

CONFRONTING

critical issues

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A N A N T H O L O G Y

An Analysis of Subjects that Affects
the Growth and Stability
of the Emerging Messianic Movement

J.K. McKee



CONFRONTING CRITICAL ISSUES

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*The one who first states a case
seems right, until the other comes
and cross-examines*

Proverbs 18:17 (NRSV)

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abbreviation chart and special terms

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that 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.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

- 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
 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*
 BECNT: *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*
 BKCNT: *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*
 C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
 CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)
 CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
 CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*
 CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
 DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
 DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
 ECB: *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*
 EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
 eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text
 EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
 ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
 exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own
 EXP: *Expositor's Bible Commentary*
 Ger: German
 GNT: Greek New Testament
 Grk: Greek
halachah: lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community
 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
 ICC: *International Critical Commentary*
 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)
 LS: *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Lidell & Scott)
 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*
 NIGTC: *New International Greek Testament Commentary*
 NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*
 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
 orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
 OT: Old Testament
 PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*
 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*
 TEV: Today's English Version (1976)

TLV: Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New
Covenant (2011)

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*

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

WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*

Yid: Yiddish

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

introduction

Many of us, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike, know that the Messianic movement has a great potential to make a difference in our world. As Yeshua (Jesus) Himself directed His followers, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). If we are able to demonstrate the love and grace of God to others, in a very concentrated and profound way—in obedience to His Torah or Law, no less—then those in our world should be able to see God’s blessings upon us, and strongly desire the salvation that we possess in His Son. The key missional aspects of Israel being a holy nation, and a light to the world around it (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 42:6; 1 Peter 2:9), are things that the enemy certainly does not want to see us embodying to their fullest extent!

By the middle of the 2000s, because of some “things” that occurred within our broad Messianic community—both insiders and outsiders alike started to employ the rather negative moniker: Messy-antic. It would not be uncommon to hear things like, “*The Messy-antic movement is such a mess...*” Suffice it to say, there is an ongoing battle taking place within the broad Messianic world, for its very heart and soul—much of it relating to its long term future. This conflict is ideological, it is philosophical, it is theological, but above all **it is spiritual**. We have been plainly told, after all, “Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We are in a spiritual war for the eternal destiny of human beings.

One of the generally good things, for which many sincere people within today’s Messianic movement should be commended—whether they are Jewish or non-Jewish—is that they really and sincerely do *want to be taught*. They really do want to probe God’s Word, and let the Holy Scriptures mold their hearts and minds so that they can mature in Him. To a wide extent, many people want to advance beyond the rudiments of basic Biblical instruction, or more likely, they want to know why certain beliefs and doctrines have developed the way that they have. There are definitely people within today’s Messianic community, who are strongly suspicious of any form of Christian theology and/or Jewish theology. Yet, there are other people within today’s Messianic community, who recognize that we have a shared Jewish and Christian heritage, which while limiting at times because people are limited mortals—surely also has its many God-inspired and appreciable virtues which are to be honored. While we have to be willing to question many things, we also have to be willing to accept the authority of the Holy Scriptures and what they legitimately communicate.

Since I was a small child in the 1980s, I have been exposed to ministry activities, not only with my parents being active members in the leadership of our local church, but with definite family lines of professional clergy preceding me in history. I am no stranger to Bible studies, or to service within the *ekklesia*. Yet, something that got me really started into apologetics and the defense of the faith—as important as it is for many evangelical Believers—was when I encountered an individual passing out his “literature” at a certain Messianic conference in 1999. The theological positions represented in the pamphlet I was given were *totally “off the wall,”* yet I made sure that I got a selection of the gentleman’s booklets, and I began investigating. From that point since, I have been able to detect some rather negative undercurrents within various sectors of today’s Messianic community. These are theological trends and ideas, which regard the nature of Yeshua the Messiah, our approach to the reliability of the Holy Scriptures, as well

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as our attitudes and the composition of the people of God. Many of these surround issues that often make us feel uncomfortable—but a well-informed and capable Bible teacher does not have the luxury of ignoring the issues that matter.

Too frequently, when the critical issues which need to be examined and dissected make themselves known, various Messianic congregational or ministry leaders do not take the required positions that are needed, in order to stop insidious teachings from spreading. In my experience in full time Messianic ministry since 2003, I have heard too many horror stories of people encountering bad teachings within their fellowships or assemblies, that could have been stopped if the right resources were available. Alas, though, those right resources generally cannot be produced, until a teacher knows what incorrect positions have to be dissected and reasoned through (thoroughly), and consequently proven fallacious. Proverbs 8:17 advises us how, “The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines” (NRSV). And to quote an anecdote, it might also be said that “The second mouse gets the cheese.” Too frequently, a little time has to pass before some decisive resolution, or a mediating solution, can be sought for a divisive issue.

Confronting Critical Issues: An Analysis of Subjects that Affects the Growth and Stability of the Emerging Messianic Movement is an anthology of articles from the Confronting Issues booklet series by Messianic Apologetics, as well as a series of additional articles which I have written and updated over the past three to four years. This massive work has also taken the liberty to produce, in their relative entirety, the contents of some of the most important *Confronting Issues* mini-books released in 2012. The topics considered range from addressing various urban legends that have circulated in the midst of much of the Messianic movement for far too long, to addressing the Divinity and Messiahship of Yeshua, to considering the Sacred Name issue, and to challenge all of us on our manner of speech and how we welcome diverse groups of God’s people into our midst.

(Do note that as an anthology of materials over a number of years, there are various points on different subjects which you will find repeated. This should not be a problem if, after reading through this book, you use it as a reference source to turn to, when needing clarification on various issues.)

More can definitely be said, and surely will be said, on each one of these subjects in the coming years as our faith community continues to grow and develop. I pray that if you have struggled at all with the *critical issues* which are considered here, that this publication will be a blessing and be most helpful, given the wide scope of areas which are tackled.

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

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the quest for credibility²⁰⁰⁴

In the history of our faith, whenever the Lord has revealed something new to His people, or a forgotten truth has been restored, the enemy has always been present to derail or deter it. This is true from the early movement of Believers in Yeshua the Messiah all the way to the present time. When the Apostle Peter proclaimed at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36), you can be rest assured that the forces of darkness were there watching and waiting to take action. Satan had tried to kill the Son of God, but in trying to destroy Him he actually ended up creating even more of a problem for himself, as Yeshua was resurrected from the dead and His followers multiplied. But instead of giving up, the enemy only altered his tactics. The enemy was likely thinking: “Well, if people are now going to receive Him in massive numbers, the least I can do is get this new movement off course.”

How many of us consciously realize that if we are all in the process of returning to the faith practices of the First Century Disciples and Apostles, that we will be returning to some of the *exact same problems* that they faced? If you want an idea about the kinds of problems we will be facing as the emerging Messianic movement, just read through the Book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. They are rife with the sorts of situations and controversies, which are going to become all too commonplace in the future for us—especially as we get closer and closer to the return of the Messiah.

Many Messianics today are greatly disturbed, and rightfully so, that many in our faith community are getting themselves involved with examining things from Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. While this is something that needs to be spoken against, it is not something new in the least. Mystical nonsense was going on in the First Century. Consider the example of Simon the magician, also called Simon Magus, in Acts 8:9-11:

“Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, ‘This man is what is called the Great Power of God.’ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.”

Simon Magus apparently welcomed the good news of Yeshua the Messiah and accepted Him (Acts 8:12-14). But, when Peter and John entered into Samaria and encountered him, Simon offered them money to purchase the Holy Spirit. Simon told them, “Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:19). He wanted to purchase the Holy Spirit so that he could use the Spirit to promote his own self-serving ends. The Apostle Peter rebuked him, “May your silver perish with you, because

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you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:20-21). The Holy Spirit was freely available to all who would acknowledge Yeshua as the Redeemer.

The Biblical account does not say that much more about Simon Magus. But the Christian writers of the Second and Third Centuries wrote extensively about him,¹ as he gained a substantial following and the *ekklēsia* had to deal with many of his heresies. *ISBE* offers the following summary of his ancient followers, the Simoinai or the Simonians:

"It is a matter of scholarly debate...whether the historical Simon was actually a Gnostic. His followers and adherents, called Simonians, were both active and influential for several centuries after the death of their founder. The later Simonians were an eclectic sect of Christian Gnostics who were frequently attacked by Christian apologists and heresiologists....In fact, some Christian apologists stated that Simon claimed to be the son of God...plausibly suggested that 'the Great Power' was the high God invoked by Simon in his magical spells, and that in the style of many incantations found in Greco-Egyptian magical papyri, Simon identified himself with this deity using the 'I am' formula."²

The Fourth Century Christian historian Eusebius describes Simon Magus in his *Ecclesiastical History*, stating, "Coming to the aid of his insidious artifices, he attached many of the inhabitants of Rome to himself in order to deceive them. This is attested by Justin...where he wrote thus: 'And after the ascension of our Lord into heaven, certain men were suborned by demons as their agents, who said they were gods...Simon, a certain Samaritan of the village called Githon, was one of the number, who, in the reign of Claudius Caesar, performed many magic rites by the operation of demons, was considered a god in your imperial city of Rome, and was honored by you with a statue as a god, in the river Tiber, (on an island) between the two brides, having the superscription in Latin, *Simoni Deo Sancto*, which is, To Simon the Holy God" (2.13.2-3).³

Practice or study of anything mystical or quasi-Gnostic is not new.

There are other problems that were going on in the First Century as well. Consider all of the frustration that Paul demonstrated in his two epistles to the Corinthians. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:1, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife" (RSV). There was incest going on in Corinth! Later on he warns the men in Corinth, "Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, 'THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH' [Genesis 2:24]" (1 Corinthians 6:16), implying that some men who were purportedly Believers in the Corinthian assembly still frequented the many bordellos in town. And this is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the many problems we see in the Pauline Epistles, which the good rabbi from Tarsus had to address.⁴

Why are there Problems?

We could go on and on for many more pages discussing how there were problems in the First Century and how many of those problems are now manifesting themselves, in various forms today, in distinct sectors of the broad Messianic movement. But this would only stir up

¹ Cf. David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 614-616.

² D.E. Aune, "Simon Magus," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:516-517.

³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C.F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 47-48.

⁴ For a further review, consult the author's articles "The Message of 1 Corinthians" and "The Message of 2 Corinthians."

negative emotions. We have to understand *why there are problems*, so that we might properly counter them.

The Torah admonishes, “So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong *your* days in the land which you will possess” (Deuteronomy 5:32-33). Followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are to strive to walk a straight and narrow path, because if they deviate from that path, then they are likely to find themselves going off on tangents. They will likely find themselves to be cursed, not blessed—or at the very least that they will have placed barriers between themselves and God. Most importantly, if God’s Instruction has not been heeded, then His people will find themselves rather ineffective in His service.

As Believers, Yeshua admonishes His followers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Above all else, as the good news is proclaimed in the world and people come to faith, we are to see that new Believers are properly trained and disciplined. They must be properly raised up in the faith.

We have many new people entering into the Messianic community today. Jewish people are coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and many non-Jewish Believers are embracing their Hebraic Roots. Many of these men and women are looking for an appropriate example to emulate, so they can be deeply rooted in the Lord. *Sadly, there are too few people setting the appropriate example.*

Today’s Messianic leaders and teachers have to empower these new people to change for the better, and not only grow in their knowledge of God—but also grow in their knowing God more intimately. The responsibility that is upon a teacher like myself *is immense*. If a teacher purposefully leads any person astray, Yeshua says, “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). James the Just too warns, “Let not many of *you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

A Lack of Credibility

I am in a unique position as a Messianic teacher and researcher, because I get to deal with information and teachings from all across the theological spectrum. A great deal of what I do, and I enjoy it quite a bit, is helping new people come into the Messianic movement, and tell them about what the Lord has done in my life as I have pursued Him, have embraced my Hebraic Roots as a non-Jewish Believer, and have adopted a lifestyle of Torah obedience. I get to tell them how much of a blessing it is to be led by the Spirit and obey the Lord more fully, because I love Him (cf. Romans 8:1-4). I get to help these people examine the Scriptures from a Messianic perspective, and discover new things that will enrich their faith and relationship with God.⁵

Many of the other things I have to do are not as fun. Research of any kind, of course, takes time and a great deal of energy expelled. The kind of research I do not like to be involved with, is in having to answer false and errant teachings that circulate around the Messianic community. I have to write theological summaries on teachings that are damaging people, and

⁵ Consult the author’s books *Introduction to Things Messianic* and *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

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exegetical papers on various Biblical passages, all pertaining to various issues that have the capacity to lead others away from faith in Yeshua. While I do not allow myself to be intimidated by anyone, it is not necessarily something one would wish for. Not enough of today's Messianic leaders and teachers, are guided by holding up the value of the Biblical text as they should be.

The challenge between these two aspects of ministry, is how am I to encourage new people in a Messianic walk, but at the same time see that they are protected and warned of the dangerous teachings that are encountered. And, they have to be protected from these dangerous things, while at the same time *not being turned off* to the Messianic movement and what the Holy Spirit has convicted them about.

The crisis that we are facing today is one of credibility.

Allow me to emphasize that credibility is not the same thing as popularity. The English word "credible" is defined by *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* as something "that can be believed, reliable."⁶ "Popular" is, "commonly accepted; prevalent," and "liked by many people."⁷ There are many credible things that people do not necessarily like, and would prefer to just disregard.

The tactic that the enemy has used in recent days, and sadly has been quite successful with—in order to deter the prophesied "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) and what many are convicted that the Lord wants to accomplish through the Messianic movement—has been **to bring various levels of discredit to our faith community and perspective**. Satan has done this in any number of ways, and through many eager, opportunistic vessels, who are trying to promote themselves rather than help other people grow in the knowledge and grace of Yeshua. Satan has done this through many different avenues, three of which we will examine in this article.

How has the enemy brought discredit to much of the Messianic movement? Consider the Torah principle "on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed" (Deuteronomy 19:15).⁸ This means more than anything else that in order for something to be true, it must be verified by some kind of evidence. How many Messianic people have you heard say something, without substantiating it with evidence or some outside proof? If a person does not have any proof for a case, then at the very least what he or she is teaching is *an opinion*, and it is not a fact. Sometimes, our ministry has encountered teachings that not only do not have two or three witnesses confirming what is being said, *but sometimes do not even have one witness!*

Another way the enemy has been able to discredit today's Messianic movement, sometimes combined with lack of evidence, is the attitude in which a teacher approaches a subject. You always have to question the motives of someone, to see if he or she has honorable intentions. Is what is coming out of a person's mouth edifying to the Body of Messiah? Does it draw people closer to the Lord and help them in their spiritual walk?

There are three areas which have seriously damaged the credibility of the Messianic movement in recent days. Many evangelical Christian outsiders who are truly convicted by the Holy Spirit about Torah observance and the Messianic lifestyle, are turned off because they see the widescale proliferation of these phenomena occurring in the Messianic community, without enough people standing up for the truth, issuing a clear response, and setting the proper example. What are these three areas?

⁶ *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus*, second edition (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc, 2002), 146.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 492.

⁸ Cf. Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; Mathew 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28.

1. Denial of the Divinity of Yeshua the Messiah
2. Denial of the inspiration of the Greek New Testament or Apostolic Scriptures
3. Treating Christians and the Christian Church with utter contempt and hatred

I believe that these three areas will largely form the “make-it or break-it” point for the current Messianic movement. If an outsider sees that we deny Yeshua as God in the flesh, that we deny the inspiration of the Apostolic Scriptures, and that we treat Christians like the proverbial “scum of the Earth”—I believe that such a person is fully justified in being suspect of the Messianic movement. I would be turned off by the Messianic movement too—if this is what is truly going on. I would be turned off by any movement that draws people *away from Yeshua*, and not toward Him.

Fortunately, however, I am pleased to report that these problems are not being caused by a majority of us. However, the Scriptural word, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough” (1 Corinthians 5:6), remains absolutely true. Some people who talk a bit too loudly, may present themselves as speaking for *all* of us, if what they say is not challenged on a significant level.

It is time for some self-examination on our part, so that we might learn to be more effective for the task that God has for us. Yeshua says, “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (Matthew 7:3-5). If we can see that some of our own internal problems and challenges are resolved first, then we can get to the Father's business of helping others.

If you are new to the Messianic movement, and you have concerns, many of those concerns are no doubt warranted. They are legitimate, and there are others like us who have been in the Messianic community for some time who are willing to speak up. We do not want the Messianic movement to be considered un-credible. Rather, we want it to be credible and believable, especially as we see many Christian Believers turning toward their Hebraic Roots and are truly being convicted by the Lord that this is of Him. Yet, it will *only* be considered of God if it draws others into a closer relationship with Him.

#1 Denial of the Divinity of Yeshua the Messiah

The first credibility problem we are facing in the Messianic movement today is very serious. It is sad, but there are people in the Messianic community today who are denying the Divinity of Yeshua. It is a fact that most of those who deny Yeshua as being God in the flesh, later deny Yeshua as being the Messiah. Why people deny Yeshua's Divinity varies from person to person and group to group, but it is not in compliance with Holy Scripture. Oftentimes, you run into people who are trying to “figure out God,” and because in their human brains they are incapable of understanding the co-existence of the Father and Son, they denigrate the Son as being something less than God.

Why must we believe that Yeshua is God? How many times are we told in the Tanach (Old Testament) that God, the LORD, is our only Savior or Redeemer?

“My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My **savior**, You save me from violence” (2 Samuel 22:3).

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"I have called upon You, for You will answer me, O God; incline Your ear to me, hear my speech. Wondrously show Your lovingkindness, O **Savior** of those who take refuge at Your right hand from those who rise up *against them*" (Psalm 17:6-7).

"For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your **Savior**; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place" (Isaiah 43:3).

"I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no **savior** besides Me" (Isaiah 43:11).

"Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a **Savior**; there is none except Me" (Isaiah 45:21).

"You will also suck the milk of nations and suck the breast of kings; then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (Isaiah 60:16).

"Yet I *have been* the LORD your God since the land of Egypt; and you were not to know any god except Me, for there is no **savior** besides Me" (Hosea 13:4).

The Psalmist declares that "No man can by any means redeem *his* brother or give to God a ransom for him" (Psalm 49:7). No human being can redeem another human being. We are told instead, "God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me" (Psalm 49:15). The Hebrew Scriptures make it clear that only an Eternal Being can save a mortal being from sin, and that only He can redeem people from the realm of death.

The angels proclaimed at the birth of Yeshua, "for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord" (Luke 2:11). How many times do the Apostolic Scriptures tell us that Yeshua is our Savior?

"For the husband is the head of the wife, as Messiah also is the head of the [assembly], He Himself *being* the **Savior** of the body" (Ephesians 5:23).

"Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua according to the commandment of God our **Savior**, and of Messiah Yeshua, *who is* our hope" (1 Timothy 1:1).

"[B]ut now has been revealed by the appearing of our **Savior** Messiah Yeshua, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

"To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Messiah Yeshua our **Savior**" (Titus 1:4).

"[L]ooking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and **Savior**, Messiah Yeshua" (Titus 2:13).

"Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Yeshua the Messiah, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and **Savior**, Yeshua the Messiah" (2 Peter 1:1).

"[T]hat you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and **Savior** *spoken* by your apostles" (2 Peter 3:2).

"We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the **Savior** of the world" (1 John 4:14).

Yeshua can only be our Savior if He is God in the flesh. If the Scriptures are clear that only the LORD, God, is our Savior—and Yeshua is not God—then by all means who is He? If He was just a human man, then how can He redeem us from the power of Sheol, and consequently eternal punishment? Can a human agent sent by God be an adequate substitute for God? Can a supernatural, but ultimately created being, genuinely redeem human sinners, who are themselves created beings?

Some at the time of Yeshua believed that He was blaspheming, because His actions demonstrated Him to be God. Yeshua forgave the sins of others, and being able to forgive sins was something that only God could accomplish. It was not something that any human being could do:

“But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?’” (Mark 2:6-7).

“The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, ‘Who is this *man* who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?’” (Luke 5:21).

Is the issue of Yeshua’s Divinity is a **salvation issue**? If God is the only One who can save us from our sins, then *yes!*

Some say the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 makes it impossible for God to be a plurality, and thus for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to co-exist. This declaration of Biblical monotheism states, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” But what the *Shema* is more than anything else it is a declaration of the primacy of the Holy One of Israel in the lives of His people. It is a declaration and commitment of His people to obey Him, and place Him above all other gods or objects of worship. The *Shema* bids God’s people to be exclusively loyal to Him, and to worship Him alone.⁹

The fact that God, or *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), is a plurality, is demonstrated from the very beginning of the Book of Genesis, when He says, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (1:26). He later says when Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us” (Genesis 3:22). When God scatters the nations at the Tower of Babel, He says, “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech” (Genesis 11:7). Speaking to Isaiah, the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” (Isaiah 6:8). In each of these instances, God speaks to Himself, and it is evident as a *plurality*.

This plurality is also evident in the Psalmist’s declaration, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (Psalm 110:1), something repeated or alluded to numerous times throughout the Apostolic Scriptures in regard to Yeshua the Messiah.¹⁰ Here, the Hebrew text reads *ne’um YHWH l’Adonai* (נְאֻם יְהוָה לַאֲדֹנָי), and God is speaking to Himself in this passage. Psalm 110:1 is notably referred to when Yeshua speaks before the Sanhedrin at His trial:

“And Yeshua said, ‘I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, AND COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN’ [Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13]. Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses?’” (Mark 14:62-63; cf. Matthew 26:64-65).

⁹ For a further examination of Deuteronomy 6:4, consult the author’s article, “What Does the Shema Really Mean?”

¹⁰ Matthew 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42, 43; Acts 2:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20, 22; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2.

confronting critical issues

The high priest considered Yeshua to be committing blasphemy here, because He associated Himself with being that Power by saying "I AM." This was a very direct way of Yeshua identifying Himself as God.

In the Hebrew Tanach when the Lord appeared to Moses at the burning bush, we are told, "Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.'" Now they may say to me, "What is His name?" What shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13-14). God specifically told Moses that He is *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), "I Shall Be As I Shall Be" (ATS). It is from the Hebrew verb *hayah* (הָיָה) or "to be" that God's proper name of יהוה or YHWH/YHVH is derived, a loose meaning of which would be "Eternal One." In the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew phrase *ehyeh asher ehyeh* was rendered as *egō eimi ho ōn* (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν), "I am THE BEING" (LXE) or "The One Who Is" (NETS). *Egō eimi* or "I AM" is used numerous times in the Apostolic Scriptures by Yeshua, each instance being a proof of His Divinity.

In Matthew 14:24-27, the Disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, and were being swayed to-and-fro by a storm. They saw Yeshua walking on the water, and they were frightened, believing Him to be a ghost. The Messiah comforted them by speaking forth "I AM":

"But the boat was now in *the* middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. But in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went out to them, walking on the sea. And seeing Him walking on the sea, the disciples were troubled, saying, It is a phantom! And they cried out from the fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Be comforted! **I AM** [*egō eimi*]! Do not fear" (LITV).

Peter went out to meet Yeshua on the lake, but began to sink because of his lack of belief. The two of them entered into the boat together. "When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" (Matthew 14:32-33). The Disciples asked themselves, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:41). Notice that the Disciples all worshipped Yeshua, and they recognized that as God among them He had the power and authority over the weather.

In John 8:56-59, Yeshua talked to a group of Jews who asked Him about Abraham. Yeshua responded to them, telling them that Abraham rejoiced over His day. These Jews asked Him how He could possibly have known this, considering the fact that Yeshua was not even fifty years old, and Abraham was long since dead:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.' So the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Yeshua said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, **I am** [*egō eimi*].' Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Yeshua hid Himself and went out of the temple."

Notice the reaction of the Jews here. Yeshua made the quintessential remark, "before Abraham was born, I am." This speaks to Yeshua's preexistence as God, because He did not say, "before Abraham was, I was." These Jews picked up stones to stone Yeshua because He was identifying Himself as God or "I AM." They considered this to be blasphemy.

In John 18:4-6, Judas Iscariot and a mob of Roman soldiers came to arrest Yeshua. They asked Him who He was, and He responded by telling them that He was Yeshua of Nazareth and with "I AM":

"So Yeshua, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Yeshua the Nazarene.' He said to them, '**I am** He.' And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, '**I am** [*egō eimi*] He,' they drew back and fell to the ground."