Torah In the Balance, Volume I: The Validity of the Torah and Its Practical Life Applications is a well-needed resource for our time, as it addresses the main aspects of how to follow God's Torah. Subjects addressed include: why Believers need the Torah, the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council, the foundational importance of the Ten Commandments, the role of the appointed times, and the dietary laws. While Messianic positions on these aspects of faith can often clash with those of our evangelical brothers and sisters, they are considered in a fair and reasonable way which encourages *positive solutions* between all people who have called out to Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) for salvation. An important amount of scholastic engagement and support is offered for the validity of these aspects of faith on the part of today's Believers.

Torah In the Balance, Volume II: The Set-Apart Life in Action—The Outward Expressions of Faith is a book which recognizes that the Torah does regulate many physical actions to be performed by God's people. *Faith in the Lord is hardly just a series of abstract mental beliefs or doctrines; it is also something which is to be demonstrated in concrete works*. But when we consider the importance of external works as a manifestation of our trust in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), what is some of the variance seen in on-the-ground Messianic settings? How do people keep the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, eat kosher, or sanctify the appointed times? What about our physical dress and appearance? What about issues like circumcision or water immersion (baptism)? What about various religious symbols like the cross or Star of David? Even when Messianic people have been theologically convinced that Moses' Teaching remains valid instruction for God's people today, there is going to be variance, and even internal disagreement, about how it is to be implemented for those living in the Twenty-First Century.

TORAH IN THE BALANCE
VOLUMES I & II

TORAH
—IN THE—
BALANCE

VOLUMES I & II

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.blog

Torah In the Balance, Volumes I&II

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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
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)
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

Torah In the Balance, Volume I was originally released in Spring 2003. It was one of the earliest resources released by a very new Outreach Israel Ministries, while I was finishing up my senior year at the University of Oklahoma. It was not intended to be a heavy-duty scholarly work, but instead a more easy-to-read book, addressing proper attitude and motive. I remember my family's first decade of being involved in things Messianic very well (1995-2004), and the great amount of tension we had to wade through, as the Lord called us into this community. While the Messianic movement possesses a broad conviction from Yeshua's (Jesus') words that the Torah of Moses has some level of ongoing validity and relevance for God's people (cf. Matthew 5:17-19), what this actually means in practice is often something else. In our family's first decade of being Messianic, there was not a huge amount of reliable information available, to which we could turn, to answer many of the questions we had. Much of the material out there was not well engaged with any modicum of Biblical scholarship, Hebrew and Greek issues were limited to Strong's Concordance definitions, and there was often a great deal of anger demonstrated toward the institution of the Christian Church, and even the Jewish Synagogue.

The title *Torah In the Balance* seemed appropriate. As we saw the Lord call many non-Jewish Believers into the Messianic movement and a Torah observant lifestyle, just as we had—observing the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, and a kosher-style of diet, among other things—could this be a genuine work of the Holy Spirit and promise of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27)? Could legalism and judgmentalism be avoided, and instead could a greater concentration of God's love and mercy prevail? *How could our family help others not repeat a number of the mistakes we had made in our first years of being Messianic?* Initially, *Torah In the Balance* was going to be a single-volume book. I quickly found out how a second volume would probably need to be written later. I had no idea that in the time between the initial release of Volume I (2003) and Volume II (2015), so many changes would take place to our family, and to the faith community we were a part of.

I actually started writing *Torah In the Balance, Volume II* in December 2004, anticipating some sort of a release by 2005. Little did I know that there would be a number of severe challenges hit the Messianic world of ideas in 2005—coupled with my entry into Asbury Theological Seminary—which would not see me really pick this up again, until 2014. A huge bevy of controversies hit the Messianic sphere of influence, largely with the emergence of what we now, largely classify as the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement. These varied issues saw our ministry produce volumes in our *Messianic Helper* series and *for the Practical Messianic* commentary series,

to help facilitate reason and stability, the best we could.[i] A great number of the issues we found we had to address, directly related to the implementation of various Torah issues in on-the-ground Messianic venues, the place *or* lack thereof for mainstream Jewish approaches and traditions, and in trying to better facilitate the Messianic mission of Jewish outreach and evangelism. Many of the issues we had to sort through, were not of our own preference or choice.

Within two years of our family relocating from Central Florida back to the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex in 2013, and in getting integrated into the Messianic Jewish community here, I realized that I needed to finish *Torah In the Balance, Volume II*. By this time, I had sufficient experience in witnessing how a variety of Torah matters, which were unnecessarily dividing many people and creating hard factions, needed to be better tempered by a philo-traditional approach, engaged with and respecting Jewish tradition. I was able to complete Volume II by the beginning of 2015. Yet in the time since, many who have encountered our ministry and resources, have frequently overlooked *Torah In the Balance, Volume II,* and the useful perspectives it provides.

Today in the mid-2020s, the Messianic movement still finds itself as a developing and maturing faith community. But things are going to get even more complicated, as we edge closer to the Messiah's return. A sizeable part of my ministry work today, is spent on a rotation: revising, updating, and expanding some of our ministry's older publications. When it came time to read through *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, it seemed logical to combine Volumes I & II together as a single book. Now no one has any excuse to overlook continued discussions and analyses. And in this composite resource, a new chapter entitled, "A Balancing Act," reviews where much of the issue of Torah observance and the Messianic experience, presently stands. *Things have certainly changed a great deal, from the time when Volume I was released in 2003!*

For those of you who have never encountered *Torah In the Balance* until now, it is my sincere hope that this publication will aid in your appreciation of Moses' Teaching, and that your convictions will not only be shored up, but that you will be able to assist others who may be struggling. For those of you who have followed the ministry teachings and perspectives of Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics for many years, and wish to have the most up-to-date versions of our writings, please know that your kind words of encouragement, honest questions and inquiries, and above all prayers and ongoing support—are greatly appreciated! The Messianic movement has not always been the easiest venue in which to serve God's people, but it is a vital one for our Father's plan of salvation history.

To all readers of *Torah In the Balance,* it is my prayer that you "keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior *Yeshua* the Messiah. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity! Amen" (2 Peter 3:18, TLV).

J.K. McKee, editor Messianic Apologetics
December 2023

[i] For a further summary, consult "My Family's Messianic Experience: 1995-2022" (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*).

TORAH
—IN THE—
BALANCE

VOLUME I

The Validity of the Torah
and Its Practical Life Applications

The Messianic movement largely advocates that the Torah or Pentateuch is relevant instruction for Believers today, and that modern Christianity has too often ignored God's revelation in the Tanach or Old Testament—not benefiting from this dismissal. Yet the subject of "Torah observance" can often be a point of contention, not only between the Messianic and evangelical Protestant communities, but even internally among Messianics. Why is this the case? ***Do we have to be negative about this?*** **Is it possible that people claiming to be Torah observant do not often know why the Law of Moses is to instruct and teach today's Believers? Have some Messianics simply lacked an appropriate perspective on how the work of the Holy Spirit is to guide God's people into greater holiness and maturity, given the promises of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27)? How are we to balance how following the Torah includes outward practices, but also includes a greater manifestation of God's love and goodness to all we encounter?**

Torah In the Balance, Volume I **is a well-needed resource for our time, as it addresses the main aspects of how to follow God's Torah. Subjects addressed include: why Believers need the Torah, the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council, the foundational importance of the Ten Commandments, the role of the appointed times, and the dietary laws. While Messianic positions on these aspects of faith can often clash with those of our evangelical brothers and sisters, they are considered in a fair and reasonable way which encourages** ***positive solutions*** **between all people who have called out to Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) for salvation. An important amount of scholastic engagement and support is offered for the validity of these aspects of faith on the part of today's Believers.**

This book is an important addition to any Messianic library, and should be read by those desiring not only a comprehensive understanding regarding what the Lord has started in this hour—but the ***great responsibility*** **we have been endowed by Him. With everything we have been called to do,** ***the transforming power of God's love*** **is emphasized above all! This resource encourages steady growth and maturity on the part of** ***all*** **of His people.**

Introduction

If you are a Messianic Believer or are a Christian who is wondering about Messianic belief and practice, you know that Messianic people are not the "norm." You know that Messianics break the proverbial "mold" which exists in much of contemporary Christianity. While, like your average evangelical Protestants, Messianics believe in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), and in foundational truths such as salvation by grace through faith and the final authority of Holy Scripture;[i] we also believe and practice things which many Christian people do not. For example, did Yeshua come to do away with the Law of Moses? Or, did Yeshua come to fulfill the Torah, meaning to live it out perfectly so that His followers might emulate His example?

Sadly, many modern Christians believe the former, rather than the latter. Sincere Christians rightly believe that the reason the Messiah came was to become the atoning sacrifice for human sins, so that the redeemed would no longer be "under the Law." But too many embrace an errant understanding of "under the Law," because sinners who have rejected the Messiah and have rejected the salvation available in Him are certainly not "under grace." On the contrary, whether or not they consciously follow the commandments of the Torah, those who do not know the Messiah are "under the Law"; they are condemned by the Torah and will be subject to punishment by God. No true Believer who has been born again and blood washed by the Messiah is "under the Law," or subject to the penalty pronounced in the Torah upon sinners. As Paul so properly wrote to the Galatians, the Messiah came "so that He might redeem those who were under the Law" (Galatians 4:5, NASU), those standing under the condemnation of the Torah.

But what was the purpose of God giving His people the Law? *Surely it was not to condemn them*, as condemnation only comes to those who break the Law. In Deuteronomy 7:6 our Creator attested, "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" (NASU). What the Hebrew word *qodesh* or "holy" really means is set-apart. What God wants for His people is for them to be set-apart; He wants His people to be different from the world around them. And He indeed has told His people how they can be separated:

> "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways" (Deuteronomy 28:9, NASU).

[i] Consult the Outreach Israel Ministries / Messianic Apologetics Statement of Faith, and be sure to notice how it broadly aligns with today's conservative evangelicalism.

The Lord plainly states that if His people want to be holy and set-apart, then they will seek to follow His commandments or *mitzvot* of the Torah.[ii] This concept was understood by Yeshua, the Apostles, and the First Century assembly of Believers. The Apostle Peter wrote,

> "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY' [Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7]" (1 Peter 1:15-16, NASU).

We live in a fallen world today which has widely decided to reject the Torah and reject God's holy Instruction. Similarly, many have decided to reject the teachings of Yeshua Himself, which are broadly a reflection of the Torah, and have rejected His salvation. And even more sadly, many Christian people claiming to know Him have gone after "another Yeshua" or "another Jesus" (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:4), who is incapable of providing salvation because he opposes God's Law—in partial fulfillment of the Messiah's own prophecy that in the Last Days, "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12, NASU). Certainly, if we followed and studied the Torah as the Messiah indeed did, then those in the contemporary Christian community today would have no discussion about whether or not homosexuality or premarital sex are sin—*because the Torah plainly denounces them as such!*

Fortunately, however, many Believers are taking the prophecies of lawlessness very seriously, and are seeking to be, as Yeshua said, "great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19, NASU). As the world gets worse and worse—and certainly increasingly more complicated—many Believers are ceding *more* control of their lives over to the Lord, and are keeping the Torah as He originally intended it to be: **a reflection of His love.** They are recognizing the value of not only the Tanach or Old Testament, but also the rich spiritual and theological heritage we all have from Judaism.

Holding to the position that the Torah or Law of Moses is still to be heeded and followed today, in the lives of born again Believers, can be very controversial. Messianic people are often criticized and chastised by others because we keep the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, and follow the kosher dietary laws, among other things. What can happen in many instances is that fierce, vehement debates will ensue among Messianic people who are Torah observant, and Christian people who are anti-Law, with faults committed on both sides. While discussion and examination of the Scriptures are good, *and should be encouraged*, treating others with contempt is, in fact, violation of God's Torah. For the Torah indeed directs, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18, NASU), and Yeshua exemplified this perfectly in His ministry example (cf. Mark 12:31; Matthew 19:19; Luke 10:27).

[ii] Do be aware, right from the beginning of this publication, that most of the commandments in the Torah deal with inter-personal relations, and regulate human ethics and morality. Being "Torah observant" is far, far more than just doing outward things.

Introduction

I personally hate division and in-fighting, but do believe that many of today's Christian people have missed out on much by not considering, or just ignoring, the instruction of God's Torah. I believe they have missed out on a treasure trove of great insights into the foundation of our faith, and have misunderstood much of the New Testament because they do not have a Torah foundation. It is also sad that I must report that I think that many Christians who do not follow the Torah may indeed be found "least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19, NASU), because they failed to let God have *more* control over their lives, and instead succumbed to the flesh. (Thankfully, only He as Creator knows their final destiny.)

Hopefully we each consciously realize that we are called to emulate the Holy One of Israel, especially as Yeshua will not return until the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) has been accomplished. He will only return until things here on Earth among His people have returned to the way which our Heavenly Father originally intended. We in the Messianic community often advocate how this means that Believers must return to the eternal truths of God contained in the Torah, that God's people should live out the Torah via the power of God's love, and most of all how we must endeavor to live a life like the Messiah Himself—who upheld the Torah in all of His words, actions, and deeds. It has been declared in prophecy that the Torah will go forth from Zion, and the nations will welcome God's Instruction from it (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3).

Torah In the Balance, Volume I is a desperately needed book for our times. The title sums it up all too well: **God's Torah is in the balance.** The Torah is in the balance because its validity is continually attacked by many claiming faith in the Messiah. And, the Torah is in the balance because many of those following the Torah, in striving to emulate the Messiah, need to learn how to properly follow and obey it.

It is sad that I must report that there are books, materials, and articles which endorse some form of Torah obedience, but do so in a very, very unfair way. These materials criticize, berate, and in many cases insult sincere evangelical Believers, thus casting many Messianics in a very bad role. On the other side there are some Messianic publications, materials, and articles which present God's Torah in an entirely "optional" way for either Jewish or non-Jewish Believers, insomuch that they present disobedience to it as *not* really being sin, and place no definite requirement before people to change. I think these are positions which we need to avoid.

I recognize that change does not happen instantaneously in the life of a born again Believer. Yet, a steady, gradual growth into greater holiness via the power of the Holy Spirit, does need to be encouraged. *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* discusses many of the "hot" issues of the Torah, but attempts to do so in a very fair, scholastic, and loving way, as much as possible. As this book's author, I have done my best to be respectful to those of you who hold different points of view, and I would expect you to treat me in the same respectful manner. I believe that a life of diligent discipleship in following the

Lord awaits each of us! Such a life *begins* with love for God and neighbor, but by no means ends there.[iii]

Torah In the Balance, Volume I addresses what the most practical aspects of the Torah are for those new to the Messianic community, or those seeking answers to some of the tough questions of beginner's observance. This book attempts to be scholastically engaged, but hopefully it is written in an easy-to-understand style which will answer many of your questions. Most of all, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* encourages Believers to seek more of God and follow Him in *all* areas of their lives. It challenges Believers to be a part of the separated people which the Lord wants us to be. It challenges people to seek more blessings, not less, which come from obeying our Father in Heaven. It desires to see a *positive* change in people, and not put a yoke of legalism or bondage onto anyone. It desires to see that no one *sin*, or break God's Law! **I desire to see you become a mature man or woman of God,** who can fulfill the great potential and purpose which He has in store for you.

May the Lord show Himself in a new way to you in these pages as you seek greater understanding. May we each learn to balance what the Psalmist says: "I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight" (Psalm 119:174, NASU).

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

[iii] Please note that this book does not address all of the proof verses commonly used to say that the Law has been "done away." Consult the author's book *The New Testament Validates Torah* for an extensive discussion of some of these passages.