? How do we maintain a high regard for Moses, but understand that Yeshua is superior?

In a very careful way, the issues of Hebrews are addressed fairly and scholastically. We need to understand who Yeshua is to us, who Moses is to us, what the New Covenant is to us, and how we should never lose sight of our saving faith in Him. You will see that the Epistle to the Hebrews is a truly inspired and profound text!

HEBREWS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

HEBREWS
FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

J.K. McKEE

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.blog

HEBREWS
FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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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: *Encylopaedia 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
MARV: Messianic Apologetics Revised Version*
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)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)

* This is a modified and adapted edition of the public domain World Messianic Bible (WMB).

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)

PROLOGUE

Various teachings have come forth in the past year (2005-2006) which have disturbed a fair number of people in sectors within the Messianic sphere of influence, as to what the message of Hebrews actually is. Some of these teachings not only have planted seeds of doubt into some minds, but they have led various persons to conclude that the Epistle to the Hebrews is not inspired Scripture and should be removed from the Bible. I believe these teachings are based on a misunderstanding of the overall message of the text, a failure to consult the Greek source text which sits behind our English translations, failure to understand the historical setting of the text, and above all is based in some kind of subjective criteria which attempts not only to denounce the inspiration of Hebrews, but ultimately to dismantle the entire Apostolic canon. *This can only lead to a discreditation of Yeshua the Messiah and His atoning work.* These occurrences are quite serious, and the only way any criticisms of Hebrews can be properly examined, is in a commentary of the entire book.

The current state of today's Messianic community is somewhat unique, because we are a growing *and* a maturing faith sector. When we come across what appear to be contradictions in the Biblical text, we are forced to ask ourselves one of two questions: (1) **Is there a problem with the text?** (2) **Is there a problem with how I am examining the text?**

Conservative examiners often ask the latter question. If God indeed inspired this writing, via the work of human beings, then certainly there cannot be any major problems with it. Readers have the responsibility to discover why there are no major problems with it, even though on the surface there may appear to be problems. Interpreters have at their disposal a vast array of English Bible translations, Bible encyclopedias and dictionaries, Hebrew and Greek lexicons and grammars, and today Bible software to aid them in their understanding of the Scriptures. People really have no excuse if all they are simply doing is reading from one English Bible translation, and force-feeding what they want the Scriptures to say.

Liberal examiners often ask the former question. They presuppose that the Bible is a work entirely of human origin. The writing contained in Scripture is merely a human "response" to God, they may argue. Liberals contend that not only is Scripture full of contradictions, but texts have been manipulated, changed, or even destroyed by religious authorities attempting to maintain a position of power. While these texts are inspirational and moving, and we should learn from them as Jews or Christians, they say, they were never meant to be taken that literally. Do we really believe that Jesus was born of a "virgin"? Do we really believe that David killed "a giant"? Do we really believe in a "Red Sea Crossing" or a

"Noah's Flood"? Do we really believe that God made Adam and Eve out of dirt, when science has proven that we exist because of millions of years of evolution? This is what **liberal** interpreters often argue.

One of the important premises, in what is often termed "higher criticism" by liberals, is that we really do not know who wrote the books of the Bible. As higher critics attack the New Testament, they will say things like,

> *The Gospel writers do not once identify themselves in the text; they are anonymous. Maybe Paul wrote some of his letters, but we don't know if James was really written by the brother of Christ, or that Peter really wrote Peter. We don't know which "John" wrote John, or Revelation.*

When they attack the Tanach or Old Testament, they will readily say that there have to be many, many textual changes between what was preserved before the Jews' exile to Babylon and after it. Higher critics will say that we do not know which Scriptures are original, and which are inauthentic. And concerning the Torah, the Torah is viewed by higher critics as being *entirely* a product of the post-Babylonian exile. Higher critics will readily point out that there is no stated author of Genesis in Genesis itself, indicating that it had to have been written or compiled by someone other than Moses.

Many teachers in the Messianic movement have not been exposed to liberal views concerning the composition of the Scriptures, of both the Tanach and Apostolic Writings. I believe that if some of them had, that some of the Hebrews controversy which has been allowed to circulate, would not be present, because they would see through the higher criticism which has been used. The exact same subjective criteria which have been used to discount the message and veracity of the Epistle to the Hebrews, has been used by liberals to more easily discount the Book of Genesis.

It is claimed that we do not know the author of Hebrews; the author of Genesis does not identify himself once in the text. It is claimed that Hebrews was written after the First Century; how did Abraham pursue Lot's captors as far as "Dan" (Genesis 14:14), a place which would not have been named until *after* the Israelites' conquering of the Promised Land? How did Abraham know to call God by the Divine Name YHWH (Genesis 21:23), which was not revealed until Moses saw Him before the burning bush (Exodus 3:15)? It is claimed that Hebrews does not accurately reflect the information seen in the Torah; how do we know that the Ancient Israelites did not borrow the Flood narrative from the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh? These are only a handful of what could be considered "contradictions" in Genesis, and the rest of the Torah, which critical theologians are common to point out.

I hope you understand that I consider both Hebrews and Genesis to be Divinely inspired books of the Bible. I accept what they say as being true and historically accurate. But I think that it is very sad to see those who have discredited Hebrews, based on what appear to be contradictions, when there appear to be even *more serious problems* in Genesis—the veracity of which such people would never question. Thankfully, God has enabled many conservative examiners, both Jewish and Christian, to address what appear to be contradictions in Genesis.

But just as the so-called contradictions in Genesis can be easily answered, so can the so-called contradictions in Hebrews be even more easily answered. Beware of those who might subjectively seek to discredit a text in the Apostolic Scriptures, claiming that it is "no good" or "uninspired," using liberal tactics—while at the same time holding to a strict fundamentalist line that the Torah has been preserved perfectly letter-by-letter and stroke-by-stroke from Mount Sinai. There is something seriously wrong with this grossly uneven scale.

Our examination of the Epistle to the Hebrews is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate some theological maturity on the part of the Messianic Bible reader. We will have to employ ***all weapons*** from our theological arsenal in this study, especially including:

1. Inductively approaching the Biblical text, considering Hebrews as a whole, and examining multiple English Bible versions.
2. Consultation of the Greek source text which lies behind Hebrews, not only taking into consideration the definitions of various words from scholastic lexicons, but also grammatical forms (i.e., parts of speech, verb tenses). This includes examination of possible quotes from the Greek Septuagint, and the Hebrew Tanach which lies behind the LXX.
3. An extreme consideration for the historical context which is demonstrated by the composition of Hebrews. This includes consultation with extant Jewish and Christian works such as the Mishnah, Talmud, and the writings of the Church Fathers which attest to the historicity of Hebrews, any traditions the author referred to, and how early Hebrews was considered authoritative.
4. Consultation of academic commentaries on Hebrews which represent a fair consensus of scholastic opinion. These commentaries, even though Christian in orientation, will often explain what appear to be difficulties or contradictions in the text with ease.

Sadly, these four hermeneutical skills have not been employed by those attempting to discredit Hebrews. The Messianic expositor has the awesome responsibility of employing these proper skills. Hebrews can be a difficult text to understand if one is armed with nothing more than an English Bible translation, likely published from the perspective that Yeshua the Messiah abolished the Torah. We have the responsibility of seeing that the message of Hebrews truly is anything but this. Can we do it with ease? I believe we can do it with ease, and we can also learn much from what the author of Hebrews was trying to tell his ancient readers about their spiritual condition.

As we examine the text of Hebrews, and the author's message for both his original audience, you are going to see how nonsensical it is to throw Hebrews out of the Bible. Hebrews is probably one of the most pro-Torah texts in the entire New Testament, when understood properly and exegeted responsibly. It is inspiring to us all to consider the superior nature of Yeshua's sacrifice and atonement for our sin, and how high the author really considered Moses and the Tabernacle to be: **to be important enough to be compared to God**

in the flesh. The author's message was not anti-Torah by any means, but demonstrated how incomplete the Torah is without the Messiah Yeshua. Our own faith will be entirely incomplete, if we fail to place the Messiah and what He has accomplished for sinful humanity, at the very center of who we are and how we live.

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics
September 2006

It is hard to believe that it has been twenty years, two full decades, since I have really looked through this commentary, *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*. Some of the original circumstances of this resource having to be composed, are still well known in various quarters of the Messianic community. At the same time, as with any relatively new religious movement, a few new matters have needed to be addressed regarding Hebrews. For certain, some fine-tuning, refinement, and expansion of various arguments have needed to be undertaken.

This 2026 release does not see any of the major conclusions I have made regarding Hebrews, at all altered. Some statements here or there have been tweaked, to reflect current Messianic circumstances of the 2020s, and at least partially represent a number of new experiences our family has had, especially since relocating to the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex, and being reintegrated into the Messianic Jewish movement, since 2013. Some information from other studies, notably the 2014 *Messianic Kosher Helper*, 2015 *Messianic Sabbath Helper*, and 2018 *Salvation on the Line, Volume II*, has been incorporated. It is my sincere hope that this commentary continues to be a useful resource, for many across today's Messianic movement.

J.K. McKee
Summer 2026

INTRODUCTION

The text known as "Hebrews" is one of the most unique, highly spiritual, highly intellectual, multi-dimensional books in the Holy Bible. If there is any text which today's Messianic community should have a strong handle on, Hebrews should be it. It enables the expositor to employ all of the weapons of his or her hermeneutical arsenal, as Hebrews begs many questions which cannot merely be answered by simply reading the text over and over again, or for that same matter reading it over and over again in multiple English Bible versions. It requires a person to examine original language texts, determine what some of the possible history necessitating its composition was, and place oneself into the position of a First Century Jewish writer who was extremely well-educated and cultured.

Perhaps most importantly, Hebrews requires a man or woman of faith to live out the essence of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-6): **to love God with a person's entire being.** However, as Yeshua (Jesus) quoted the *Shema*, one is to "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND" (Matthew 22:37, NASU; cf. Mark 12:30). When examining Hebrews, interpreters are called into a place of worship which causes them to seek the Lord with *both* heart and mind. We are forced to come to the place where the Psalmist declared, "Examine me, HASHEM, and test me; scrutinize my intellect and my heart" (Psalm 26:2, ATS).

The Epistle to the Hebrews[1] presents Believers in Yeshua with many uplifting and spiritually edifying words. Upon an individual's first reading of the text, you should be able to notice that Hebrews uplifts Messiah Yeshua and His completed work in a very unique way. The author defineed the importance of His final sacrifice, His priestly service, and the New Covenant in very eloquent and persuasive language. **Yeshua the Messiah—without any doubt—was the central focus of Hebrews**.

While our Lord and Savior in all His glory is a wonderful focus to behold, Hebrews nevertheless asks its readers a very important question: **How are human beings to approach the Supreme Creator?** They discover that the author compared his First Century audience to the rebellious generation of Israelites in the wilderness, who saw the actual presence of God in the Tabernacle and His manifestations to them. He urged them not to fall

[1] Please note that in spite of the common reference to Hebrews as "the Book of Hebrews," I am going to purposefully refer to the text as either the Epistle to the Hebrews or the letter to the Hebrews, and not use this reference. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.