

FAQ VOL II

A WORK IN PROGRESS

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Frequently Asked Questions

VOLUME II

© John Kimball McKee

latest update 08 November, 2024

All rights reserved. With the exception of quotations for academic purposes, no part of this publication may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher.

A planned resource 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

Fair Use Notice: This publication contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We make use of this material as a matter of teaching, scholarship, research, and commentary. We believe in good faith that this constitutes a “fair use” of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law, and is in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. For more information go to: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/17/107>

Outreach Israel Ministries is a non-profit 501(c)3. All prices listed on the publications of Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics are suggested donations.

<p><i>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.</i></p>
--

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: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	JBK: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Koren</i> (2000)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
Ara: Aramaic	KJV: King James Version
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament</i> by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	LES: <i>Lexham English Septuagint</i> (2019)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	LS: <i>An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell-Scott)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	LSJM: <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LXX: Septuagint
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	m. Mishnah
CGL: <i>Cambridge Greek Lexicon</i> (2021)	MT: Masoretic Text
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Holladay)	NASB: <i>New American Standard Bible</i> (1977)
CJB: <i>Complete Jewish Bible</i> (1998)	NASU: <i>New American Standard Update</i> (1995)
CJSB: <i>Complete Jewish Study Bible</i> (2016)	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NEB: <i>New English Bible</i> (1970)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NETS: <i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> (2007)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
ESV: <i>English Standard Version</i> (2001)	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIV: <i>New International Version</i> (1984)
GNT: <i>Greek New Testament</i>	NJB: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic</i> (1985)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: <i>Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures</i> (1999)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NKJV: <i>New King James Version</i> (1982)
HCSB: <i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i> (2004)	NRSV: <i>New Revised Standard Version</i> (1989)
Heb: Hebrew	NLT: <i>New Living Translation</i> (1996)
HNV: <i>Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible</i>	NT: <i>New Testament</i>
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	
IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>	
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	

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)

Tattooing and Body Piercings

I have noticed that many of the younger people in my congregation are getting tattooed, and/or that they have many odd body piercings. What does the Torah say about this?

reproduced from *Torah In the Balance, Volumes I&II* (McKinney, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2024)

Two definite areas of personal grooming, not only to which the Torah issues some important instruction—but which are widely witnessed in Western society today—concern the areas of tattooing and body piercings. On the whole, concurrent with a great deal of today's Judaism, the Messianic movement does not look favorably on people having their bodies “inked” with tattoos. For that same matter, Messianics do not tend to be that excited about affluent body piercings all over one's person.

Leviticus 19:28 directs, “You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD” (NASU). The noun *ketovet* involves “a writing (mark or sign) of imprintment, scriptio stigmatis, perh. of tattooing” (BDB),¹ and is rendered by the NJPS with “incise,” the Koren Jerusalem Bible with “print,” and Fox's *Five Books of Moses* as “skin-etching.”² There should be little dispute that some form of tattooing is in view, although obviously not the more developed tattooing witnessed today in parlors with electronic needles. But is tattooing in general what is prohibited, or only tattooing for the sake of the dead and/or memorializing something?

It is witnessed within a great deal of the historic Jewish tradition, that Judaism has demonstrated a strong disapproval of any form of tattooing, for any real reason. Originally from the period of the Torah, tattooing is believed to have been an ancient form of idolatry. The widescale Jewish negativity witnessed toward tattooing is based in the position that human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), and that to tattoo the body is to dishonor the body God has loaned them. To be certain, religious Jews recognize today that less religious members of the Jewish community often get tattoos for many reasons, often cultural. Tattooing is hardly believed to be an offense which can cut one off from the God of Israel. Yet, given the advance of laser technology, more conservative and traditional branches

¹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 508.

² Everett Fox, trans., *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 605.

of Judaism could make tattoo removal a requirement of conversion, burial,³ or synagogue leadership.

The opinions regarding tattooing in contemporary evangelical Protestantism are, to be sure, across the board. Many would view Leviticus 19:28 as being an outdated instruction for Ancient Israel in the Ancient Near East, with no application for Believers today in the post-resurrection era. Others may choose to interpret Leviticus 19:28 in a restricted sense, ranging from the commandment being only applicable in terms of ancient idolatry, tattooing for some matter of memorializing the dead, and/or tattooing as a matter of an ancient people being identified as slaves, a status the Ancient Israelites were obviously freed from. Still, the fact that tattooing is discussed in Holy Scripture, in a negative manner, does mean that there will be negative opinions found of it within evangelicalism. Of particular importance would be the stress of how born again Believers are to be regarded as a temple of the Holy Spirit (i.e., John 14:17; Romans 8:9, 11; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), which should at least cause any mature Christian person to pause before getting a tattoo, evaluating his or her motives. A tattoo is a relatively permanent symbol one will be emblazing on his or her skin, communicating some sort of message to those who see it. Will such a message actually be glorifying to the Lord, and reflective of His Kingdom?⁴

While some would consider tattooing an issue of adiaphora or things indifferent, many of the tattoos people get today, including many committed Christians, are precisely to remember family members, friends, or fellow soldiers and sailors, who have died. Just think of all of the 9/11 memorial tattoos one will encounter today. Certainly for those serving in the military, servicemen and women who receive a tattoo to remember their tour of duty in a particular army regiment or on board a ship, usually do so with the purpose of remembering those who have fallen. And, as mundane as one might think it to be, getting the flag of one's home country tattooed on oneself, is also most probably done to remember those who have died. This would actually be in direct violation of what Leviticus 19:28 communicates: "Don't cut gashes in your flesh when someone dies or tattoo yourselves; I am ADONAI" (CJSB). And, it can be observed how there can be various dark, spiritual dynamics to such tattooing. Many of the tattoos people receive today, are quantitatively indifferent than those of Ancient Israel's pagan neighbors.

Obviously, the Lord is gracious enough to look beyond one's ignorance of the Torah's instruction regarding tattoos. However, Messianic people—including many Messianic Jews—who have been tattooed, need to very much consider having them removed, if they indeed can. Cosmetically speaking, tattoos will often change as people get older, and they will not look the same—and some will even look grotesque on a person, because of age. For someone such as myself, whose father died in 1992 from malignant melanoma, a skin cancer, being tattooed is a huge mistake, as it can obscure my ability to check myself for potential

³ Cf. Ron Isaacs, *Kosher Living: It's More Than Just the Food* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), pp 46-47.

⁴ Some useful thoughts are offered by Sandra Dimas. (2010). *Thinking about Ink. Reasons to Believe*. Accessible via <<http://www.reasons.org>>.

Tattooing and Body Piercings

issues and abnormal growths. But far more serious, spiritually speaking, if there had ever been a reason for someone to be tattooed to remember a deceased comrade, then a full violation of Leviticus 19:28 has probably been committed, and a mature Believer in Yeshua should want to see past errors fully rectified.

The issue and controversy of body piercings, which could range from a relatively standard and culturally accepted one earring in either ear for females, to men wearing earrings, to people in general having multiple body piercings in multiple parts of their bodies, is something which can arise when evaluating Deuteronomy 14:1: “You are the sons of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead” (NASU). Here, the verb rendered as “cut” is *gadad*, appearing in the Hitpael stem (intensive action, reflexive voice), can indeed mean “to **make incisions upon oneself**” (HALOT),⁵ hence a number of Jewish versions having “gash” (NJPS, Jerusalem Bible-Koren) or “cut gashes” (Keter Crown Bible), and the NRSV having “lacerate.”

The type of cutting or mutilation in view is obviously pagan in origin. Elsewhere in the Tanach, pagan people cutting or gashing themselves, either for mourning the dead or entreating a deity, is witnessed (1 Kings 18:28; Jeremiah 16:6-7; 41:4-5; 47:5). It is also logical to assume that some of these practices may have been involved with ancestor worship or various cults of the dead (Deuteronomy 18:8-11). But does the cutting detailed by Deuteronomy 14:1 really have to do with wearing earrings, nose rings, or some other body piercing common in some parts of society today?

Contemporary Jewish opinions on body piercings, just like tattooing, are guided by the Biblical assertion of human beings made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), which is to affect any decision one may make (and could likely also extend to having various forms of plastic surgery, either to correct a malady, or alter appearance). Jewish examiners do often note how there were various forms of earrings, for example, employed in the Biblical and post-Biblical periods, ranging from how it designated various forms of slaves to those Jews within particular trades. Today’s Conservative Judaism, for example, is not too negatively inclined toward various forms of body piercing. However, there are limitations to be considered, especially as they regard matters of personal hygiene and modesty.⁶

What the Bible communicates about body piercings might not be as clear or as direct as some might want them to be. However, the locations where people commonly get body piercings, tend to be the same locations where people are tattooed. Many of the body parts where it is popular for people to be pierced are those which would be considered sexual. And, there are various cultural associations with body piercings in certain parts of the human person, which are non-sexual, which today’s Messianic people would not want. *People who get their lips pierced, do look like they had a fishing accident!* Still, it is to be recognized that a female who has pierced ears, but no other body piercings, would in Judaism be in a much different

⁵ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:177.

⁶ Cf. Isaacs, pp 44-45.

position than someone who might have a pierced tongue. The latter would be much, much more of a risk to health, than the former.