

INTRODUCTION TO THINGS MESSIANIC

**An Introduction for Newcomers
to the Messianic Movement**

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MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Introduction to Things Messianic

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Cover Image: JMWScout via Istockphoto

ISBN 979-8316753604 (paperback)

ASIN B00685T1FG (eBook)

Published by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries

P.O. Box 516

McKinney, Texas 75070

(407) 933-2002

outreachisrael.net / outreachisrael.blog

messianicapologetics.net / messianicapologetics.blog

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
 AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
 ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
 Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
 Ara: Aramaic
 ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
 ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
 b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
 B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
 BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
 BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
 C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
 CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
 CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
 CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
 CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
 CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)
 DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
 DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
 EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
 EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
 ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
 Ger: German
 GNT: Greek New Testament
 Grk: Greek
 HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
 HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
 Heb: Hebrew
 HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
 IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
 IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
 ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
 IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
 Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
 JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
 JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
 KJV: King James Version
 Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)
 LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
 LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
 LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
 LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
 LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
 LXX: Septuagint
 m. Mishnah
 MT: Masoretic Text
 NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
 NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
 NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
 NEB: New English Bible (1970)
 Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
 NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
 NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*

NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
NT: New Testament
OT: Old Testament
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

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In studying the Bible, many Christians unfortunately find themselves only reading the New Testament or the Apostolic Scriptures. Although these important Scriptures speak of the gospel message, testify to the works of our Lord Yeshua (Jesus), and speak of issues that the First Century Believers had to contend with, these writings comprise less than one-third of the Bible. Those whose focus is almost *exclusively* in this part of the Bible can have an unbalanced approach to our Creator and His plan for the ages.

Although the Messianic Scriptures were written down in Greek, their very nature is Hebraic. The figure who authored more than half of these writings was the Apostle Paul, a Rabbinical scholar who studied with Gamaliel (Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:5), a revered sage of Judaism (b.*Megillah* 21a).

Our Messiah Himself was a Hebrew, as are many of His expressions and sayings. Consider the following examples:

“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matthew 5:29, NASU).

“The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matthew 6:22-23, NASU).

The above quotations are just two examples of the Hebraic nature of our Savior’s teachings. In theological studies they are generally referred to

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as Hebraisms or Semitisms in the Biblical text. For centuries, readers have debated verses such as those above. Many have been confused. Do they require such a literal viewpoint that demands a physical “plucking out” of eyes? Not at all. To a First Century Jew, the eye can mean more than just an organ with which one sees. It can be a person’s mind, emotions, will, or good sense, depending on the context. There can be a very deep meaning to Yeshua’s statements when one understands that there is an Hebraic nature behind them. This is where the Messianic movement steps in and where a First Century Jewish perspective of the Scriptures is crucial.

Although the Messianic movement is composed of people from many theological traditions: largely Conservative and Reform Judaism, and evangelical Protestantism, the emphasis concerning the ancient roots of our faith in the Messiah is very important concerning the times in which we live. In the 1970s or 1980s, if one uttered the name “Yeshua,” very few would have known who, or for that matter, what the person was talking about. However, many evangelical Believers by the late 1990s and early 2000s became aware of the fact that *Yeshua* is the original Hebrew name of the Messiah. Why has this come about? **Because many have realized the fact that understanding the Jewish Roots of our faith is important.**

Why is it important to understand our collective faith heritage in the Scriptures of Israel, the Tanach or Old Testament? Yeshua the Messiah is returning to Jerusalem and the gates of New Jerusalem are named after the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Revelation 21:10-12). The Apostle Paul himself said that if one is in the Messiah, he or she is a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Our faith in Messiah Yeshua is undeniably connected to Israel and to the Jewish people, as it was indeed regarded as a sect of Second Temple Judaism (cf. Acts 24:14). Knowing about the origins of our faith is imperative if we are to return to truly having an “Apostolic theology.”

Knowing about “things Messianic” and distinctively Hebraic is the first step toward having a more wholistic view of our faith, from Genesis to Revelation. By understanding the Hebraic origins of our faith, many of the obscure parts of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) should begin to become clear and take on a new depth, as Bible students consider their background and the lifestyle practices of the first Believers in Yeshua. The first Believers in the Messiah lived out the missional expectations of the Tanach or Old Testament in evangelizing the ancient world (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 4:6; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6), something that we are to surely continue today.

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“The Church” (*Ekklesia*)

Many Christians believe that “the Church” started at Pentecost following Yeshua’s ascension into Heaven. They believe that “the Church” is a group of chosen ones separate from Israel, and perhaps that it is not important to really study the Tanach or Old Testament, because it does not directly apply to “the Church.” The Biblical truth is that the called-out body or community of God’s chosen existed long before this time.

The word “church” never appears in the Greek texts of Scripture. The word commonly translated as such comes from *ekklēsia*. *LS* defines *ekklēsia* as “an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned, the legislative assembly” and “in N.T. the Church, either the body, or the place.”¹ In the Apostolic Scriptures *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and thus by extension, is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. *TDNT* remarks that

“Since the NT uses a single term, translations should also try to do so, but this raises the question whether ‘church’ or ‘congregation’ is always suitable, especially in view of the OT use for Israel and the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic... ‘Assembly,’ then, is perhaps the best single term, particularly as it has both a congregate and an abstract sense, i.e., for the assembling as well as the assembly.”²

This Christian resource says that “assembly” would be the best, consistent translation for the word *ekklēsia*. There are indeed widely known speciality editions of Scripture, such as Young’s Literal Translation (YLT) or the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (LITV) by Jay P. Green, which render *ekklēsia* as “assembly.”

The Septuagint (LXX), the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, frequently translated the Hebrew word *qahal*, or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *Qahal* is a Hebrew term for “assembly” or “congregation” used in the Tanach, which almost exclusively refers to Israel. *TWOT* indicates, “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX.”³ When the Jewish Apostles used the Greek word *ekklēsia*, often rendered as “church” in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate

¹ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 239.

² K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397.

³ Jack P. Lewis, “*qāhāl*,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:790.

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assembly or group of people away, and entirely cut off from Israel. They considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel, and the non-Jewish Believers to be “fellow heirs” (Ephesians 3:6) with them, grafted-in as wild olive branches (Romans 11:16-18). It is not surprising by any means that one of the definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include “Israel.” Thayer states that “in the Sept. [*ekklēsia* is] often equiv. to [*qahal*], the assembly of the Israelites.”⁴ It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as “church,” whereas it would be best rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation.”

It is important to know that the *ekklēsia* or assembly of God’s chosen has always existed. The Holy Spirit being poured out at Pentecost was a fulfillment of prophecy, recorded in both the Tanach (Old Testament) and the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament). But the events that occurred on this day did not start some “new group” of elect or chosen. Pentecost, in actuality *Shavuot* or the Feast of Weeks—one of the Biblical festivals specified in Leviticus 23—was one of the commanded times of ingathering in the Torah or Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 16:16). The Apostle Peter attested that what occurred when the Holy Spirit was poured out was a fulfillment of prophecy:

“[B]ut this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT and they shall prophesy. AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED’” (Acts 2:16-21, NASU).

The events at Pentecost/*Shavuot* were foretold in Joel 2:28-32:

“It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. I will

⁴ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 196.

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display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Joel 2:28-32, NASU).

So did the *ekklēsia*, or assembly of God’s elect, begin at Pentecost/*Shavuot*? All the Book of Acts says is that there was a fulfillment of prophecies in Joel which will be fully completed in the end-times before the Messiah’s return. Interestingly enough, the martyr Stephen detailed that “the Church” (meaning, God’s elect) actually existed much earlier at Mount Sinai. In the KJV, he is recorded as saying,

“This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in **the church in the wilderness** [*tē ekklēsia en tē erēmō*] with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us” (Acts 7:37-38, KJV).

The so-called “Church Age” did not begin in 30 C.E. Yeshua the Messiah only spoke of this age and the age to come (Mark 10:30; Matthew 12:32; 13:49; Luke 18:30), meaning the future Messianic Kingdom.

In reference to the ancient roots and origins of our faith, it is important to remember that the early Believers in the Messiah were not at all foreign to the Hebrew Bible. Numerous references to “the Scriptures” in the Apostolic Writings (New Testament) are referring to the *Torah*, *Nevi’im*, and *Ketuvim*—or the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings: the **Tanach**. The Gospels, Epistles, and many of the other Messianic Writings had yet to be canonized or even written when “the Scriptures” were referred to or appealed to by the Apostles.⁵ When Paul wrote Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, NASU), it was the Tanach or Old Testament of which he was specifically speaking.

As previously mentioned, Paul was a Rabbinical scholar quite affluent in the Tanach, and when witnessing to his fellow Jews in the Synagogue he would have tried to show them how Yeshua fulfilled the prophecies and prophetic patterns seen in His life from the Hebrew Bible. Acts 17:2 records how it was Paul’s frequent ministry technique to reason with his Jewish kinsfolk on the Sabbath, proving to them from the Scriptures that

⁵ Acts 17:2, 11; 18:24, 28; Romans 15:4; 16:26; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

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Yeshua was the Messiah: “And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (NASU).

It is also important to note that prior to 70 C.E., the year the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, what we commonly call “Christianity” today was a legal religion in the Roman Empire, as Rome considered it to be a sect of Judaism which was exempt from worshipping Caesar. However, as a common resource like the *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* explains, “Jewish Christians (Messianic believers) were considered to be a sect (Acts 24:5) of Judaism. But, after A.D. 70, all Christians were on their own; they were recognized as separate from Judaism.”⁶ After that time, especially with the majority of Messiah followers being non-Jewish Greeks and Romans, the *ekklēsia* steadily distanced itself from its faith heritage in Second Temple Judaism. Much of this was created by Roman anti-Semitism, and was coupled by the Synagogue authorities ejecting many Believers in Yeshua.⁷

What emerged into what has become known “Christianity,” actually originated from Second Temple Judaism. When one can peel away a great deal of added traditions and dogmas since the First Century Disciples and Apostles, we should be able to clearly see how our faith in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) at its very core is Hebraic. The Messiah, Yeshua, is an Israelite and is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:4-5). When He returns to Planet Earth, He will restore Israel (Acts 1:6-7) and will reign from Jerusalem!

So why should we study the ancient roots of our faith? You cannot have a house without a foundation. The foundations of the *ekklēsia* pre-Pentecost are definitively Hebraic. It is crucial to understand the worldview that Yeshua, the Apostles, and the early Believers in the Messiah had, so we can more fully understand Scripture as it was originally composed: God-inspired from an Hebraic world view.

⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “Galatians,” in *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, NASB (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994), 1548.

⁷ Consult the benediction against heretics, actually seen in various editions of the Jewish *siddur* until modern times: Joseph H. Hertz, ed., *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, revised (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1960), 283; Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Complete ArtScroll Siddur, Nusach Ashkenaz* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984), 107.

Also consult a summary of early negative Christian remarks toward the Jewish people: “Jew, Jews,” in David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 374-378.

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The Jerusalem Council

In the very early days of the community of Believers following Pentecost or *Shavuot*, the vast majority of the Believers were Jewish. Later, however, the good news or gospel message began to spread beyond the borders of the Land of Israel. Israel, of course, was to be a light to the nations, and God's conduit by which He would save the world. Israel's Kingdom could only be restored in conjunction with the whole world knowing about the greatness of Israel's God, and its Messiah, Yeshua.

As many God-fearing, non-Jewish Greeks and Romans, came to faith in the Messiah, things changed substantially. There was debate among many of the Jewish Believers whether these people had to be circumcised, becoming Jewish proselytes or converts, and then receive the Messiah (Acts 15:5)—or whether they could receive Him directly and then grow in their faith. It caused a great stir as many believed that circumcision and observance of the Torah or Law of Moses had to precede the salvation experience. Acts 15 records the decisions made by the Jerusalem Council as the *goyim* or *ethnē*, "the nations," were coming to faith in the Messiah:

"The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?'" (Acts 15:6-10, NASU).

Before the Council issued its ruling, Peter restated what had occurred. Previously in Acts 10:9-16, the apostle was shown a vision of a sheet with animals on it considered unclean by the Torah's standards. Peter was told three times to "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" (Acts 10:13, NASU), and he responded with, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14, RSV). This passage is usually interpreted as meaning that God nullified the dietary requirements of the Torah or Law of Moses. However, Peter himself issued the appropriate interpretation of his vision that had nothing to do with meat:

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“And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and *yet* God has shown me that **I should not call any man** [*mēdena...anthrōpon*; or ‘any human being’] unholy or unclean” (Acts 10:28, NASU).

In Acts 15:6-11, Peter testified that the nations have been made clean by the blood of the Messiah, can receive the same Holy Spirit, and must come to redeeming faith **in the same way as Jewish Believers**. He also emphasized that “a yoke...which...our fathers nor we were able to bear” (Acts 15:10, NIV) should not be put upon them, implying that *legalistic* or mandatory observance of the Law of Moses involving circumcision for salvation and/or for acceptance among the Believers was not necessary. James the Just, half-brother of Yeshua, issued the following ruling for the new-Jewish Believers coming to faith:

“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:19-21, NASU).

Four requirements were given to the new non-Jewish believers, in order for them to congregate with Jewish Believers in the Messiah:

1. Abstinence from pollutions of idols
2. Abstinence from fornication
3. Abstinence from things strangled
4. Abstinence from blood

Briefly summarized, Believers from the nations were to avoid idols, fornication (sexual immorality), meats that were not butchered in a proper method (Deuteronomy 14:2-20), and blood (Deuteronomy 12:23-25).

Why were the First Century non-Jewish Believers coming to faith, told to observe these four things? The much debated Acts 15:21 says, “For Moses from ancient generations has had in every city those who proclaim him, since he is read in all the synagogues every *Shabbat*” (TLV). A significant way of reading the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15:20, is that the new, non-Jewish Believers, *when* observing the four stipulations, would be *then be cut off* from their old pagan spheres of influence—and *find themselves* part of a new community, along with their fellow Jewish

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Believers, where the declaration of the Law of Moses every week would be taking place.

James had stated that the salvation of the nations was taking place in accordance with “the words of the Prophets” (Acts 15:15), specifically detailing how the restoration of the Tabernacle of David (Acts 15:16-18; Amos 9:11-12, LXX) was at hand. Yet, among many other anticipated prophecies of the Tanach or Old Testament, was how the nations would stream to Zion in the Last Days and be taught from God’s Torah (Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4). The Apostolic Decree issued some non-negotiable essentials (Acts 15:20, 29), which were mandatory for the new non-Jewish, Greek and Roman Believers, to follow to enter into the faith community (Acts 15:23-29). The record of the Book of Acts and Apostolic letters, is that the Apostolic Decree was followed in some places, and in others it was not.

In Ephesians 2:11-16, the Apostle Paul wrote that non-Jewish Believers who come to faith in Yeshua have been made a part of the Commonwealth of Israel:

“Therefore remember, that once you, the nations in the flesh—who are called ‘Foreskin’ by the ones called ‘Circumcision,’ *which is* in the flesh, made by hands—*remember* that you were at that time separate from Messiah, alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who were once far off, have been brought near in the blood of Messiah. For He is our peace, who made both *groups* one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, the *religious* Law of commandments in dogmas, that He might create in Himself the two into one new humanity, *so* making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the wooden scaffold, having killed the enmity by it” (Ephesians 2:11-16, author’s rendering).

Paul said that those who were “separate from Messiah” were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel” (Ephesians 2:12, RSV), but that through the sacrifice of the Messiah He would make the two into “one new humanity” (Ephesians 2:15, NRSV/CJSB). Ephesians 2:15 states that “God through the cross... put to death the enmity” (NASU) or sin which has been atoned for through the sacrifice of the Messiah, which once separated God the Father from humanity. All Believers in Yeshua are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel—but non-Jewish Believers from the nations were, however, sternly warned by the Apostle Paul not to boast or

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speak against the Jewish people as the natural branches of Israel's olive tree. As Paul attested,

"[D]o not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either" (Romans 11:18-21, NASU).

No non-Jewish Believer is to boast against the Jewish people, because if God can break off natural branches from Israel's olive tree in order to save wild branches of the nations, He can certainly break off the wild branches. The Jewish people, as Paul was clear, have an irrevocable calling which must be honored (Romans 11:29).

The ancient roots of our faith come from Israel and ultimately Yeshua, the Root. Non-Jewish Believers who had once been separate from Israel had nothing to boast about (Romans 11:17-22), but they needed to respect those who held the oracles of God (Romans 3:2). The Jerusalem Council ruled that there was equal access to the salvation and grace provided in Israel's Messiah, to all members of the human race, regardless of whether they were Jewish or not. All Believers in Israel's Messiah are a part of the same community of faith and must be welcome (cf. Galatians 3:28), showing mutual honor, respect, and love to each other (Romans 12:10).

Roman Catholicism Takes Its Toll

What we have described concerning the Jerusalem Council is somewhat different than what is often taught in much of contemporary Christianity. Non-Jewish Believers are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel via their faith in Israel's Messiah. Various contemporary scholars are concluding more and more how the First Century Jewish Believers did not at all dispense with their faith heritage and practices in the Torah or Law of Moses, including the seventh-day Sabbath, the appointed times, and the kosher dietary laws.⁸ Rather, in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) it is made clear that legalistic observance of the Torah via a conversion to Judaism was not a salvation requirement of the non-Jewish Believers, and

⁸ This is, to various degrees, recognized by scholars associated with the New Perspective of Paul, and Paul Within Judaism.

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that no person would gain salvation by keeping commandments. *Yeshua does come first*, followed by recognizing how the Torah plays a role in disciplining Believers in holiness.

But if the First Century *ekklēsia* was very Hebraic and Jewish, how did we get to where we are today? Presumably, these Believers did not celebrate mainstream Christian practices such as “Sunday church” or the holidays of Christmas and Easter (at least as we currently know them).

History records that following the First Council of Nicea in 325 C.E., the institutional Church began passing legislation prohibiting the keeping of the Sabbath and the Biblical festivals.⁹ (This is an indication that even up until the Fourth Century there were some pockets of Believers who were keeping, or at least nominally keeping, these practices.) When “Christianity” was made a legal religion in the Roman Empire by the Emperor Constantine, syncretism was largely practiced by the clergy, meaning that Biblical concepts were often merged with pagan customs, often with an attempt to “evangelize” the local heathen. It ultimately resulted in the widescale merger of Church authority with political authority, and the Roman Catholic Church and its apparatus were formed as a consequence.

Following the fall of Rome in 476 C.E. to the Visigoths, the Dark Ages began. During this period, Europe experienced one of the worst times in human history, which the Roman Catholic Church dominated. One risked death by simply possessing a written copy of the Holy Scriptures, and disease and plague were rampant. Europeans were also some of the most uneducated people in the known world (especially when compared to Jews and Muslims) as the Roman Catholic officials and hierarchy held most Biblical, historical, and philosophical documents solely in their possession. Of everything that was taught and believed, the most dangerous was that the Catholic Church held that eternal life or salvation only came through participation in its sacraments. The pope was believed to have the authority on Earth to give people exemption from Divine punishment, or condemn them eternally.¹⁰

⁹ Council of Antioch (341 C.E.), Canon 1; Council of Laodicea (363 C.E.), Canon 29.

¹⁰ The two main textbooks I was assigned for this period of Church history, during my time at Asbury Theological Seminary, include: Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984); Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

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The Reformation

We should each truly believe that the Reformation, which began in the early Sixteenth Century, was an act of God. German monk Martin Luther could not reconcile the Biblical concept of “the just shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:11) with the Roman Catholic teaching of salvation provided via the Church’s sacraments. History records that his protests against the Catholic Church began what would develop into the Protestant Reformation. From that point onward men and women of God began to read their Bibles and question Roman Catholic tradition.

The two primary goals of the early Protestant Reformers were (1) to purge the Church of non-Biblical Roman Catholic practices, and (2) to present the general populus with copies of the Scriptures in their native languages. During this time famous English translations such as the 1599 Geneva Bible and 1611 King James Bible were produced. The Biblical realization that salvation came by grace through faith alone, and not by actions prescribed by the Roman Catholic Church, was also reestablished. Certainly, the Reformers did not agree on everything, and many different Protestant groups and sects did arise. But, had it not been for what they did, we would certainly *not* be where we are today.

When we review the current Messianic movement and its growth today, one must realize that the Reformation accomplished much, although there are still many areas of Biblical theology which need to be reformed. The Reformation demonstrated that the practices of Roman Catholic ritual confession, praying to the saints, veneration of the Virgin Mary, and belief in purgatory, were non-Biblical. A number of people you may encounter in today’s Messianic community believe that the Protestant Reformation was a failure because Protestants still observe some Roman Catholic practices. However, would we be better off if the Reformation had not occurred? Are we not building upon the work of those who have preceded us in the journey of faith—both Jewish rabbis *and* various Christian theologians? *Today, we benefit from access to things that the early Reformers **did not** have access to.* We benefit from access to the lands of the Bible, secondary historical data and resources, and disciplines like archaeology, largely arising in the mid-to-late Nineteenth Century.

What has the Messianic movement today achieved?

The Messianic movement today was originally started by Jewish people who were Believers in Messiah Yeshua as an evangelistic outreach to fellow Jews. The Hebrew Christian movement of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century, later transitioned in the 1960s and 1970s into the Messianic Jewish movement. Messianic congregations and synagogues were established to be places where Jewish Believers in Yeshua would not have to assimilate into a non-Jewish Christianity and give up on their Jewish heritage and customs—and most especially would be a place where the good news or gospel message could be declared in a Jewish context to Jewish non-Believers. By the 2000s, however, many of today's Messianic congregations, have a mixed group of constituents, including both Jewish people who have received Yeshua as the Messiah, and others from diverse Christian backgrounds wanting to enrich their faith and join in unity with them. Overall, the Messianic movement has been responsible for awakening many evangelical Believers to the ancient origins and Jewish Roots of their faith.

There are, however, distinctive differences between your average Messianic congregation and your standard church setting. Just as there are many types of evangelical Protestant churches, there are a wide variety of Messianic congregations.

One of the most obvious differences between a Messianic congregation and your average church is that Messianics typically assemble or hold services on a Friday night or Saturday in remembrance of the Biblical Sabbath or *Shabbat*. Depending on what region of the world in which you live, a congregation can be very much like an Orthodox Jewish synagogue, or very similar to a standard church setting, with all the variance you can imagine in between. (Most Messianic congregations are actually like a Conservative or Reform Jewish synagogue.) Use of traditional Hebrew liturgy is also not uncommon in Messianic settings. Some are more charismatic than others, and some are highly reserved. Again, depending on where you are and what congregation you are attending, can affect the degree of Jewishness that you encounter.

The Messianic movement has been responsible for awakening many non-Jewish Believers to their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures, and continues to grow larger and larger every year. Many are of the firm position that its presence in the world today is a major signal that the

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return of the Messiah is drawing closer, as Jewish people come to saving faith in Yeshua in greater numbers, and many evangelical Believers are being convicted that they need to return to the lifestyle practices of the First Century holy ones or saints (cf. Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is returning to Jerusalem. He prophesied that His Twelve Disciples would “sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28, NASU). He said that people would be judged for how His Jewish brethren are treated (Matthew 25:34-46). Yeshua adamantly stated that those who treat the Jewish people badly or with malice shall go “into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41, KJV). Isaiah 2:3 details that in the Last Days “the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (NASU; cf. Micah 2:4). Just knowing about these four things, is it important to understand Israel and the ancient origins of our faith? Absolutely!

Each Believer’s goal should be to be as Biblically sound as humanly possible, Genesis-Revelation and not just Matthew-Revelation. Understanding the ancient origins of the relationship with our God, the Holy One of Israel, is a crucial part of attaining this goal. May you seek a firm foundation as you grow in your faith and examine His Word for answers!

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 1

1. What is the problem with “only” focusing on the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament)? How can a person be unbalanced in his or her view of the Scriptures?
2. What expressions in the Gospels are challenging to understand without examining them from an Hebraic perspective? Give some possible examples.
3. Do you know any Christians who recognize that the Messiah’s original name was Yeshua?
4. Why do you think it is important to understand the Jewish Roots of our faith?
5. Do you believe that the *ekklēsia*, the Lord’s assembly, has existed going all the way back to Mount Sinai? Why or why not?
6. If there had been no “New Testament” for the First Century Believers to use, then which Scriptures did they consult for spiritual guidance and edification?
7. What was the debate that the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 had to address? What did they rule concerning non-Jews coming to faith?
8. How did the emerging Christian Church separate itself from its faith heritage in Second Temple Judaism?
9. Do you believe that the Protestant Reformation was helpful to our faith? Do you think further reformation needs to occur?
10. Give a very brief overview of today’s Messianic movement. What are your observations and what has been your experience?

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