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CRITICAL ISSUES

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CONFRONTING CRITICAL ISSUES

A N A N T H O L G Y

**AN ANALYSIS OF SUBJECTS THAT AFFECTS
THE GROWTH AND STABILITY
OF THE EMERGING MESSIANIC MOVEMENT**

J.K. MCKEE



CONFRONTING CRITICAL ISSUES

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Published by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries

P.O. Box 516

McKinney, Texas 75070

(407) 933-2002

www.outreachisrael.net

www.messianicapologetics.net

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**THE ONE WHO FIRST STATES A CASE
SEEMS RIGHT, UNTIL THE OTHER COMES
AND CROSS-EXAMINES**

PROVERBS 18:17 (NRSV)

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ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

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

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <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 (Marcus Jastrow)</i>
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	JBK: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)</i>
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
Ara: Aramaic	KJV: King James Version
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)</i>
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon (Lidell & Scott)</i>
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	LXX: Septuagint
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	m. Mishnah
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	MT: Masoretic Text
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	NASB: <i>New American Standard Bible (1977)</i>
CEV: <i>Contemporary English Version (1995)</i>	NASU: <i>New American Standard Update (1995)</i>
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	NEB: <i>New English Bible (1970)</i>
CJB: <i>Complete Jewish Bible (1998)</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NETS: <i>New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)</i>
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIV: <i>New International Version (1984)</i>
ESV: <i>English Standard Version (2001)</i>	NJB: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)</i>
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own	NJPS: <i>Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NKJV: <i>New King James Version (1982)</i>
Ger: German	NRSV: <i>New Revised Standard Version (1989)</i>
GNT: <i>Greek New Testament</i>	NLT: <i>New Living Translation (1996)</i>
Grk: Greek	NT: <i>New Testament</i>
halachah: lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	OT: <i>Old Testament</i>
HCSB: <i>Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)</i>	PreachC: <i>The Preacher's Commentary</i>
Heb: Hebrew	REB: <i>Revised English Bible (1989)</i>
HNV: <i>Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible</i>	RSV: <i>Revised Standard Version (1952)</i>
ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>	t. Tosefta
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>	Thayer: <i>Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	TDNT: <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
	TEV: <i>Today's English Version (1976)</i>

TLV: Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New
Covenant (2011)

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New
Testament revised edition

v(s). verse(s)

Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and
New Testament Words*

Vul: Latin Vulgate

WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*

Yid: Yiddish

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

INTRODUCTION

Many of us, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike, know that the Messianic movement has a great potential to make a difference in our world. As Yeshua (Jesus) Himself directed His followers, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). If we are able to demonstrate the love and grace of God to others, in a very concentrated and profound way—in obedience to His Torah or Law, no less—then those in our world should be able to see God’s blessings upon us, and strongly desire the salvation that we possess in His Son. The key missional aspects of Israel being a holy nation, and a light to the world around it (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 42:6; 1 Peter 2:9), are things that the enemy certainly does not want to see us embodying to their fullest extent!

By the middle of the 2000s, because of some “things” that occurred within our broad Messianic community—both insiders and outsiders alike started to employ the rather negative moniker: Messy-antic. It would not be uncommon to hear things like, “*The Messy-antic movement is such a mess...*” Suffice it to say, there is an ongoing battle taking place within the broad Messianic world, for its very heart and soul—much of it relating to its long term future. This conflict is ideological, it is philosophical, it is theological, but above all **it is spiritual**. We have been plainly told, after all, “Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We are in a spiritual war for the eternal destiny of human beings.

One of the generally good things, for which many sincere people within today’s Messianic movement should be commended—whether they are Jewish or non-Jewish—is that they really and sincerely do *want to be taught*. They really do want to probe God’s Word, and let the Holy Scriptures mold their hearts and minds so that they can mature in Him. To a wide extent, many people want to advance beyond the rudiments of basic Biblical instruction, or more likely, they want to know why certain beliefs and doctrines have developed the way that they have. There are definitely people within today’s Messianic community, who are strongly suspicious of any form of Christian theology and/or Jewish theology. Yet, there are other people within today’s Messianic community, who recognize that we have a shared Jewish and Christian heritage, which while limiting at times because people are limited mortals—surely also has its many God-inspired and appreciable virtues which are to be honored. While we have to be willing to question many things, we also have to be willing to accept the authority of the Holy Scriptures and what they legitimately communicate.

Since I was a small child in the 1980s, I have been exposed to ministry activities, not only with my parents being active members in the leadership of our local church, but with definite family lines of professional clergy preceding me in history. I am no stranger to Bible studies, or to service within the *ekklēsia*. Yet, something that got me really started into apologetics and the defense of the faith—as important as it is for many evangelical Believers—was when I encountered an individual passing out his “literature” at a certain Messianic conference in 1999. The theological positions represented in the pamphlet I was given were *totally “off the wall,”* yet I made sure that I got a selection of the gentleman’s booklets, and I began investigating. From that point since, I have been able to detect some rather negative undercurrents within various sectors of today’s Messianic community. These are theological trends and ideas, which regard the nature of Yeshua the Messiah, our approach to the reliability of the Holy Scriptures, as well

as our attitudes and the composition of the people of God. Many of these surround issues that often make us feel uncomfortable—but a **well-informed and capable Bible teacher does not have the luxury of ignoring the issues that matter.**

Too frequently, when the critical issues which need to be examined and dissected make themselves known, various Messianic congregational or ministry leaders do not take the required positions that are needed, in order to stop insidious teachings from spreading. In my experience in full time Messianic ministry since 2003, I have heard too many horror stories of people encountering bad teachings within their fellowships or assemblies, that could have been stopped if the right resources were available. Alas, though, those right resources generally cannot be produced, until a teacher knows what incorrect positions have to be dissected and reasoned through (thoroughly), and consequently proven fallacious. Proverbs 8:17 advises us how, “The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines” (NRSV). And to quote an anecdote, it might also be said that “The second mouse gets the cheese.” Too frequently, a little time has to pass before some decisive resolution, or a mediating solution, can be sought for a divisive issue.

Confronting Critical Issues: An Analysis of Subjects that Affects the Growth and Stability of the Emerging Messianic Movement is an anthology of articles from the Confronting Issues booklet series by Messianic Apologetics, as well as a series of additional articles which I have written and updated over the past three to four years. This massive work has also taken the liberty to produce, in their relative entirety, the contents of some of the most important *Confronting Issues* mini-books released in 2012. The topics considered range from addressing various urban legends that have circulated in the midst of much of the Messianic movement for far too long, to addressing the Divinity and Messiahship of Yeshua, to considering the Sacred Name issue, and to challenge all of us on our manner of speech and how we welcome diverse groups of God’s people into our midst.

(Do note that as an anthology of materials over a number of years, there are various points on different subjects which you will find repeated. This should not be a problem if, after reading through this book, you use it as a reference source to turn to, when needing clarification on various issues.)

More can definitely be said, and surely will be said, on each one of these subjects in the coming years as our faith community continues to grow and develop. I pray that if you have struggled at all with the *critical issues* which are considered here, that this publication will be a blessing and be most helpful, given the wide scope of areas which are tackled.

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

THE QUEST FOR CREDIBILITY ²⁰⁰⁴

In the history of our faith, whenever the Lord has revealed something new to His people, or a forgotten truth has been restored, the enemy has always been present to derail or deter it. This is true from the early movement of Believers in Yeshua the Messiah all the way to the present time. When the Apostle Peter proclaimed at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah—this Yeshua whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36), you can be rest assured that the forces of darkness were there watching and waiting to take action. Satan had tried to kill the Son of God, but in trying to destroy Him he actually ended up creating even more of a problem for himself, as Yeshua was resurrected from the dead and His followers multiplied. But instead of giving up, the enemy only altered his tactics. The enemy was likely thinking: “Well, if people are now going to receive Him in massive numbers, the least I can do is get this new movement off course.”

How many of us consciously realize that if we are all in the process of returning to the faith practices of the First Century Disciples and Apostles, that we will be returning to some of the *exact same problems* that they faced? If you want an idea about the kinds of problems we will be facing as the emerging Messianic movement, just read through the Book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles. They are rife with the sorts of situations and controversies, which are going to become all too commonplace in the future for us—especially as we get closer and closer to the return of the Messiah.

Many Messianics today are greatly disturbed, and rightfully so, that many in our faith community are getting themselves involved with examining things from Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. While this is something that needs to be spoken against, it is not something new in the least. Mystical nonsense was going on in the First Century. Consider the example of Simon the magician, also called Simon Magus, in Acts 8:9-11:

“Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, ‘This man is what is called the Great Power of God.’ And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.”

Simon Magus apparently welcomed the good news of Yeshua the Messiah and accepted Him (Acts 8:12-14). But, when Peter and John entered into Samaria and encountered him, Simon offered them money to purchase the Holy Spirit. Simon told them, “Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:19). He wanted to purchase the Holy Spirit so that he could use the Spirit to promote his own self-serving ends. The Apostle Peter rebuked him, “May your silver perish with you, because

you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:20-21). The Holy Spirit was freely available to all who would acknowledge Yeshua as the Redeemer.

The Biblical account does not say that much more about Simon Magus. But the Christian writers of the Second and Third Centuries wrote extensively about him,¹ as he gained a substantial following and the *ekklēsia* had to deal with many of his heresies. *ISBE* offers the following summary of his ancient followers, the Simoinai or the Simonians:

"It is a matter of scholarly debate...whether the historical Simon was actually a Gnostic. His followers and adherents, called Simonians, were both active and influential for several centuries after the death of their founder. The later Simonians were an eclectic sect of Christian Gnostics who were frequently attacked by Christian apologists and heresiologists....In fact, some Christian apologists stated that Simon claimed to be the son of God...plausibly suggested that 'the Great Power' was the high God invoked by Simon in his magical spells, and that in the style of many incantations found in Greco-Egyptian magical papyri, Simon identified himself with this deity using the 'I am' formula."²

The Fourth Century Christian historian Eusebius describes Simon Magus in his *Ecclesiastical History*, stating, "Coming to the aid of his insidious artifices, he attached many of the inhabitants of Rome to himself in order to deceive them. This is attested by Justin...where he wrote thus: 'And after the ascension of our Lord into heaven, certain men were suborned by demons as their agents, who said they were gods...Simon, a certain Samaritan of the village called Githon, was one of the number, who, in the reign of Claudius Caesar, performed many magic rites by the operation of demons, was considered a god in your imperial city of Rome, and was honored by you with a statue as a god, in the river Tiber, (on an island) between the two brides, having the superscription in Latin, Simoni Deo Sancto, which is, To Simon the Holy God" (2.13.2-3).³

Practice or study of anything mystical or quasi-Gnostic is not new.

There are other problems that were going on in the First Century as well. Consider all of the frustration that Paul demonstrated in his two epistles to the Corinthians. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:1, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife" (RSV). There was incest going on in Corinth! Later on he warns the men in Corinth, "Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, 'THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH' [Genesis 2:24]" (1 Corinthians 6:16), implying that some men who were purportedly Believers in the Corinthian assembly still frequented the many bordellos in town. And this is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the many problems we see in the Pauline Epistles, which the good rabbi from Tarsus had to address.⁴

WHY ARE THERE PROBLEMS?

We could go on and on for many more pages discussing how there were problems in the First Century and how many of those problems are now manifesting themselves, in various forms today, in distinct sectors of the broad Messianic movement. But this would only stir up

¹ Cf. David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 614-616.

² D.E. Aune, "Simon Magus," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:516-517.

³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. C.F. Cruse (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 47-48.

⁴ For a further review, consult the author's articles "The Message of 1 Corinthians" and "The Message of 2 Corinthians."

negative emotions. We have to understand *why there are problems*, so that we might properly counter them.

The Torah admonishes, “So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong *your* days in the land which you will possess” (Deuteronomy 5:32-33). Followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are to strive to walk a straight and narrow path, because if they deviate from that path, then they are likely to find themselves going off on tangents. They will likely find themselves to be cursed, not blessed—or at the very least that they will have placed barriers between themselves and God. Most importantly, if God’s Instruction has not been heeded, then His people will find themselves rather ineffective in His service.

As Believers, Yeshua admonishes His followers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Above all else, as the good news is proclaimed in the world and people come to faith, we are to see that new Believers are properly trained and disciplined. They must be properly raised up in the faith.

We have many new people entering into the Messianic community today. Jewish people are coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua, and many non-Jewish Believers are embracing their Hebraic Roots. Many of these men and women are looking for an appropriate example to emulate, so they can be deeply rooted in the Lord. *Sadly, there are too few people setting the appropriate example.*

Today’s Messianic leaders and teachers have to empower these new people to change for the better, and not only grow in their knowledge of God—but also grow in their knowing God more intimately. The responsibility that is upon a teacher like myself *is immense*. If a teacher purposefully leads any person astray, Yeshua says, “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). James the Just too warns, “Let not many of *you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

A LACK OF CREDIBILITY

I am in a unique position as a Messianic teacher and researcher, because I get to deal with information and teachings from all across the theological spectrum. A great deal of what I do, and I enjoy it quite a bit, is helping new people come into the Messianic movement, and tell them about what the Lord has done in my life as I have pursued Him, have embraced my Hebraic Roots as a non-Jewish Believer, and have adopted a lifestyle of Torah obedience. I get to tell them how much of a blessing it is to be led by the Spirit and obey the Lord more fully, because I love Him (cf. Romans 8:1-4). I get to help these people examine the Scriptures from a Messianic perspective, and discover new things that will enrich their faith and relationship with God.⁵

Many of the other things I have to do are not as fun. Research of any kind, of course, takes time and a great deal of energy expelled. The kind of research I do not like to be involved with, is in having to answer false and errant teachings that circulate around the Messianic community. I have to write theological summaries on teachings that are damaging people, and exegetical papers on various Biblical passages, all pertaining to various issues that have the

⁵ Consult the author’s books *Introduction to Things Messianic* and *The New Testament Validates Torah*.