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Answering the “Frequently Avoided Questions” About the Messiahship of Yeshua 2007

answering the claims of the anti-missionary movement

The Messianic community of faith presently finds itself at a very serious crossroads, not just a crossroads in determining its long term purpose and where it is going to be in the next few decades, but most seriously in its theology and how we are to approach the Bible. The enemy desperately wants us to get off course and away from the mission of seeing the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel accomplished (Acts 1:6). He wants us to not be a movement of positive change and transformation, where people are empowered by the Lord to accomplish His tasks in the world—but rather be one of mischief, confusion, and apostasy. The enemy wants us to seriously “mess up” and gain a bad reputation so that people will (rightly) stay away.

One of the most significant ways that this has happened over the past several years has been seen when various Messianic individuals deny the Divinity of Yeshua the Messiah. There have been both Messianic teachers and laypersons who have decided that Yeshua the Messiah was nothing more than a human being empowered by God, but certainly not God in the flesh. They have stripped away the reality of His Incarnation, and made Him little more than a mortal like one of “us.”

It is not all that surprising, but among a significant number of those who deny Yeshua’s Divinity **are those who later deny His Messiahship**. Not content with their entirely human Yeshua, these people then question whether or not Yeshua is even the Messiah and whether they truly need Him. Outsiders to the Messianic community who witness this trend, often believe that the Messianic movement is *not* something that God has raised up to restore the lost Hebraic and Jewish Roots of the faith, or even just see a generation of Jewish people brought to Yeshua—but rather is a move of the Adversary to lead people *away* from the salvation available in Yeshua and the truth of the gospel. Is this truly the case? Are we nothing more than a revolving door, leading people into our midst for a short season, and then into the open arms of a Messiah-less Synagogue?

What are some of the “frequently avoided questions” about Yeshua’s Messiahship that we must answer to prevent any further apostasy? How might the issue of Yeshua’s Messiahship shake us out of our complacency in other areas of theology?

Who have we invited into the camp?

There have always been obstinate arguments present in the Jewish world against the Messiahship of Yeshua. The testimony of the Gospels is clear that many Jews in the First Century rejected Yeshua as the Messiah. The testimony of history is likewise clear that many Jews throughout the centuries rejected Him as well. Some of the reasons as to why Yeshua was rejected are complicated. On the one hand, many who encountered Yeshua and His Disciples wanted nothing to do with them for ideological reasons or because they found their message of repentance offensive. On the other hand, many Jews throughout history have rejected Yeshua because of the unfortunate politicization of much of the Medieval Christian Church, and grossly misguided laws and persecution imposed by anti-Semitic leaders.¹ Certainly, the Church has played a large role in Jewish rejection of Yeshua, but it is not solely to blame. The defiant will of any person—Jewish or otherwise—in rejecting the gospel is just as responsible.²

Fast forwarding to today, through the rise of Messianic Judaism in the Twentieth Century, and now with many Christians eagerly examining their Hebraic Roots, a sector of Jewish teachers commonly known as “anti-missionaries” has arisen. These anti-missionaries specifically target Messianic Jews and Christians interested in their Jewish Roots *for (re)conversion to Judaism* and to denounce Yeshua as Messiah.

Anti-missionary organizations and teachers originate mainly from the Orthodox branch of Judaism. What makes this significant, in combating their arguments, is in knowing that Orthodox Jewish theology is largely sectarian, its hermeneutics can, at times, often be overly simplistic, and it is usually isolationist. Orthodox Jewish examination of the Tanach is frequently devoid of external discussion regarding history, comparative linguistics with cognate languages of Biblical Hebrew, and factors relating to Ancient Near Eastern society.

It cannot be ignored that anti-missionary teachers and organizations tend to sit at the far Right end of the theological spectrum. They often hold to extreme views regarding the composition of the Tanach that cannot be substantiated in the larger field of Biblical Studies. Has the Torah been preserved *perfectly* stroke-by-stroke since Mount Sinai *without any* textual deviations of any kind? Are issues such as time, place, location, and contemporary history to be considered *irrelevant* when determining not only the meaning of a Biblical text, but also a text’s reliability? These are some major issues where the Orthodox Jewish scholarship employed by anti-missionaries comes up severely short.

Just to see a common example of the style of interpretation we will respond to, consider a rather “mundane” issue presented by Exodus 1:8: “Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” Why is this the case? Surely, with all of the exploits of Joseph seen in Genesis chs. 39-50 as a political leader in Egypt, this new king would have known of Joseph. Messianics commonly struggle over this passage, often not knowing how to interpret it. Often turning to

¹ Note that we need not make any broad or overly-simplistic conclusions regarding the complicated history of relations between the Jewish people and the Christian Church. While it is very true that the Church has been directly responsible for atrocities against the Jews (which have largely been renounced by modern Christian leaders), it is also very true that there were many Christians who stood against these atrocities as well. **Having a fair minded view of the issues is absolutely imperative.** We cannot discount the fact that these poor relations have equally been a Jewish problem as they have been a Christian problem, as the Jewish community was often not open to reasoned dialogue and discussion any more than the Christian community was often not open to moderate and cordial relations with their Jewish neighbors.

Consult the author’s article, “The Top Ten Urban Myths of Today’s Messianic Movement” for a further discussion. Also consult the balanced and realistic remarks of Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 1: General and Historical Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), pp 124-145.

² I would also emphasize here that even though many Jews have rejected Yeshua, *ultimately*, only God Himself knows the heart condition and eternal destiny of *any person*—Jewish or non-Jewish.

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Orthodox Jewish resources like the *ArtScroll Chumash*, they are confronted with explanations such as the following:

“Either it was literally a new king, or an existing monarch with ‘new’ policies, who found it convenient to ‘ignore’ Joseph’s monumental contributions to the country (*Sotah* 11), probably on the grounds that whatever the Jew Joseph had done for Egypt was ancient history and no longer mattered. This ‘what have you done for me lately’ kind of anti-Semitism is another familiar phenomenon of Jewish history.”³

Certainly, while there are many good things that one can glean from Orthodox Jewish Bible scholarship, this explanation for the Pharaoh not knowing Joseph is not one of them (including Joseph being anachronistically called a “Jew,” as the term *Yehudi*, יהודי was not readily used until after the Babylonian exile). Are we to honestly think that the new king of Egypt did not “know” (Heb. *yada*, יָדָע) Joseph in some kind of *intimate way*, meaning that he just casually did not acknowledge Joseph’s accomplishments? Or, are we to consider the first possibility: that a new king arose over Egypt from a new dynasty who did not *factually* know of Joseph? It is clear which position the *ArtScroll Chumash* takes: the subjective interpretation. The exegesis represented here takes the “easy path.”

The objective interpretation, though, forces us to take the “hard path.” It forces us to consider not only the text of Exodus 1:8, but also the possible Egyptian historical backdrop. We have to consider events that may have occurred between the time of Joseph and the sons of Jacob entering into Egypt, and the installation of this new king over Egypt. Non-Orthodox Jewish scholarship (and much of Christian scholarship) does not ignore these critical factors and is engaged in a much larger conversation. As Jewish commentator Nahum M. Sarna summarizes,

“The most reasonable explanation for the change in fortune lies in the policies adopted by the pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty (ca. 1306-1200 B.C.E.), and especially by Ramses II (ca. 1290-1224 B.C.E.), who shifted Egypt’s administrative and strategic center of gravity to the eastern Delta of the Nile.”⁴

Sarna gives a further clue on his commentary for Exodus 1:9-10 as to why the Egyptians may have been fearful of the Ancient Hebrews:

“The eastern Delta of the Nile was vulnerable to penetration from Asia. In the middle of the eighteenth century B.C.E. it had been infiltrated by the Hyksos, an Egyptian term meaning ‘rulers of foreign lands.’ The Hyksos were a conglomeration of ethnic tribes among whom Semites predominated. They gradually took over Lower Egypt and ruled it until their expulsion in the second half of the sixteenth century B.C.E.”⁵

A new Pharaoh of Egypt from a new dynasty could have easily not known of Joseph because the Israelites settled in Goshen, in the Nile Delta region of Lower Egypt or Northern Egypt, and as Pharaoh he would have been from Upper Egypt or Southern Egypt, moving back into previously conquered territories. Wanting to rebuild an empire that had been diminished, the Israelites having multiplied would make a convenient workforce. Politically it would have been easy to enslave them, because as Semites they would remind many Egyptians of the Hyksos invasion.

I give this illustration because ignoring the critical factors of history, setting, and to a lesser degree linguistics, is seen throughout much Orthodox Jewish examination of the Tanach. God

³ Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 293.

⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

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has given us all minds and reasoning skills so that we might be joined to a large and much more modern theological conversation. The anti-missionaries, in contrast, often set themselves off to the side, isolating themselves in a theological vacuum. We should not be shocked to see that the factors of history, setting, and linguistics are often not employed in their criticisms of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament. **If they are not of the habit of employing these things in how they examine the Tanach, they will certainly not be employed when examining the Apostolic Scriptures and life of Yeshua.** (Ironically enough, in many cases they ignore some of their own literature which reflects various interpretations and opinions regarding key Messianic texts.)⁶

It should also not be surprising to us when we see that the greatest influence of the anti-missionary movement takes place among (former) Messianics who strongly lean toward an Orthodox style, or even some kind of more fundamental form, of Torah *halachah*.⁷ Messianics who separate themselves in a spiritual and social vacuum, often not interacting with other Messianics or with other people in general, are those who are most susceptible to the anti-missionary arguments. Some of them are open because they feel that they will be fully accepted by the Synagogue, and others are open because they have bitterness and hatred toward anyone who is not a part of their clique (primarily Christians).

While the Messianic movement will probably always have the nagging annoyance of the anti-missionaries to deal with, it will only remain at “crisis proportions” until the theology of the broad Messianic community can progress more significantly toward the Center and away from the (extreme) Right. Answering the claims against Yeshua’s Messiahship is complicated because of the current tensions that exist in Messianic theology, the realm of our hermeneutics (how we examine and interpret Scripture), our approach to the larger Jewish (and to a lesser extent, Christian) world, and whether or not we are engaged in the much larger theological “conversation.”

Likewise, in examining the Messiahship of Yeshua, things are complicated because too many Messianic teachers make the mistake of believing that *only* the Hebrew source text of the Tanach is sufficient for Biblical examination. Too many fall into the serious error (and indeed urban myth) of believing that the Masoretic Text (MT) used in today’s Orthodox Judaism, and which is also the primary text used for most English Bibles’ translation of the Tanach or Old Testament, has been copied without deviation or any kind of variance since antiquity.⁸ *We should not be so naïve.* Not enough Messianics are aware of the fact that the final form of this text dates from the Seventh-Tenth Centuries C.E., a minimum of seven hundred years *after* the ministry of Yeshua—and certainly a long way from the Exodus and Mount Sinai.⁹ While we will indeed be considering the Hebrew of the MT in our primary examination of Yeshua’s Messiahship, our analysis *will by no means* disclude the textual witnesses of the Greek

⁶ Michael L. Brown’s *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus* series provides many of these references in relation to Biblical passages and historical Jewish interpretations, many of which go beyond the intended scope of this article.

⁷ Please note that these comments should *not* be interpreted as meaning that I am opposed to mainline Jewish tradition (such as the Karaites, who often practice the same kind of disengaged exegesis as Orthodox Judaism) or a conservative approach to Torah *halachah*. What it is to say is that a *halachah* leading to isolationism and non-interaction with society at large is wrong, and these are generally things not seen in the more Centrist branches of Judaism.

Consult the relevant sections of the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics (forthcoming).

⁸ We recommend that if you use a Hebrew text for the Tanach, that you have a critical text like the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977). While this text reads practically identical to the Rabbinical text of today, it does offer in its footnotes alternate readings that appear in the Greek Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, Aramaic Targums, Dead Sea Scrolls, and other ancient translations and manuscript sources.

⁹ Cf. E.J. Revell, “Masoretic Text,” in David Noel Freedman, ed. et. al., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:597-599.

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Septuagint (LXX), Latin Vulgate, or Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), and linguistic studies beyond that of Biblical Hebrew.

The narrow minded anti-missionary reliance upon only the MT is strong evidence that they are not part of a larger theological, and indeed, textual conversation. One common anti-missionary tactic is to claim that the Apostolic Scriptures misquote from the Hebrew Tanach. To a certain extent this is not incorrect; the Apostolic Scriptures do not quote from a Seventh-Tenth Century C.E. Hebrew text that did not exist in the First Century C.E. The Apostolic Scriptures largely employ the Greek LXX, and may even rely upon some of its *interpretive value judgments* to make theological points. Acts 15:17 is an excellent example of this, where James the Just quotes from the Prophet Amos at the Jerusalem Council:

“SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME.”

The Hebrew MT in Amos reads slightly different:

“So that they shall possess the rest of Edom and all the nations once attached to My name—declares the LORD who will bring this to pass” (Amos 9:12, NJPS).

The difference between what James says and the Hebrew text in Amos, is that James follows the Septuagint rendering which reads with *hoi kataloipoi tōn anthrōpōn* (οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων) for the Hebrew *sh'eirit Edom* (שְׁאִרֵי יֶדֶם). The LXX translators understood *Edom* (אֱדוֹם) to be connected to *adam* (אָדָם), also the Hebrew word for “**mankind, people**” (*HALOT*),¹⁰ and rendered it in Greek as “the remnant of men” (Apostle’s Bible) or “those remaining of humans” (NETS), referring to God’s faithful remnant that would come forth out of humanity’s masses. James makes the connection between the salvation of Israel and those of the nations coming to faith in Israel’s Messiah.

Far too many of today’s Messianic people do not have a high regard for the Greek Septuagint, or for that matter Greek language studies in general. They find themselves as easy prey for those who claim that the Apostolic writers misquote from the Tanach, when in actuality the Apostolic writers are often just quoting from the Septuagint.¹¹ We do have to make the value judgment whether or not the LXX—the **oldest complete witness to the Scriptures of Israel**—plays a role in our Messianic theology and exegesis. Many decide a definite “no,” and they are the same ones who are often led to reject Yeshua’s Messiahship. But we should know better, because Israel is supposed to be God’s conduit by which the entire world can be blessed (Genesis 22:18; Deuteronomy 4:5-8), and by necessity one must communicate to the world in languages other than Hebrew to fulfill this Divine mandate.¹²

Unfortunately, when we look at some of the things resulting from an Orthodox Jewish style of *halachah* in our midst today, and what the anti-missionaries have done to the Messianic world, we have some serious things to consider and (re)evaluate. Some Messianics have to remove themselves from their isolationism and begin to consider things not only that have been left out of the conversation regarding interpretation of the Apostolic Scriptures, but *also* have been ignored regarding the Tanach itself. When we do this, we find that the Messiahship of Yeshua, while being one of the most serious issues in our faith—is uniquely connected to other issues that we commonly avoid. **I do not believe that God will let us avoid these things any longer.**

¹⁰ *HALOT*, 1:14.

¹¹ Not realizing this fact has already caused a sector of Messianics to doubt and disregard the canonicity of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whose author makes over thirty-two direct quotations from the LXX. For a further review, the author’s commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

¹² Consult the author’s article “Can We Trust the Greek Scriptures?” Also consult R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

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Can we be entirely “objective”?

When one encounters the arguments of anti-missionaries, such teachers do not hide the fact that they have a bias. It is a firm teaching of Orthodox Judaism that one cannot be a Jew and believe in Yeshua. Centuries of Christian teaching only reinforced this concept from the other side, as one could not be a Christian and a Jew at the same time. Only until the advent of Messianic Judaism in the Twentieth Century would one be able to even have a concentrated “anti-missionary movement,” ready to go out and stop Jews en masse from hearing about the Messiah. What has made Messianic Judaism so radical is that it affirms that a Jewish person can be a Believer in Yeshua the Messiah, and still retain his or her Jewishness. But while Christian positions on the Jewishness of Jewish Believers have greatly moderated, the same cannot really be said for Jewish positions on the Jewishness of Jewish Believers.

Things are more complex today with large numbers of non-Jews entering into the Messianic movement. For some reason or another, many non-Jewish Believers are experiencing great spiritual fulfillment in Messianic congregations and fellowships. They are learning things about their faith that were not discussed in their previous church settings. They are discussing commonly overlooked Scriptures. They are learning about the Jewishness of Jesus and about the richness of His teachings. To the anti-missionary, these people make prime targets for conversion.

Certainly, the anti-missionary, who wants to see the numbers of Orthodox Judaism increase, has a definite agenda and bias. He will prey on the ignorance of a Believer in Yeshua to get him or her to renounce faith in Him. This is compounded when a Messianic teacher may be responsible for presenting an unbalanced amount of attention to Orthodox Jewish views of the Tanach—notably at the expense of the more moderate branches of Judaism—and constantly repudiates Christian Bible teachers and the Christian Church. People can then begin to idolize “the Rabbis,” and find themselves led down a path to apostasy. It is no different than what Paul tells the Galatians about the Influencers: “They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them” (Galatians 4:17). These “Rabbis” are not people who are open to dialogue with Believers in Yeshua, but they certainly want Believers in Yeshua to seek out their opinions so they can be swayed away from Him.

I do not want to be seen as anti-Jewish by any means in these remarks, but much of today’s broad Messianic movement often lacks realism and pragmatism when it comes to “the Rabbis.” The anti-missionaries capitalize on this time and time again, and Messianic teachers who are unbalanced to our *shared* spiritual and theological heritage coming from both Judaism *and* Christianity only add to the problem. The anti-missionaries are not objective and their aims at getting people to deny our Lord and Savior are never hidden.

Those of us who affirm Yeshua’s Messiahship should certainly strive to be as objective as possible, unlike the anti-missionaries. We should strive to be part of a larger theological conversation, *not* ignoring the factors that anti-missionaries commonly ignore. Yet, in that objectivity we should plainly recognize that **one’s spirituality does play a distinct role in believing whether or not Yeshua is the Messiah**. A person in a Messianic congregation will often be unprepared to encounter anti-missionary tactics and arguments. Someone may ask a random question at a Bible study from a website or e-mail they have read, or worse yet an actual anti-missionary may surreptitiously visit your congregation. What does a person do when backed up against a wall, having to respond to arguments he or she has never heard before? Are you to capitulate and give in?

I can only answer for myself. While I have certainly had enough theological training to know that things are never as simplistic as anti-missionaries often make them, the spiritual

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forces at work via the anti-missionaries are quite severe. It is not as though the anti-missionaries are just misguided people; they have a mission from Satan himself.¹³ It is not as though these people are interested in reasoned and constructive dialogue trying to find some common ground (as many other Jewish people may be); they want your soul. A Believer in Yeshua—when backed up against the wall by anti-missionary arguments—**must fall back on his or her spiritual experience with God via His Son Yeshua.**

The end-time saints described in Revelation overcome Satan “because of the blood of the Lamb **and because of the word of their testimony**, and they did not love their life even when faced with death” (Revelation 12:11). Anyone, be they anti-missionaries or atheists wanting Believers to deny Yeshua, must ultimately be overcome via our personal testimonies of salvation. When anti-missionary ideas or the people themselves infiltrate your ranks, you may not have time to respond to their arguments. No matter how much study or preparation you have had, you may not be able to anticipate all of their arguments. **You must stand confident in your relationship with God via His Son.**

On August 8, 1995 I had a profound supernatural encounter with the God of Israel. I had just returned from a Christian youth camp where the Ten Commandments were emphasized throughout the week as God’s standard of holiness. Returning home, I was unsure of my spiritual condition or whether or not I was even “saved.” I spent several hours in my bedroom confessing my violation of the Ten Commandments before God. *These were some several hours.* Not only did I feel forgiven of my sins, but demons that had been allowed to influence me manifested themselves, and I was shown the reality of the eternal, *never-ending* judgment that awaited me separated from God’s presence.¹⁴ **I always fall back on my experience when attacks are issued against my faith.** I do not claim total objectivity, because having a supernatural encounter with the Creator God is never something totally objective. *I do not hide my bias.*¹⁵

If we have a deep seated assurance of our salvation, then responding to the arguments of those who would steal our redemption is only a matter of study and time. And, given the largely disengaged perspective of the anti-missionaries, we find that this is often quite easy when we are equipped with the proper tools and data.

Answering these “Frequently Avoided Questions”

Time and space do not permit us to address all of the claims that are made against the Messiahship of Yeshua. Indeed, new reasons are being proposed all of the time as the Messianic community grows and the anti-missionary movement becomes more virulent. **Many of the issues have to be considered in yet-to-be-written Messianic commentaries on books of the Bible.** Still, there are some significant claims that are commonly made by anti-missionaries about the life of Yeshua, prophecies that He supposedly did not fulfill, and supposed misapplications of Tanach texts by the Apostolic writers. These claims easily upset and disturb Messianic Believers, who often do not have a readily available answer to them. The claims that we will answer in our analysis largely relate to these areas. We have limited them to the

¹³ I do not hesitate to tell the reader that I believe that the Jewish anti-missionary movement is likely “the synagogue of Satan” seen in Revelation 3:9. Consult the chapter of *When Will the Messiah Return?*, “The Philadelphian Assembly.”

¹⁴ Consult the author’s article “The Assurance of Our Salvation” (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*) for a further discussion of the importance of God’s commandments in the salvation process. Also consult the relevant sections of the author’s publication *Why Hell Must Be Eternal*.

¹⁵ Of course, we should all be reminded of the fact that the most biased issue that human beings have to consider is whether or not there is a Supreme Being who created the universe. Answering the question, “Is there a God?” is *most definitely affected* by one’s experience, **just as much** as the question “Is Yeshua/Jesus the Messiah?”

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common ten claims that usually circulate—so-called “frequently avoided questions”—that are often asked of our ministry by those who encounter anti-missionary works.

You will find that there are relatively easy answers to most of the claims that are made today by anti-missionaries against the Messiahship, and indeed the ministry of Yeshua of Nazareth. However, many of these claims are also innately connected to other Biblical issues. So, in offering responses to claims that are made against our Lord and Redeemer, each of us—whether a teacher or layperson—is going to be challenged in other areas of our theology. Surely, if the Messianic movement is indeed something that God is going to use for some great things in the future, He is going to make sure that we are a mature people *who can handle any issue*.

False Claim #1

Numbers 23:19 clearly states that God is not a man, yet Christianity considers Jesus to be God, when at most he was just a human teacher.

A bridge between denying Yeshua’s Divinity and later His Messiahship is often built by anti-missionaries quoting Numbers 23:19 to a person who fails to consider the setting and context in which its words are given. Seeds of doubting the Messiahship of Yeshua are planted, as it may seem that Christian expositors have misunderstood the Gospels and have inappropriately given Jesus of Nazareth a status that He was never intended to have. But this is not what Numbers 23:19 says.

The setting of this verse is the Torah portion *Balak* (Numbers 22:2-25:19), when King Balak of the Moabites commissions the prophet-for-hire Balaam to curse the people of Israel. The narrative of Numbers 23, specifically, includes a dialogue between the Lord and Balaam, including a word that Balaam is to give Balak (23:7-10), and Balak arguing with Balaam about him not cursing Israel (23:11-15). After carrying on a dialogue with God (23:16), Balaam issues the following words to Balak:

“Arise, O Balak, and hear; give ear to me, O son of Zippor! **God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?** Behold, I have received a *command* to bless; when He has blessed, then I cannot revoke it. He has not observed misfortune in Jacob; nor has He seen trouble in Israel; the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brings them out of Egypt, He is for them like the horns of the wild ox. For there is no omen against Jacob, nor is there any divination against Israel; at the proper time it shall be said to Jacob and to Israel, what God has done! Behold, a people rises like a lioness, and as a lion it lifts itself; it will not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain” (Numbers 23:18-24).

In Numbers 23:19, the false prophet Balaam, speaking the words of God, says “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (NIV). Anti-missionaries make good on someone’s ignorance of the context of the passage which has *nothing to do* about the makeup or composition of God, but has everything to do with the character of God. Numbers 23:19 is an excellent example of where an inclusive language translation for *lo ish El* (לֹא אִישׁ אֵל) and *u’ben adam* (וּבֶן אָדָם) can actually make the text much clearer. Numbers 23:19 speaks of the fact that “God is not a **human being**, that he should lie, or a **mortal**, that he should change his mind” (NRSV).¹⁶

¹⁶ The NJPS has the similar, “God is not man to be capricious, or **mortal** to change His mind.”

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Even though “Son of Man” is a title used by Yeshua to refer to Himself frequently throughout the Gospels, Numbers 23:19 employs *ben adam* or “son of man” in a way comparable to “mortal” (NJPS), referring to the fact that when God makes a decision He follows through on it not repenting or changing His mind. This is clear given the fact that Balaam testifies to Balak of God’s blessing Israel, something that He is not going to change given His previous actions of leading Israel out of Egypt and preserving them in the wilderness. God not being a man or a mortal is substantiated where His perfect character is contrasted to the limitations of humans. (Also to be considered can be God’s restraint in judgment seen in Hosea 11:9, where He says “For I am God and not man [for I am God and no mortal, NRSV], the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.”)

Contrary to how “son of man” is used in Numbers 23:19, Yeshua no doubt employed the title “Son of Man”¹⁷ for Himself via its Danielic usage (Daniel 7:9-14), where Daniel is shown the throne room of God. The Prophet says, “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man [Ara. *bar enash*, בֶּרֶךְ אֱנָשׁ] was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.” The context here is not Earthly, but rather is clearly Heavenly, representing one at the right hand of God. I.H. Marshall validly remarks, “the Danielic background suggests a figure closely associated with the Ancient of Days...Jesus took over this sense of the phrase, and thus identified his role with that of the figure in Daniel 7.”¹⁸ Yeshua notably uses the title “Son of Man” to describe His return to the Earth (Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27) and thus His dominion over “all the peoples, nations and *men of every language*” (Daniel 7:14).

While “son of man” can be a reference to human beings as appears in Numbers 23:19, Yeshua’s usage of this title for Himself is substantially different. We need not be confused by anti-missionaries who not only misquote Numbers 23:19 out of context, when the passage deals with the character of God, but by those who fail to see a broader view of the title “Son of Man” in relation to one intimately involved with the Ancient of Days.

False Claim #2

Psalm 22:17(16) uses “lion” and not “pierced” in the Hebrew. Christian Bibles have purposefully mistranslated the verse to prove the Messiahship of Jesus.

Psalm 22 is a significant text as it relates to the crucifixion and subsequent death of Yeshua. So significant is it, that Derek Tidball observes in his book *The Message of the Cross*, “Certainly the Gospel writers could not read it without thinking of the cross of Christ. Not only did its opening words form the wrenching cry of dereliction that came from the lips of Jesus as he died, but also the manner of his death, in detail after detail, seems to be prophesied here.”¹⁹

Yeshua quotes this psalm’s opening words, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1) while suffering on the tree (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). While it may seem that Yeshua has been “forsaken” by His Father, Psalm 22 is actually attributed to David of his entreating God for His vindication of righteous action (vs. 23-31). The text has some definite parallels with specific actions of the life of Yeshua, including a reference to garments being divided up after lots are cast (vs. 18-19; cf. Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24). Likewise, the words “let Him [God] deliver him” (v. 8) were hurled at Yeshua as He was dying (Matthew 27:39-43).

¹⁷ Grk. *ho huios tou anthrōpou* (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου).

¹⁸ I.H. Marshall, “Son of Man,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 781; cf. Tim Hegg, *The Messiah: Introduction to Christology* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2006), pp 53-68.

¹⁹ Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 85.

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Psalm 22:16 is significant as it says in the NASU, “For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; **they pierced my hands and my feet.**” In referring to the suffering of our Lord, we can certainly see the significance of this verse relating to His crucifixion. Indeed, the imagery of being “pierced” features throughout the Messianic expectation and hope of the Apostolic Scriptures (Isaiah 53:5; Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34).

Certainly, Psalm 22 has some parallels to the life of King David, but as Walter C. Kaiser validly asks, “what events in David’s life might provide the background for the abject status before all people mentioned in verse 6? When were his hands and feet pierced (assuming that is the proper reading of v. 16) and his garments divided among his detractors (v. 18)?”²⁰ This is certainly not a text that anti-missionaries want connected to the life of Yeshua and His death.

Anti-missionaries commonly use Psalm 22:16 to say that Christian Bibles deliberately manipulate this verse to prove the Messiahship of Yeshua. Indeed, as this verse reads in the ATS version, “For dogs have surrounded me; a pack of evildoers has enclosed me, **like** [the prey of] **a lion are my hands and my feet.**” The MT Hebrew clearly reads *hiqqiphuni ka’ari yadai v’raglai* (הִקְפִּיפוּנִי כְּאַרְיֵי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי).²¹

It is notable that Psalm 22:16(17) has issues that are easily seen when one compares the MT to the witnesses of the LXX and Vulgate. Tim Hegg points out that *hiqqiphuni ka’ari yadai v’rag’lai* “is pointed by the Masoretes to read ‘like a lion my hands and my feet.’ כְּאַרְיֵי is taken to be the particle כֶּ-, ‘like’ or ‘as’ plus the noun, אַרְיֵי ‘lion.’ The Lxx, however, reads the word as כָּרוּ or כָּארוּ (or something similar), a third person plural perfect verb of a speculated root כָּאָר as related to כוּר or כרה...The Aramaic verb כעַר, ‘to make ugly,’ ‘to disfigure,’ or Hebrew כרה, ‘to dig’ and by analogy, ‘to pierce,’ corresponds to the Lxx ὀρύσσω, ‘to dig, pierce.’”²¹

Indeed, the LXX of Psalm 22:16 reads with *ōrušan cheiras mou kai podas* (ὄρουσαν χεῖράς μου καὶ πόδας), “they pierced my hands and my feet” (LXE), followed by the Vulgate’s *foderunt manus meas et pedes meos*, “They have dug my hands and feet” (Douay Rheims). Kaiser notes that these are the oldest available readings,²² and new manuscript discoveries confirm the authenticity of the underlying Hebrew originally being the verb *karu* (כָּרוּ) or “they dug,” by extension meaning “they pierced.” Hegg summarizes,

“Scraps from a scroll containing some of the Psalms were discovered at Nachal Hever, and one scrap contained the line from Psalm 22:16 with the word in question well in view. Though the writing on the scrap was faint, under magnification it was easy to see and decipher. The word clearly ended in a *vav* [ו] not a *yod* [י], and was therefore a 3rd person plural verb: ‘they dug’ or ‘they pierced.’ Here was evidence that the Lxx translators had not ‘fooled’ with the text, but had faithfully translated the Hebrew original that was before them. Since this scrap is dated (in accordance with the style of letters used) to 50-68 CE, it is almost 1000 years earlier than the Masoretic text, and shows that in at least one of the earliest Hebrew traditions of Psalm 22, the word is not ‘like a lion’ but ‘they dug’ or ‘pierced.’”²³

Only if one is constrained to the straightjacket of the Hebrew MT of Psalm 22:16(17) exclusively in Biblical exegesis, as the anti-missionaries are, can a person be convinced that “like lions *they maul* my hands and feet” (NJPS) is the correct reading. The ancient witnesses of the LXX, Vulgate, and now textual evidence from Nachal Hever attests to the reading “they pierced

²⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 112.

²¹ Tim Hegg, *Messiah in the Tanach* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2003), 139.

²² Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 115, fn#10.

²³ Tim Hegg (n.d.). *Psalm 22:16—“like a lion” or “they pierced”?* *Torah Resource*. Retrieved 07 October, 2007, from <<http://www.torahresource.com>>.

Cf. Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 3: Messianic Prophecy Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), pp 123-127.

My hands and feet” (NASU). Psalm 22 is a very important section of Scripture that reflects the suffering of Yeshua, and His ultimate vindication. We need not follow a simplistic method of examination as do those who deny Him, but one where we investigate all textual avenues.²⁴

False Claim #3

Matthew 2:23 is wrong. There is no single prophecy that states that the Messiah will be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 2:23 records that Yeshua the Messiah “came and lived in a city called Nazareth. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: ‘He shall be called a Nazarene.’” The challenge for some interpreters is the fact that no specific text is being quoted. This is not unusual to see in the Apostolic Scriptures by any means. Yeshua Himself says in Matthew 26:54, “How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, *which say* that it must happen this way?” Here, the Messiah is speaking of the general sense or meaning of the Tanach, not necessarily a specific verse. In James 4:5 we see a similar usage: “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’?” Here, James appeals to the general sense of Scripture from the Tanach, rather than a specific verse or prophecy.

In Matthew 2:23, the author references the “prophets,” indicating that he is appealing to a theological concept evidenced in several places in the Tanach, *not* a single prophecy as anti-missionaries try to mislead people to believe. What is actually being communicated by the statement, “He will be called a Nazorean” (NRSV), has been a cause of great discussion and some debate among Bible interpreters and commentators.

What is likely being communicated by Matthew is some kind of word play on the terms *nazir* (נָזִיר), primarily meaning “(s.one) dedicated, consecrated” (*CHALOT*),²⁵ by extension “a nazirite,” and the word “Nazarene” (Grk. *Nazōraios*, Ναζωραῖος), meaning someone from the city of Nazareth. An adequate description of a nazirite is given to us in Judges 13:7, where Samson’s mother is told how her son is to live:

“But he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’”

The Hebrew *ki-nezir Elohim yihyeh* (כִּי־נָזִיר אֱלֹהִים יִהְיֶה) was rendered two different ways in the Greek Septuagint, both of which would have been extant in the First Century. The LXX(a) version has *naziraion Theou* (ναζιραῖον θεοῦ) or “nazirite of God,” whereas the LXX(b) version has *hagion Theou* (ἅγιον θεοῦ), “holy to God” (LXE). This attests to the fact that being a “holy one” of God and a “nazirite” of God were considered to be interconnected sometime before the First Century. One did not necessarily have to take a “nazirite vow” to be considered a holy person, which there is no record of Yeshua ever doing. In Mark 1:23-24 we see Yeshua being *Nazarēne* (Ναζαρηέ, adjective) or “of Nazareth” connected to His holiness:

“Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, ‘What business do we have with each other, Yeshua of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’”

Matthew, seeing this concept referred to in Mark’s Gospel, whose audience was largely Roman and would have overlooked any connection between “Nazareth” and “Holy One,” is likely expounding upon this for his Jewish audience, possibly using additional source

²⁴ For a further examination of Psalm 22, consult Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, pp 111-118.

²⁵ William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 232.

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material.²⁶ His Jewish audience would have been familiar with the terms *nazir*, or the Septuagint renderings of *naziraion Theou* or *hagion Theou*. Matthew's emphasis, more than anything else, is to connect the concept of Yeshua being a Nazarene to His holiness. Notably, one does not necessarily have to take a "nazirite vow" to be considered holy, though as Hegg notes, "Yeshua's words at the last Pesach [Passover], that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He came into His kingdom, are reminiscent of the Nazirite prohibition against eating or drinking anything from the vine. The same may be said of Yeshua's refusal to accept the wine while on the cross."²⁷

A second, and more commonly proposed view espoused by many Messianics, is that Matthew is making some kind of word play on *netzer* (נֶצֶר), meaning "sprout, shoot (of plant)" (*CHALOT*),²⁸ or by extension "branch." This would have probably been a commonly known Hebrew word in the First Century among both Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, and *does not* require that Matthew would have had to compose his Gospel in Hebrew. It is commonly connected to prophecies such as Isaiah 11:1:

"Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch [*netzer*] from his roots will bear fruit."

This prophecy has been viewed in a Messianic context by the Jewish Sages,²⁹ and is appealed to various times by the Apostles (Romans 15:12; 1 Peter 4:14; Revelation 5:5). One of the challenges with holding *exclusively* to this view, though, is the fact that other Messianic prophecies applying to Yeshua employ the Hebrew term *tzemach* (צֶמַח) for "branch":

"Behold, *the days are coming*,' declares the LORD, 'When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch [*tzemach*]; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5).

"In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch [*tzemach*] of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth" (Jeremiah 33:15).

"Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch [*tzemach*]" (Zechariah 3:8).

"Then say to him, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch [*tzemach*], for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD" (Zechariah 6:12).

We can certainly consider the words *netzer* and *tzemach* to be synonyms, as the latter likewise means "growth, what sprouts," "shoot, bud" (*CHALOT*).³⁰ This would account for Matthew's reference to "the prophets," as opposed to a singular prophet (cf. Isaiah 11:1). Matthew, more than anything else, relies on his audience's knowledge of knowing that the

²⁶ Consult the author's entries for the Gospels of Mark and Matthew in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, for a further description of these texts' composition.

²⁷ Hegg, *Matthew: Chapters 1-7*, 70.

²⁸ *CHALOT*, 244.

²⁹ One does not have to go far to see this reflected in contemporary Orthodox Jewish opinion. The reference notes in the *ArtScroll Tanach* attest to Isaiah 11:1 being a Messianic prophecy:

"The Ten Tribes, which were exiled by the Assyrians, will also be redeemed by the future Messiah, who will descend from the son of Jesse i.e., David (*Rashi*)" (Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *ArtScroll Tanach* [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1996], 972).

³⁰ *CHALOT*, 307.

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terms *nazir*, *naziraion*, and “holy one” are all connected with Yeshua being a “Nazarene.” The major point that Matthew emphasizes is that Yeshua has been separated out as the Father’s appointed servant and is the ideal of holiness, and being holy unto God or sanctified is certainly a theme epitomized in the Prophets. Hegg validly states, “Yeshua, in all of His life lived out the quintessential meaning of the Nazirite vow, for He was the Holy One of God in every way.”³¹ One need not go very far to understand this connection and how it makes Yeshua a “Nazarene.”

Anti-missionaries are able to lead people astray by getting them to think that *one prophecy=one fulfillment* is what is communicated by the Gospel authors. In some cases, a specific prophetic reference may certainly be made by the Gospel authors. But in other cases, however, a *general understanding* of prophetic texts may also have to be considered. The Gospel authors consider Yeshua of Nazareth to be the epitome of the Hebrew Tanach, and that He embodies in His person the fullness of the qualities of holiness communicated by its Prophets.³² Note that if Matthew is primarily building his case for Yeshua being a “Nazarene” from Judges 13:7, that the Book of Judges is considered a part of the *Nevi'im* or “the Prophets” in the traditional Jewish order of the Tanach (whereas Christian tradition places it among the Historical Books). Has Matthew misapplied Scripture, or are Jewish anti-missionaries trying to oversimplify things?

False Claim #4

Matthew 2:15 has deliberately misapplied Hosea 11:1, as it calls the people of Israel out of Egypt, not Jesus out of Egypt.

In the narrative describing the birth, infancy, and young childhood of Yeshua, Matthew’s Gospel records how Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt as King Herod was seeking to kill Him:

“Now when they [the magi] had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.’ So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt” (Matthew 2:13-14).

Joseph, Mary, and the Child Yeshua were able to flee to Egypt because Egypt in the First Century had a huge Jewish community where they could find refuge. In the next verse, Matthew records that King Herod dies, making it safe for Joseph, Mary, and the Child Yeshua to return to Judea:

“He remained there until the death of Herod. *This was* to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON’” (Matthew 2:15).

³¹ Hegg, *Matthew: Chapters 1-7*, 71.

³² Matthew’s statement “*This was* to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets” (2:23), likely referring to several verses seen in the Prophets, applying them to Yeshua, is immensely more responsible than some of the so-called prophecies often referred to in Orthodox Jewish scholarship today.

In Genesis 14:14 we are told that Abraham pursued Lot’s captors “as far as Dan.” If we accept exclusive Mosaic authorship of the Torah, as all Orthodox Jews do (and far too many Messianics do), how on Earth would Moses have known to write “Dan” as a place name in Genesis when the possession of Canaan had yet to occur? The most commonly held view is that since Moses was a prophet he prophesied the name of this place into being. Yet, this is a very unlikely possibility. “Dan” is a place name; Genesis 14:14 is not a prophecy that is intended to speak of a future event or a prophecy by which people return to God.

Far be it from Genesis 14:14 being the result of either the so-called J or E source of the Pentateuch, conservatives who accept Mosaic composition have widely recognized this verse as including an aMosaic reference, likely appended at a later date, possibly even after the Babylonian exile via the authorization of Ezra the Priest.

For a further discussion, consult the author’s entry for the Book of Genesis in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

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The specific text referenced by Matthew is Hosea 11:1: “When Israel *was* a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.” The entire Book of Hosea is largely a lament by the Prophet of the sins and rebellion of the Northern Kingdom.³³ We see references in Hosea to God’s work in delivering Israel, and how Ephraim has been responsible for disregarding His deliverance. Hosea 11:2 summarizes that after God called Israel out of Egypt, “The more they called them, the more they went from them; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols.” Having delivered Israel via the Exodus, all the people can do is fall into sin.

The application of Hosea 11:1 to the Child Yeshua leaving Egypt asks the interpreter certain questions about the usage of prophetic typology. It has to be noted that Hosea’s word “out of Egypt I called My son” is not isolated, as in Numbers 24:8 it is asserted “God brings him [Israel] out of Egypt.” Clearly in both Numbers and Hosea, the historical, collective people of Israel—“God’s son” as they are called—are being referred to. The Prophet Hosea felt perfectly free to quote from the Torah—in a word delivered regarding a blessing of Israel—and may be seen as actually applying it as a curse as Hosea 11:5 further says, “They will not return to the land of Egypt; but Assyria—he will be their king because they refused to return *to Me*.” God delivers Israel, Israel refuses Him, and God must then punish His people, which in Hosea’s case was specifically concerned with the Northern Kingdom.

In what sense does Matthew feel free to apply Hosea 11:1 to Yeshua? Is he justified in doing so? It absolutely must be noted that the ideas of First Century Messianism—whether applied to Yeshua of Nazareth or not—were profoundly affected by the broad themes of Ancient Israel’s Exodus from Egypt. The coming Messiah was viewed as a Second Moses who would offer a greater deliverance that Moses did not provide. Can the Gospel writers take a particular theme in the history of Israel and then apply it to Yeshua of Nazareth? Rabbinical literature is affluent with examples of where past historical events are used to interpret more current events. C.A. Evans explains,

“Emphasis on the unity of Scripture and history is the distinctive of typological interpretation. What God has done in the past (as presented in Scripture), he continues to do in the present (or will do in the future). Recent events or future events that are interpreted as salvific are frequently compared to major OT events of salvation...Typological interpretation makes it possible for later communities of faith to discern the continuing activity of God in history. It is likely that these ideas lay behind the typologies that Jesus developed...Typological interpretation is not limited to the NT; it is also found in rabbinical writings...The messianic age is often compared with the Exodus, a comparison frequently developed by typological interpretation.”³⁴

In considering Hosea 11:1 to be a reference to Yeshua, who would return to Judea from Egypt, is Matthew doing something strange or irregular? The Rabbinical technique known as *gezera shava* would often link one or two vocabulary words in a text to make an important theological point or application. Matthew does this to not only connect “Egypt” to the return of Yeshua to Judea, but also “Son”—representing Israel—to Him. God commands Moses to declare to Pharaoh in Exodus 4:22 that “Israel is My son, My firstborn.” Herod, a kind of “Pharaoh,” has just died, and Yeshua is the Son who embodies the hopes and aspirations of Israel. Yeshua, as “Son” here represents the quintessential Israelite. By quoting Hosea 11:1, Matthew is trying to communicate critical ideas regarding the Exodus and necessarily *greater* deliverance that Yeshua will provide.

³³ Consult the author’s entry for the Book of Hosea in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

³⁴ C.A. Evans, “Typology,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 863.

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Matthew is only doing something strange or irregular if God’s plan of salvation history is not repeated to some degree in the persons or vehicles used to accomplish His purposes—whether through Yeshua or through other people. In the case of Yeshua, if the model of the Exodus is *to some degree* to be repeated in His life, then the typological application of Hosea 11:1 by Matthew to Yeshua returning from Egypt is certainly *not invalid*. It is a message from Matthew to those reading his Gospel, that the Son Yeshua, embodying the national hope of Israel, is One who must be heeded.³⁵ And, this hope is not only for those Jews in Judea, but concerns those of the exiled Northern Kingdom referred to in the Book of Hosea, and indeed the *entire world* of humanity at large. Yeshua has come to redeem all people from the curse!

False Claim #5

Jesus is not the “greater prophet” spoken of by Moses.

The message of Deuteronomy is one where Moses must repeat God’s Instruction to Israel before He dies, as it recapitulates the story of the Exodus, the wilderness journey, and it issues some final words not seen in the previous four books of the Torah.³⁶ In Deuteronomy 18, in particular, Moses commands Israel not to fall into idolatrous ways (18:9-14), and then issues a word that a prophet like him will be raised up among the people:

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’ The LORD said to me, ‘They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him’” (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The original word delivered by Moses to Israel assures the people that God will raise up a prophet to whom they must heed. Moses serves as the prototype of this prophet. The people do not desire to have the Almighty God tell them *directly* what they must do as they cannot bear the thunder and smoke of Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 20:18-19; Deuteronomy 5:23-27), and so He must send an intermediary. The uniqueness of Moses as a prophet for Ancient Israel is seen in the closing words of Deuteronomy:

“Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).³⁷

Numbers 12:6-8 speaks of the significance of Moses as a prophet:

“He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?’”

³⁵ Cf. Hegg, *Matthew: Chapters 1-7*, pp 62-65.

³⁶ Consult the author’s article “The Message of Deuteronomy” (appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*).

³⁷ The significance of this word is enhanced if it was inserted centuries after the original composition of Deuteronomy, during the time of Ezra the Priest when the final form of the Pentateuch was issued (cf. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 58 fn#22; b.Sanhedrin 21b). This would be a reflection on the fact that by the Sixth-Fifth Centuries B.C.E., the prophet of which Moses spoke still had not arrived.

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Kaiser indicates, “all the other prophets missed something that Moses had because of his unique relationship with God. In this regard, then, this promise to Moses served to unite him with the coming one, the Messiah.”³⁸

But was Deuteronomy 18:15-19 actually a word viewed with some kind of Messianic overtones in the First Century? Note that people do ask John the Immerser, “Are you the Prophet?” (John 1:21); and after the feeding of the five thousand by Yeshua, people declare, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). The testimony of the Gospel of John, at least, is that a Great Prophet was expected. The Apostle Peter’s message at *Shavuot*/Pentecost directly appropriates the words of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 and applies them to Yeshua:

“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Yeshua, the Messiah appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, ‘THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people’” (Acts 3:19-23).

Is the text of Deuteronomy 18:15-19 a direct, or even indirect, Messianic reference? 1 Maccabees 14:41 indicates that a little less than two centuries before Yeshua, “the Jews and their priests decided that Simon should be their leader and high priest for ever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise” (RSV). This shows us that there was some expectation of a future prophet arising in Israel. Likewise, in the Qumran document 4Q175 (or 4QTestimonia) from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Qumran community connected selections such as Deuteronomy 5:28-29; 18:18-19; Numbers 24:15-17; and Deuteronomy 33:8-11 and interpreted them in a futuristic Messianic fashion.³⁹ Does Peter draw a misguided conclusion, applying Deuteronomy 18:15-19 to Yeshua, that has no precedent? It does not appear so, as Peter’s conclusion that Yeshua is the Great Prophet is based within the opinions of his time.

In the original context of Deuteronomy 18:15-19, it may be that Moses’ principal emphasis was that there is an office of prophet that will be filled when the people need someone to deliver a direct word from God to them. This prophet will call the people back to God and to obedience to Him. Certainly, many prophets in the history of Israel did this to some degree. Deuteronomy 18:15-19 need not have originally applied to the coming Messiah, as Hegg concludes it is “a general promise of the continuing prophetic office rather than a specific prophecy of the Messiah.”⁴⁰ Yet, Yeshua Himself is considered by Peter to be the Great Prophet *par excellence* who entirely fulfills the purpose of the one spoken of by Moses who would fully reveal God’s plan to Israel. Kaiser validly remarks, “each prophet became a type of the final prophet who was to appear,”⁴¹ that Prophet being Yeshua of Nazareth.

The major anti-missionary discussion regarding Deuteronomy 18:15-19 often does not relate to whether or not this text had some Messianic significance in the First Century, which the Apostles can apply to Yeshua. On the contrary, it often relates to the surrounding verses, Deuteronomy 18:9-14 and 20-22. Anti-missionaries assert that Yeshua the Messiah led many Jews of the First Century astray by magic arts and witchcraft, and spoke presumptuously

³⁸ Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 59.

³⁹ Cf. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), pp 229-231.

⁴⁰ Hegg, *Messiah in the Tanach*, 74.

⁴¹ Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 61.

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incurring the curse of a false prophet. The first accusation is clearly a value judgment made on the basis of not accepting His miracles as truly Divine works of God, as prophets in the Tanach are often seen performing miracles via God’s power.⁴² The second, that Yeshua made false predictions, is often made with support found in His words from the Olivet Discourse on the Last Days:

“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matthew 24:34; cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32).

Anti-missionaries will often say that because the end-time events of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 did not occur in the First Century, that Yeshua of Nazareth was a false prophet. Interestingly enough, there are three major interpretations of Yeshua’s words that exist among interpreters today that need to be considered:

1. The Lord says “this generation will not pass away,” and is referring to the generation that lived during the time that He declared these words. Preterists who believe that the “end-times” actually took place during the First Century, and consider the antimesiah/antichrist of Revelation to be Nero Caesar, are the most common advocates of this view.
2. The Lord says “this generation will not pass away,” and is speaking of a future group of people, which will be those who will witness all of the events prior to His return.
3. When the Lord refers to what the Greek records as *hē genea autē* (ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ), which in most Bibles is rendered as “this generation,” He is not referring to a “generation” of people. As should be noted, *genea* has a variety of possible renderings, including “race, stock, family” and “a race, generation” (LS).⁴³

Yeshua’s words need not be interpreted regarding a specific “generation” that He either spoke to in the past, or is speaking to in the future, but rather an ethnic group of people that will have survived long enough into the future to be present to experience the end-times. Of the three options considered, the most probable could very well be that Yeshua actually referred to “this race will not pass away,”⁴⁴ a reference to the preservation of the Jewish people. Yeshua has not made a false prediction; anti-missionaries have just oversimplified one of His statements. (Of course, the interconnectivity of the Messiahship of Yeshua with other issues is fully realized because if “this race will not pass away” is indeed the valid viewpoint, it can significantly affect some current opinions of eschatology seen in today’s Messianic movement.)

Is Yeshua the epitome of not just all the Prophets of the Tanach, but of Moses himself? Was a prophet greater than Moses anticipated by the Jews of the First Century? Is Yeshua that Prophet? This can only be found in one understanding the true mission and purpose of Moses, the Prophets of the Tanach, and the ministry and service of Yeshua as seen in the Gospels. Today’s Messianic community has a great responsibility in that we understand who our Lord actually is as typified by Moses and the Prophets, and that we truly understand who He is from His own teachings and actions. Unfortunately, in a Messianic movement too often dominated by “Torah study,” these critical studies are largely yet to be performed to the degree they

⁴² What set Yeshua apart from the Prophets of the Tanach is that He was able to forgive sins (Mark 2:7), something that only God Himself could do, and many Jews of His time considered to be blasphemy. Not surprisingly, anti-missionaries consider Yeshua and His claim to be God (John 10:33) to be blasphemy.

⁴³ LS, 161.

⁴⁴ The *Ryrie Study Bible* actually confirms these conclusions, remarking, “No one living when Jesus spoke these words lived to see ‘all these things’ come to pass. However, the Greek word can mean ‘race’ or ‘family,’ which makes good sense here; i.e., the Jewish race will be preserved, in spite of terrible persecution, until the Lord comes” (ed. Charles C. Ryrie [Chicago: Moody Press, 1978], 1490).

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should have. Because they have yet to be performed, too many have become cannon fodder and are easily led astray by anti-missionaries.⁴⁵

False Claim #6

The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 do not align with the genealogies of the Tanach.

Anti-missionaries are able to, unfortunately, have a great amount of success in disturbing Believers in claiming that the genealogies of Yeshua in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 do not somehow “properly correspond” with genealogies seen in the Tanach. What is most significant to consider when we see the distinct genealogies of Yeshua, as recorded in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, is that we cannot subject ancient genealogies to our Twentieth or Twenty-First Century Western expectations of exactness. While we would today expect a precise correlation between fathers, sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, etc.—genealogies seen throughout Scripture are often given to make an important point with the people who are listed, **and may not be as exact as the modern person would want them to be.**

Modern genealogies are used today for the expressed purpose of communicating one’s descent and family history. Many people living in North America, for example, can trace their lineage back to Western Europe, and they often stem from several different European nationalities. The genealogies of one’s family today are expected to provide a direct record with no broken links to the past. (Yet, many who have genealogical records probably cannot provide an endless array of records going back more than three or four centuries.)

Our modern expectations regarding genealogy are much different from what is seen in the Tanach. It is common in the Tanach to see **telescoped genealogies** that purposefully *skip generations* in order for a Biblical author to make an important theological point, or to draw one’s attention to the people actually listed.⁴⁶ An easy-to-identify example is seen in the genealogy of Ezra the Priest, given to us in both 1 Chronicles 6:3-15 and Ezra 7:1-15:

Genealogy of Ezra the Priest		
1 Chronicles 6:3-15	Ezra 7:1-5	combined
Aaron	Aaron	Aaron
Eleazar	Eleazar	Eleazar
Phinehas	Phinehas	Phinehas
Abishua	Abishua	Abishua
Bukki	Bukki	Bukki
Uzzi	Uzzi	Uzzi
Zerahiah	Zerahiah	Zerahiah
Meraioth	Meraioth	Meraioth
Amariah	Azariah	Amariah
Ahitub	Amariah	Ahitub
Zadok	Ahitub	Zadok
Ahimaaz	Zadok	Ahimaaz
Azariah	Shallum	Azariah
Johanan	Hilkiah	Johanan
Azariah	Azariah	Azariah
Amariah	Seraiah	Amariah
Ahitub		Ahitub
Zadok		Zadok
Shallum		Shallum
Hilkiah		Hilkiah
Azariah		Azariah
Seraiah		Seraiah

⁴⁵ Likewise, there is severe deficiency in today’s Messianic movement in understanding the epistles of the Apostolic Scriptures and how they instruct us on how to form productive and spiritually maturing communities of faith. Consult the author’s article “Congregations Among Us” for a further discussion of this issue.

⁴⁶ John Millam (n.d.). *The Genesis Genealogies. Reasons to Believe*. Retrieved 14 October, 2007, from <<http://www.reasons.org>>.

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While doing something like this is completely unacceptable in the modern era, Ezra 7:1-5 *excludes* six people (*italicized* in “combined” column above) from the genealogical list of Ezra the Priest that is seen in 1 Chronicles 6:3-15. Why does the list do this? Obviously, the author of Ezra is communicating something to his audience that the Chronicler is not. The names listed are not just used to establish the credibility of Ezra, but also illustrate his importance by recalling those who have preceded him.

It is very obvious to see that Yeshua’s genealogy given in Luke 3 follows a similar pattern, as it traces ancestors from Eli (or Heli in some versions) all the way to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). Luke is telescoping his record, giving his readers the “high points” of Yeshua’s lineage, skipping over people in great stride. In stressing a lineage all the way back to Adam, Luke is likely connecting his readers with Yeshua’s identification with humanity as a kind of Second Adam.

The real issue in Luke’s genealogy involves the immediate person described after “Joseph” in Luke 3:23: “When He began His ministry, Yeshua Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli.” There have been several proposals made by theologians regarding what this might mean, including Luke’s genealogy being the actual descent of Joseph, husband of Mary, and Matthew’s genealogy being the royal descent. Another suggestion is that Eli and Jacob (Matthew 1:16) were half-brothers, having the same mother but different fathers, and that Eli died and Jacob married his widow, becoming a step-father to Joseph. Still, others propose that the genealogy of Luke 3 is Mary’s genealogy, given the remark “as was supposed,” as a reference to the virgin birth, yet this is complicated because Mary is not listed by name.

Walter L. Liefeld makes the pertinent observation, “we possess not a poverty but a plethora of possibilities. Therefore the lack of certainty due to incomplete information need not imply error...[I]t is not possible to know how Luke would have handled a genealogy involving a virgin birth, and so ‘the case is unique.’”⁴⁷ Indeed, the principal thrust of Luke’s genealogy is that we understand Yeshua’s identification with the human race (cf. Philippians 2:5-11). Luke does not open his Gospel with the genealogy of Yeshua, indicating that for his broad audience of both First Century Jews and Greeks and Romans, genealogy would not have been as important to them as some of the other features of Yeshua’s identity.

Matthew’s genealogy is much more complicated than Luke’s, given his largely Jewish audience, as his specific aim is to identify Yeshua as the “son of David, son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). Genealogy was very important to the Jews of the First Century. Yeshua is established to be of the royal line of David. But whereas Luke moves backward all the way to Adam, Matthew moves forward from Abraham to David and finally to Yeshua.

The likelihood of telescoping employed in Matthew 1 is also very high, and the rendering of “A fathered/was the father of B” as seen in many Bible versions (RSV, NASU, NIV, NRSV) is **unfortunate**⁴⁸ as the average Bible reader will expect there to be a *direct* father-son-grandson-great-grandson relationship, when in some cases *there is not*. Indeed, as Ancient Near Eastern scholar K.A. Kitchen points out, “The phrase ‘A begat B’ does not always imply direct parenthood. This is shown by its use in Matthew 1 in cases where links are known (from the Old Testament) to have been omitted.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, some of the people “inserted” into

⁴⁷ Walter L. Liefeld, “Luke,” in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. et. al, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:861-862.

⁴⁸ The NKJV uses the more proper formula “A begot B.”

⁴⁹ K.A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Madison, WI: InterVarsity, 1966), pp 38-39.

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Matthew's genealogy who do not appear in the Tanach (i.e., Amminadab in Matthew 1:4) need not be a result of "tampering" with the text, but the fact that Matthew is working from genealogical sources that are no longer extant, or that there was an oral tradition in Joseph's family of additional people not seen in 1 Chronicles.⁵⁰

There are two major issues that are brought forward by anti-missionaries regarding Matthew's genealogy. The first concerns Matthew's listing of King Jeconiah (1:11), and the fact that Jeremiah prophesied that a descendant of his would not sit upon his throne again:

"Thus says the LORD, 'Write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah'" (Jeremiah 22:30).

Anti-missionaries have been able to disturb many people by claiming that since Matthew lists Jeconiah in Yeshua's genealogical list, then Yeshua cannot rule over Israel since Jeconiah was punished by God. However, an important clue is given to us by Matthew when he writes, "Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers **about the time they were carried away to Babylon**" (Matthew 1:11, NKJV). Far from this being a permanent curse upon Jeconiah and the kingly line of Judah, the Talmud indicates that this curse was only to be temporary, with the exile to Babylon being sufficient punishment:

"Said R. Yohanan, 'Exile atones for everything, for it is said, "Thus says the Lord, Write this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days, for no man of his seed shall prosper sitting upon the throne of David and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer. 22:30). After [the king] was exiled, it is written, 'And the sons of Jechoniah, the same is Assir, Shealtiel, his son ...' (1Ch. 3:17). [So he was not childless, and through exile he had atoned for his sins.]' 'Assir' because his mother conceived in prison" (b.Sanhedrin 37b).⁵¹

Here, we see that the Sages considered the curse issued by Jeremiah against Jeconiah to be lifted as a result of the exile, because he very clearly does have additional descendants (1 Chronicles 3:17), which Jeremiah's prophecy said he would not have. Matthew's insertion of Jeconiah in the genealogy of Yeshua is not invalid.

The second issue anti-missionaries commonly point out regarding Matthew's genealogy concerns his concluding remark, "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations" (Matthew 1:17). Obviously, while the fact that Matthew likely does some telescoping is not considered, if one adds the third set of generations from Jeconiah to Joseph (Matthew 1:12-16), we only see thirteen generations.

One possible explanation is that both Joseph and Mary, listed in Matthew 1:16, are intended to be counted as two generations. Another explanation is that Yeshua's own generation is to be counted. Still, a third explanation is that what is really being communicated is the connection to *David* (דָּוִד), a common enough Hebrew word (not necessitating a Hebrew composition for Matthew)⁵² whose numerical value is fourteen and could have been easily recognized by Judean or Diaspora Jews.⁵³

⁵⁰ Cf. Hegg, *Matthew: Chapters 1-7*, pp 20-22; D.A. Carson, "Matthew," in *EXP*, 8:65.

⁵¹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary. MS Windows XP*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

⁵² As Hegg, *Matthew: Chapters 1-7*, 15 notes, "Even if Matthew's readers were receiving his words in Greek, they most likely would have been familiar with the Hebrew spelling of the name."

⁵³ Carson, in *EXP*, 8:69.

This would be one of the few isolated incidents in Scripture where use of gematria is valid, with both a specific name and number referenced.

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The fact that Matthew can list names according to a formula of “fourteen,” via telescoping and/or referencing *David*, is not uncommon to the Tanach. Two significant genealogies that communicate something similar are the anti-diluvians of Genesis 5 from Adam to Noah, and the post-diluvians of Genesis 11 from Noah to Abraham. Both genealogies list “ten” generations. As Kitchen describes, “there is...symmetry of ten generations before the Flood and ten generations after the Flood. With this, one may compare the three series of fourteen generations in Matthew’s genealogy of Christ...which is *known* to be selective, and not wholly continuous.”⁵⁴ Sarna concurs, “There is reason to believe that the ten-generation pattern for genealogies was favored by Western Semites in general and that the convention left its mark on the historiography of Israel.”⁵⁵ Thus, the number “ten” in the Ancient Near East brought with it an aura of distinction (perhaps royal distinction), designed in Genesis 5 and 11 to give some “high points” of individuals who lived between Adam and Noah, and then Noah and Abraham—but by no means are all of the generations of people between Adam and Noah, and then Noah and Abraham, recorded on these lists.⁵⁶

Properly understanding the genealogies of Matthew 1 and Luke 3 is a definite area where anti-missionaries reveal how they are often not engaged with the Ancient Near Eastern background of the Tanach. And indeed, it is difficult to not subject the Bible to our modern expectations of precision. However, neither Luke in his telescoped genealogy of Yeshua going back to Adam, nor Matthew in his formulated genealogy of 14 generations connected to David, have done something irregular. On the contrary, anti-missionaries have preyed on the ignorance of people, subjecting ancient texts to modern-day expectations of precision, divorcing them from their original context.

False Claim #7

Isaiah 7:14 has been purposefully mistranslated with “virgin” in Christian Bibles, to fit a pagan concept of a virgin giving birth, specifically to Jesus.

Refuting the virgin birth of Yeshua is a common practice of liberals in Christianity, who often doubt anything supernatural, and consequently anti-missionaries have joined the bandwagon by claiming Isaiah 7:14 is not a prophecy of the Messiah to come, that the Gospels have misapplied this word, and even that the concept of a virgin giving birth is “pagan.” Messianics who are unfamiliar with the Isaianic expectation of one to be born find themselves very easy to be manipulated.

It is undeniable that Isaiah 7:14 plays a role in the Messianic expectation of the Apostolic Scriptures. Matthew 1:22-23 attests, “Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,’ which translated means, ‘GOD WITH US.’” Here as a prophetic support for Yeshua’s Messiahship and Incarnation, Isaiah 7:14 is quoted. When the Revised Standard Version was originally published in 1952, it caused quite a stir rendering Isaiah 7:14 as “Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name

⁵⁴ Kitchen, 37.

⁵⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 40; cf. Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 12.

⁵⁶ Kitchen’s concluding remark, “one cannot use these genealogies to fix the date of the Flood or of earliest Man” (p 39) asks questions that today’s Messianic movement is largely unprepared to answer, as it still relies quite heavily on the conclusions of Seventeenth Century Archbishop James Ussher.

Cf. R.K. Harrison, “Chronology from Adam to Abraham,” in *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp 147-163. Also consult the FAQ, “Genesis 5, 11 Genealogies” and “6,000 Year Teaching.”

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Immanuel.” Consequently, since then, the subject of the virgin birth and how Isaiah 7:14 should be viewed has been quite a debate.⁵⁷

The original backdrop of this word concerns an alliance between Rezin, king of Aram (Syria), and Pekah, king of the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim, who prepare to attack the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Isaiah 7:1-2). If this alliance is successful, and Judah is destroyed, so is all hope of God being faithful to His covenant promises. The Prophet Isaiah and his son Shear-Jashub are directed by God to go to King Ahaz of Judah (Isaiah 7:3-6), and he is to be specifically told, “It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass” (Isaiah 7:7). Isaiah asks Ahaz to request of God a sign that He will be faithful to His promises, and although Ahaz refuses (Isaiah 7:12), the Prophet tells him what the sign will be:

“And he said, ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.’ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good” (Isaiah 7:13-15, RSV).

It is at this point that the anti-missionaries stop. Matthew is stated by them to have misapplied a word that was given to King Ahaz in ancient times, which only speaks of the conception of a child called Immanuel. People are then easily led to conclude that the whole “Christian” idea of a so-called virgin birth is wrong.

First to take notice of is the first clause in Isaiah 7:14: *yitten Adonai hu l'khem ot* (הוּא לְכֶם אוֹת), literally “will give the Lord Him to you a sign.” The most overlooked part of this clause is how *l'khem* or “to you” appears in the **plural**, not the singular,⁵⁸ thus indicating that the sign of which Isaiah speaks regards the entire House of David, and not just King Ahaz as an individual.

The second clause indicates what is going to happen: *hinneh ha'alimah hara v'yoledet ben* (הִנֵּה הַעֲלִמָּה הָרָה וַיֵּלֶדֶת בֵּן), literally “behold the young woman/virgin look and bearing a son.” There is endless controversy as to how *ha'alimah* (הַעֲלִמָּה), either “the young woman/maiden” or “the virgin,” should be translated. Note that it is insufficient for us to just consider *almah* here; the definite article “the” in *ha'alimah* is what is used in the text, and is intensified by being prefixed with the imperative *hinneh* or “behold.”

Is the scope of Isaiah’s prophecy here just limited to a young woman conceiving and having a child? Indeed, the most common anti-missionary tactic is to say that if Isaiah were truly speaking of a virgin, then the word *betulah* (בְּתוּלָה), used to describe Rebekah in Genesis 24:16, would have been used. However, when one examines varied Tanach usages of the word *almah* and weigh them into the equation, this is not the conclusion that a responsible interpreter can draw.

It is very true that Rebekah is described as a *betulah* or “virgin” in Genesis 24:16, but later in Genesis 24:43, as an unmarried woman, she is also called an *almah*. The usage of *betulah* is unclear, necessitating the addition of the clause “no man had had relations with her” in Genesis 24:16, whereas the usage of *almah* requires no such clarification. Miriam, the sister of Moses, is referred to as an *almah* in Exodus 2:8, being called by the daughter of Pharaoh to fetch Moses’ mother to nurse him, and we should surely not expect for Miriam to have had sexual relations at such a young age.

The pre-Christian Septuagint translators undoubtedly understood the difference between *betulah* and *almah*, and thus they were able to render *almah* as *parthenos* (παρθένος), “female of

⁵⁷ For a summary of this debate, consult “Virgin Birth of Christ,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pp 759-764.

⁵⁸ The LXX follows suit, rendering *l'khem* with the plural *humin* (ὑμῖν).

marriageable age w. focus on virginity” (BDAG).⁵⁹ Has Matthew misapplied Isaiah 7:14? It is notable, as it concerns Yeshua’s conception, that Mary does say “How can this be, since I do not know a man⁶⁰?” (Luke 1:34, NKJV). Matthew’s Gospel, employing the term *parthenos* as the LXX rendered Isaiah 7:14, has made a value judgment. Likewise, so have any Bible translators who have rendered *almah* as “virgin.”

This is only part of the issue, though. Has Matthew totally missed the point of the promise to King Ahaz? We need not disconnect Isaiah 7:14 from the verses following in Isaiah 7:16-17:

“For before the boy will know *enough* to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken. The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father's house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria.”

Who is this child being talked about? Is this the child who was to be born to the virgin? It cannot go unnoticed that while the plural “you” appears in Isaiah 7:14, *l'khem*, that Isaiah 7:16 says *ha'adamah asher atah qatz m'pn'ei shnei malkeiyha* (הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה קָצַת מִפְּנֵי שְׁנֵי מַלְכֵיהָ), with the singular “you,” *atah*, appearing instead. Previously, the dilemma of the House of David as a whole has been described, whereas here the more immediate problem of the Southern Kingdom for its leader, King Ahaz, is in view.

Many readers of Isaiah 7 have thought that there is a kind of dual reference here. A child born during the reign of King Ahaz of the Southern Kingdom would not live very long before the immediate problem threatening Judah, although with some negative aftermath, would be gone. Partial fulfillment of Isaiah 7 would lead to a greater degree of fulfillment in later history, via the virgin birth of Yeshua the Messiah.⁶¹

Another thought is seen in how Hegg suggests that the usage of *na'ar* (נַעַר) or “lad” in Isaiah 7:16 is to be taken in a generic, somewhat proverbial sense. He indicates, “In a short time (illustrated by the time it takes for a child to grow into moral awareness) the land which the two kings...who had allied together against Jerusalem were fighting for would be forsaken, that is, laid waste.”⁶² From this perspective, the lad spoken of in vs. 16-17, is not to be viewed as the Messiah to come, but rather is an allusion to the fact that before a period of about twelve years (cf. Deuteronomy 1:39) has expired, King Ahaz’ enemies will be dealt with.

This is a good enough proposal, but it has not taken into consideration why *ha'na'ar* (הַנַּעַר) or “the lad/boy,” with the definite article, is what appears in Isaiah 7:16, which would need to refer to some specific person. Is this specific lad or boy, the child to be born who would be known as Immanuel? An excellent answer is provided by Michael Rydelnik, in that the boy being referred to in Isaiah 7:16 is actually Isaiah’s young son Shear-Jashub, who accompanied the Prophet to witness what was said to King Ahaz. He eloquently addresses some of the difficulties seen in Isaiah 7:13-16:

“While many have considered v. 16 to be a continuation of the prophecy in 7:13-15, the grammar of the passage suggests otherwise. The opening phrase in Hebrew [*ki b'terem, בְּטֶרֶם, כִּי*] can reflect an adversative nuance, allowing for a disjunction between the child described in 7:13-15 and the one described in verse 16. There is a different child in view in this verse.

“*The Identity of the Child.* So who is the child in 7:16? In light of Isaiah being directed to bring his own son to the confrontation with the king at the conduit of the upper pool (cf. 7:3), it

⁵⁹ BDAG, 777.

⁶⁰ Grk. *andra ou ginōskō* (ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω).

⁶¹ Cf. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, pp 160-162; Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 3*, pp 25-28.

⁶² Hegg, *Messiah in the Tanach*, 93.

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makes most sense to identify the lad as Shear-Jashub. Otherwise there would be no purpose for God directing Isaiah to bring the boy. Thus having promised the virgin birth of the Messiah (7:13-15), the prophet then points to the very small boy that he has brought along and says, 'But before *this* lad (using the article with a demonstrative force) knows enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.' In this way, Shear-Jashub functioned as a sign to the king. Apparently, Isaiah could tell Judah in the very next chapter, 'Here I am with the children the LORD has given me to be signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of Hosts who dwells on Mount Zion' (8:18).

"The Identity of the Addressee. To whom does Isaiah make this prediction? What is not evident in the English text is plain in the Hebrew. The prophet returned to using the second-person singular pronoun in 7:16 ('the land of the two kings *you* [sg.] dread'). In 7:10-11 he used the singular to address King Ahaz. Then, when addressing the house of David with the prophecy of Messiah, he shifted to the plural. But in 7:16, he addressed King Ahaz, using the singular pronoun once again and giving him a near prophecy: before Shear-Jashub would be able to discern good from evil, the northern confederacy attacking Judah would fail. Within two years, Tiglath-Pileser defeated both Israel and Syria, just as the prophet had predicted.

"Having completed his long-term prophecy, Isaiah gave a short-term prophecy. In doing so, he followed a frequent pattern of his book. He consistently did this so his readership could have confidence in the distant prediction by observing the fulfillment in the near one."⁶³

Ultimately, the answer that the House of David and King Ahaz would have sought to all the problems of Judah, Israel, and even the nations at large—was only to be found in the far future by a miraculous birth of one called "Immanuel" or God with us. This is a Child who would live in a time when there would be "curds and honey" (Isaiah 7:15) present, which Rydelnik takes to represent "the food of oppression" (cf. Isaiah 7:21-22), in that "the prophecy of Messiah concludes with a hint that He will be born and grow up...at a time when Judah is oppressed by a foreign power,"⁶⁴ which would surely be the case with Judea dominated by Rome in the First Century. The One prophesied to be born is a different kind of king who has never before been seen. Indeed, as Isaiah 9:6-7 further describes,

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."

For Matthew, Isaiah 7:14 clearly spoke of the Messiah to come, and the text can certainly be understood from this point of view. Indeed, many passages that appear throughout Isaiah 7:1-12:6 can only be applied to a figure to come, including: the wonderful ruling son (Isaiah 9:1-7) and the reign of Jesse's son (Isaiah 11:1-16), **not** someone from Ahaz' contemporary period. Michael L. Brown concludes, "as Matthew looked back at these prophecies hundreds of years later, it would have been apparent to him that (1) these chapters were clearly linked together, and (2) the promises of a worldwide, glorious reign of the promised Davidic king were not yet

⁶³ Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), pp 157-158.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

His specific reason for this is that "fields will not be cultivated and [they] will become pastures for oxen and sheep (7:23-25). The effect of this will be an overabundance of daily (or butter/curds) because of the pasturing of livestock, and an excess of honey because bees will be able to pollinate the wild flowers" (*Ibid.*). Assyria is said to have shaved the land of people (Isaiah 7:20), and a similar situation would be in place at the arrival of the Messiah during the Roman era.

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realized.”⁶⁵ Isaiah 7:14, as applied to the birth of Yeshua, would not have been provided isolated from other Isaianic expectations considered by Matthew.

The second criticism from anti-missionaries is that the virgin birth—perhaps more correctly termed, at times, the virgin conception—is “pagan.” This line of reasoning used to attack the Messiahship of Yeshua can find many who are eager to embrace it, primarily because of the influence of certain “Messianic” publications and ministries who during the past decade (1996-present) have directed a great deal of spiritual venom against the Christian Church. It has been widely asserted by these publications and ministries that the Christian Church is “totally saturated” with paganism (and often *their* subjective views of paganism at that). Rather than choose a constructive way to dialogue with Christians about issues such as Torah observance and the Hebraic background of Yeshua’s life, in a quest to be Biblical, damning all Christians and the Church is the method that is preferred. So, we should not be surprised when all the rhetoric regarding “paganism” is unleashed that anti-missionaries find a great opportunity to attack a significant area of Apostolic doctrine.

It is not impossible to find some possible parallels between a virgin conceiving by supernatural means, as depicted in the Gospels, and what one sees in pagan mythology. In fact, significant parallels exist between the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua and the play Prometheus Bound by Aeschylus. If a misguided person wants to use these criteria to reject the Messiahship of Yeshua, and indeed the gospel, one can choose to do so. But I would severely warn the person who takes this course of action **to be consistent in what he or she rejects** on the basis of “paganism”—something that anti-missionaries *fail* to do.

If the virgin conception of Yeshua is indeed “pagan,” then could it not also be true that the Creation account and Noahdic Flood are likewise borrowed from paganism? The Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh strongly mirrors the story of the Flood described in the Bible. How do we know that the Epic of Gilgamesh is not a prototype for what is described in the opening chapters of Genesis?⁶⁶ Anti-missionaries are certainly not going to answer these questions, yet they are perfectly valid because liberals who deny Yeshua’s virgin birth likewise deny that the opening chapters of the Bible, the Exodus, the Conquest, and possibly even the monarchy of Israel is not valid history and is largely mythology. How far are we willing to go? Will one be consistent with how much of the Bible could in actuality be “pagan”? Or, will one have the discernment to see that the enemy has always had a counterfeit to God’s truth?⁶⁷

False Claim #8

Matthew 27:9 has deliberately misreferenced the Tanach. The text says that “Jeremiah” spoke a prophecy that should really be a word credited to Zechariah.

At this point, when the naïve and spiritually immature person has been lulled to accept the largely disengaged, and overly simplistic perspective of the anti-missionary, hearing that Matthew 27:9 has misreferenced a Tanach passage will often be accepted without any serious examination or consideration. Interestingly enough, this is one of the easiest claims against Yeshua’s Messiahship that can be responded to.

Matthew 27:9 says, “Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel.’” David H. Stern points out the possibility, “the scroll of the Prophets

⁶⁵ Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, Volume 3, 25.

⁶⁶ Cf. Jon D. Levenson, “Genesis,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp 8-11.

⁶⁷ For a further discussion, consult the author’s article, “Is the Story of Yeshua Pagan?”

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may have originally begun with Jeremiah...not Isaiah; if so, Mattityahu [Matthew] by naming Jeremiah is referring to the Prophets as a group, not naming the particular prophet quoted"⁶⁸ (cf. b.*Bava Batra* 14b-15a). Likewise to be considered is the fact that two likely Scripture passages are being melded together: Jeremiah 32:6-9 and Zechariah 11:12-13:⁶⁹

"And Jeremiah said, 'The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle is coming to you, saying, 'Buy for yourself my field which is at Anathoth, for you have the right of redemption to buy it.'" Then Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of the LORD and said to me, "Buy my field, please, that is at Anathoth, which is in the land of Benjamin; for you have the right of possession and the redemption is yours; buy *it* for yourself.'" Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. I bought the field which was at Anathoth from Hanamel my uncle's son, and I weighed out the silver for him, seventeen shekels of silver'" (Jeremiah 32:6-9).

"I said to them, 'If it is good in your sight, give *me* my wages; but if not, never mind!' So they weighed out thirty *shekels* of silver as my wages. Then the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter, *that* magnificent price at which I was valued by them.' So I took the thirty *shekels* of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD" (Zechariah 11:12-13).

Of the two passages quoted, Zechariah 11:12-13 is clearly the one that is more probably referred to by Matthew in relation to the field purchased with the blood money given to Judas Iscariot. Zechariah 11 speaks of the shepherd in God's flock whose job it was to help separate the condemned sheep and the ones who are to be shown His grace (Zechariah 11:7-9). Judas Iscariot certainly played in this role via his betrayal of Yeshua, thus resulting in His execution. Only with Judas' betrayal could the plan of God be fully enacted.

Yet, Jeremiah's name is probably mentioned by Matthew to draw attention to the fact that just as Jeremiah was directed by God to purchase the field of Hanamel, so would the blood money given to Judas for betraying Yeshua at least be directed for some positive task, not going to total waste. Likewise, just as Jeremiah was directed by God to do something, so does Matthew's quotation point out something that God is ultimately responsible for. It would be very easy for one to think that Yeshua's execution was solely the work of evil people, when in fact it was part of God's Divine plan to accomplish the redemption of the world.

Applying Scripture passages in this manner is not unique to the Gospels. Mark (1:2-3) similarly quotes Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, yet makes a reference to Isaiah as the better-known prophet.

Sadly, anti-missionaries are not going to take the time to consider the possible theological ideas being communicated among several prophecies meshed together, instead preferring an overly-simplistic approach.

False Claim #9

The suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is Israel, not Jesus.

Isaiah 53 is indeed a very controversial passage of Scripture when it comes to the Messiahship of Yeshua and the exact identity of the servant described. There are multiple views that have been extant in Judaism, including: identifying the servant as the people of Israel and their role in history, the Prophet Jeremiah and his suffering, or perhaps even Moses.⁷⁰ Christian interpreters have almost always associated the servant of Isaiah 53 with Yeshua the Messiah,

⁶⁸ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 83.

⁶⁹ Aland, *GNT*, 108.

⁷⁰ Benjamin D. Sommer, "Isaiah," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 891.

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and indeed, the Apostolic Scriptures appropriate verses from Isaiah 53 and directly apply them to Yeshua (Isaiah 53:1 and John 12:32; Romans 10:16; Isaiah 53:4 and Matthew 8:17; Isaiah 53:6 and 1 Peter 2:25; Isaiah 53:9 and 1 Peter 2:22; Isaiah 53:12 and Luke 22:37), not to mention all of the other typological connections that parallel events in the ministry of Yeshua. We would all do well to (re)familiarize ourselves with the words of Isaiah 53:

“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself *as a* guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.”

All of us at one point or another have probably heard these words recited, or possibly delivered via Handel’s operatic performance *The Messiah*. There are an extreme amount of parallels between these verses and the account of Yeshua that are not difficult to see, if one possesses a cursory knowledge of the Apostolic Scriptures:

- The origins of Yeshua in the Gospels are described as being very humble (Isaiah 53:2), and how no one followed Him because of His appearance.
- The Gospels describe how Yeshua was not always accepted, and indeed was frequently despised (Isaiah 53:3).
- Yeshua had a healing ministry, bearing the infirmities of others (Isaiah 53:4).
- Yeshua is portrayed in the Gospels as bearing the sins of the world (Isaiah 53:5-6).
- Yeshua underwent extreme pain and torture prior to His execution (Isaiah 53:7), remaining silent before His accusers (Matthew 27:12-14; Mark 14:60-61; 15:4-5; Luke 23:8-9; John 19:8-9).
- Yeshua is attested in the Gospels to have had an unfair trial (Isaiah 53:8).
- Yeshua was executed as a common criminal, yet was buried in a rich man’s, Joseph of Arimathea’s, tomb (Isaiah 53:9-10; cf. Matthew 27:57-60).
- As a result of Yeshua’s life, the Apostolic Scriptures attest that human beings can be fully justified or declared righteous (Isaiah 53:11).

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- The Apostolic Scriptures attest that Yeshua is the mediator between God the Father and humanity (Isaiah 53:12).

There have been many excellent, thorough studies conducted on the meaning of these words, and how they are undoubtedly connected to Yeshua, His ministry, and His atoning work for the world as portrayed in the Apostolic Scriptures that I recommend you consult.⁷¹ It is because of these many connections between Isaiah 53 and the ministry of Yeshua that, as the *Jewish Study Bible* notes, “Medieval rabbinic commentators devoted considerable attention to refuting this interpretation.”⁷² Indeed, of all the potential Messianic prophecies in the Tanach, it is Isaiah 53 where the most attention has been spent.

What disturbs many Messianic Believers is when they hear that Judaism has not interpreted this passage in a framework relating to the Messiah to come. Some easily brush this reason aside as being reactionary on Judaism’s part, with the Synagogue not conducting any serious examination or consideration for what is being said by Isaiah when compared to the ministry and service of Yeshua. But, people, who are either unsure of Yeshua’s Messiahship, or perhaps give too much credence to “the Rabbis” in their Biblical examination, can be often convinced that Yeshua is not the Messiah when they hear the line that “Judaism interprets Isaiah 53 as a reference to Israel, not the Messiah.” Actual examination and consideration for the meaning of the text is often not given, and the non-Jewish person wanting to convert to Judaism, or the Messianic Jew wanting to return to the Synagogue, now feels justified in doing so.

No one can deny the fact that Isaiah 53 has been interpreted by Jews in the past as relating to Israel as the servant of God, and not a suffering Messiah. Certainly, we could expect to see variance among Jewish interpreters before the First Century, some of whom may have not applied Isaiah 53 to a singular figure, although there are certainly ancient interpretations that clearly do apply it to a single figure. Following the times of Yeshua, historical Jewish interpreters such as Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Radak applied the text to Israel, yet there was also variance, as some in the later Chassidic movement sought to apply Isaiah 53 to Menachem Schneerson.⁷³ Anti-missionaries are not going to be objective with the Jewish history of interpretation of Isaiah 53, presenting you with all of the options that are available and have been proposed. Brown summarizes this dilemma:

“...[W]hen you realize that sections from Isaiah 52:12-53:12 are quoted several times in the New Testament, and the passage as a whole can arguably be called *the* clearest prophecy of Jesus in the entire Tanakh...many traditional Jewish commentators and teachers have *still* interpreted the prophecy as Messianic. How tempting it would have been for the Talmudic rabbis and their successors to interpret this passage with reference to Israel—rather than to the Messiah or any other individual—seeing that it played such an important role in Christian interpretation and polemics. Yet they did not interpret the passage with reference to the nation of Israel in any recorded traditional source for almost one thousand years, nor did they interpret it with reference to national Israel with unanimity thereafter.”⁷⁴

Indeed, the bulk of Rabbinic interpretation regarding Isaiah 53 as Israel, and not a Messianic figure or single individual, came during the Middle Ages long after the ministry of Yeshua. If one is going to truly consider Jewish interpretations of Isaiah 53, then a person needs

⁷¹ I specifically refer the reader to Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, pp 178-181; Hegg, *The Messiah in the Tanach*, pp 109-121; and Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 3*, pp 49-86.

⁷² Sommer, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 891.

⁷³ Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections of Jesus, Volume 3*, pp 49-50.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

to take a few steps back and look at a much broader array of Jewish interpretations that have existed over the millennia. When we do this, **the key issue that needs to be considered is whether or not the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament can serve as a definitively Jewish witness in the discussion.** Were the Apostolic writers misled in their interpretation, or did they have as much to contribute as any Jewish person in the First Century? Were the Apostles wrong to apply the prophecies of Isaiah to what they saw in the ministry and service of Yeshua of Nazareth? I can only answer for myself: I do not believe the Apostles were misled when they saw Yeshua as the epitome of what Isaiah 53 prophesied.⁷⁵

False Claim #10

Human sacrifice is deplorable to God. How can Jesus be “the sacrifice” for all humanity when God Himself would never accept it?

The final disturbing claim that is made against the Messiahship of Yeshua is directed against His execution. The overwhelming conclusion of the Apostolic Scriptures is that Yeshua died to atone for the sins of all humanity. As the Apostle Paul summarizes it, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Indeed, the purpose of celebrating Passover as Believers is so that we might “proclaim the Lord's death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Yeshua's death and subsequent resurrection are the cornerstones of our faith, something that the Apostles believed was embodied in the message of the Tanach.

Many liberal Christian theologians certainly doubt that Yeshua was physically resurrected from the dead, and so denying anything supernatural they propose that the Disciples simply hallucinated His resurrection. On the other side of this argument Messianics encounter anti-missionaries who claim that a human sacrifice would never be accepted by God. Both issues: hallucinating Yeshua's resurrection, and an unacceptable sacrifice, are more *ideological* than they are theological. One presupposes that supernatural events cannot take place, and the other presupposes that there is no precedent in Scripture for people being sacrificed before God. Both rely on shock value.

There is, in fact, very clear precedent in the Tanach for people being offered as sacrifices before God. God very plainly asked Abraham, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you” (Genesis 22:2, NJPS). Indeed, the narrative tells us that not only did Abraham obey the Lord, but Isaac went willingly:

“Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ And he said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ Abraham said, ‘God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ So the two of them walked on together” (Genesis 22:6-8).

Abraham responds to Isaac's question about the sacrifice with the words, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering,” somewhat darting around the question. While some would stop there, indicating that Abraham expected just a lamb (Heb. *seh*, שֶׁה) to be provided, and Isaac is accompanying his father on an interesting journey, the following actions when Abraham and Isaac arrive at the designated place speak for themselves:

⁷⁵ For a further discussion, consult the author's entry for the Book of Isaiah in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

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“Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son” (Genesis 22:9-10).

The Hebrew verb *shachat* (שָׁחַט), appearing in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), clearly means “to slaughter, kill” (*HALOT*).⁷⁶ We see that Abraham had every intention of taking his knife and terminating the life of his son as a sacrifice before the Almighty, just as He had asked him to do. Yet, just at the moment when Abraham is ready to kill Isaac, he is stopped:

“But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me’” (Genesis 22:11-12).

Abraham is told that he has fulfilled the request that God had of him. Abraham has not “withheld your son, your favored one, from Me” (NJPS). Abraham, being committed in his mind to kill Isaac and present him as a burnt offering, goes as far as preparing to kill him. But rather than his son being killed, we see that “a ram caught in the thicket by his horns” (Genesis 22:13) is what is offered before the Lord. The author of Hebrews appropriates this scene, considering it to be a foreshadowing of the sacrifice Yeshua would make as the Son of God:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED’ [Genesis 21:12]. He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, **from which he also received him back as a type**” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

The typology of Isaac’s binding, or the *Aqedah* (אֶקֶדָה) as it is commonly called in Jewish theology, is what is offered as valid evidence of Yeshua’s sacrifice. This kind of sacrifice, with definite precedent in the Torah, is what is ultimately realized via Yeshua’s atonement. Yeshua is portrayed in the Gospels as being the only, beloved Son of God (John 3:16) whose sacrifice will atone for the sins of all humanity. Whereas Isaac did *not* go “all the way” in being killed, Yeshua on the other hand, *was killed*.

The sacrifice of Yeshua at Golgotha (Calvary) is to be contrasted against prohibitions in the Torah forbidding child sacrifice to Canaanite gods such as Molech (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; 2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35). Indeed, Solomon is attested in the Biblical record as having built temples to Molech (1 Kings 11:7), and actual human sacrifice probably took place in sectors of the Southern Kingdom all the way until the Babylonian exile.⁷⁷ Knowing the dire consequences of what resulted to Israel because of such heinous sin, it is ludicrous to think that the Apostles see Yeshua’s sacrifice before God in a similar light. Even more ridiculous is to think that Yeshua’s sacrifice before God would be like the temporary sacrifice appeasing a pagan deity like Molech. On the contrary, as the Apostle Paul describes it, Yeshua’s sacrifice is unique because it covers the sins of both the righteous and unrighteous:

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Messiah died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

If anything, Yeshua is portrayed as being the substitute for the common death penalty that all human beings since Adam fall under as sinners in rebellion toward God. This is not “human

⁷⁶ *HALOT*, 2:1458.

⁷⁷ Cf. J. Gray, “Molech, Moloch,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 3:422-423.

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sacrifice”; it is Yeshua, God’s Son, being the substitute penalty for all of us. And Yeshua, by His very sacrifice, has absorbed onto Himself the capital punishment of the Torah (Colossians 2:14).⁷⁸ This is a far cry from the human sacrifice seen in the Ancient Near East.

The Torah does make it clear that the Israelites were prohibited from sacrificing people the way that their Canaanite neighbors often did. Such acts were considered to be an abomination to the Lord. But, the Torah likewise portrays Abraham being asked by God to sacrifice his only son to Him. **This is what portrays the ultimate presentation of God’s Son before Him as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of all humanity.**

The Criticism Only Messianics Can Respond To

Many of the reasons that are used by anti-missionaries as proofs against Yeshua’s Messiahship, as we have just seen, can usually be easily responded to because anti-missionaries over-simplify the meaning of verses, and they are largely deficient because they fail to take into account the context, historical background, and larger scope of a passage. Both Christian and Messianic interpreters have shown most anti-missionary claims to be quite misguided and incomplete (and the only ones not shown as such are the claims we cannot predict). However, there is one significant claim against Yeshua’s Messiahship that only Messianics can really respond to:

Jesus Christ came to abolish the Torah of Moses

Current Christian positions regarding the role of the Torah do indeed vary. Many rightly see that the Torah or Law of Moses plays a role, albeit limited, in one’s faith experience with God. They see that the “moral law” contained in the Torah is continuous, and that God certainly expects us to be good, upstanding people. They rightly recognize that the Torah’s principal commandments are to love God and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18), concepts fully reemphasized by Jesus (Matthew 22:35-37; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28).

Others, however, believe that via His sacrifice that Yeshua the Messiah abolished the Torah in its entirety—meaning that its commandments relating to not only Israel as a national people (i.e., practices such as the Sabbath, appointed times, kosher laws, circumcision) have been abolished—but also those relating to morality. Some espouse that “the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2) is actually a different set of instruction, divorced from the Torah, and that all the Law of Moses could do was to place people in bondage.

It is this latter group that often draws the most attention by anti-missionaries, *and is often the principal reason why Jews reject the Messiahship of Yeshua*, precisely because the Messianic expectation of the Prophets is that the Messiah will come to uphold the Torah as a standard of God’s righteousness. Consider this basic Messianic prophecy with which most Christians are familiar:

“Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

⁷⁸ For some useful discussion, consult the article “The Significance of the Messiah Event” by Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

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Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war” (Isaiah 2:1-4; cf. Micah 4:1-3).

Contrary to the Messiah coming to abolish the Torah, or even that observing the Torah as a born again Believer is some kind of “apostasy” against Him, the Messiah is to uphold the standard of the Torah for God’s people. It is very true that with Yeshua’s arrival and sacrifice, things regarding the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices have changed (Hebrews 7:12), capital punishment has largely been nullified (Colossians 2:14), and that the Abrahamic promise of His descendants being a blessing to all nations can be fully realized (Genesis 12:2-3; cf. Galatians 3:8-9). But is this to suggest a widescale abandonment of the morality and ethos of the Torah as many Christian theologians may imply? Is the Torah only good for knowing about the history of the Bible, *not* providing any valid, relevant spiritual instruction today? As Yeshua is so commonly quoted as saying by Messianics,

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

Unfortunately, many people in today’s Christian Church—who teach that Yeshua the Messiah came to abolish the Torah—will be considered “least” by Him. Not only have *too many* failed to contemplate the meaning of the wider implications of this word, but too many have probably also been responsible for helping people disregard the necessity of keeping God’s commandments—in essence, obeying God. This is severely complicated today in an American evangelical Christianity which is being largely split over issues regarding post-modernism and how to be relevant to our culture. With the moral compass of the Torah largely not considered, conservatives and those who are not-so-conservative, often do not know what to do. It is perfectly legitimate to question whether or not disregarding or dismissing the Torah’s instruction has truly “empowered” the Church; **because it should be patently obvious that it has not**. When outsiders from Judaism see this, it only keeps them away from wanting to consider the gospel—especially if our gospel does not involve any kind of obedience to God.⁷⁹

Obviously, we should not be so simplistic so as to think that the Church has never had any regard for the high standards of the Torah. On the contrary, many holiness and piety movements over the centuries have based their very founding on the morality and ethics of the Torah. These people, not being Jewish, simply did not consider ordinances such as the *moedim* or dietary laws to apply to them.

Today’s emerging Messianic community has come onto the scene to show that there is a better way. We need not think that belief in Yeshua the Messiah and obedience to God’s commandments are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, as demonstrated by the life of Abraham, belief in God is to be coupled with action reflecting the trust that we place in Him. Likewise, if we are to truly understand the Torah obedience of Yeshua and His Apostles, we need to be engaged with the Apostolic Scriptures and place what they tell us into their First Century context. When we do this, we see that Yeshua and the Apostles very much lived within the normative, mainline Jewish culture of their time. This not only includes the Twelve Apostles, but also the Apostle Paul—one who is commonly misquoted and vilified as being

⁷⁹ For a further and most thorough discussion of this issue, consult the author’s book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

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anti-Law—when in actuality he just offered unique and innovative solutions as the gospel message expanded beyond the borders of Judea and encountered other cultures and societies.

The biggest argument that the Messianic movement can offer before Jews regarding the changing power of Yeshua—and indeed His Messiahship—is for us to live transformed lives in obedience to Him. This obedience need not be a rote observance of the commandments with little or no love, joy, peace, or even true enjoyment. This obedience needs to be a reflection of the great supernatural change that has been enacted within us because we have placed our trust in Yeshua. As Paul so astutely says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Our good works, just as the Lord says (Matthew 5:16), are to be seen by others **because they are a more significant testimony of what has been enacted within us** than any theological argument we can muster.

If our faith community truly has a burden for the salvation of the Jewish people, then we all need to understand that Jews have been burdened for centuries with arguments about why they should “believe in Christ.” Many of these arguments have not been delivered in a spirit of reasoned and constructive dialogue. The best way to convince a Jewish person of the truth of the gospel—and indeed *any person*—is by living a transformed life of faith. You will be able to testify *by your actions*, that you reflect the character of Yeshua the Messiah, and that you embody the ethos of the Torah which He came to uphold. Letting your life in Messiah witness to Jewish people will help them more than handing out tracts, trying to get them engaged in some kind of “Torah discussion,” or even supporting the State of Israel. **This is what the Messianic movement needs to learn how to do.** And undeniably, many Christians who see the moral decline in the Church will likewise be living this kind of life in the not-too-distant future (because this is the *same way* that they will be convinced that the Torah is important.)

What other doors has the anti-missionary influence (finally) opened?

The influence that the Jewish anti-missionaries have had in sectors of the Messianic community is very insidious. It is a move of the enemy to do nothing less than to take people away from saving faith in Yeshua the Messiah. It is a movement that has a specific agenda that we must learn to properly combat in the days ahead. But what few of us often realize, is that the anti-missionary movement *has actually performed a necessary service* for today’s Messianic movement. **It is going to force us out of our theological complacency** and to join into the wider “conversation” of Biblical Studies, at least in terms of the issues that we can no longer afford to avoid or ignore.

Accepting lightweight arguments against Yeshua’s Messiahship can lead a person to accepting other lightweight arguments as they relate *specifically* to the reliability of the Tanach or Old Testament itself. As a ministry, we can already document several cases where Christian individuals have: (1) entered into the Messianic movement and embraced a lifestyle of Torah observance, (2) denied the Divinity of Yeshua, (3) **denied the Messiahship of Yeshua**, and then (4) denied the existence of God Himself. Certainly, I do not want to suggest that these kinds of things do not happen in the Christian Church; they do, as there are former Christians who have denied Jesus, but perhaps in not such an interesting way. Those who deny Yeshua in the Church often go straight to atheism. Former Messianics who eventually go to atheism actually end often up as atheists because they originally sought after “Truth” with a capital T, and they were led down a path straight to Hell.

Confronting Critical Issues

Knowing that there are cases where denying Yeshua's Messiahship has later led to people denying *other things*, I would ask you to take a serious look at the following list of issues that the anti-missionary movement has opened up for us. Not unlike discovering an Egyptian tomb in the Valley of the Kings, the tomb known as "the anti-missionary movement" is interconnected to a variety of other tombs. Ironically enough, *all* of these issues pertain directly to the reliability of the Hebrew Tanach, and are issues that the anti-missionaries themselves would certainly not be willing to discuss:

- the influence of higher criticism on Tanach/Old Testament studies
- the historicity of Israel's monarchy during the reign of King David
- the historicity of the Conquest of Canaan
- the reliability of Mosaic authorship/composition of the Pentateuch, versus the JEDP documentary hypothesis
- the historicity of the Exodus, when lack of Egyptian records for it is taken into consideration
- the historicity of the Flood, and whether it was global or regional to the Ancient Near East
- the role of Ancient Near Eastern mythology in the formation of Pentateuchal narratives
- Young Earth Creationism versus Old Earth Creationism versus Theistic Evolution
- **Theism versus Atheism**

Because of the cases of where people denying Yeshua have later denied God Himself, all issues regarding the reliability of the Bible and the events it records, the composition of His Creation and human beings, and indeed His very existence— have just been opened as a direct result of the anti-missionary movement. I would dare say that most Messianics—either laypersons *or* leaders—are really *not* ready for this. Yet, these are not new issues to consider at all, many of which are centuries-old debates. These issues present questions that anyone in theological studies has had to consider at one time or another. These are issues that can be dealt with in a reasonable manner, as the validity of Scripture can be confirmed. **They are the issues that today's Messianic movement can no longer avoid.** When considering Yeshua's Messiahship, *and the other things it is connected to*, are we going to do what we normally do—cover our ears and hide under our beds?

Today's Messianic movement is about four decades old, and for a forty-year old or so movement we have significant progress to make in some areas. **We do not need to be known as a movement that takes people away from God.** As of today, Outreach Israel Ministries has been part of only a handful of Messianics to address the above issues in any kind of detail, and most of the references to these issues have thus far been only in passing. These issues are *not discussed* at the vast majority of Messianic "Torah studies"—and most Messianic "Torah teachers" we have encountered do not even know about them. *This is going to change in the future.* If we are truly a move that God is going to use to make a difference not only for Jewish people who need to know the Jewish Messiah, but also Christians who want to live holy lives, then we will need to be prepared to address all the issues of the times and have answers that uphold the Bible.

In a way, we can thank the anti-missionary movement for helping us to see that we have been theologically complacent. Sometimes in a true move of God, the Lord must use dramatic means to wake people out of their slumber, get them to focus on the work He has assigned, and for them to then be empowered to make a difference. Only by addressing these subjects can the Messianic movement become more theologically mature and stable. Likewise, by addressing

Answering the “Frequently Avoided Questions” About the Messiahship of Yeshua

these subjects we will be able to reach out to a world that has questions, not just about the “New Testament” and the life of Yeshua of Nazareth, but also the “Old Testament” and why they have been placed here on Earth.

The current fundamental attitude that dominates much of Messianic Biblical examination will inevitably give way to one that will actually engage and dialogue with the issues, considering and discussing their (greater) significance. Our answer for the criticisms of the History Channel or Discovery Channel will no longer be turning off or throwing away the television, but will actually be spent considering the arguments, data, and indeed the motives of those involved. This is what we have had to do with the anti-missionary movement, *and it is only the beginning of what lies ahead*. While we have a great deal of work ahead of ourselves, we actually have a great deal of things to look forward to, because we can really be used by God to not only see people come to faith—but live lives that experience His complete *shalom*.

Once a person has denied Yeshua’s Messiahship, the only other thing one can deny is the existence of God Himself. Will another installment, something like “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Bible,” be needed? I sincerely hope not, but the possibility remains certain. **But what is going to be necessary is for us to realize that God wants to get our attention.** When people question the Messiahship of Yeshua, doubting who He is, it signals that we need to truly realize that we are in a spiritual war for the souls of human beings. We need to be prepared for the other things that the enemy will lodge at us that will take people further and further toward eternal punishment.