

**TORAH**  
—IN THE—  
**BALANCE**

VOLUME I

The Validity of the Torah  
and Its Practical Life Applications

J.K. McKee

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## **Torah In the Balance** **Volume I**

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*The LORD will establish you as a  
holy people to Himself, as He  
swore to you, if you keep the  
commandments of the LORD  
your God and walk in His ways.*

Deuteronomy 28:9



## Dedication

*Torah In the Balance* is dedicated to my mother, Margaret McKee Huey, who was both the originator of the idea for this book and who has been my inspiration through thick and thin. If it were not for the faithful devotion of my mother to things of the Lord and her prayers for my salvation, I would not know Yeshua as my Savior and the blessings of following God's Torah. My heartfelt regards and thanks go out to my "Moogie" whom I love dearly.



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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 TNN Press. 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 unique to this publication that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Lidell & Scott)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	LXE: Brenton's English translation of the Septuagint
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	LXX: Septuagint
b. Babylonian Talmud ( <i>Talmud Bavli</i> )	m. Mishnah
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	MT: Masoretic Text
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NIV: New International Version (1984)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
Ger: German	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
GNT: Greek New Testament	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
Grk: Greek	REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew &amp; Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	t. Tosefta
Heb: Hebrew	Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</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>
IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old &amp; New Testament)</i>	TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)	TWOT: <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
KJV: King James Version	UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
Lattimore: <i>The New Testament</i> by Richmond Lattimore (1996)	v(s). verse(s)
	Vine: <i>Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i>
	Vul: Latin Vulgate
	WBC: <i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
	YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

# Introduction

If you are a Messianic Believer or are a Christian who is wondering about Messianic belief and practice, you know that Messianics are not the “norm.” You know that Messianics break the proverbial “mold” that exists in much of today’s Christianity. While, like your average evangelical Christians, Messianics believe in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ),<sup>i</sup> and in foundational truths such as salvation by grace through faith and the final authority of Holy Scripture;<sup>ii</sup> we also believe and practice things that many Christians do not. For example, did Yeshua come to do away with the Law of Moses? Or, did Yeshua come to fulfill the Torah, meaning to live it out perfectly for us so that we might follow His example?

Sadly, many modern Christians believe the former, rather than the latter. Christians rightly believe that the reason the Messiah came was to become the atoning sacrifice for our sins so that we would no longer be “under the Law.” But too many embrace an errant understanding of “under the Law,” because sinners who have rejected the Messiah and have rejected the salvation available in Him are certainly not “under grace.” On the contrary, whether or not they follow the commandments of the Torah, those who do not know the Messiah are “under the Law”; they are condemned by the Torah and will be subject to its punishments. No true Believer who has been born again and blood washed by the Messiah is “under the Law,” or subject to the penalty pronounced in the Torah upon sinners. As Paul so properly wrote to the Galatians, the Messiah came “so that He might redeem those who were under the Law” (Galatians 4:5), standing under the condemnation of the Torah.

But what was the purpose of God giving His people the Law? *Surely it was not to condemn them*, as condemnation only comes to those who break the Law. In Deuteronomy 7:6 our Heavenly Father says, “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” What the Hebrew word *qodesh* or “holy” really means is set-apart. What God wants us for is to be set-apart; He wants us to be different from the world around us. And He truly tells us how we can be separated:

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<sup>i</sup> *Yeshua* (ישוע) is the original Hebrew name of Jesus meaning, “He is Salvation” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus is derived from the Greek transliteration of Yeshua, *Iêsous* (Ἰησοῦς), originally employed by the Greek Septuagint.

<sup>ii</sup> Consult the TNN Online Statement of Faith at <[tnnonline.net/statementoffaith.html](http://tnnonline.net/statementoffaith.html)>, and be sure to notice how most of its basic tenets fully align with today’s evangelicalism.

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“The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways” (Deuteronomy 28:9).

The Lord plainly tells us that if we want to be a holy and set-apart people, then we will follow His commandments or *mitzvot* of the Torah.<sup>iii</sup> This concept was understood by Yeshua, the Apostles, and the First Century assembly of Believers. The Apostle Peter writes, “but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’” (1 Peter 1:15-16).<sup>iv</sup>

We live in a fallen world today that has decided to reject the Torah and reject God’s holy Instruction. Similarly, many have decided to reject the teachings of Messiah Yeshua, which are a reflection of the Torah, and have rejected His salvation. And even more sadly, many Christians claiming to know Him have gone after “another Yeshua” or “another Jesus,” who is incapable of providing salvation because he opposes the Torah—in partial fulfillment of the Messiah’s own prophecy that in the Last Days, “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). Certainly, if we followed and studied the Torah as the Messiah indeed did, then those in the contemporary Christian community today would have no discussion about whether or not homosexuality or premarital sex are sin—*because the Torah plainly denounces them as such!*

Fortunately, however, many Believers are taking the prophecies of lawlessness very seriously, and are seeking to be, as Yeshua said, “great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). As the world gets worse and worse, many Believers are ceding *more* control of their lives over to the Lord, and are keeping the Torah as He originally intended it to be: *a reflection of His love*. They are recognizing the value of not only the Old Testament, but also the rich spiritual and theological heritage that we have from Judaism.

Holding to the position that the Torah or Law of Moses is still to be followed today is very controversial. Messianic Believers are often criticized and chastised by others because we keep the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, and follow the kosher dietary laws. What can happen in many instances is that fierce, vehement debates will ensue among Messianics who are Torah observant and Christians who are anti-law, with faults committed on both sides. While discussion and examination of the Scriptures are good, *and should be encouraged*, treating others with contempt is

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<sup>iii</sup> Do be aware, right from the beginning of this publication, that most of the commandments in the Torah deal with inter-personal relations, and regulate human ethics and morality. Being “Torah observant” is far, far more than just doing outward things.

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7.

## Introduction

in violation of God's Torah. For the Torah indeed tells us, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), and Yeshua exemplified this perfectly in His life (cf. Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27).

I personally hate division and in-fighting, but do believe that many of today's Christians have missed out on much by not considering, or just ignoring, the instruction of God's Torah. I believe they have missed out on a treasure-trove of great insights into the foundation of our faith, and have misunderstood much of the New Testament because they do not have a Torah foundation. It is also sad that I must report that I think that many Christians who do not follow the Torah will indeed be "least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19), because they failed to let God have *more* control over their lives and instead succumbed to the flesh. (Thankfully, only He as Creator knows their final destiny.)

Hopefully we each consciously realize that we are called to emulate the Holy One of Israel, especially as Yeshua will not return until the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) has been accomplished. He will only return until things here on Earth among His people have returned to the way that our Heavenly Father originally intended. We in the Messianic community advocate that this means that Believers must return to the eternal truths of God contained in the Torah, that we should live out the Torah via the power of God's love, and most of all that we must endeavor to live a life like Messiah Yeshua—who upheld the Torah in *all* of His words, actions, and deeds. It has been declared that the Torah will go forth from Zion, and the nations will welcome God's Instruction from it (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3)

*Torah In the Balance, Volume I* is a desperately needed book for our times. The title sums it up all too well: **God's Torah is in the balance.** The Torah is in the balance because its validity is continually attacked by many claiming faith in the Messiah; and the Torah is in the balance because many of those following the Torah, in striving to emulate the Messiah, need to learn how to properly follow and obey it.

It is sad that I must report that there are books, materials, and articles that endorse Torah obedience, but do so in a very, very unfair way.<sup>v</sup> These materials criticize, berate, and many times insult Christians, thus casting Messianics in a very bad role. On the other side there are some Messianic publications, materials, and articles that present God's Torah in an "optional" way for either Jewish or non-Jewish Believers, insomuch that they present

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<sup>v</sup> These include, but are by no means limited to, pseudo-scholarly publications like *Fossilized Customs* or *Come Out of Her, My People*.

## **Torah In the Balance, Volume I**

disobedience to it as *not* really being sin, and place no definite requirement before people to change. I think these are positions that we need to avoid.

I recognize that change does not happen instantaneously in the life of a born again Believer, but that a steadily, gradual growth into greater holiness via the power of the Holy Spirit, does need to be encouraged. *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* discusses many of the “hot” issues of the Torah, but attempts to do so in a very fair, scholastic, and loving way as much as possible. As this book’s author, I have done my best to be respectful to those of you who hold different points of view, and I would expect you to treat me in the same respectful manner. I believe that a life of diligent discipleship in following the Lord awaits each of us! Such a life *begins* with love for God and neighbor, but by no means ends there.<sup>vi</sup>

*Torah In the Balance, Volume I* addresses what the most practical aspects of the Torah are for those new to the Messianic community, or those seeking answers to some of the tough questions of beginner’s observance. This book attempts to be scholastically engaged, but hopefully it is written in an easy-to-understand style that will answer many of your questions. Most of all, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* encourages Believers to seek more of God and follow Him in *all* areas of their lives. It challenges Believers to be a part of the separated people that the Lord wants us to be. It challenges people to seek more blessings, not less, that come from obeying our Father in Heaven. It desires to see a *positive* change in people, and not put a yoke of legalism or bondage on anyone. It desires to see that no one *sin*, or break God’s Law! I desire to see **you** become a mature man or woman of God who can fulfill the great potential and calling that He has created you for.

May the Lord show Himself in a new way to you in these pages as you seek greater understanding. May we each learn to balance what the Psalmist says: “I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight” (Psalm 119:174).

J.K. McKee,  
Editor, TNN Online

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<sup>vi</sup> Please note that this book does not address all of the proof verses commonly used by today’s Christians to say that the Law has been “done away.” Consult the author’s book *The New Testament Validates Torah* for an extensive discussion of some of these passages.

## **Plan of the Book**

### **Part I: The Importance of the Torah**

**The Importance of the Torah** addresses the need for Believers to reevaluate common Christian misperceptions of the Law of Moses. It discusses why we must return to keeping the Torah's commandments in a day and age where many claiming Biblical faith are compromised, weak-willed, and unwilling to change. We need to be a holy people unto the Holy One of Israel and separated from the world. We need to take serious heed of the end-time prophecies of lawlessness and understand that sin is transgression of God's Torah.

### **Part II: The Ten Commandments**

**The Ten Commandments** is a series of short chapters discussing the importance of the eternal statutes that God carved into stone with His own finger. Each commandment is commented upon. We analyze the need to understand the foundational principles of Biblical Instruction as Messianic Believers, lest we lose sight of the goal, which is to be a living testimony and sacrifice for Yeshua, spreading His light to a dark world.

### **Part III: God's Appointed Times and Their Human Substitutes**

**God's Appointed Times and Their Human Substitutes** offers a brief scholastic handling of the appointed times found in Leviticus 23 and the holidays that people have replaced them with. It offers a fair and loving discussion of why Believers need to return to keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and the Father's *moedim*. It discusses how we can properly deal with Christians who substitute the Biblical holidays with replacement holidays, and how celebrating the Lord's holidays is more fulfilling.

### **Part IV: The Separated Life in Action**

**The Separated Life in Action** concludes *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* discussing why we as Believers need to observe and study God's Torah. It addresses the importance of the dietary commandments of Scripture, how Messianic Believers can properly engage in Torah study, and how we can properly deal with others who do not desire to obey God's Torah, and finally how we deal with others who label themselves as "Torah observant," but who have differing opinions in regard to its interpretation/application.

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## **PART I**

# **The Importance of the Torah**



## A Question for the Ages

One of the most intriguing issues that I dealt with as an undergraduate at the University of Oklahoma, as a political science major, was the philosophy known as Liberalism. This "Liberalism," with a capital "L," is not the ideology that is converse to conservatism as in "Republicans versus Democrats" here in the United States. Liberalism is, rather, an ideology centered around individual rights and free enterprise that every human being is believed to be entitled to. These ideals are adhered to very strongly in the Western democratic world, and they have enabled me to speak my views in a society where the freedom to express one's own opinion is greatly upheld.

Many Believers, notably those in the United States, greatly respect the freedoms and liberties that we have. According to our system of government, we can worship God in the way we choose and believe whatever we want as long as it does not disrupt the public order. But for many centuries prior to the founding of our country, this was not the case. On the contrary, in the early days of our Messianic faith, following the ascension of Yeshua into Heaven, Believers have continually run into problems with civil authority. The Messianic Scriptures (New Testament) repeatedly tell us that the Apostles ran into problems with both the Jewish religious leaders, who by-and-large rejected the Messianic claims of Yeshua, and with the Roman civil authorities, many of whom believed that they were the cause of an insurrection against the emperor. History later records that many Believers were indeed persecuted and martyred for their faith in Him.

The question for the true Believers since has always been: **How do we function in society, yet keep our faith?** As we review what has happened to those who since the First Century C.E. have claimed a belief in Messiah Yeshua, different groups of people have responded to this question in different ways.

Four centuries after Yeshua's ascension into Heaven, Augustine, bishop of Hippo, wrote his work *City of God*. Whether you agree with his theology or not, his writings have influenced many over the centuries, both Catholic and Protestant alike. He described what he believed to be a split in human life, between one's carnal and spiritual existence, writing down an incredibly long list of sins and perversions that has tainted and marked fallen man throughout

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the ages with which we should all agree.<sup>1</sup> In describing the human condition, Augustine made the analogy between two cities: the City of God and the City of Man. In our Earthly lives he believed we must contend with what has been dealt us in the City of Man, its gross imperfections, and live with the civil authorities as long as they do not harass us for our faith. But as followers of the Lord we strive to enter the City of God and its perfections in the hereafter. He writes, "In the one [City of Man], the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other [City of God], the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all."<sup>2</sup>

Many years later this challenge was brought forth by two of the Reformers who greatly shaped Protestant theology: Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther, in particular, recognized the distinct separation between civil and religious powers. In Luther's work "The Christian In Society," he comments that "Both [systems] must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other. No one can become righteous in the sight of God by means of the temporal government, without Christ's spiritual government."<sup>3</sup> His position was very close to Augustine's. Do your best in society and be a witness for the faith, but recognize that secular government has its place in God's eternal plan.

Calvin held to a slightly different position than Luther or Augustine. The author of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and numerous other books and commentaries, Calvin actually put many of his beliefs and philosophies to practice in the city of Geneva, trying to create a utopia here on Earth. Calvin did, however, believe in a separation between secular government and religion. He states in his book *God and Political Duty*, that "spiritual reign, even now upon earth, commences within us some preludes of the heavenly kingdom, and in this mortal and transitory life affords us some of the

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<sup>1</sup> These sins are, according to Augustine: "gnawing cares, disquiet, griefs, fears, wild joys, quarrels, law-suits, wars, treasons, angers, hatreds, deceit, flattery, fraud, theft, robbery, perfidy, pride, ambition, envy, murders, parricides, cruelty, ferocity, wickedness, luxury, insolence, impudence, shamelessness, fornications, adulteries, incests, and the numberless uncleanness and unnatural acts of both sexes, which it is shameful so much as to mention; sacrileges, heresies, blasphemies, perjuries, oppression of the innocent, calumnies, plots, falsehoods, false witnessings, unrighteous judgments, violent deeds, plunderings, and innumerable other crimes that do not easily come to mind, but that never absent themselves from the actuality of human existence" (St. Augustine, "City of God," in Mitchell Cohen and Nicole Fermon, eds., *Princeton Readings in Political Thought* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996], pp 133-134).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, "The Christian in Society," in *Ibid.*, 197.

## A Question for the Ages

prelibations of immortal and incorruptible blessedness..."<sup>4</sup> Although some aspects of God's Eternal Kingdom could be captured on Earth, which is what Calvin tried to do in Geneva, it was ultimately Heaven where the Believer's hope rested. Many theologians since have held to the belief that while some elements of God's Kingdom could be brought to Earth, the Kingdom may not be consummated on this Planet with the Messiah's physical return.

These examples throughout history demonstrate some of the different attitudes of today's Christians concerning how they are to function in society. All too often Christians have been of the mindset that they are not to look for a *physical, coming* manifestation of God's Kingdom on Earth via the return of Yeshua. Rather, they try to do the best they can here in the present system capturing varied "elements" of the Kingdom, but live knowing that Heaven is better. Surely, we all desire to meet our Lord and Savior in Heaven at the time of our departing this mortal frame, but an intermediate Heaven between death and resurrection is not our ultimate destination.<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew Prophets speak of an age when God Himself will indeed be present among us. Zechariah 8:3 says, "I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts *will be called* the Holy Mountain." The Lord God, in the Person of Yeshua the Messiah, will physically reign on Planet Earth for a thousand years, and then lead us all into eternity.

One day Yeshua will return and establish His Eternal Kingdom. During the time God has given us on this sphere we must endeavor to do all we can to see that ultimate goal accomplished. We must make sure that we are performing our appropriate role as His Kingdom's representatives, living the life of the world to come *in the present evil age* (cf. Galatians 1:4).

## We Must Change

When we look back at history, certainly the attitude of separating carnal and spiritual powers was understandable for the times in which the early Reformers lived. They were protesting a Roman Catholic system which had essentially merged spiritual and political authority in Europe, with the pope commanding an incredible amount of power. But what of today? What of the Believers who our Heavenly Father is drawing to Himself in this time, when all too often the tendency in our world is to draw away from the Bible and His Son, Yeshua? An attitude of just "mucking through life" hoping for better on the other side might have worked in the Middle Ages and even on up until the early 1900s. But it will not work in the Information Age when secularism and

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, "God and Political Duty," in *Ibid.*, pp 202-203.

<sup>5</sup> For a further discussion, consult the author's article "To Be Absent From the Body."

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ecumenism erode the core foundations of Biblical faith. How are we going to handle the difference between the competing “temporal” and “spiritual” powers? How are we going to know where our hope of salvation rests?

The world is only getting worse and worse, with high rises in sin and lawlessness. **We need not fall prey to the deception that the enemy has laid.** We must learn to change our lives for the better and return to a foundational grounding in *all* that the Lord has provided for us in His Word. We must have transformed lives, not only in word, but also in deed.

If as Believers in the Risen Savior, Yeshua the Messiah, we want to properly answer the challenges and tribulations that the world is going to give us in the times ahead, we need to do something different. We must not make the separation between “temporal” and “spiritual” that many of our ancestors did, just “living” with the powers that be. We as the Body of Messiah must become that separated people He is returning for. We must desire to see a change here on Planet Earth. As the generation that is first seeing the distinct Hebraic and Jewish lifestyle of the Apostles being restored in significant effect, and the initial growth of the Messianic movement—**the call God has given us is much greater than those who have gone before.** We must be ready to properly answer the call and take up the challenge.

### But His Kingdom is Not of This World...

All too often it has been quoted of Yeshua saying to Pontius Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm” (John 18:36).

This Scripture is used by some to justify the idea that we as Believers should *not* be trying to change others and desire to see His Kingdom restored here on Earth, because supposedly it is only in Heaven. Calvin actually said “it is a Jewish folly, therefore, to seek and include the kingdom of Christ under the elements of this world,”<sup>6</sup> which could possibly be taken as meaning that the coming Kingdom of God on Earth is not ideal, as a popular hermeneutic of his time was to spiritualize or allegorize prophecies concerning Israel’s physical Kingdom for the role of the Church.<sup>7</sup> But when Yeshua said that His Kingdom is not of this world and that His Disciples did not “fight” for Him, the Messiah was speaking that *the nature* of His Kingdom was not of this world. He was not saying that one day His Kingdom would not be consummated *physically* on Earth with Him ruling from Jerusalem. He said,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>7</sup> Note how Calvin probably did not intend his statement to be viewed this way, even though this is a sentiment of many later teachers and theologians.

## A Question for the Ages

rather, “My kingdom is not of this world....But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36, NIV).

As Believers in Yeshua, we are still awaiting His return and the full establishment of the Messianic Era. The full reign of His Kingdom—presently—“is” from another place—even though it affects those of us who are redeemed and citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20), yet living on Earth. But for how much longer will this be the case? When will we see the consummation of the ages, and Yeshua return to Earth?

## A Challenging Time Lies Ahead

Anyone who studies end-time Bible prophecy will tell you that the return of Yeshua is nearing. All you have to do is pick up a newspaper and realize that world events are being staged that will one day lead toward a one-world government, cashless “mark of the beast” monetary system, a single world leader, and numerous conflicts that could very well annihilate the human race. Even if we think some of these things may be decades away, we are still getting closer every year. The Scriptures tell us quite plainly that if the Messiah does not return, “no flesh would be saved” (Matthew 24:22, NKJV; cf. Mark 13:20), an indication of how bad things will eventually be.

Such a message can be very depressing for some Believers, and likewise, more questions are created concerning *what* we should do if we believe God’s people are to endure the end-times. Will it just be as if we are given “spiritual impartation” and know what to do by the Holy Spirit filling us by “osmosis”? Or in this time of relative tranquility is the Lord giving us the opportunity to be military officers in training, so that when the difficult times come, those who are firmly grounded in the truths of His Word may rise up as leaders and proclaim His good news and minister to those in need? Whether or not we are the generation that will see Yeshua return, we have still been given some immense responsibility. We could be the precursor generation to the last generation, or be those who are responsible for raising up the precursor generation to the last generation. We cannot know for certain if we will see the end-times and Second Coming—but *we certainly have work to do in order to get there!*

The Western governmental system that many of us benefit from presently grants us many freedoms, because much of it is founded in the Bible. This has unfortunately not been the case for many who have gone before us in the faith, such as during the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic Church held the only copies of Scripture and the masses did not have them, in addition to the almost absolute power it held in Western Europe for many centuries. Modern trends, however, indicate that the time for us to conduct ourselves freely in the

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religious world is waning. The political ideology of Liberalism, while giving Believers in Yeshua the freedom to religiously express themselves as they want, also demands that we respect other religions, and likewise not become “exclusive” in saying that salvation or approval only comes from One Source, Messiah Yeshua. Ecumenism and the belief that all religions worship the same “God” is gaining considerable ground. Those of us who worship and believe in the Holy One of Israel, and are of the sound conviction that Yeshua the Messiah—*legitimately* known to many by His English name Jesus Christ—is the only Redeemer, need to be firm in our faith as His return draws closer.

The problem is, given all the temptations of the world and modern trends, how are we supposed to do this? Unfortunately, much of modern Christianity, or for that matter the Messianic movement, does not have the answer. Many people in Christianity are looking for a pre-tribulation rapture escape to Heaven, or are falsely mistaken so as to think that the Kingdom *is not coming*. The Messianic movement today is still developing and maturing, *both spiritually and theologically*. Much of it still cannot deal with the basic issue of what it is to become in the future. Many do not realize that the overarching goal of our faith is to see God’s Kingdom restored on Planet Earth, not so that we would just see the complete transformation of our individual selves, but of His entire Creation.

Add to this mix those of us who believe that the Lord’s major focus of this hour is to begin the restoration of all Israel. We have a serious challenge ahead, especially because this restoration—while anticipated in the Scriptures—is being deterred by sensationalists and fundamentalists, who have brought a great deal of false teaching into the camp, all of whom have an agenda, a few of whom have denied the Lord Yeshua.<sup>8</sup> We must be able to confront the deception, knowing Biblical truth and being able to defend the truth, but also knowing **that how we conduct ourselves** will be the key to us being a people separated from the world and holy unto Him. Ungodly attitudes can decelerate a move of God.

Unfortunately this third part, being set-apart from the world, is the most difficult for many of us to grasp, because it is something that has not been the most readily emphasized by modern Christianity. On the contrary, many Christian teachers have told their students and followers to “blend in” with contemporary society and culture, rather than being separated from it and able to subvert it. Yet the Apostolic Scriptures are replete with examples of how people like the Apostle Paul were able to maintain their separated standing as

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<sup>8</sup> Consult the author’s articles “The Quest for Credibility” and “The Top Ten Urban Myths of Today’s Messianic Movement.”

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a part of God's community, and subvert the pagan religious ideology of his day. *A delicate balance indeed.*

Although being a separated people unto God might sound like a good idea on paper, putting this concept into practice can be very difficult. We are certainly *not* called to be a separated people by secluding ourselves in some cave or commune, or by putting our fingers in our ears and hiding under our beds when bad things happen. We must walk upright and be a living and active testimony for our Lord and Savior in our communities and the world at large.

### Love is the Key

It can be agreed among born again Believers that there is a strong need for those who have been redeemed and bought by the blood of the Messiah that we must be different from the rest of the world. Yeshua told us quite plainly, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden...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 5:14, 16). Likewise, He said "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Prior to Yeshua telling us to "love one another," He makes a very intriguing statement. He says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). All too often, many have glossed over this verse thinking that the Messiah was instituting a "new" commandment, replacing it with one of those "Old Testament commandments," as the "Old Testament Law" is inappropriately perceived as being a series of "strict rules and regulations" that did not have anything to do with love.

On the contrary to what some people might think, this is not the case at all. In Leviticus 19:18, the Lord clearly says "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." "Love" is not simply a "New Testament" concept, as the command to love is clearly issued in the Tanach or Old Testament. Many unfortunately do not realize that Yeshua was directly quoting from Scripture when He said "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31).

Not surprisingly, the Greek word for "new" in John 13:35, *kainos* (καίνος), can mean "new; of new quality; unused; unknown, unheard of" (CGEDNT).<sup>9</sup> It could be argued that in the First Century the command to love one another—

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<sup>9</sup> Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1971), 90.

## Torah In the Balance, Volume I

or love outsiders—was not something readily emphasized by the religious leaders of the time, considering the fact that the Jewish people were suffering from Roman occupation in Judea, and other than a brief period of independence under the Maccabees, had not been independent since the Babylonian dispersion.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that we could view Yeshua's words as "an *unused* commandment I give to you," meaning that the Torah command to love had gone largely forgotten among many of His time. The depth that Yeshua gave to the love required of His Disciples cannot be overlooked. F.F. Bruce, acknowledging how the command to love (John 13:34-35) is from the Tanach or Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18), simply suggests, "Jesus imparted a new depth of meaning to it."<sup>11</sup>

We will all agree on the fact that having love for one another, which in turn will create cohesive unity in the Messiah's Body, will certainly set us apart from the world. Divine love, *agapē* (ἀγάπη) as it widely appears in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), will guide us. *Agapē* is so powerful that Yeshua says of it, "Greater love [*agapē*] hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, KJV).

Yeshua is the embodiment of pure love, and is the example that we are to all follow. Yeshua, our Ultimate Friend, laid down His life for us and paid the penalty for our sins with His own blood. Now can we do that for one another? As you continue reading this book, keep this imperative concept in mind. We will be discussing many issues interpreted differently among Believers in the faith. Remember that although there may be differences of opinion, our love for one another is ultimately manifested in whether or not we can *die* for each other, as Yeshua died for us. This was certainly something "new" to the Disciples of Yeshua. I love my evangelical Christian brothers and sisters with the love of Jesus Christ, and because I love them, *I want the changes I have made in my life to impact them positively!*

### How are we to be separated from the world?

Love by itself is an interesting, but often abstract concept. But our faith is also a living *and* active one. It is one thing to say that you love God and love your brothers and sisters, but it is another thing to actually go and *do it*. What is the evidence of our love for the Lord and for our brethren? What is some important, external evidence of the inward change we have experienced through Yeshua—that will indeed set God's people apart from everyone else

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<sup>10</sup> Consult the author's article "The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism," in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* (2009 edition), for a further discussion.

<sup>11</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 294.

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on Planet Earth? The answer is found in Yeshua's teaching in His Sermon on the Mount:

"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).

Yeshua tells His followers that others will see the light that they have through their good works.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that we are saved by our works. The Scriptures state quite plainly "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, if we truly have been changed by an encounter with God and have been spiritually regenerated, we will naturally do good things. The following verse, Ephesians 2:10, clearly admonishes, "For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." By doing good things, hopefully those of the world will be drawn to us and want to know more about the Almighty One we serve. Our Heavenly Father says, "For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that *are* upon the earth" (Deuteronomy 14:2, KJV).

But what are "good works"? Most Christians will say that doing good works are following the Divine will of God and doing what He told us. *We should all agree with this assessment.* However, we should each take serious notice of what Yeshua specifies after telling His followers to have good works. His teaching continues in this passage, saying, "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" (Matthew 5:17-18).

The Messiah came to fulfill the Torah or Law of Moses, meaning that He came to live it out perfectly for us, so that we might emulate His example of obeying His Father's commandments. The Greek verb translated as "fulfill" is *plēroō* (πληρόω). Commenting on this, *TDNT* validly remarks, "the idea is not simply that of validating the law as distinct from abolishing it. The goal of Jesus' mission is fulfillment. He does not simply affirm the law and the prophets but actualizes the will of God that is declared in them from the standpoint of both promise and demand."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Grk. *hopōs idōsin humōn ta kala erga* (ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα); "so that they may see your good works" (NRSV).

<sup>13</sup> G. Delling, "plēroō," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 869.

For a further discussion, consult the author's exegetical paper on Matthew 5:17-19, "Has the Law Been Fulfilled?"

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It is the Messiah Himself who said that the Torah will continue to remain in effect until Heaven and Earth pass away and all is accomplished. Contrary to what many Christians believe, all has not been accomplished. We are not living in the Messianic Age and there are many prophecies in the Tanach (Old Testament) that have yet to be fulfilled. The Torah is still in effect and applicable for Believers today. While Yeshua has come as our everlasting atonement for sin, and some changes have taken place in regard to the Levitical priesthood and animal sacrifices (Hebrews 7:12)—there are still eternal principles in the Torah that we are to follow. It still forms the basis of Biblical ethics and morality, and how God’s people are to be identified as His own. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Messiah” (1 Corinthians 11:1). We are called to emulate Yeshua and follow the Father’s will, just as He did.

### What is the Father’s will?

Yeshua actually assigns eschatological penalties to those who would teach others to not follow the Torah’s commandments, teaching “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 5:19). Even more severe and not to be overlooked is a very sober warning given in Matthew 7:21-23:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’ [Psalm 6:8].”

The Messiah says that only those who perform the will of the Father are allowed into the Kingdom of Heaven. He speaks of those who *thought* they were in His Divine will, and even performed miracles and cast out demons in His authority, but were not, because they committed lawless acts. The Greek word for “lawlessness” is *anomia* (ἀνομία), which *BDAG* defines as the “*state or condition of being disposed to what is lawless, lawlessness.*”<sup>14</sup>

Could we not argue from this that being in the will of God very much includes being in obedience to Him and to His commandments? Consider what the Lord Himself says to us in Deuteronomy 5:29: “Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments

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<sup>14</sup> 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), 85.

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always,<sup>15</sup> that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!" God plainly says that He wants His people to observe His statutes and ordinances so that life may be good for them, and that they might be blessed.

When God appeared before Moses, he proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations" (Exodus 34:6-7e). Scripture tells us that the Lord is One "keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation" (NRSV). *Chesed* (חֶסֶד) relates to "God's relationship with the people or an individual, **faithfulness, goodness, graciousness**" (HALOT).<sup>16</sup> The Lord says that He will show *chesed*, "lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:6). While God's *chesed* is freely bestowed, the people who He bestows it to should acknowledge such lovingkindness by their obedience.

If we desire to have God be merciful and compassionate upon us in our times of need, then we should endeavor to be obedient to Him and to His commandments. Is it possible that we might overemphasize God's mercy sometimes—at the expense of our responsibility to be obedient to Him? Are not God's grace and our obedience to Him *both* vital to a right relationship with Him?

## Loving God and Keeping His Commandments

There is a strong connection between loving God and keeping His commandments. After all, it was the Messiah Himself who told us in His Olivet Discourse concerning the Last Days, "because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12, LITV). Or, as rendered in the Complete Jewish Bible, "many people's love will grow cold because of increased distance from *Torah*."

The Apostle Paul states in Romans 13:10, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the law*." The Greek word for "fulfillment," *plērōma* (πλήρωμα), is understood to be "**that which is brought to fullness or completion**" (BDAG).<sup>17</sup> James the Just similarly says, "If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'YOU SHALL LOVE

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<sup>15</sup> Heb. *l'hem l'yir'ah oti v'lish'mor et-kol-mitzvotai kol-ha'yamim* (אֲתִי וְלִשְׁמֹר אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתַי כָּל־הַיָּמִים) (לָהֶם לִירְאָה).

<sup>16</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:337.

<sup>17</sup> BDAG, 829.

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YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,' [Leviticus 19:18] you are doing well" (James 2:8). Love is the overwhelming evidence of understanding what God's Torah is. When we keep God's commandments, we are to be learning to demonstrate *more* of His love, compassion, mercy, and goodness to all we encounter.

God gave us His Instruction out of love—not to be a burden or hassle as many mistakenly believe. The Torah is to keep us safe and within appropriate, acceptable boundaries, not too dissimilar from how Deuteronomy 22:8 originally instructed, "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you will not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it." For those who love God, His commandments provide the framework for how we are to best experience the relationship He desires with us.

The Apostle John comments extensively about the connection between Divine love, *agapē*, and God's commandments. He says in 1 John 5:2-3, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." We are not to obey the Torah out of some legalistic sense of "duty" or "obligation," but rather because we love Him and *naturally* want to follow His Instructions. However, John also admonishes, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). If we are in the faith yet we fail to keep God's commandments, and do not really want to obey Him, then are we nothing but liars? This does not mean that we may fail to do things out of ignorance, but are we at all seeking to obey God? If we fail to seek the Lord's conviction in our lives, then who are we deceiving? God or ourselves?

The Messiah says in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Yeshua, who is the LORD God made manifest in the flesh, is the Giver of the Torah and the Torah composes *His commandments* (cf. Isaiah 33:22; James 4:12). Moses told the Ancient Israelites in Deuteronomy 28:9 that "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways." The Hebrew word for "holy," *qodesh* (קֹדֶשׁ), is defined by *BDB* as "*apartness, sacredness, holiness.*"<sup>18</sup> Its equivalent in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures is *hagios* (ἅγιος), from which our English terms "holy" and "hallowed" are derived. If we as Believers want to be a set-apart and holy people, then we must commit ourselves to obey God's commandments.

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<sup>18</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 871.

## **A Question for the Ages**

In understanding the times and seasons in which we live, the need to be a separated people unto the Lord is only going to increase. Secularism and the idea of universal tolerance of religion are sweeping through at an alarming rate, and we as His people must take steps to preserve who we are Biblically. The overwhelming issue we face becomes: **How will we accomplish this?**

Concerning the Last Days and our need to be a holy and separated people, the Apostle Peter asks a strong rhetorical question in stating, "Since everything is going to be destroyed like this [in the Day of the LORD], what kind of people should you be? You should lead holy and godly lives, as you wait for the Day of God and work to hasten its coming" (2 Peter 3:11-12a, CJB).

Let those of us who truly desire to be a holy people unto Him, sanctified, separated from the rest of the world, seek Biblical truth above all else. Let us not be those whom Yeshua called "lawless," and then are dismissed from His presence. Let us truly seek to be in God's will and strive to keep His commandments. Let us truly live holy and godly lives as we wait for the Messiah's return **and seek to make a difference in our world**, as people at large witness our good works!

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**SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 1**

1. What is the ideology of Liberalism? How does it affect people in the religious world and how they conduct themselves?
  
2. How important is the question “How do we function in society, yet keep our faith?” Do you think answering this question incorrectly has led any Christians to compromise themselves?
  
3. How are we to fully grasp the Biblical reality that the Kingdom of God is actually *coming to Earth*?
  
4. Do you believe we are the final generation who will see the return of the Lord? If so, how important do you think it will be for us as Believers to both know *and emulate* Him in our lives? If not, what legacy do you intend to leave for those who come after you?
  
5. Do you believe that the Lord is raising up people who are firmly committed to Him and are being trained up in a Torah foundation? What are your thoughts?
  
6. Should the purpose of the faith community be to ultimately see God’s Kingdom restored on Earth? What are your thoughts? How do you think His Kingdom will be restored?
  
7. Do you think it is problematic to teach that one must blend in with the world to spread the gospel? Why or why not? How does one properly subvert the world?
  
8. How is the commandment to “love one another” not something that is new? How is this admonition replete throughout the Tanach (Old Testament) and Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament)? How is our love for one another ultimately manifested?
  
9. What are good works as defined by Yeshua the Messiah? What is God’s will for His people?
  
10. How important do you think it is for us as Believers to make up a holy and set-apart people? Describe some areas of your life that you have had to change in your pursuit of Messianic things. Do you believe you have changed for the better and have grown spiritually?