

The Messianic movement largely advocates that the Torah or Pentateuch is relevant instruction for Believers today, and that modern Christianity has too often ignored God's revelation in the Tanach or Old Testament—not benefiting from this dismissal. Yet the subject of "Torah observance" can often be a point of contention, not only between the Messianic and Christian communities, but even internally among Messianics. Why is this the case? *Do we have to be negative about this?* Is it possible that people claiming to be Torah observant do not often know why the Law of Moses is to instruct and teach today's Believers? Have some Messianics simply lacked an appropriate perspective on how the work of the Holy Spirit is to guide God's people into greater holiness and maturity, given the promises of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27)? How are we to balance how following the Torah includes outward practices, but also includes a greater manifestation of God's love and goodness to all we encounter?

Torah In the Balance, Volume I is a well needed resource for our time, as it addresses the main aspects of how to follow God's Torah. Subjects addressed include: why Believers need the Torah, the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council, the foundational importance of the Ten Commandments, the role of the appointed times, and the dietary laws. While Messianic positions on these aspects of faith can often clash with those of our Christian brothers and sisters, they are considered in a fair and reasonable way that encourages *positive solutions* between all people who have called out to Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) for salvation. A large amount of scholastic engagement and support is offered for the validity of these aspects of faith on the part of today's Believers.

This book is an important addition to any Messianic library, and should be read by those desiring not only a comprehensive understanding regarding what the Lord has started in this hour—but the *great responsibility* we have been endowed by Him. With everything we have been called to do, the transforming power of God's love is emphasized above all! This resource encourages growth and maturity on the part of *all* of His people.

TORAH IN THE BALANCE
VOLUME I

TORAH
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BALANCE

VOLUME I

**The Validity of the Torah
and Its Practical Life Applications**

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

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 (NASU)

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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</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	KJV: King James Version
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)
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</i> (Liddell & Scott)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	LXE: Brenton's English translation of the Septuagint
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	LXX: Septuagint
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	m. Mishnah
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	MT: Masoretic Text
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	NASB: <i>New American Standard Bible</i> (1977)
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	NASU: <i>New American Standard Update</i> (1995)
CJB: <i>Complete Jewish Bible</i> (1998)	NEB: <i>New English Bible</i> (1970)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
ESV: <i>English Standard Version</i> (2001)	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
GNT: <i>Greek New Testament</i>	NIV: <i>New International Version</i> (1984)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: <i>Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures</i> (1999)
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	NKJV: <i>New King James Version</i> (1982)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NRSV: <i>New Revised Standard Version</i> (1989)
Heb: Hebrew	NLT: <i>New Living Translation</i> (1996)
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	REB: <i>Revised English Bible</i> (1989)
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	RSV: <i>Revised Standard Version</i> (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*

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

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

v(s). verse(s)

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

Vul: Latin Vulgate

WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*

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), and in foundational truths such as salvation by grace through faith and the final authority of Holy Scripture;ⁱ 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, NASU), 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” (NASU). 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

ⁱ Consult the Outreach Israel Ministries / Messianic Apologetics Statement of Faith, and be sure to notice how it broadly aligns with today’s conservative evangelicalism.

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to be different from the world around us. And He indeed tells His people how they can be separated:

“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, NASU).

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.ⁱⁱ 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, NASU).ⁱⁱⁱ

We live in a fallen world today which 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, NASU). 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, NASU). 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 all 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

ⁱⁱ 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.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7.

Introduction

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 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, NASU), and Yeshua exemplified this perfectly in His ministry example (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, NASU), 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, often 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.