

THE HEBREW NEW TESTAMENT

**Misunderstanding
and related issues**

confronting issues series

THE HEBREW NEW TESTAMENT

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and related issues

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC
APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

THE HEBREW NEW TESTAMENT MISUNDERSTANDING

and related issues

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Cover photos: Istockphoto

Published by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries
P.O. Box 850845
Richardson, Texas 75085
(407) 933-2002

www.outreachisrael.net
www.messianicapologetics.net

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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>	understand what a Biblical text means on its own
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	Ger: German
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	GNT: Greek New Testament
Ara: Aramaic	Grk: Greek
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	Heb: Hebrew
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Ba'ali, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	KJV: King James Version
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to	

LXX: Septuagint
m. Mishnah
MT: Masoretic Text
NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: New English Bible (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIGTC: *New International Greek Testament Commentary*
NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
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)
TLV: Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant (2011)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
Yid: Yiddish
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

Introduction

The *Confronting Issues* series began in 2007, as a selection of small stapled booklets, comprising a rather forthright article or two produced by Outreach Israel Ministries and (now) Messianic Apologetics. Today in 2012-2013, because of the significant wave of changes and transitions occurring within the broad Messianic community, the *Confronting Issues* series is being retooled a bit, into small books, addressing some of the major debates of the day. It would be our hope and prayer that these new releases are able to interject a well-needed perspective into the conversation regarding the different topics of importance, offering fair-minded and constructive solutions, which carefully address the Biblical text, and can sincerely help Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in their walk with Yeshua the Messiah.

Many people within the broad, contemporary Messianic movement, have a romance with the Hebrew language. *This is not something which should be discouraged.* From the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, *Shema Yisrael ADONAI Eloheinu ADONAI echad* (יְהוָה אֶחָד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ), “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!,” to the famed word of Psalm 86:8, *ein-k’mokha b’elohim Adonai* (אֵין-כְּמוֹךָ בְּאֱלֹהִים אֲדֹנָי), “There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord”—the Hebrew language has a very special place in the liturgies of not only the traditional Jewish Synagogue, but Messianic congregations and fellowships around the world. Songs in either Biblical or modern Hebrew are a major feature of Messianic congregational worship every *Shabbat* or Sabbath. The fact that Messianic Believers are prone to use the Messiah’s Hebrew name of Yeshua (יֵשׁוּעַ) far more than the English name Jesus—is a good indication that some familiarity with Hebrew terms is necessary, in order to navigate much of our faith community.ⁱ It is to be commended that many Messianic congregations and fellowships have some sort of Hebrew class available for their members and constituents, so they can be familiar with the *alef-bet*, read some

ⁱ If you need to, consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, “Jesus, Pagan Name.”

basic Biblical passages from the Tanach (Old Testament), and even be able to possibly converse in some modern Hebrew.ⁱⁱ

While many Messianic teachers and congregational leaders have some sort of working knowledge of Biblical Hebrew—namely so that they can exposit from the weekly Torah reading and/or demonstrate some competency in traditional liturgy—there is one skill which is significantly lacking from a great majority of Messianic congregational leaders, across the broad Messianic spectrum: **some sort of working knowledge of Biblical Greek**. Most Messianic people today in leadership, with a small handful of exceptions, have never bothered to study Greek, whether it be classical Greek or Biblical Greek. The reasons for this are varied, some of them relating to a laziness of not wanting to have to study multiple languages, and others relating to an unjustifiable prejudice against anything that is not perceived as “Hebraic.”ⁱⁱⁱ For some reason or another, learning the language spoken by the significant majority of not only the First Century non-Jewish Believers in the Mediterranean—but also a significant number of Diaspora Jews in the Mediterranean—is actually believed to be an affront to the God of Israel.^{iv}

ⁱⁱ A selection of good resources to consider, when learning **Biblical Hebrew**, includes: Menahem Mansoor, *Biblical Hebrew: Step by Step, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); *Biblical Hebrew: Step by Step, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971); Ethelyn Simon, Irene Resnikoff, and Linda Motzkin, *The First Hebrew Primer* (Oakland: EKS Publishing, 1992); C.L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

Two resources that were used for my **modern Hebrew** classes at the University of Oklahoma (2001-2002) included: Edna Amir Coffin, *Lessons in Modern Hebrew: Level I* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977); *Lessons in Modern Hebrew: Level II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1978). Also useful is Hayim Baltans, *Webster's NewWorld Hebrew Dictionary* (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 1992).

ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, it should not go unnoticed that after Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek (and to a lesser extent Latin), that the main theological language which merits some familiarity by the examiner, is actually **German**, given the wide amount of scholastic material written in this language—after English, of course.

(This is directly affected by the fact that the English speaking world has the largest concentration of Protestant scholasticism, to then be followed by those in German-speaking Central Europe. Some level of **French** competency then logically follows German, as there is a third tier of noticeable theological writing in French.)

^{iv} A selection of good resources to consider, when learning **Biblical Greek**, includes: N. Clayton Croy, *A Primer of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994); *It's Still Greek to Me* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998); William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

The failure for many of today's Messianic congregational leaders and teachers to have any Greek competency, is a travesty with which we are all going to have to reckon over the next two decades (2010s-2020s). What happens when a congregational leader has learned a fair amount of Hebrew, but virtually no Greek? It means that various teachings on the Apostolic Scriptures or the New Testament, where a teacher has been most likely relying on an English translation of the Bible^v and/or some rather poor *Strong's Concordance* definitions,^{vi} may be up for some serious reevaluation. It means *why we know* why many congregational teachers and leaders cannot answer some of the basic claims made by many Christians against the validity and relevance of God's Torah, with various passages from the Apostolic Scriptures offered as proof.^{vii} It also means that we have been able to diagnose one of the major reasons why the Messianic community, at present, lacks a total volume of commentaries on the New Testament—engaged with some level of detail from the Greek Apostolic Writings.^{viii} With the exception of our own ministry, per the release of my workbook *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic* (2012 paperback), no one in the Messianic community has yet to even release some kind of general New Testament introduction/survey book.^{ix} There is a definite phobia present among many, when the mixed Jewish, Greek, and Roman audiences of the Messianic Scriptures are considered—and with it the written language of those Scriptures.

Over the years, Outreach Israel Ministries has had to field the question, *Do you believe that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew?* many, many times. Many other Messianics would avoid the

One resource that was used for my **classical Greek** class at the University of Oklahoma (2000) was: Maurice Balme and Gilbert Lawall, *Athenaze: An Introduction to Ancient Greek* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

^v For a rather poignant example of this in recent Messianic theological debate, consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, "Galatians 5:2-3."

^{vi} Consult the author's article "Getting Beyond Strong's Concordance," appearing in his book *Confronting Critical Issues: An Analysis of Subjects that Affects the Growth and Stability of the Emerging Messianic Movement*.

^{vii} Consult the author's book *The New Testament Validates Torah: Does the New Testament Really Do Away With the Law?*

^{viii} To date (2013), as a part of the *for the Practical Messianic* commentary series produced by Messianic Apologetics, this writer has completed volumes on (listed in order of release) on: James, Hebrews, Philippians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, Acts 15, the Pastoral Epistles of 1&2 Timothy and Titus, and 1&2 Thessalonians. He has also released survey workbooks on the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures.

^{ix} About as far as anything has come close, to date, for this, would be the various, largely useful, introductions present for the New Testament books in *Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011).

topic completely. Others might provide some answer to the effect of: “They were written in Hebrew...and I actually had *a dream* that they will be discovered in Israel one day...” Others might tout the Aramaic Peshitta New Testament from the Fifth Century C.E. as being superior to the Greek Apostolic Scriptures. And others, still, might make some kind of prejudicial remark about the Creator of the universe not being too concerned with the salvation of those who did/do not speak Hebrew as their native language. Given the complicated spiritual and theological dynamics present within the Messianic movement—one has to really have some courage to say, *No, we do not believe that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew.* There is, to be sure, no Hebrew New Testament document or fragment of any kind from the broad Biblical period. *This stands in stark contrast to the fact that the Greek New Testament, and fragments of the Greek New Testament, are the most widely attested and accessible work of antiquity—even more so than the classical works of Greece and Rome.* The claim, that the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, has actually been disregarded by many in Biblical Studies. The idea that there are thousands of colloquial Hebrew expressions or Hebraisms contained in the New Testament, which serve as proof of a written Hebrew original, can be contested. Ultimately, because of much of the Messianic movement’s leaders’ lack of homework—there are many ideas circulating about a presumed “Hebrew New Testament” which cannot be substantiated.

Sorting through this, sifting through data and noise, and evaluating what is fact and what is fiction—is by no means something easy. While seeking to maintain the inspiration, integrity, and reliability of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures—no one wants to be perceived as somehow trying to discount the veracity of the Hebrew Tanach, Hebrew language studies, or even studies in Judaism as somehow illegitimate. **I, for one, encourage today’s Messianic people to study the Hebrew language, Second Temple Judaism, and to be familiar with Rabbinics, among other things.** Yet, there are ideological questions to be asked about the existence of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, historical questions to be asked about the logic of Hebrew New Testament proponents, and other significant side-issues to be evaluated. As we seek some resolution to these issues, I would ask each of you to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider the following statement from Proverbs 18:17:

“The one who first states a case seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines” (NRSV).

Many of you are likely to have heard some teachings or statements on the origin of the Apostolic Scriptures or Messianic Writings—which have made some presumed “sense” to you. It may be time for you to perhaps consider another opinion as it involves the origins of the New Testament. This publication offers you some information, which you are going to have to weigh into your evaluations, as we consider some of the documented facts regarding the Gospels, General Epistles, Pauline Epistles, and later New Testament works.^x

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

^x Two resources which are recommended for the layperson, attempting to have some higher level of introduction to the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, include the single-volume works: Edward W. Goodrick, *Do It Yourself Hebrew and Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) and A. Philip Brown II and Bryan W. Smith (Heb.), Richard W. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski (Grk.), *A Reader's Hebrew and Greek Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

Can We Trust the Greek Scriptures?

It is indeed phenomenal that many of today's non-Jewish Believers are coming to a revelation of the Hebraic Roots of our faith, are adopting a Torah obedient lifestyle, and are seeing themselves as a part of the community of Israel, in solidarity with the Jewish people. But as with any move of God, there are concerns that exist—concerns that sometimes wrench at the heart and soul of what we should be doing, as opposed to what we should not be doing. We should be proclaiming the gospel message of salvation and discipling others as they grow and mature in their faith, fulfilling Yeshua's Great Commission, and aiming to see the restoration of God's people and the Kingdom to Israel.

Of course, with this restoration comes many things, such as the realization that our Heavenly Father does not have two groups of elect as is commonly supposed, Israel and "the Church," but rather one, the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) or Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). As all Believers, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, are a part of this Kingdom realm of Israel, such a community is called to obey God's Torah, and via their obedience to Him be a light to the entire world (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

Many Messianic Believers think that it is important to learn the Hebrew language, the language of the Tanach or Old Testament. This is to be commended and encouraged, as these texts make up the first two-thirds of our Bible that many Christians, sadly, ignore or feel are important only for Bible history. However, there is another portion of the Bible, the Apostolic Scriptures or Messianic Writings, commonly known as the New Testament, which were not written in Hebrew, and should not be cast by the wayside.

Confronting the Challenges in Our Midst

Many you will encounter within the broad Messianic movement say that the New Testament Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, and that the Greek texts we have today cannot be trusted. This is an opinion that is widely circulated throughout our faith community, but one that has many problems. The foremost of these problems is *where* these “Hebrew New Testament” manuscripts are, if they once existed. Of all of the arguments, though, given in favor of a so-called “Hebrew New Testament,” **the most substantial one that must be addressed is the ideological one.** The following individual, quoting Yeshua’s words of Matthew 5:17-19,¹ essentially says that the God of Israel is incapable of inspiring His words in a language other than Hebrew:

“The amazing thing is that a ‘jot’ is the smallest Hebrew letter called a Yodh (‘iota’ in Greek, letter I or Y in English) and the ‘tittle’ is the smallest Hebrew particle called a Seraph (‘keriaia’ in Greek, horn or apex in English). Why is this important? Yeshua is saying that the HEBREW character called the Yodh and the HEBREW particle called the Seraph WILL NOT PASS AWAY FROM THE TORAH!!! The Messiah has clearly stated here that the final ‘authority’ regarding the Torah and the Prophets was to be the Hebrew writings – not translations. The Greek language does not have a character called a Yodh nor a particle called a Seraph! Yeshua is not condemning ‘translations’, but He is teaching us ‘today’ that it is the HEBREW, which constitutes the final court of appeal regarding what is right, and what is wrong. Where does that leave the Greek translation called the Septuagint? Where does that leave the Greek translations of the Messianic Writings? **It leaves them ‘out’ as the final word of authority regarding the truths of Scripture!**” (emphasis mine).²

The last time that I checked, the Creator God of the Universe is all-powerful and is the ultimate originator of *all languages*. I was unaware that the Eternal One was monolingual and that He is only powerful enough to communicate to human beings in Hebrew. The individual

¹ “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19, KJV).

² Charlotte Fludd (2003). Cited in *Devarim/Words*, 02 August, 2003. *Sheepfold Gleanings*. Retrieved 28 March, 2004, from <<http://www.mim.net>>.

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quoted above, and indeed many others in the Messianic community, believe that the God of Israel will only communicate to humankind in Hebrew. An attack can be made on anything that is “Greek,” and this even includes the Apostolic Scriptures or the New Testament—which contains for us the good news of Yeshua the Messiah, His teachings, and the accounts of His ministry. At the very least, this sort of simplistic teaching discredits the Messianic movement in the minds of many evangelical Christians investigating their Hebraic Roots. In many cases, because the inspiration of the Greek New Testament is readily spoken against, it has led some to deny the faith and convert to Judaism.

The question of whether or not the Greek Scriptures can be trusted is one of ideology. **Is our God powerful enough to inspire His words in a language other than Hebrew or not?**

I have never been against the Hebrew language or the Tanach (Old Testament). I have formally studied Hebrew at both the under-graduate and post-graduate levels, and appreciate the deep richness of the ancient tongue. I enjoy Hebrew music, liturgy, and the ability to converse with others with some modern Hebrew. I encourage people to learn Hebrew to enhance their Bible studies. However, the claims against the Greek New Testament one will often encounter in the Messianic community, are overrated and unwarranted. They often come from those who are misinformed and have never studied the Greek language. They criticize something they have no business criticizing.

I have examined the Greek texts of the Apostolic Scriptures and they have only confirmed my beliefs as a conservative Messianic Believer. In them I have found confirmation that the Torah is still to be followed today, that God does not have two groups of elect, that our Heavenly Father is in the process of restoring Israel and welcoming the righteous from the nations into His Kingdom, and most importantly that Yeshua is indeed God made manifest in the flesh and that He is the Messiah. I do not believe that some Hebrew text of the Apostolic Scriptures is needed to prove such claims.

Many people I have encountered in the Messianic community fail to examine the Greek text itself, as opposed to biased English translations, before discrediting it. This is a blatant violation of the Torah, which requires multiple witnesses to be evaluated before something can be established as fact.³ Even more importantly, almost all

³ Cf. Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28.

advocates of a “Hebrew New Testament” have *consistently failed* to give a book-by-book historical analysis of why they believe the Gospels, General Epistles, and Pauline Epistles were all originally written in Hebrew. They have simply said things along the lines of “It was written in Hebrew,” but have failed to substantiate their claim with any hard evidence.

I have received e-mails and letters from many people, throughout my time in Messianic ministry, telling me over the years why I should deny the inspiration of the Greek New Testament. They essentially say things along the lines of “Hebrew is the holy language,” “Why would Yeshua speak Greek?”, and even “Why would Paul write to Hebrews in Greek?” On the surface, some of the arguments can seem rather convincing to the layperson, but many of them come from people who have studied neither language and they are merely repeating the claims of others. They have looked at the Apostolic era through a grid that is largely devoid of any legitimate historical accuracy. And, what of the motives of the people involved?

What are the Hebraic Roots of the faith?

Many have varying opinions in regard to what the “Hebraic Roots” of the faith actually are. What one defines as “Hebraic Roots” can determine how we handle the Apostolic Scriptures. For some, “Hebraic Roots” encompasses the origins of our faith as they relate to the Hebrew Bible, the Tanach or Old Testament, and how all of God’s people need to have a foundation in it to understand the Messianic Scriptures or New Testament. This includes things such as learning about the Biblical festivals and how they relate to the sacrifice of Yeshua and His Second Coming, why we need to understand the Sabbath, and why God gave the Torah to Israel. It also simply includes knowing about the history of Ancient Israel, which many people, *including Messianics*, can be under-informed of in various areas.

This is what I consider my definition of “Hebraic Roots” to be. You must have knowledge about the first two-thirds of Scripture—for without a foundation you cannot have a house—and with it be able to properly understand what the writers of the Apostolic Scriptures communicate to their audiences.

There are, however, others whose definitions of “Hebraic Roots” are somewhat different than my own. Many seek to take the written Greek texts of Scripture and stridently argue that every saying of Yeshua, the Apostles, and others are colloquial Hebraic expressions, and that the Greek can only be a translation, and likely an errant one at

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that. Thus, it is said that the Greek texts of Scripture are only “second hand.” Many go as far as to say that they “cannot be trusted” and that the Greek must be “retranslated” back to Hebrew. But some of these so-called “Hebraisms” offered by people are not supported by Biblical scholarship, in comparison with Rabbinical Jewish writings and ancient sources, and especially in comparison with other Scripture passages. Claiming that something is an “Hebraic expression” to others who are uninformed, can be a way of manipulating people, and to make what a Biblical text says fit one’s pre-determined agenda. Unfortunately for many people who have denied the significance of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, some of the same have denied Yeshua as the Messiah. For once you deny the veracity of the message, what is really keeping you from denying the Messenger?

There is merit in knowing that there *are* colloquial Hebraic expressions in the Greek texts of Scripture, which no conservative Christian scholar should deny. One example comes from Matthew 16:19, when Yeshua tells the assembly, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” This expression strictly deals with *halachah* or Torah application, as the Messiah was giving Peter the authority to “bind” (restrict) or “loosen” (permit) various requirements of the Torah to the congregation of Believers.⁴ But even if the expression were translated from Hebrew to English instead of Greek to English, it would be largely meaningless without historical knowledge of the setting.

To the Greek text’s credit, an arguably more important statement as it relates to us, appears in the previous verse where Yeshua tells Peter, “upon this rock I will build My church.” This verse has been interpreted by Roman Catholics as meaning that through the Apostle Peter, Yeshua started an unending line of papal succession. Protestants who are dispensationalists believe it means that He was starting a new assembly of elect.

But is this what Matthew 16:18 says? No. The Greek verb translated “build” in the passage, *oikodomeō* (οἰκοδομέω), could just as well be translated “rebuild” or “strengthen”—and the Greek text alone validates our position as Messianic Believers that God has only one group of elect, as Yeshua was in the process of restoring the *ekklēsia* on Himself.

⁴ Cf. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 90.

So what do we do about this? I believe that during Yeshua's ministry He largely spoke in Hebrew, or in Aramaic, and much of this *verbal* dialogue has been written down for us in Greek, largely word-for-word. But does this in any way "invalidate" the Greek text? Absolutely not. In fact, if anything it should show us that readers need to have a working knowledge in *both* Hebrew and Greek in accessing Scripture. We have to deal with the Biblical text as it exists in its final form *first*, before we can engage in any other kind of speculation.

One way that theologians often build a "bridge" between the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures is through the Septuagint (LXX), or the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible which was produced around three centuries before Yeshua. It is quoted extensively throughout the Greek New Testament, and was considered authoritative Scripture in the Greek-speaking Jewish synagogues of the Diaspora.

In the case of Matthew 16:18, our position of God having only one assembly of elect is vindicated from Jeremiah 33:7: "I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them as they were at first." In this verse, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint, rendered the Hebrew verb *banah* (בָּנָה) as *oikodomeō*, the same verb used in Matthew 16:18 for "build." Not only can this validate our claim that Yeshua did not establish a second *ekklēsia* of elect commonly called "the Church," but it establishes the fact that He came to restore Israel.

Note the slight difference in the translation of Jeremiah 33:7 from Sir L.C.L. Brenton's 1851 English translation of the Septuagint: "And I will turn the captivity of Juda, and the captivity of Israel, and will **build** them, even as before." Note that *oikodomeō* is translated here as "build."⁵

If using the Septuagint as a bridge between the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures demonstrates the fact that the Greek New Testament does in fact support our beliefs—but that we may, at times, need to use the Septuagint to understand the underlying Hebrew meanings behind Greek words—then the importance of having an ability to understand the Greek language is just as important as understanding the Hebrew language. But sadly, as I observed in my past Greek classes, the importance of knowing Greek can be overstated just as understanding Hebrew can be overstated. Many Christians fail to learn Hebrew, and many Messianics fail to learn Greek. **But we are called to set a higher standard and to be more thorough.**

⁵ Matthew 16:18-19 is addressed more fully in the author's publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*