

TORAH IN THE BALANCE
VOLUME I

TORAH -IN THE- BALANCE

VOLUME I

The Validity of the Torah
and Its Practical Life Applications

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC
APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Torah In the Balance

Volume I

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*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

Dedication

Torah In the Balance is dedicated to my mother, Margaret McKee Huey, who was both the originator of the idea for this book and who has been my inspiration through thick and thin. If it were not for the faithful devotion of my mother to things of the Lord and her prayers for my salvation, I would not know Yeshua as my Savior and the blessings of following God's Torah. My heartfelt regards and thanks go out to my "Moogie" whom I love dearly.

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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*
 Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
 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*
 BKCNT: *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*
 C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
 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)
 EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
 ESV: *English Standard Version* (2001)
 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)
 Heb: Hebrew
 IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
 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)
 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* (Liddell & Scott)
 LXE: Brenton's English translation of the Septuagint
 LXX: Septuagint
 m. Mishnah
 MT: Masoretic Text
 NASB: *New American Standard Bible* (1977)
 NASU: *New American Standard Update* (1995)
 NEB: *New English Bible* (1970)
 Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
 NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
 NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
 NIV: *New International Version* (1984)
 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)
 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*
 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*
 WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
 YLT: *Young's Literal Translation* (1862/1898)

Introduction

If you are a Messianic Believer or are a Christian who is wondering about Messianic belief and practice, you know that Messianics are not the “norm.” You know that Messianics break the proverbial “mold” that exists in much of today’s Christianity. While, like your average evangelical Christians, Messianics believe in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ),ⁱ and in foundational truths such as salvation by grace through faith and the final authority of Holy Scripture;ⁱⁱ we also believe and practice things that many Christians 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 for us so that we might follow His example?

Sadly, many modern Christians believe the former, rather than the latter. Christians rightly believe that the reason the Messiah came was to become the atoning sacrifice for our sins so that we 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 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 its punishments. 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), 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 Heavenly Father says, “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.” What the Hebrew word *qodesh* or “holy” really means is set-apart. What God wants us for is to be set-apart; He wants us to be different from the world around us. And He indeed tells 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).

ⁱ *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ) is the original Hebrew name of Jesus meaning, “He is Salvation” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus is derived from the Greek transliteration of Yeshua, *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς), originally employed by the Greek Septuagint.

ⁱⁱ Consult the Messianic Apologetics Statement of Faith at messianicapologetics.net/statementoffaith.html, and be sure to notice how most of its basic tenets fully align with today’s evangelicalism.

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The Lord plainly tells us that if we want to be a holy and set-apart people, then we will follow His commandments or *mitzvot* of the Torah.ⁱⁱⁱ This concept was understood by Yeshua, the Apostles, and the First Century assembly of Believers. The Apostle Peter writes, “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’” (1 Peter 1:15-16).^{iv}

We live in a fallen world today which has decided to reject the Torah and reject God’s holy Instruction. Similarly, many have decided to reject the teachings of Messiah Yeshua, which are a reflection of the Torah, and have rejected His salvation. And even more sadly, many Christians claiming to know Him have gone after “another Yeshua” or “another Jesus,” who is incapable of providing salvation because he opposes the Torah—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). 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). As the world gets worse and worse, 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 Old Testament, but also the rich spiritual and theological heritage that we all have from Judaism.

Holding to the position that the Torah or Law of Moses is still to be followed today is very controversial. Messianic Believers 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. What can happen in many instances is that fierce, vehement debates will ensue among Messianics who are Torah observant and Christians 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 violation of God’s Torah. For the Torah indeed tells us, “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), and Yeshua exemplified this perfectly in His ministry example (cf. Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27).

I personally hate division and in-fighting, but do believe that many of today’s Christians 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

ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

^{iv} Cf. Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7.

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 will indeed be “least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19), 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 that our Heavenly Father originally intended. We in the Messianic community, often advocate that this means that Believers must return to the eternal truths of God contained in the Torah, that we should live out the Torah via the power of God’s love, and most of all that we must endeavor to live a life like Messiah Yeshua—who upheld the Torah in *all* of His words, actions, and deeds. It has been declared 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 that endorse Torah obedience, but do so in a very, very unfair way.^v These materials criticize, berate, and many times insult Christians, thus casting Messianics in a very bad role. On the other side there are some Messianic publications, materials, and articles that present God’s Torah in an “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 that we need to avoid.

I recognize that change does not happen instantaneously in the life of a born again Believer, but that a steadily, 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.^{vi}

^v These include, but are by no means limited to, pseudo-scholarly publications like *Fossilized Customs* or *Come Out of Her, My People*.

^{vi} Please note that this book does not address all of the proof verses commonly used by today’s Christians 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.

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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 that 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 that 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 on 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 calling that 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).

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

PART I

The Importance of the Torah

A Question for the Ages

One of the most intriguing issues that I dealt with as an undergraduate at the University of Oklahoma, as a political science major (1999-2003), was the philosophy known as Liberalism. This "Liberalism," with a capital "L," is not the ideology that is converse to conservatism as in "Republicans versus Democrats" here in the United States. Liberalism is, rather, an ideology centered around individual rights and free enterprise that every human being is believed to be entitled to. These ideals are adhered to very strongly in the Western democratic world, and they have enabled me to speak my views in a society where the freedom to express one's own opinion is greatly upheld.

Many Believers, notably those in the United States, greatly respect the freedoms and liberties that we have. According to our system of government, we can worship God in the way we choose and believe whatever we want as long as it does not disrupt the public order. But for many centuries prior to the founding of our country, this was not the case. On the contrary, in the early days of our Messianic faith, following the ascension of Yeshua into Heaven, Believers have continually run into problems with civil authority. The Messianic Scriptures (New Testament) repeatedly tell us that the Apostles ran into problems with both the Jewish religious leaders, who by-and-large rejected the Messianic claims of Yeshua, and with the Roman civil authorities, many of whom believed that they were the cause of an insurrection against the emperor. History later records that many Believers were indeed persecuted and martyred for their faith in Him.

The question for the true Believers since has always been: **How do we function in society, yet keep our faith?** As we review what has happened to those who since the First Century C.E. have claimed a belief in Messiah Yeshua, different groups of people have responded to this question in different ways.

Four centuries after Yeshua's ascension into Heaven, Augustine, bishop of Hippo, wrote his work *City of God*. Whether you agree with his theology or not, his writings have influenced many over the centuries, both Catholic and Protestant alike. He described what he believed to be a split in human life, between one's carnal and spiritual existence, writing down an incredibly long list of sins and perversions that has tainted and marked fallen humanity throughout the ages with

which we should all agree.¹ In describing the human condition, Augustine made the analogy between two cities: the City of God and the City of Man. In Earthly life he believed people must contend with what has been dealt to them in the City of Man, its gross imperfections, and live with the civil authorities as long as they do not harass God's people for their faith. But as followers of the Lord, the righteous should strive to enter the City of God and its perfections in the hereafter. He says, "In the one [City of Man], the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other [City of God], the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all."²

Many years later this challenge was brought forth by two of the Reformers who greatly shaped Protestant theology: Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther, in particular, recognized the distinct separation between civil and religious powers. In Luther's work "The Christian In Society," he commented that "Both [systems] must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other. No one can become righteous in the sight of God by means of the temporal government, without Christ's spiritual government."³ His position was very close to Augustine's. Do your best in society and be a witness for the faith, but recognize that secular government has its place in God's eternal plan.

Calvin held to a slightly different position than Luther or Augustine. The author of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and numerous other books and commentaries, Calvin actually put many of his beliefs and philosophies to practice in the city of Geneva, trying to facilitate a utopia here on Earth. Calvin did, however, believe in a separation between secular government and religion. He stated in his book *God and Political Duty*, that "spiritual reign, even now upon earth, commences within us some preludes of the heavenly kingdom, and in this mortal and transitory life affords us some of the prelibations of immortal and incorruptible blessedness..."⁴ Although some aspects of God's Eternal Kingdom could be captured on Earth, which is what Calvin tried to do in Geneva, it was ultimately Heaven where the Believer's hope rested. Many theologians since have held to the belief that while some elements of God's Kingdom could be brought to Earth, the Kingdom may not be consummated on this Planet with the Messiah's physical return.

¹ These sins are, according to Augustine: "gnawing cares, disquiet, griefs, fears, wild joys, quarrels, law-suits, wars, treasons, angers, hatreds, deceit, flattery, fraud, theft, robbery, perfidy, pride, ambition, envy, murders, parricides, cruelty, ferocity, wickedness, luxury, insolence, impudence, shamelessness, fornications, adulteries, incests, and the numberless uncleanness and unnatural acts of both sexes, which it is shameful so much as to mention; sacrileges, heresies, blasphemies, perjuries, oppression of the innocent, calumnies, plots, falsehoods, false witnessings, unrighteous judgments, violent deeds, plunderings, and innumerable other crimes that do not easily come to mind, but that never absent themselves from the actuality of human existence" (St. Augustine, "City of God," in Mitchell Cohen and Nicole Fermon, eds., *Princeton Readings in Political Thought* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996], pp 133-134).

² *Ibid.*, 136.

³ Martin Luther, "The Christian in Society," in *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴ John Calvin, "God and Political Duty," in *Ibid.*, pp 202-203.