

TORAH IN THE BALANCE
VOLUME II

TORAH -IN THE- BALANCE

VOLUME II

The Set-Apart Life in Action-
The Outward Expressions of Faith

J.K. McKee



Torah In the Balance

Volume II

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See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

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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: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
 AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
 ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
 Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
 Ara: Aramaic
 ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
 ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
 b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
 B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
 BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
 BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
 BECNT: *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*
 BKCNT: *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*
 C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
 CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)
 CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
 CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*
 CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
 DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
 DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
 ECB: *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*
 EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
 eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text
 EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
 ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
 exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own
 EXP: *Expositor's Bible Commentary*
 Ger: German
 GNT: Greek New Testament
 Grk: Greek
halachah: lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community
 HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
 HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
 Heb: Hebrew
 HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
 ICC: *International Critical Commentary*
 IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
 IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
 ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
 IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
 Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
 JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
 JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
 KJV: King James Version
 Lattimore: *The New Testament* by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
 LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
 LS: *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell & Scott)
 LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
 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
PME: Practical Messianic Edition of the Apostolic Scriptures
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

Torah In the Balance, Volume I was originally released in 2003, and so one can legitimately wonder: Why has it taken so long for *Volume II* to finally be released? There are a number of reasons why this is the case, as when *Volume I* was issued it was always my plan to see a *Volume II* issued as well. While I can formulate any number of reasons as to why this publication has taken over eleven years for me to finally sit down and complete, the word of Proverbs 16:9 is something for us to keep in mind: “The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.” While it is good for each of us to make plans for the future, to have useful projects on the horizon for the people of God to benefit from on the drawing board—time is in the hands of God, so that everything takes shape at the right moment.

The first time I actually sat down and started typing in a few chapters for *Torah In the Balance, Volume II* was in January 2005! Between 2005 and 2015, though, much has occurred both spiritually and theologically within the broad Messianic movement—not to mention changes that have occurred to Outreach Israel Ministries. Certainly when one sees the wide array of publications that we have released, it is obvious that we have been busy! But over the past ten years, I completed my M.A. in Biblical Studies from Asbury Theological Seminary, we started the Wednesday Night Bible Study podcast and the *for the Practical Messianic* commentary series, we have witnessed the expansion of our *Messianic Helper* series, and in late 2012 we all relocated from Central Florida back to the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex, among other things.

Most important, to be sure, is that the second volume of *Torah In the Balance*—still being a rather general resource on various issues in the orbit of “Torah”—needed to adequately classify those issues, and I as the writer needed to be comfortable enough with addressing them all. On some topics analyzed, such as the seventh-day Sabbath or dietary laws, I have felt a greater comfort addressing them here generally, and then being able to refer people to the Messianic Apologetics *Messianic Kosher Helper* and *Messianic Sabbath Helper* (forthcoming) volumes for further reading—than just addressing kosher or *Shabbat* generally with no further reading available. On some other others, such as Messianic people grooming themselves, circumcision, and water immersion or baptism—I have had to wait for a while, not only to work through various Bible passages, but also to make sure that what I have wanted to see communicated was done so in an understanding and fair way.

From 2005 to the present, the Messianic community has blown wide open. The phenomenon of the late 1960s to the present, of the Messianic movement mainly being a tool for Jewish evangelism, has transitioned into something that has also seen many evangelical Christian Believers embrace their Hebraic Roots in a very tangible way. Our ministry, while having to serve the people whom the Lord sends

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across our path, has recognized the dual mission that has emerged over the past decade: seeing Jewish people come to faith in the Jewish Messiah *and* seeing non-Jewish Believers trained and educated as a part of the Messianic movement. This has not always been easy, as there is certainly tension present within the Messianic world over its future, and we have had to wait for our Heavenly Father to release us to address particular issues and controversies at the right time. It has not always been easy to grasp the thrust of James 4:15: “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that...”

Before committing to finally write *Volume II*, I have taken the point to read *Volume I*, making a few adjustments and tweaks here and there. I was definitely sure to notice that *Volume I* was written when circumstances in the broad Messianic movement of the early 2000s, were a bit different. The influx of non-Jewish Believers into Messianic congregations and fellowships, and the explosion of the widely independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, had not really taken place. While there continue to be necessary admonitions issued to all Messianic people regarding their approaches or attitudes to various aspects of Torah observance, in 2003 the various controversies associated with the Biblical calendar, the Sacred Name controversy, or the unity of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Body of Messiah, was not as pronounced as it can be today in 2014-2015. The purpose of *Volume I* was to address the validity of God’s Torah and its practical application, and in some places does “rub” a bit, as fairly as it can, at many Christians’ misunderstanding of the Law of Moses. The purpose of *Volume II*, after much soul searching and deliberation, is to consider the Torah in action on the ground **in a wide array of important areas**, which necessarily means consulting and weighing how the Jewish people and Synagogue institution have observed it for millennia.

In other publications—notably unforeseen since *Volume I* was released in 2003—our ministry has addressed how there are a variety of competing visions regarding the Torah in the broad Messianic world. Much of Messianic Judaism, while appreciating that non-Jewish Believers are studying the Torah and being enriched by their Hebraic Roots, does not often think that Torah observance for non-Jewish Believers is at all a good idea. The One Law/One Torah sub-movement, while advocating an ideology rooted in the idea that God’s Torah is relevant instruction for all of His people,ⁱ has not often fleshed out what this means in real life circumstances, or conducted a huge amount of troubleshooting. The One Law sub-movement is also stigmatized with a great deal of legalism, and does widely fail to consider various post-resurrection realities inaugurated by the work of Yeshua. On top of this would be the widely independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement,ⁱⁱ much of which is known by popular conference events and

ⁱ This would be principally based in passages such as: Exodus 12:48-49; Leviticus 7:7; 24:22; Numbers 9:14; 15:15-16, 29-30.

Consult the author’s article “Approaching One Law Controversies: Sorting Through the Legalism” for a further analysis of these passages.

ⁱⁱ This may include the Two-House sub-movement as well, which gives a great deal of significance to passages like: Isaiah 11:12-16; Jeremiah 31:6-10; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Zechariah 10:6-10.

sensational speakers. Among all the varied sectors of the broad Messianic community, there has not been a huge amount of time taken, by too many people, to sit down and put in writing some fair-minded analysis of the issues facing us.ⁱⁱⁱ In striving to be a ministry that sits above much of this, **we have had to purposefully wait** to provide much of the analysis present in this publication.

In the Apostle Paul's instruction of 1 Corinthians 12, it is obvious that not all people in the Body of Messiah have been granted the same gifts, talents, or skills—but that all are to still work together for the mission and purposes of God. The thrust of his word in Galatians 3:28, subverting an ancient Jewish prayer (t.*Berachot* 6:18), was “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua,” still does not make every human person *exactly* the same.^{iv} Even with the sojourner or *ger* (גר) entering into Ancient Israel being enjoined to hear and follow Moses' Teaching (Deuteronomy 31:11-12), the sojourner within the community of Israel was still not exactly the same as the native Israelite. Yet, even with there being diversity among the people of God—who do indeed compose the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), as what might be best described as an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel^v—each of us has to decide if the thrust of Holy Scripture is to principally emphasize *common faith first* or *differences first*. It is sad to have to observe this, but most within the broad Messianic movement, among all of its sectors, have chosen the latter option. Who we are as sinful and fallen human beings in need of redemption via the work of Messiah Yeshua as God Incarnate,^{vi} is apparently not as important to as many Messianic people as their own individual or cliquish identities.^{vii}

The array of issues addressed in *Torah In the Balance, Volume II* is intended to provide you, as the reader, with an appropriate orientation to approach them as a man or woman who is a part of a still-maturing and ever-emerging Messianic movement. The significant majority of the issues considered involve outward areas of Biblical instruction. Certainly in much Christian thought, understandably guided by imperatives such as, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart... this defiles a person” (Matthew 15:18, ESV), observance of various outward, physical instructions in Holy Scripture has often taken, at best, a

Consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, “Two-House Teaching,” as well as the author's book *Israel In Future Prophecy*.

ⁱⁱⁱ The diversity of positions represented, regarding the Torah in the Messianic movement, are explored in the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

^{iv} Consult the exegesis paper on Galatians 3:28, “Biblical Equality and Today's Messianic Movement,” in the author's commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

^v For an evaluation of present Messianic debates surrounding the people of God or ecclesiology, consult the author's publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*

^{vi} Consult the author's publication *Confronting Yeshua's Divinity and Messiahship*; something planned to be followed up sometime in the future with *Salvation on the Line: The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity* (two volumes: (I) Gospels and Acts; (II) The General Epistles, The Pauline Epistles, The Later New Testament).

^{vii} This is addressed further in the author's article “The Faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah,” appearing in his book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.

secondary place to observance of various inward, moral or ethical instructions. **But are outward, physical instructions of Holy Scripture unimportant?** 1 Thessalonians 5:23 actually directs, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete,” as all components of the human person are to be transformed by God. The sub-title of this book is *The Set-Apart Life in Action—The Outward Expressions of Faith*, and as its author I see no apparent contradiction or conflict between Believers being ethical, moral, and loving people, and also honoring God with their physical selves. Romans 6:12-13 does steadfastly direct, after all,

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.”

As one considers the proper role and place of various outward instructions in the life of a Messianic person, there are many factors—spiritual, sociological, and applicational—to be considered. Many of these will involve the role of consulting Jewish tradition, to see how the Jewish community has interpreted and applied various Torah instructions and commandments over the millennia. Is the Messianic community supposed to adhere to Jewish tradition in any capacity, or be anti-traditional? Is the Messianic community, if being philo-traditional, supposed to mirror an observance level of Orthodox Judaism, or more Centrist-to-progressive branches of Judaism like the Conservative or Reform movements? How do people sort through issues that are congregational and involve the local faith community, versus issues that are individualistic or more family oriented?

The Christian theological tradition, aside from various academics who have analyzed the role of Torah commandments for either Ancient Israel or Jews living in the Second Temple period, does not have a huge amount of instruction to consider in weighing what various outward commandments mean to the people of God today. While Yeshua (Jesus) did indeed place a high priority on inward thoughts and attitudes, this by no means negates or nullifies the need to act properly with one’s physical body and physical actions.

The Apostle Paul admonished Titus on the island of Crete, “avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless” (Titus 3:9). Some of this may have involved some spurious or less-than-credible approaches to the Torah as brought on by false teachers, but some of this may have also involved unnecessary debates over issues of minutiae. We can be reminded of how Galatians 5:22-23 elaborates, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; **against such things there is no law.**” Yet the Psalmist also declares, “How I loved Your teaching. All day long it was my theme” (Psalm 119:97, Alter),^{viii} with Paul also directing, “earnestly desire the greater gifts” (1 Corinthians

^{viii} Robert Alter, trans., *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 427.

12:31). There does come a point in the life of a mature man or woman of God, when issues pertaining to outward conformity to the Word of God do need to be addressed *in a calm, gentle, and constructive manner*. A sound inward morality imbued by God's Spirit transforming the heart and mind,^{ix} does need to be enjoined with outward holiness (Leviticus 11:44-45). Concurrent with this, an attitude of wanting to see other people transformed by such a Holy Spirit, and brought together as one composite but diverse people of God, needs to be seen within the Messianic world.

Torah In the Balance, Volume II offers some analysis on the "finer issues" of God's Torah, which have needed to be brought out in a very frank and open manner, considering where at times, leaders and teachers have not been considering the whole picture. The Messianic movement is to be a force of God's holiness and righteousness, not a house so internally divided that it cannot make a difference. If the Father's goal is to see His people restored—particularly among Jews and Christians—then not only are we to consider the value of those Christian theological schools that have always upheld the moral law of the Old Testament, but also the value of mainline Jewish traditions that have kept the Synagogue bound together as a coherent community. How do we need to have more establishment among us, so we can make a positive impact for the Lord in the wider world?

Anyone who has surveyed the current state of the broad Messianic movement knows that there is a great deal of internal debate over Torah observance. Many of us might all believe, in principle, that God's Torah is relevant instruction for His people. But how do we practice it? Can we follow every single one of the commandments in the Twenty-First Century? What changes to Torah application have truly been enacted as a result of Yeshua's atoning sacrifice? What role, if any, should Jewish tradition and protocol play in us applying the Torah's commandments? Can Torah observant people actually be anti-Jewish?

How do we bridge the polarization of Torah observant people who care very little for mainline Jewish tradition, versus those who embrace all of the extremities of either the ultra Orthodox or Chassidic movements? *Torah In the Balance, Volume II* presents a case for a philo-traditional style of Torah observance, representing a third way which has largely not been given a hearing. There is an entire array of Torah-related issues that is deserving of analysis, but we do not have to think that we are stuck having to choose between those who abhor a traditionally Jewish way of following God's commandments, and those who add so many dogmas to God's commandments that we may forget their original purpose. *Torah In the Balance, Volume II* presents you with a Messianic style of Torah observance consistent with the Centrist branches of modern-day Judaism, respecting both Jewish tradition and considering proposals made in contemporary Biblical Studies, a style that is often represented by today's Messianic Judaism in practice, and now on paper.

J.K. McKee, Editor

Messianic Apologetics

^{ix} Cf. Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:25-27.

PART I

Entering Into a Life of Torah Observance

-1-

Where is the Messianic Movement Today?

Where is the Messianic movement today? This is a question that must be asked by all who are pursuing some kind of a Torah obedient lifestyle, and striving for a walk of faith more consistent with that of Yeshua and His early followers. This question is a critical one that must be answered as we address the breadth and scope of a wide array of issues that change a person's outlook on the Bible, the way a person conducts himself or herself in the world, and most importantly how it affects an individual's personal life and conduct with other human beings. It involves not only having a proper handling of the Holy Scriptures and a solid theology, but also an understanding that outsiders are watching and they are looking to us as Messianic Believers for a positive spiritual example: one that is edifying, constructive, and always leads us to Messiah Yeshua.

It might be that the better question for us to ask ourselves is first: **Where is Christianity today?** This may help us have a better picture of where the Messianic community is so we can properly reflect upon many of the issues at hand.

Almost five centuries ago, when we review the history of the Church, men and women of God who began to read the Bible for themselves began to question many of the teachings and traditions of Roman Catholicism. These men and women began to discover that these teachings and traditions had no Scriptural basis and began what we know today as the Reformation. Their intention was to reform the Christian Church and get it to return to the original faith of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) and the Apostles. They succeeded in what they were supposed to do, but it is obvious that we still have some way to go if we are indeed to return to the original style of faith practiced by our Lord and Savior and His early followers. We know much more about the life and times of the First Century Jewish world in which Yeshua lived, than the original Reformers knew in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.

Today in the Twenty-First Century, Protestant Christianity is indeed substantially different than Roman Catholicism, albeit its differences with Catholicism vary from denomination to denomination. Those in mainline Protestant denominations such as the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, or the Presbyterian Church, claim to believe that salvation is by grace through faith, and

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that Holy Scripture must be our final authority. **As Messianic Believers, we should certainly and wholeheartedly agree with these foundational understandings.** But at the same time, we know that these three denominations, and the many more that exist, are ultimately man-made institutions and that as such they have their flaws. Each one of them, or a branch of each one of them, has in some way compromised with the Word of God on some issue that we will often take for granted as Believers. Surely, if some of the early Reformers were with us today, they would be speaking against the ills of adultery, fornication, homosexuality, abortion, and the overall decline of morality. They would be flabbergasted as the infection of liberalism in much of the Christian (as well as Jewish) world, and the relegation of the stories of Scripture as part of the Judeo-Christian “mythos.” They would be appalled to see the direction that much of the established Church has gone.

Why some of these sins are becoming rampant in mainstream Christianity today is a complicated issue, and one that varies from group to group. There is no clear-cut answer to why some of these things are happening, aside from the simple fact that humans have inherited a fallen sin nature from Adam, and that the Bible tells us that there will be apostasy in the Last Days. Specifically, the Messiah tells us that lawlessness, or a departure from the instruction of Torah or Law of Moses, will become commonplace:

“Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

Yeshua stated that as a consequence of lawlessness increasing, that love for the brethren will grow cold. Oftentimes, sin is focused on one’s self, and one’s own personal desires or lusts, not on helping others, and certainly not on helping others grow or mature spiritually.

The Apostle Paul reemphasized this concept by describing how the apostasy or falling away from the faith, must occur before Yeshua can return:

“Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction” (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The antimessiah/antichrist is called the “man of lawlessness,”¹ indicating that he will have no regard whatsoever for the Torah or the Law of God. He will have no respect for the eternal precepts of the Lord and discard them and speak against them (cf. Revelation 13:6).

Prophetically speaking, whether we like to hear about apostasy or not, it is going to happen. Is the decline of morality and the departure of too much mainstream Christianity from the foundational truths of God’s Word part of this apostasy? *Very sadly, the evidence is not in the Church’s favor.* If Christians are not willing to stand up to the evils of society, and many continue to compromise themselves with the world, things will only get worse and not get better.

¹ Grk. *ho anthrōpos tēs anomias* (ὁ ἄνομος τῆς ἀνομίας).