

# EPHESIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

# FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC COMMENTARY SERIES

by **J.K. McKee**

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MESSIANIC

J.K. MCKEE

**MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS**  
messianicapologetics.net

# EPHESIANS

## FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

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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>	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
Ara: Aramaic	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old &amp; New Testament)</i>
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
b. Babylonian Talmud ( <i>Talmud Bavli</i> )	KJV: King James Version
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LXX: Septuagint
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	m. Mishnah
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	MT: Masoretic Text
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIV: New International Version (1984)
GNT: Greek New Testament	NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew &amp; Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
Heb: Hebrew	

NT: New Testament

orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world

OT: Old Testament

PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*

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*

TEV: Today's English Version (1976)

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)



# PROLOGUE

Each of Paul's letters seems to have a specific message to the person who reads it. We have encountered this in our previous two studies (2007-2008). In *Philippians*, we have seen that for Paul, the center of his life is Yeshua the Messiah. In *Galatians*, we have seen that he considers Jewish and non-Jewish Believers to be one in Him, with faith in Israel's Messiah being the determining factor of one's membership among God's people.<sup>i</sup> As we prepare to turn to *Ephesians*, we are presented with yet another of one of the most important texts for today's emerging Messianic movement. An undeniable theme for today's Messianic community is the Apostle Paul's emphasis on Believers in Yeshua being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (2:11-12). This is a call that has certainly gone forth from many Messianic pulpits since the 1990s, as scores of non-Jewish Believers have embraced their Hebraic Roots and have desired a oneness with their fellow Jewish Believers. But what does it mean for any of us to be a part of the Commonwealth of Israel?

I would submit that one of the most difficult things for today's Messianic community to consider is what it means to be a people empowered by God and able to accomplish His mission for the Earth. This was certainly something demanded of the Ancient Israelites in the Torah, who were called by God to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), with the intention of recognizing that "all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5). Being a testimony to the nations involved declaring His goodness, and being obedient to God via proper conduct (cf. Deuteronomy 4:5-6). When one examines *Ephesians*, these qualities are explained in a very eloquent and appropriate manner, especially for a group of non-Jewish Believers redeemed by the blood of the Messiah. The premise of one demonstrating himself or herself as a part of the people of God (Israel) via holy living has not changed between the Tanach or the Apostolic Scriptures, or even up until today!

The letter of *Ephesians* among the Pauline corpus also addresses First Century issues from which today's Believers can gain much insight. As Christopher J.H. Wright reminds us,

"Most of Paul's letters were written in the heat of missionary efforts: wrestling with the theological basis of the inclusion of the Gentiles, affirming the need for Jew and Gentile to accept one another in Christ and in the [assembly], tackling the baffling range of new problems that assailed young [assemblies] as the gospel took root in the world of Greek polytheism, confronting incipient heresies with clear affirmations of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and so on."<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Consult the author's commentaries *Philippians for the Practical Messianic* (2007) and *Galatians for the Practical Messianic* (2007). Also consult his article "Congregations Among Us" (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

<sup>ii</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 49.

Preparing myself to comment extensively on Paul's letter of Ephesians, I find myself in a similar predicament. I am a teacher in a Messianic community today that struggles with the issues of non-Jewish inclusion and oneness, the questions posed by what it means to be Messianic in the Twenty-First Century, various personal and congregational struggles common to us as Believers, and even some false teachings that have entered in which deride who the Messiah is to us as our salvation. How relevant is Ephesians to us, and why is it one of those texts of Scripture that commonly gets overlooked by our community? Should we not be concerned with "the unfathomable riches of Messiah" (3:8)? How might Ephesians mean *even more to us* when we place it against its ancient Jewish and Mediterranean background?

Paul speaks of the work of Yeshua in Believers, "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (1:18). The Holy Spirit is sent to Believers, as "the guarantee of our inheritance" (1:14, RSV). Ephesians largely speaks to non-Jewish Believers in the First Century who were once "dead in...trespasses and sins" (2:1), yet who were made alive via the work of the gospel. These people, being made a part of God's Kingdom, now have some roles and responsibilities they must perform. While they have been saved by God's grace (2:8-9), He nonetheless requires good works of His children (2:10). And by inference, the Jewish members of Paul's audience must treat the non-Jewish Believers as equal members of the Messiah's Body, or their "fellow citizens" (2:19). *All* who have come to know the God of Israel via His Son have suffered, to one degree or another, from the consequences of sin unleashed upon humanity (2:2-3)—yet they have *all* been redeemed and *all* can enter into God's marvelous purpose!

While Ephesians undoubtedly inspires us to never take our salvation for granted, what does it teach us about God's Torah? Does Paul take a negative view of God's Law in this letter (2:14-15; cf. 6:13)? Is there any Torah background behind the behavior that he asks his audience to demonstrate? What might Ephesians teach us about the person of Paul, and the unique work that God assigned to him among the nations (3:8-10)? How are we as the *ekklēsia* to be a united people focused on Yeshua the Messiah as our central hope (4:3)? What does it mean for each of us to wear the full armor of God (6:11-19)? What does Ephesians teach us today about spiritual warfare and the challenges that life presents us? These are all important questions that need to be answered.

I believe today's Messianic movement is one that possesses great potential to enact a positive difference in today's world, when we will learn to take God's mission for His people seriously. While Paul undoubtedly emphasizes that the gospel is to be proclaimed "to the Jew first,"<sup>iii</sup> Ancient Israel was given a mandate to proclaim the goodness of its God to the world around it. It is my personal opinion that while today's Messianics should be commended for evangelizing and seeing that a generation of Jewish people came to a saving knowledge of Yeshua, it has not done that well with the other side of evangelism and discipleship: "also to the Greek" or "all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). Many in today's Messianic Judaism avoid the letter of Ephesians, because of Paul's emphasis on a oneness and unity between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers that either they do not want, or want to act as though it does not exist in the Bible.

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<sup>iii</sup> Romans 1:16; 2:9-10.

For those Messianics who do believe in equality between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers as part of the “one new humanity” (2:15, NRSV/CJB), I wonder why they do not often read Ephesians—because it gives us the clues on how we are to conduct ourselves, demonstrating the transforming power of God within us (4:23-24). **The audience of Ephesians is one which we should all truly strive to emulate and see replicated, as new Messianic congregations and fellowships are birthed.** How do we all learn to respect one another as human beings who have been redeemed by the Lord? How do we learn to function as one Body of Messiah? How does personal holiness extend to familial holiness and manifest itself into corporate holiness? Perhaps most avoided, how are we preparing ourselves for people—Jews, Christians, and others—who will one day come to us wanting unique *Messianic* answers? Ephesians has much to say that we need not overlook any more.

In order for today’s Messianic community to enter into the great things that the Lord has in store for it, we need to go through a season of intense spiritual and theological refinement. I can think of no better text to consider for this than Ephesians. I consider the primary thrust of this letter to be, as Paul so aptly puts it, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (5:1). As the sons and daughters of the Most High, men and women who have come to know Him via His Son Yeshua, we should be following after the instructions of God. We are those who should be reaching forward “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Messiah” (4:13b, RSV). Ephesians teaches us important life lessons about what it means to live not only as born again Believers—but as *adults* accomplishing the tasks of God! It tells us things about congregations and fellowships made up of both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, and how we must “attain to the unity of the faith” (4:13a).

So as we prepare to begin, what life lessons do you believe Ephesians will teach you, and aid you with, concerning the tasks the Lord has in store (5:3-33)? It is my sincere hope and prayer that our study of Ephesians will once again be helpful, as we all desire to see that mature, transformed, and impactful Messianic movement emerge that can be more than a movement—but a force for the power of God in the Earth! *Amein v’amein.*

*J.K. McKee, Editor  
Messianic Apologetics*

For this 2012 printing, areas where some further analysis has been conducted include 2:11-13 with some new developments in Messianic ecclesiology and what the “Commonwealth of Israel” (*politeia*) actually is, and 5:21-33 including consultation with the rather brilliant and thorough book *Man and Woman, One in Christ* by Philip B. Payne (2009). A new addition to this commentary is the summary article “The Message of Ephesians.” With this release, it will now be much easier to use both this resource and *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* (2010) together, given the overlap in content among these epistles.



# INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter of Ephesians<sup>1</sup> (Grk. *Pros Ephesious*, ΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΕΣΙΟΥΣ) is a very rich, full, and spiritual text of the Bible, having brought great inspiration to many Believers. Throughout history, this has been one of the favorite books of many, particularly as it regards the nature of God's people and Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) ruling and reigning over them. Yeshua the Messiah is uplifted over the cosmos, as the One from whom great blessings originate. It places an emphasis on proper living, and how God's people are to be empowered for His service. Ephesians is also a rather broad and general epistle; it includes both doctrine as well as an emphasis on the corporate election of God's people. Many have considered Ephesians to be a masterful work of ecumenicism, emphasizing the unity that God desires to have among all of His people. Ephesians certainly asks important questions of any generation or group of people that desires to be used by the Lord in the world, and place Him at the center of their mission.

Among many who read Ephesians is certainly the question of what kind of a text it actually is. While it is easy to call Ephesians a letter or an epistle, "Despite its epistolary opening and closing, it is a 'letter' only in a highly qualified sense. Ephesians has been characterized by many as a theological 'tractate' or 'manifesto'" (*ABD*).<sup>2</sup> Others consider Ephesians to be a homily. Harold W. Hoehner indicates, "this book is regarded by many as the crown of all Paul's writings,"<sup>3</sup> followed by I. Howard Marshall who concludes, "it resembles the so-called 'catholic' epistles."<sup>4</sup> From this point of view, Ephesians would more closely match the genre of the General Epistles (James, 1&2 Peter, 1-3 John), and would almost serve as a capstone or summation to all of Paul's teachings. Some commentators have considered Ephesians second only to Romans in its significance among the Pauline corpus, with F.F.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that in spite of the common reference to Ephesians as "the Book of Ephesians," I am going to purposefully not refer to this text by this designation. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

Per the debate of Ephesians' actual audience, I will simply be referring to its recipients as "the audience," "Paul's listeners," "those who received the letter," etc.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, "Ephesians, Epistle to the," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:536.

<sup>3</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 613.

<sup>4</sup> I. Howard Marshall, "Ephesians," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1385.

Bruce calling Ephesians “the quintessence of Paulinism.”<sup>5</sup> In my own personal view, it is not impossible at all that Ephesians is a text akin to James the Just’s “James” (although I doubt that few would necessarily view Ephesians as “Paul”).

Yet, in spite of all of the excellent and encouraging qualities that one can list regarding Ephesians, there are some questions regarding Ephesians that will have to be answered in our examination of the text. Not enough people who just pick up their Bibles and read Ephesians are aware of these issues, but they certainly dominate both conservative and liberal exegesis. A significant issue concerns whether the Ephesians are the only audience of the letter, one of its audiences, or not an audience at all. Likewise, there are many theologians who doubt whether or not the Apostle Paul is even the true author of Ephesians, or that it was even written during his lifetime. Furthermore, does the Epistle to the Colossians play any role in the message or themes of Ephesians? Which one came first?

Examining the letter of Ephesians as a whole, and engaging in a dialogue with contemporary scholarship regarding its composition, are things which are widely overlooked by today’s Messianic community. This text of Scripture has much to teach us about our mission, purpose, and what God desires us to be—as the Commonwealth of Israel—a theme that is emphasized. Ephesians has a unique character forming ability that need not be ignored, especially as Messianic Believers should be eager to accomplish those assignments that the Lord has given us in the best way possible. Robert H. Gundry rightly remarks, “Ephesians expresses praise for the unity and blessings shared by all believers.”<sup>6</sup> A desire for unity is certainly expressed by individuals in much of today’s Messianic movement, so perhaps by examining Ephesians in much more detail we will understand how such unity can be achieved. And, this unity is not just unity in a general sense, but in a very actualized sense between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, the latter of whom could not be redeemed without the nation of Israel.

In examining Ephesians in detail, this commentary (2008) also represents the first serious Messianic engagement with what is often considered to be a Deutero-Pauline text.

## WHO WAS THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF THIS LETTER?

The most significant issue as it concerns a proper examination of the letter titled Ephesians, is whether or not the Ephesians were the only audience. This is a significant discussion in theology today that does affect one’s interpretation and application of the epistle, and whether or not location specific information needs to be considered. Was Ephesians sent to only one audience, or was the letter intended to be circular to multiple audiences?

While it is not obvious to most English Bible readers (although a good study Bible should reference this in some way),<sup>7</sup> there are some noticeable differences among the textual

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<sup>5</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 229.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 397.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha*, RSV (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1417; Kenneth L. Barker, ed., et. al., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids:

witnesses of Ephesians. Whereas most Bibles begin the epistle with “Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Messiah Yeshua” (1:1, NASU), the 1952 Revised Standard Version broke tradition and rendered the verse with: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus.”<sup>8</sup> The notable clause that is missing is “in Ephesus.” In critical editions of the Greek New Testament, the source text reads *tois hagiois tois ousin [en Ephesō] kai pistois en Christō Iēsou* (τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὐσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), with “in Ephesus” placed in brackets.<sup>9</sup> Bruce M. Metzger explains,

“The words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ are absent from several important witnesses (ⲡ<sup>46</sup> a\* B\* 424<sup>c</sup> 1739) as well as from manuscripts mentioned by Basil and the text used by Origen...Since the letter has been traditionally known as ‘To the Ephesians,’ and since all witnesses except those mentioned above include the words ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, the Committee decided to retain them, but enclosed within square brackets.”<sup>10</sup>

The oldest extant manuscripts of Ephesians lack the clause *en Ephesō* or “in Ephesus.”<sup>11</sup> While this may not seem to be that substantial of an issue at first, it actually can become one when we consider the relationship of the author of Ephesians to his audience. Unlike the other Pauline Epistles which are directed to specific audiences, where Paul does act as though he knows his audience personally, the author of Ephesians does not appear to know his readers personally (1:15; 3:2; 4:21), although he presumably had ministered almost three years to them (Acts 20:31). The author of Ephesians has “heard about your faith” (1:15, NIV); the audience has “heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you” (3:2); and the author will assert “if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him” (4:21)—all indicating a detached relationship. There are no references to anyone who he might have known, or people who both the audience and Paul knew even if they had not met personally. Because the author and audience appear to be somewhat distant, certainly in comparison to the other Pauline letters, it indicates that there may be more to “Ephesians” than meets the eye.

Interpreters of Ephesians have certainly been able to propose various solutions regarding the manuscript differences of 1:1, and the distance between author and audience.

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Zondervan, 2002), 1829; Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2090; Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1916.

<sup>8</sup> A. Skevington Wood indicates, “This is doubtless the most satisfactory way of construing the participle [*ousin, οὐσιν*] in the absence of ‘in Ephesus’ or some other designation,” although he notes that there are some “grammatical difficulties” (“Ephesians,” in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 11:11).

<sup>9</sup> Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), 503; *Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament*, NE27-RSV (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies/Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), 503; cf. Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 655.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 601.

<sup>11</sup> David H. Stern notes in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 577, “Some manuscripts lack ‘in Ephesus,’” but he does not attempt to explain further the issues surrounding the epistle’s target audience.