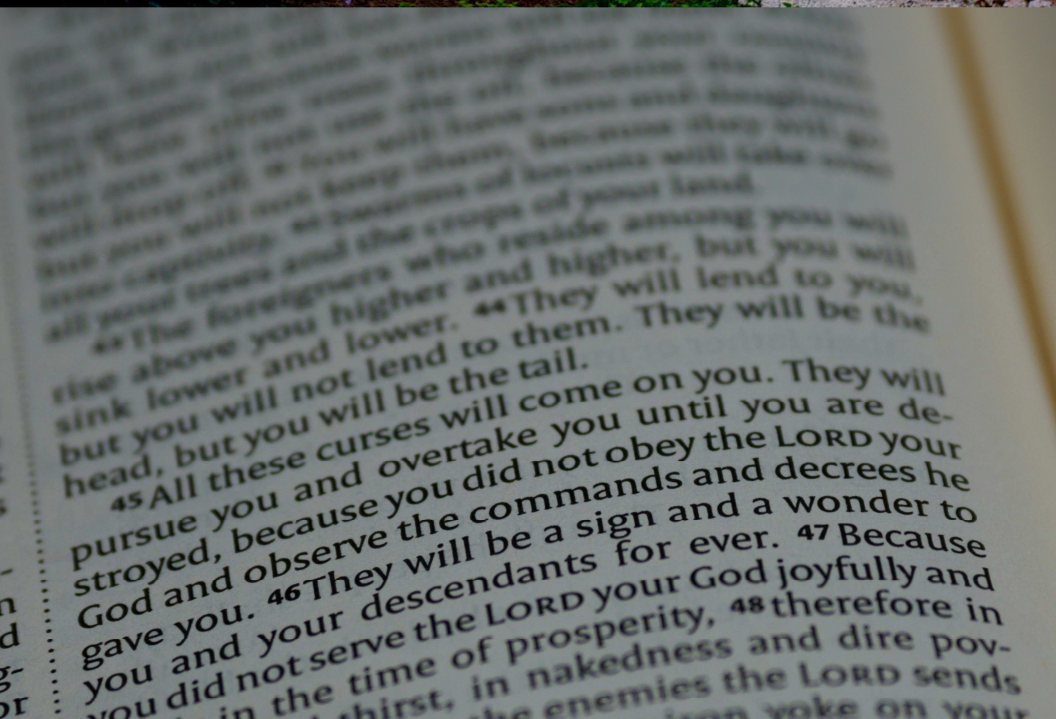


# OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries  
and MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS



APRIL 2024

WHAT DOES IT MEAN  
TO HAVE A TORAH FOUNDATION?

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## STATEMENT OF BELIEF

*Outreach Israel Ministries  
and Messianic Apologetics*

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts

All Believers in Israel's Messiah are to be regarded as a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to respect one another in mutual love as brothers and sisters, and are to work together for the salvation of the Jewish people and return of Israel's Messiah.

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be studied and heeded by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the Believers after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

*For a fuller Statement of Faith, consult the OIM website*

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# OLM UPDATE

April 2024

J.K. McKee

Throughout today's broad Messianic movement, there is a common stress that all of God's people need to have a *Torah foundation* in their theology. **But what**

**does it actually mean to have a Torah foundation?** Many people you will encounter, who stress that Messiah followers need to have a Torah foundation, do not actually know what they mean when they say this. Regardless of how rigid or permissible one may be, with various matters of Torah—each and every one of us needs to evaluate what it means to have a Torah foundation.

Yeshua Himself emphasized that the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms foretold of Him (Luke 24:44). So, an absolutely minimal Torah foundation would see it as a necessary component of Biblical history, and Messianic prophecy expectation. Various theological traditions which believe that the Torah's commandments have been abolished for the post-resurrection era, could still nonetheless be said to have a "Torah foundation," if approaching it from the perspective of Messianic expectation.

Far more frequently, though, those who stress a need for Believers to have a Torah foundation, do so with an emphasis that Jewish and non-Jewish Messiah followers today, need to be following its instruction in some significant way. But this, in and of itself, can demonstrate a great deal of variance. It definitely involves people needing to study the weekly Torah portions, and letting its stories and lessons inform them about their ethics and morality. More tangibly, beyond Bible study, a Torah foundation would involve following or participating in major aspects of what has commonly been labeled as "Torah observance": remembering the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, the appointed times/*moedim*, eating a kosher style of diet—

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A TORAH FOUNDATION?

with attendance and membership in a Messianic congregation or synagogue something to be preferred. Beyond this kind of Torah foundation can involve those who can be either (1) involved in some kind of Orthodox Jewish style of observance, incorporating many traditional interpretations and /or high employment of extra-Biblical Jewish literature at the level of Scripture, or (2) those whose Torah foundation means returning to a kind of (hyper-)patriarchy, paralleling Ancient Near Eastern clannism, often devoid of traditional Jewish approaches.

The vast majority of people, who consider themselves to be "Torah observant," sit within a relatively safe window of being actively involved in a Messianic congregation, where the good news of Yeshua the Messiah is lifted up as central to our faith. Yet, a Torah foundation in one's reading of the Bible, appreciating the Tanach (OT) as the Bible of Yeshua and the Apostles, and wanting to incorporate its principles of holiness and godliness into one's life—still requires Messianic Believers to trace some theological development for themselves. As obvious as it may be, none of us—Jewish or non-Jewish—are the original audience to whom the Torah was given: Ancient Israel in the Ancient Near East. Each of us have to navigate, and even negotiate, what we mean by having a Torah foundation, as something important to a living and active faith in Israel's Messiah.

## The Validity of the Torah

While different theological traditions are seen to have varied approaches to the validity or relevance of the Mosaic Torah for Messiah followers, on the whole, your average evangelical Christian does not tend to think of the Tanach or Old Testament as being too relevant for their life today. Even though the Tanach was the "all Scripture" referred to in 2 Timothy 3:16, there are too many incorrect, crystalized understandings in contemporary Protestantism, when it comes to the issue of the Law. Many of these misunderstandings are based in half-verses or statements cherry-picked out of context. A great number of these misunderstandings come from poor Bible literacy. The significant bulk of these misunderstandings, though, come from what can be a simplistic religious culture, and a widespread spirituality bereft of a desire to follow any code of conduct or commandments. **There are significant obstacles to be overcome, to adjusting a**

person to see God's Torah and its instruction, as having some high degree of relevance for the behavior of born again Believers.

Many are seen to begin changing their theology, when encountering Yeshua's statements of Matthew 5:17-19 in His Sermon on the Mount. These words afford some kind of significant continuance to Moses' Teaching, albeit with His fulfillment composing the definitive interpretation and application of it. But what does one do, when encountering the statements of Paul, in particular the claim that Believers are not "under the Law" (Romans 6:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 9:20; Galatians 3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18)? Does this not mean that Believers do not have to concern themselves that much with the Torah's commandments? Many are able to textually see how "under the Law" can indeed be interpreted as being subject to the Torah's condemnation and penalties upon sinners—a minority interpretation witnessed throughout a great deal of post-Reformation history.

When people are able to make alterations, to how they approach the Messiah's fulfillment of the Torah, and "under the Law" meaning condemnation upon sinners—they are then usually prepared to sort through the details involving other Pauline passages. Some of these passages may involve biased translations from the Greek source text into English (i.e., Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:24; 1 Timothy 1:9), but some of them may involve some kind of ancient background issues (i.e., Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 3:2, 5). Some passages are more complicated (i.e., 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23; Ephesians 2:15), and so an alternative approach can take some time to really sort through. Many have struggles, though, with interpreting the Pauline Epistles from an original audience first perspective—although it will definitely open one up to recognizing many of the Jewish and non-Jewish issues the First Century Body of Messiah was sorting through, which much of contemporary evangelicalism ignores.

The process can, surprisingly for some, be enjoined with the thoughts and proposals of Bible scholars and interpreters—who have been clear to indicate in various commentaries and technical works, how the Apostle Paul may not be as anti-Torah as he has been frequently interpreted. *Paul has to be interpreted as a Jewish emissary, reaching out with the good news of Israel's Messiah to the pagan*

*world*. This can serve as confirmation, at times, that one has not completely gone out of bounds, in wanting to afford some kind of post-resurrection era validity to the Law.

## The Torah as the Foundation of All Scripture

When I was taking Old Testament Theology at Asbury Seminary (Spring 2008), one of my textbooks (John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003]) made what some would consider to be provocative statements about the Scriptures. Essentially what was communicated is that the conviction of the New Testament is that the Old Testament is **the Bible**—and what is commonly regarded as the New Testament, is really a series of footnotes or an appendix, onto the Old Testament. Certainly I can see how many contemporary Christians would be aghast at such a statement. Yet the point made is how the New Testament is tirelessly incomplete without the Old Testament. Few Christians understand how deeply the vocabulary and concepts of the Old Testament are embedded in the New Testament—beyond obvious quotes made from “the Scriptures.” (For a good idea about how this can work, consult the massive G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007].)

Within today's Messianic movement, many people do not have the problem which many contemporary Christians have: we recognize the valuable place of the Tanach within the scope of God's revelation. **Today's Messianic community, in some way, has a Torah foundation.** But what this actually means in terms of the totality of Holy Scripture, can certainly vary.

There are many people in the Hebrew Roots movement who make a reverse mistake of many Christians: the Torah or Pentateuch becomes the only relevant Scripture to their theology and spirituality. If something is not specifically mentioned or present within the Torah, then it can become something entirely suspect, if not rejected. The principle of progressive revelation (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2), with God steadily revealing His plan to humanity, may not apply: the Torah is all which really matters. Do recall some of the major conflicts in the

Gospels which Yeshua had with the Sadducees: a Jewish sect which quantitatively denied the doctrine of resurrection (Mark 12:18; Matthew 22:23; Luke 10:27). The reason the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead, was because they did not see it explicitly spoken of in the Torah, the only Scriptures they accepted as valid.

People, within the Messianic Jewish sphere of influence, tend to be quite keen to recognize that the tradition of reading the weekly Torah portion is important, as is understanding the foundational accounts and instructions of Moses' Teaching. Messianic people also recognize how while you cannot have a house without a foundation, a house has to compose *more* than just a foundation. The discipline of examining an associated Haftarah from the Prophets, along with the weekly Torah portion, is doubtlessly helpful. On the whole, when recognizing a Torah foundation—and with it the formation of Ancient Israel as God's vehicle by which to declare His goodness to the world at large—today's Messianic movement does so with the intention of wanting to stress Biblical unity and continuity. God's plan for His Creation began in Genesis, and it will conclude in Revelation. God's intention is to restore humankind to what was lost in Eden. God has to take significant steps in order to do this, both through the people of Israel and the Messiah Yeshua. God's immutable character does not change (cf. Malachi 3:6), yet the results of significant points of His salvation can see various dynamics altered (cf. Hebrews 7:12).

A regular examination of the Torah, is going to change any person who submits to its instruction. While many have the impression that Torah study is something which mainly involves sorting through various commandments and their applicability—Torah study also very much includes understanding the deliverance of Ancient Israel, and God preparing them for the Promised Land. The significant majority of one's reading the Torah, is encountering the Israelites in the wilderness, the struggles they faced, and indeed the obstinance they demonstrated. When many people read the Torah, they are actually asked questions regarding the limitations of their own humanity, and whether or not if they had been in the place of the Ancient Israelites, they would have actually done anything differently. Consequently, many of the same questions and issues are revisited throughout the Prophets, Writings, and Apostolic Scriptures.

## The Torah for Ancient Israel

Messianic people who consciously commit themselves, to having some kind of Torah foundation in their Bible reading and theology, have a number of challenges they are probably not aware of. In my family's three decades (since 1995) of being involved within the Messianic movement, most people within today's Messianic community approach their reading of the Torah or first five books of the Bible, from one of two perspectives: (1) they read the Torah as though it were written more-or-less directly to them in the Twenty-First Century, or (2) they read the Torah incumbered by a great deal of Orthodox Jewish commentaries and materials (i.e., the *ArtScroll Chumash*). For sure, there is a *place* for personal reading and reflection upon the Torah, as there is a *place* for factoring in various Rabbinical perspectives and views. Yet as obvious as it may be, the most common error made by Messianic people reading the Torah, **is in failing to read it for its original audience first.**

The Torah's instruction, forming the foundation of Holy Scripture, was originally given to the Ancient Israelites in the Ancient Near East. Many of its commandments are specific, in that they were to regulate the economy and society of Ancient Israel, as soon as they took possession of their inheritance in the Land of Canaan. Many of the instructions of the Torah, were given with a Bronze Age level of technology in view. While surely important instructions to review and be informed by, there cannot be an easy one-for-one transference into our modern time. Various centuries of Jewish and Christian examination between the Fifteenth/Thirteenth Century B.C.E and today, bear witness to how scholars have instead often approached these kinds of Torah regulations, for probing the character and intentions of God. God was concerned with the Israelites' agriculture, for example, and so He would surely be concerned for human beings and their sustenance today. What might the Torah's direction for Ancient Israel in Canaan, communicate to those who are farmers or ranchers?

Perhaps some of the most debated parts of the Torah, as witnessed throughout Biblical Studies for the past century-and-a-half, concern those areas where the Pentateuch closely parallels various areas of Ancient Near Eastern paganism. What similarities and differ-



ences are there between the Biblical accounts of Creation and the Flood, and the Mesopotamian myths? The critical tradition has widely advocated the Torah to not be a product of Mosaic origin or oversight, but rather the redaction together of disparate sources after the Babylonian Exile in the Sixth Century B.C.E. While today's Messianic movement will seldom see anyone advocate adherence to the JEDP Documentary Hypothesis, in stark contrast one will often encounter some of the most fundamental views of the composition of the Torah represented—such as it being preserved 100% without error since Mount Sinai. A conservative approach to the composition of the Torah and Tanach, would not just dismiss Ancient Near Eastern or human factors—including the likelihood of further edits to the text of the Torah, in later centuries by figures such as Ezra the Priest (b.*Sanhedrin* 21b; also review the perspectives broadly offered by R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969].).

## Returning to the Values of Yeshua and the Apostles

The main impetus, for non-Jewish Believers genuinely being convicted by the Holy Spirit, in wanting to have a Torah foundation for their theology—is to return to the values and practices of the First Century Believers. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, which saw the huge rise in non-Jewish Believers entering into Messianic congregations, the main engine behind much of this was wanting to connect to “Jesus in the feasts,” and understand His prophetic fulfillment of the appointed times in His First and Second Comings. For many, this followed with attendance at a Messianic congregation, participation in *Shabbat*, weekly Torah study, and being more quantitatively exposed to various aspects of Torah observance, and both Jewish tradition and the Jewish experience.

While many people are crying out for a more authentic spiritual experience, witnessing how the evangelical Protestantism of the late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries is not necessarily the faith of the original Apostles—there are some other, more deep seated reasons for many wanting a Torah foundation. When a Bible reader approaches Matthew 5:17-19, and explicitly sees that the Messi-

ah's intention was to fulfill, and not abrogate the Law of Moses—this does not often translate into a great deal of popular Christian preaching or teaching. The Messiah's teachings and value system are supposed to be things which are in correlation and continuity with Moses, not disparity. The same holds true for the Apostles as well. Many are looking for a place where Biblical wholism is highly valued, rather than a compartmentalized view of the Bible—one which would mainly look at God's revelation in the Tanach or Old Testament as being present for little more than dusty history.

It can easily be overlooked sometimes, but wanting to connect to tangible things like *Shabbat*, the appointed times, or a kosher style of diet—are not the only reasons why many evangelical Protestant Believers have been led by the Lord into the Messianic movement. ***Look at the state of Western Christian ethics and morality.*** In the 1990s and into the 2000s, the issues which were present regarded a wide variety of heterosexual sins. The 2010s upped the game with homosexual sins taking more publicity. And now in the 2020s, transgenderism and who knows what else, is a live matter. Whether people know it or not, when you advocate a theological system where Moses' Teaching and the Tanach Scriptures have been invalidated—you not only have an incomplete approach to the Apostolic Scriptures—but you have spiritually invoked lawlessness to prevail. It has wreaked unspeakable havoc on the contemporary Christian system, with few signs indicating that it is going to stop (cf. Matthew 24:12).

The value system, which was employed by Yeshua and the Apostles, was found in their Bible, the Tanach. For certain, born again Believers should regard the interpretation and application of the Tanach, provided by Yeshua and the Apostles, as being authoritative and definitive. But Yeshua serving as the Interpreter of Moses's Teaching, is different than completely casting out Moses' Teaching.

## The Torah in the Era of New Covenant

Contemporary Christianity, especially when people encounter much of the Messianic movement, claims that we are New Covenant Believers—and with that, the Mosaic Torah is to be regarded as a thing of the past. Anyone who affirms to have a Torah foundation, is in severe theological and spiritual error, and at the very least is

probably trying to earn his or her salvation.

Yeshua explicitly did claim at the Last Supper/Seder, that the blood He was to pour out, inaugurated the New Covenant (Luke 22:20)—**and the Messiah event is the most important event in human history**. Without the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua, there could be no New Covenant. It is absolutely astounding, how many lay readers and professional interpreters of the Scriptures, tend to (purposefully?) divorce the concept of the New Covenant from its Tanach background. When Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 are specifically reviewed—while the promises of permanent forgiveness from sin, and a new heart are surely present—so also is the explicit word about God’s Torah being supernaturally written upon the heart. The Torah and Tanach Scriptures, more frequently called the Old Testament, are to be supernaturally inscribed onto the heart and mind of a disciple, as much as the Messiah’s own teachings.

Having the right Torah foundation, means that at the base of your understanding of not only reading the Bible—but reviewing God’s plan of history—that the Torah’s accounts and instructions bear great significance and importance to you. It is a mistake, however, to think that the Torah is capable of providing someone with eternal life (Galatians 3:21); it is not. A proper Torah foundation must involve the recognition that our human inability to properly keep its instruction, is to reveal our need for a Redeemer, and bring us to Him (Galatians 3:24). *Moses’ Teaching has to be understood through the prism and effects of the Messiah event*. For many contemporary Christians, this means it is to be disregarded. For today’s Messianic Believers, this means that the instruction of the Tanach is part of a vast tapestry to be investigated, appreciated, and probed. The Holy Spirit which is to write God’s Law onto the heart and mind, is to also empower them with the proper discernment and abilities, to study, interpret, and apply its commandments in the Twenty-First Century.

To be sure, in the life of discipleship, each one of us is going to make various mistakes along the way, as we seek to better establish a Torah foundation for our faith in Messiah (cf. Romans 3:31). This is where the presence of the critical Torah commands of love for God and neighbor come into play. It is also where each of us needs to not only be tempered by His grace in our actions, but often forgive others who are working through various instructions.