

FAQ VOL II

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MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Frequently Asked Questions, Volume II is a multi-year work in progress. Please note how the text may be corrected, updated, or amended, before final publication. Page numbers are also likely to be altered.

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)

Bilateral Ecclesiology

Can you please explain to me why bilateral ecclesiology can be a major divisive issue in Messianic theology?

The following material has been adapted and expanded from J.K. McKee, *The Messianic Walk: The End-Time Move of God* (McKinney, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2020), pp 202-204.¹

Ecclesiology is the formal study of the *ekklēsia* or the people of God. In evangelical Protestant settings, ecclesiology often involves the life body of the local faith community. In today's Messianic movement, however, discussions and debates over ecclesiology often involve the place of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers together, in the Body of Messiah. While no one doubts how Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah remain Jewish, and they clearly are a part of the community of Israel—what is the relationship of non-Jewish Believers to the community of Israel? Much of this involves what it specifically means for non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah to be reckoned as members of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) or grafted-in to the olive tree (Romans 11:16-18).

Throughout a great deal of academic Messianic Jewish writing, one will commonly see the concept of a **bilateral ecclesiology** promoted. A bilateral ecclesiology would affirm that Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are together a part of the Commonwealth of Israel, but that such a Commonwealth of Israel is to be composed of two distinct segments: the Messianic Jewish community, and the Christian Church. The term "commonwealth" is approached from the position of it being like the British Commonwealth of Nations, rather than *politeia* in its classical context of it being, "**the right to be a member of a sociopolitical entity, citizenship**" (BDAG).² Those who adhere to a bilateral ecclesiology model are not always welcoming of non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement. While Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are not exactly the same, and do have their natural distinctions—those who promote a bilateral ecclesiology can be seen to rigidly emphasize distinctions among God's people, at the expense of the common faith that we are to have in Yeshua.

A competing model which is seen at many Messianic congregations—particularly those which would emphasize that Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to function as "one new man" or "one new humanity" (Ephesians 2:15)—is probably best labeled as the **enlarged**

¹ This material was employed for the Messianic Theology Explained installment from 08 August 2024, "Bilateral Ecclesiology," accessible via <youtube.com/MessianicApologetics>.

² Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 845.

Kingdom realm of Israel model. In Acts 15:15-18, James the Just placed the salvation of the nations squarely as a component of the restoration of the Tabernacle of David, referencing Amos 9:11-12: “The words of the Prophets agree, as it is written: ‘After this I will return and rebuild the fallen tabernacle of David. I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it, so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord—namely all the Gentiles who are called by My name—says ADONAI, who makes these things known from of old’” (TLV). During the reign of King David, Israel was not only to be regarded at its ideal peak as a state, but as indicated in the Hebrew of Amos 9:12, “That they may possess the remnant of Edom” (NASU), noting how the borders of Israel’s jurisdiction reached beyond the Twelve Tribes. An enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel model would regard all of God’s people as members of the Commonwealth of Israel, with a restored Twelve Tribes at the center, and enlarged borders to welcome in the righteous from the nations.

For the authors of the workbook *Messianic Judaism Class*,

“We believe that the Jews according to the flesh (descendants of Abraham through Isaac; whether through the blood line of the mother or the father) who place their faith in Israel’s Messiah Yeshua have not disowned or separated themselves from their race and Judaic heritage, but remain sons and daughters of Israel. Gentiles who place their faith in Israel’s Messiah Yeshua are also, spiritually sons and daughters of Israel.”³

For the latter, even though reckoned as “fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:19, TLV), they are also strongly warned against being arrogant to the Jewish people who have yet to receive the Messiah (Romans 11:19-20). **Non-Jewish Believers should not just call themselves “Israel,”** as that can be frequently construed as arrogant, insensitive to the Jewish struggle throughout history, and even supportive of replacement theology. Non-Jewish Believers should qualify their participation within Israel’s Commonwealth, as being grafted-in, fellow citizens with Jewish Believers, and most especially co-laborers in the restoration of Israel’s Kingdom with Jewish Believers.

What is commonly witnessed at Messianic Jewish congregations, which would emphasize some form of an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel model? Non-Jewish Believers within today’s Messianic movement, while needing to be specially called by the Lord into this faith community—certainly at its present phase of development—can indeed be included at all levels of congregational body life. This not only involves co-participation in weekly and yearly holidays and festivals—but non-Jewish Believers recognized as elders, deacons, Messianic Pastors, and Messianic Teachers of local assemblies, alongside of Messianic Jewish Rabbis. Non-Jewish Believers, while perhaps being asked why they might sense a desire to participate in Messianic Judaism, are not actively turned away from it, either.

³ James Appel, Jonathan Bernis, and David Levine, *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book (Copenhagen, NY: Olive Press, 2011), 148.

What is commonly witnessed in Messianic Jewish venues, which would emphasize some form of bilateral ecclesiology? A recent summary of bilateral ecclesiology is offered by Jennifer M. Rosner, in *Finding Messiah: A Journey into the Jewishness of the Gospel* (2022):

“[B]eing a follower of Jesus looks different for Jews than it does for Gentiles...[T]here are two parts of the *ekklēsia*, or body of Christ. For Jews, following Messiah means living out the contours of God’s enduring covenant with Israel, believing Jesus to be the climax of the covenant and the ultimate model of covenant fidelity. For Gentiles, following Jesus does not require adherence to Jewish practice or tradition.”⁴

Bilateral ecclesiology is correct to emphasize that distinctions between Jewish and non-Jewish people, do not disappear because of faith in the Messiah. And in Rosner’s view, she appreciably acknowledges how, “the Spirit...orders the lives of Gentile followers of Jesus so that they may live as the people of God alongside and joined to the people of Israel.”⁵ She also recognizes how “Gentile followers of Christ are, in Paul’s language, grafted into Israel’s mission and redemptive activity”⁶ (cf. Romans 11).

When it comes to matters of inclusion and participation in the local Messianic assembly, congregations which adhere to a bilateral ecclesiology are widely seen to limit, discourage, and in some cases indirectly turn away non-Jewish Believers investigating their Jewish Roots. Advocates of bilateral ecclesiology are frequently seen to downplay the present occurrence of prophecies such as Micah 4:1-2 and Isaiah 2:2-4, the nations streaming to Zion to be taught God’s Torah, and the Zechariah 8:23 of ten joining of the nations joining with a Jewish person. Non-Jewish Believers people who have felt a supernatural calling from the Lord to join with Messianic Jewish Believers, have at times, been accused of adhering to an “overly-realized eschatology,” as future realities need to apparently be reserved for the opposite of Yeshua’s Second Coming.⁷

Messianic Judaism is hardly uniform when it comes to bilateral ecclesiology, although many who do not support it, are usually hesitant to speak out against fellow Messianic Jews—often due to the small size of the Messianic movement. Supporters of bilateral ecclesiology have been some of the strongest voices claiming that many non-Jewish people involved in Messianic things, have been guilty of supersessionism or replacement theology. At the same time, supporters of bilateral ecclesiology have also been involved in various ecumenical ventures, even including high levels of Roman Catholicism at the Vatican—to the disapproval of many.

Any alternative to bilateral ecclesiology, certainly has to be rooted within the text of Holy Scripture. But, it must be enjoined by non-Jewish Believers actively participating in the

⁴ Jennifer M. Rosner, *Finding Messiah: A Journey into the Jewishness of the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022), pp 118-119.

⁵ Ibid, pp 127-128.

⁶ Ibid, 151.

⁷ Consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, “Overly-Realized Eschatology.”

Bilateral Ecclesiology

Messianic Jewish mission, and standing shoulder to shoulder with Messianic Jewish Believers, against anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. This is the only way claims of supersessionism can be adequately diffused.⁸

⁸ For a further review, consult the author's publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*