

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## M

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**Malachi, Book of:** What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Malachi?

**Approximate date:** 460s B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate, some Left); 400s-100s B.C.E. (some Left)

**Author(s):** Malachi (Right, some conservative-moderate); an unnamed messenger (some conservative moderate, Left)

**Location of prophet/author(s):** somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

**Target audience and their location:** Southern Kingdom Israelites and Jerusalemites

The name Malachi (Heb. *Malaki*, מַלְאָכִי) means “My messenger.” Some have been tempted to believe that the title of this book is generic, as *malaki* is rendered in the Greek LXX as *aggelou autou* (ἄγγελου αὐτοῦ) or “His messenger” (*IDB*, 3:229). The prophecies of Malachi appear in the period following the reconstruction of the Temple in 516 B.C.E., and the return of Nehemiah to Persia in 433 B.C.E. When Nehemiah returned, the Jews had fallen back into sins such as breaking the Sabbath, intermarrying with foreigners, and the priesthood was corrupt and not performing its duties ably (Harrison, 959-960). These are the same sins condemned by Malachi (1:6-14; 2:14-16; 3:8-11). Many lean toward Malachi and Nehemiah being contemporaries, possibly with Malachi’s prophetic ministry occurring between Nehemiah’s departure to Persia and his return to Jerusalem. Most interpreters point to Malachi being written during the Persian period. Nothing is known in the Biblical record of Malachi, behind this as some kind of name or designation.

No specific date is given in the text of Malachi, yet it is clearly post-exilic (*NBCR*, 804; *NIDB*, 616; *ABD*, 4:479), with specific supports for this dating inferred from the text (*ISBE*, 3:226). John Calvin believed that the “messenger” was actually Ezra the Scribe, whereas historically the Church Fathers followed Jewish tradition in ascribing Malachi’s prophecies to a real prophet named Malachi (*ABD*, 4:478). The debate over the name of Malachi as “my messenger” led some throughout Jewish and Christian history to support a view that this is not a proper name, and that another individual, anonymous or otherwise, was this messenger (*ISBE*, 3:226; *EXP*, 7:702). Most scholars, conservative or liberal, have maintained some kind of unity for the Book of Malachi (*ISBE*, 3:226). It is notable that Rabbinic tradition attributed that the men of the Great Synagogue had the ultimate responsibility for collecting and editing the prophetic books (b.*Bava Batra* 14b; *ABD*, 4:485). The Talmud classifies Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all as three separate Prophets (b.*Yoma* 9b; b.*Sukkah* 44a; b.*Rosh Hashanah* 19b; b.*Megillah* 3a).

Some liberals propose that the Book of Malachi is the third in a set of prophecies added on to the prophecies of so-called Deutero-Zechariah (*ABD*, 4:478). Yet, it is notable that not all liberals are united around the idea of Malachi being something other than a personal name. Jewish liberals, in particular, do commonly assert that Malachi was a personal name, even though there are attestations in Rabbinic literature of Malachi being Ezra (b.*Megillah* 15a).

The Hebrew MT of Malachi is in relatively good condition, although the Greek LXX does add some interpretive extrapolations. The Latin Vulgate actually follows the Hebrew more closely. Some expressions seen in Malachi are difficult to translate (Harrison, 961-962; *ABD*, 4:480).

Major themes expounded upon in Malachi are how God as the Great King (1:14) will judge His people (3:1-5; 4:1), but also restore them (3:6-12; 4:2). The message of Malachi emphasizing the certainty of God’s judgment can be seen in how the Prophets’ expectation of Israel being restored had not been fulfilled. Uncontent with waiting on the Lord, His people fell back into their same old sinful patterns (*NBCR*, 804; *ISBE*, 3:228). Malachi rebukes the people for doubting God’s love (1:2-5) and the poor actions of the priests (1:6-2:9). God will judge His own people first (3:5), and the only reason why God has not destroyed Israel is because of His covenant faithfulness (3:6). The people cannot be restored and experience His blessing unless they repent

(3:6-12). A great deal of Malachi is presented in a question-and-answer style of format (*New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1351), with both the people and God asking questions of one another. The Book of Malachi calls the people of God to properly reform themselves (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1268-1269).

Malachi is the last of the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) in the Jewish and Christian book order of the Tanach, and it is also the last book in the Christian book order of the Old Testament. It is notable that the verses marked 4:1-6 in Christian Bibles simply continue as 3:19-24 in Jewish Bibles. Malachi 1:1-2:7 is read as the Haftarah selection for *Toledot* (Genesis 25:19-28:9).

The Apostolic Scriptures appropriate some important themes from the Book of Malachi (Dillard and Longman, 442), notably including a reference to the coming of John the Baptist (3:1; cf. Matthew 11:10).

There is presently no significant Messianic engagement with the Book of Malachi. While verses from Malachi (4:4) may often be quoted as “sound bytes” to encourage people to follow the Torah, the overall message of God's messenger is largely not understood or is underappreciated. Many of today's Messianics believe we are in an hour of restoration, yet when it does not come on the timetable that many are expecting, will we fall into the same pattern as the Jews depicted in the text? Let us hope not, and heed Malachi's message of repentance, patiently waiting for God to perform His complete redemption of the Earth. In a similar manner, let us remember that much of today's Church seems to have reached a plateau, thinking that since so much has been accomplished for God, no new heights can be reached. Too many modern Christians have fallen into the same trap of Malachi's original audience.

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posted 09 November, 2007

**Mark, Gospel of:** What can you tell me about the composition of the Gospel of Mark?

**Approximate date:** late 50s or early 60s C.E.

**Author:** John Mark, secretary of the Apostle Peter

**Location of author:** Rome

**Target audience and their location:** predominantly Roman, later Alexandrian

The majority of conservative scholars are in agreement that the Gospel of Mark was the first of the four Gospels to have been written, with the authors of Matthew and Luke borrowing extensively from it. If we accept that Yeshua the Messiah can predict the future as He predicted the fall of Jerusalem in Mark 13:2, then the composition of Mark can be placed before 70 C.E. If Mark pre-dates the composition of Matthew, Luke, and Acts, then its composition should likely be dated in the late-50s or early 60s C.E. In the past, the Gospel of Mark has gone largely neglected when compared to the larger Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which borrow extensively from it. At least 90% of the material of Mark is repeated in Matthew. But in recent years, because of new studies designed to address the origin of our Gospels, the past neglecting of Mark has been replaced by a renewed interest in Markan studies. Some specialty translations of the New Testament, with a trend started by classics scholar Richmond Lattimore, now place Mark as the first Gospel before Matthew and Luke.

The authorship of the Gospel of Mark is generally believed by conservatives to be John Mark (Acts 12:25; 15:37). He was the son of Mary, whose house provided a meeting place for the Believers in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) and was a companion with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5). Mark deserted Paul and his party at Perga in Pamphylia, and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). He is described as being Paul and Barnabas' "helper," and there was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas about taking him on their second journey (Acts 15:36-39), which resulted in them splitting up. Paul seems to have become extremely displeased about Mark, but later extends greetings to him (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), indicating that he had regained his trust. He also sends for him prior to his death (2 Timothy 4:11).

While not stated in this Gospel internally, it was unanimously agreed by the Church of the Second Century that John Mark authored this Gospel. Papias' fragments, an *Exposition on Oracles of the Lord*, attests that "Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ" (6.13). Irenaeus writes in his book *Against Heresies*, "After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter" (3.1.1). According to these, and other traditions, Mark was the traveling companion of Peter and traveled with him to Rome until the time of Peter's death. In composing his Gospel, Mark is actually writing down Peter's oral account to him. Thus the Gospel of Mark could be described as the life of Yeshua the Messiah as told to Mark by the Apostle Peter. These traditions place Mark being written while Mark was with Peter in Rome prior to his martyrdom. According to the Fourth Century Church historian Eusebius, "Mark, they also say, being the first sent to Egypt, proclaimed the gospel there which he had written and first established churches at the city of Alexandria" (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.16.1). This tradition indicates that after composing his Gospel, Mark was sent to Alexandria and used his written Gospel to proclaim the good news and establish congregations in Egypt.

The historical background for the composition of the Gospel of Mark is generally agreed to have been directed at a Roman audience during the time just prior to the persecution of Believers in the Roman Empire. Compared to the Gospel of Matthew, there are far less quotations from the Tanach (Old Testament) in Mark. This would suggest that his primary audience when writing would have been Roman, and they would not have required extensive quotations from the Tanach to prove the Messiahship of Yeshua, unlike a Jewish audience. Mark goes to some length to explain various Jewish customs of the First Century, and provides internal translations of Aramaic words used to explain to his Roman audience who would be the immediate recipients of his writing. Mark also uses a number of Latin-specific terms as well.

There are some in the Messianic community who believe that the Gospel of Mark was originally written in Hebrew, or possibly Aramaic, failing to account for where Mark was written and its initial target audience. Those who believe this often do not account for the fact that the name of the Gospel is actually *Markos* (Μάρκος) or *Markus*, a name of Latin origin, in fact retained in modern Hebrew translations such as UBSHNT, which uses *Marqos* (מַרְקוֹס). "Some Aramaic expressions, which are retained in the text, are interpreted into Greek and this seems to be evidence that Mark's readers would not otherwise have understood them. This seems to rule out any possibility of Aramaic-speaking readers" (Guthrie, pp 71-72). There is some indication of Semitic influence on the text, as "We have good reason to speak of an Aramaic background to the Greek of the Gospel." However, "the existence of Aramaic sources" are probably "oral; and we can speak of the Evangelist's use of a tradition which ultimately is Aramaic; but to say more is speculation" (*ISBE*, 3:249). Any Semitic sources used in composing the Gospel of Mark are oral at best, indicated by the author's usage of the term "translated" in Mark 5:41; 15:22; and 15:34. Mark's Gospel also employs a fair amount of Latinisms, accounting for a likely Roman audience. Mark's immediate Roman audience would have been familiar with Koiné Greek, as would have the larger audience that would have used it in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Mark's Gospel is a very active text, recording less of the sayings of Yeshua than the other Gospels, but more of His miracles, actions, and other mighty works. This Gospel's primary message is to convey what Yeshua did, and was likely written in a time that would initially encourage the new Believers in Rome. Some expositors place its composition at 64 C.E., and assert that possibly Mark was written just prior to the fire in Rome when Nero set fire to the city and blamed it on the "Christians," the Believers in the Messiah Yeshua. The Believers in Rome had needed their faith in the Messiah assured, and with this background it is likely that Mark wanted to prepare his readers for the inevitable suffering they would endure for believing in "the Jewish Messiah." By recording and featuring the miracles and works of Yeshua, Mark reveals that this Savior is indeed all powerful and worth believing in to those who are skeptical. The material in Mark was widely drawn upon by Matthew and Luke, for the composition of their Gospels. Its place has been assured in the Apostolic canon because of the traditions which attest to Mark having been the traveling companion of Peter, one of the original Twelve Disciples.

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**Mark 7:19:** What does it mean that "Jesus declared all foods clean"? Does this mean that the kosher dietary laws were abolished by the Messiah? I am confused.

Many Christians will readily admit that Yeshua, as a First Century Jew, observed the dietary commandments of the Torah. But, they will say that Yeshua abolished the kosher laws in the Gospels. Did Yeshua truly abrogate these commandments as many Christians believe? Mark 7:18-19 is often used as a proof text to say that the Messiah annulled *kashrut* law:

"And He said to them, 'Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?' (*Thus He declared all foods clean.*)" (NASU).

Many will examine these two verses, here quoted from the New American Standard, and then make their case that Yeshua did indeed "declare all foods clean." But in order to understand what He is truly saying here, we must consider the entire scope of His statements, and examine the Greek source text.

Previously, Mark 7:1-5 tells us, "The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders; and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?'"

Notice that the issue that this group of Pharisees brings against Yeshua relates to His Disciples eating with unwashed hands. These Pharisees held to a tradition that required them to "give their hands a ceremonial washing" (NIV) or "wash the hands to the wrist" (YLT), before eating, which is what Yeshua's Disciples failed to do. This, and related traditions, are described in the Mishnah tractate *Yadayaim*.

It is with this background that Yeshua tells these Pharisees that what goes into a person does not defile him, but it is what comes out of a person that does. This spiritual principle is by far what is most important as Proverbs 12:18 tells us, "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing," as what we say can be administered

as a deadly weapon. However, even though this is true, this does not suddenly negate or make unimportant the need to eat as God has told us. These Pharisees were making an issue out of an extra-Biblical tradition in regard to ritualistic hand washing before eating. Author David Friedman makes the following important observations from his book *They Loved the Torah*:

“In this passage, Yeshua nowhere negated the validity of *kashrut*. To do so would contradict his statement of Matthew 5:17-18, where he said he had not come to abolish the Law. Instead, Yeshua was teaching about the misconceptions of the נטילת ידיים (Hebrew, *n'tilat yadayim*, the ritual hand washing before meals). The group of Pharisees in this text always carried out this ritual hand washing before each meal, believing that not to do so according to their specific method would cause a person to be ritually defiled. Therefore, Yeshua said, ‘To eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.’ That is, not performing the ritual hand-washing ceremony according to the method of this group of first-century Pharisees did not make one impure before God, and thereby did not obligate the person to cleanse himself ritually” (p 25).

Another description of this comes later in Matthew 15:1-2: “Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Yeshua from Jerusalem and said, ‘Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’”

Friedman makes another important observation, “In Matthew 15:2, [this] is considered a type of ‘tradition of the elders.’ In the Greek text παραδοσιν των πρεσβυτερων (*paradosin ton presbuteron*) reflects the Hebrew concept מסורות האבות (*masortey ha'avot*, or ‘traditions of the fathers’) and not a mandated *mitzvah* [commandment] from the Torah. This concept denotes the development of traditions, not necessarily found in the Torah, which deal with how to perform a certain *mitzvah*” (Ibid.).

The Complete Jewish Bible renders Mark 7:19 as “Thus he declared all foods ritually clean,” meaning that it was unnecessary to participate in the extra-Biblical ceremonial hand washings to eat. This rendering could be valid, however the Greek text does not say, “Thus He declared” in it at all. It simply reads *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζω πάντα τὰ βρώματα). Literally what this means is “purging all the foods” (LITV).

There is a debate in Bible translation regarding how *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* should be translated. The majority of modern English versions render it as “Thus he declared all foods clean” (NRSV) or something close. Many English versions render this phrase in parenthesis ( ), indicating the opinion of some that this statement may have been added by a scribe in later centuries to clarify Yeshua’s words. However, there has always been the long-standing minority opinion that “purging all the foods” is the more accurate translation. Robert A. Guelich remarks, “Others view this as a possible anacoluthon drawing an obvious, if sarcastic, conclusion that the digestive process ‘cleanses all foods’” (*Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1-8:26*, Vol. 34a).

In the context of Mark 7, Yeshua says that it is not eating with unwashed hands that makes one unclean, but what goes into a person’s heart. He then finishes His discourse with saying that food, *which Biblically does not include pork or shellfish*, eaten with unwashed hands does not defile a person: “*This is* because it does not enter into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out into the wastebowl, purging all the foods” (Mark 7:19, LITV). That food which is eaten with unwashed or dirty hands is processed by the natural functions of the body and “is eliminated, *thus purifying all foods*” (NKJV).

Two liberal English translations, surprisingly enough, properly render Mark 7:19. *The New Covenant* by Willis J. Barnstone renders it as “since it doesn’t enter the heart but the stomach, and goes into the sewer, purging all foods” (p 68). *The Original New Testament* by Hugh J. Schonfield says, “because it enters his stomach, not his mind, and is evacuated in the toilet” (p 22).

“Thus He declared” is an addition by Bible translators that is not in the Greek text. On the contrary, the text speaks of a person’s bodily elimination of food by excretion. This is confirmed by the parallel passage in Matthew 15:17: “Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?”

Yeshua the Messiah did not abrogate the Biblical dietary commandments in Mark 7. He criticized a group of Pharisees for their ritualistic handwashing and said that food eaten with

unwashed hands was not unacceptable. But at the same time He also said that what is more important is what comes out of a person's mouth. Those of us who follow the dietary commandments need not be harsh to those who do not. We need to speak words of encouragement and life into these people that the Holy Spirit may convict them to fully obey the Lord.

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**Mark of the Beast: What do you believe the mark of the beast is, or will be?**

Revelation 13:16-17 tells us, "And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and *he provides* that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name." The mark of the beast is received by those who follow after the antimessiah/antichrist, and is required for them to conduct in commerce. Given the advent of modern technology and electronic transactions, it is possible to say that the mark of the beast will probably be some kind of microchip or biotechnology implant. There will be seemingly "logical reasons" given by global authorities in the future for the necessity of such implants, including the dangers of identity theft and terrorism. Nevertheless, the eternal fate of those who take the mark of the beast is not a pleasant one:

"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name" (Revelation 14:11).

Consult the editor's article "What is the Mark of the Beast?" for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

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**Matthew, Gospel of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Gospel of Matthew?**

**Approximate date:** early-mid 70s C.E.

**Author:** Matthew the disciple

**Location of author:** Phoenicia, Transjordan, Alexandria (debated)

**Target audience and their location:** the Jewish Diaspora

The Gospel of Matthew demonstrates the most Jewish character of all the Gospels. This is fully realized by its numerous appeals, direct or indirect, to the prophecies of the Tanach that demonstrate the Messiahship of Yeshua. The primary readership of Matthew's Gospel without a doubt was Jewish Believers. This is evidenced by the fact that Yeshua's ancestry from the Patriarchs of Israel is documented (1:1-17); the author does not explain Jewish customs or traditions in the text (which differs substantially from Mark and Luke); he makes references to God as "Heaven" or "the Kingdom of Heaven" consistent with First Century Jewish practice that avoided usage of the Divine Name YHWH; and the author emphasizes Yeshua as the "Son of Man" or the "Son of David." The author wants his readers to know in no uncertain terms that Yeshua is the Messiah and the King of Israel. This does not mean that First Century Jews were Matthew's only audience, but doubtlessly were his primary audience.

Scholars are not in uniform agreement as to when the Gospel of Matthew was composed, as dates suggested range from the early 60s C.E. all the way to the mid to late 80s C.E. This is contingent on the fact of whether or not Yeshua's statement in Matthew 24:2 regarding the destruction of Jerusalem was written down before it occurred or not. Those who accept predicative prophecy may accept a post-70 C.E. composition date of Matthew (given the text's likely reliance on Mark), and this includes many conservative Christians and Messianics.

Some theologians question this text's authorship, as the author does not identify himself in the Gospel. What we do know about this Gospel comes from Christian tradition, which ascribes Matthean authorship. The Second Century Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor, is

recorded as having written, by the Fourth Century historian Eusebius, “Matthew composed his history [*logia*] in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3:39.16). This one statement by Papias, which appears to have been repeated by some of the other Church Fathers, has been interpreted in various ways, some misleading.

The Gospel of Matthew, because of its sheer size, was one of the most frequently used texts in early Christianity. Matthean authorship of this Gospel has been easy to accept because of the fact that Matthew, or Levi, was a tax-collector (9:9), and could seemingly have written a valid record of Yeshua’s life. Greek copies of this Gospel started appearing with the words *kata Matthaion* (KATA MATΘAION) around 125 C.E. (Guthrie, 43). Conservative theologians have no problem accepting genuine Matthean authorship of this Gospel. The controversy over Matthew’s Gospel, however, relates to what Papias means by saying that Matthew wrote “*logia*” (λόγια), a Greek term for “sayings” or “oracles,” “in the Hebrew dialect.” Many, especially in the Messianic movement, interpret this as meaning that Matthew was the originator of a complete text in Hebrew or Aramaic, and that the Greek Matthew we possess today is a translation. (Some Messianics even say that the Greek is invalid.) This presents a problem because “Matthew’s Greek reveals none of the telltale marks of a translation. Furthermore, Matthew’s OT quotations are derived from the LXX [Septuagint] rather than the Hebrew text” (*ISBE*, 3:281).

The ambiguity of the word *logia* has led to several theories, since no ancient Hebrew or Aramaic Matthew, or fragment of such a text, has surfaced that pre-dates our present Greek Matthew. A significant belief proposed is that Matthew composed a list of sayings of Yeshua in Hebrew or Aramaic, which were then used for the composition of a later Greek gospel. This would make this “Hebrew Matthew” be the “Q” or “Source” document (“Q” is an abbreviation for *Quelle*, the German word for “source”) that some theologians believe lies behind our canonical Gospels. If Q is what composed the *logia* that Papias talks about, “then it is possible that Matthew expanded these into a Greek Gospel” (*NIDB*, 631). The problem with this is simply where Q is today, as it would likely have been carefully preserved by the early Believers.

A second possibility is that this text referred to by Papias was a later Hebrew translation of Matthew from the Greek that *post-dates* the Greek Matthew we have today. This would require that any Hebraisms used by Matthew in his Gospel be oral, as “The gospel traditions undoubtedly once circulated in oral Aramaic; but the written gospels are Greek books, and the basic source for Matthew and Luke was unquestionably a Greek work, the Gospel According to Mark” (*IDB*, 3:304). This view advocates that Matthew borrowed from Mark’s Gospel, coming from the Apostle Peter’s viewpoint, and repeats Mark’s material, adding to it where necessary, to confirm its Apostolic authority.

Many weighing the evidence (including the author) believe that Matthew’s Gospel was composed using both Mark’s Gospel and the Hebrew or Aramaic *logia*, notes that had been previously compiled by Matthew. There is *no hard evidence* that Matthew as a complete Gospel was originally written in Hebrew, pending the discovery of a legitimate text that pre-dates our present Greek Matthew; **at best the *logia* that Papias describes would be what some believe is Q.**

A third possibility is simply that “in the Hebrew dialect” is synonymous to “in a Jewish style.” In other words, Matthew’s Gospel was originally a Greek document that incorporated Hebraic sources, and then everyone who read it interpreted it as best as possible. This seems to be the default position of many commentators on this text.

The language question is highly contingent on the fact of establishing where Matthew’s Gospel originates. The earliest quotation of this text appears in the Second Century *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (1:1), written by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (Gundry, 163). Antioch was a Greek-speaking city. “Other specific suggestions are that the gospel originated in Phoenicia or in a Transjordan situation or in Alexandria” (Guthrie, 39). Caesarea has also been suggested as a place of origin (*Ibid.*). All of these places adjacent to the Land of Israel, with the exception of Transjordan, spoke Greek as their primary language. If Matthew’s Gospel was indeed composed in one of these cities, then it points to a Jewish audience in the Diaspora, which on the whole did not speak Hebrew or Aramaic as its primary language.

Theologically speaking, the Gospel of Matthew is the broadest sweeping of all the Gospels, covering the most amount of material. Its content is focused around five specific narratives: the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7), Missionary Discourse (ch. 10), Parable Discourse (ch. 13), Kingdom Discourse (ch. 18), and Eschatological Discourse (ch. 24). More than a few theologians have tried to explain these five separate “parts” of Matthew as the author setting up a parallel to the Pentateuch or the Torah. In actuality, such claims appear to be overstated as they often ignore the remainder of Matthew’s content. It is notable, however, that much of Matthew’s usage of Tanach quotations is done so in a very midrashic style, requiring one to be very familiar with First Century Jewish hermeneutics. Matthew does not go to great lengths explaining First Century Jewish customs or traditions, nor explaining the historical context of the events as Luke does. When reading Matthew, one must have a knowledge of First Century Judaism, and a strong foundation in the Tanach.

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**Matthew, Hebrew Gospel of:** I have encountered some Messianics who believe that an ancient Hebrew text of the Gospel of Matthew has been discovered, and they claim that this is primary to our existing Greek texts. I find this unbelievable. Do you have any comments on this?

There is a text floating around the Messianic community that is called the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, with an English translation of it produced by George Howard (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995). He had to reconstruct this text from a Fourteenth Century Jewish work called *Evan Bohan*. The text of the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* is part of a larger Jewish work entitled *Evan Bohan*. This was compiled by a Spanish Jew named Shem Tov ibn Shaprut (or Shafrut), and completed in 1385. The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* comments, regarding who he was, that he was a “Spanish philosopher, physician, and polemic; born at Tudela in the middle of the fourteenth century... While still a young man he was compelled to debate in public, on original sin and redemption, with Cardinal Pedro de Luna, afterward Pope Benedict XIII. This disputation took place in Pamplona, Dec. 26, 1375, in the presence of bishops and learned theologians...As a Talmudic scholar he carried on a correspondence with Sheshet. At Tarazona he completed his ‘Eben Bohan’ (May, 1380 or 1385), a polemical work against baptized Jews. As a model and guide for this work, which consists of fourteen chapters, or ‘gates,’ and is written in the form of a dialogue, he took the polemical ‘Milhamot Adonai’ of Jacob ben Reuben, falsely attributed to David Kimhi...Ibn Shaprut translated portions of the Four Gospels into Hebrew, accompanying them with pointed observations; answers to the latter, written by a neophyte named Jona, also exist in manuscript” (Richard Gottheil and Meyer Kayserling (n.d.). *Ibn Shaprut*, Jewish Encyclopedia. Retrieved 15 July, 2005, from <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/>>).

Portions of the Gospel of Matthew, written in Hebrew, are in this text, and are followed by commentary by Shaprut refuting the Messiahship of Yeshua and central doctrines of our faith. As Howard must note, “Shem-Tob’s Matthew, as printed above, does not preserve the original in a pure form. It reflects contamination by Jewish scribes during the Middle Ages” (George Howard, trans., *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, 178). Howard, taking this manuscript, did his best to reconstruct it into a narrative similar to the canonized Matthew from the accepted Greek texts of Scripture.

The text in which the so-called *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* appears is not a Biblical manuscript or codex, but rather a Jewish theological anti-missionary work, compiled by Shem

Tov ibn Shaprut, who was a Jewish apologist. This work was designed to refute the actions of those Jews who in the Fourteenth Century had gone through Christian conversion. Included in this work was his version of the Gospel of Matthew, which was translated from Greek and/or Latin sources available by the ecclesiastical authorities of his day, as demonstrated by the inclusion of various Greek and Latin words in the Hebrew text. The University of Leiden in the Netherlands has a complete copy of one of the revised editions of his original work from 1584. This work is described as “a discussion on the articles of Christian belief. The thirteenth book, exhibited here, (incorrectly called the twelfth book) is a translation and a critique on the Gospels, starting with Matthew” (University of Leiden Bible Collection <<http://ub.leidenuniv.nl/bc/tentoonstelling/Judaica/object7.htm>>, accessed 15 July, 2005). Apparently, Shem Tov ibn Shaprut was only able to critique Matthew’s Gospel, but there is no doubt that if he could, he would have translated and critiqued the remaining Gospels, if not the entire Apostolic canon, to use in his anti-missionary work.

A few Messianics believe that this text is authentic, and is primary to the Greek version of Matthew that most Bibles are translated from. We contacted the American Bible Society ([www.americanbible.org](http://www.americanbible.org)), which handles all of the issues regarding textual criticism in the United States, concerning this text, and we were told that it is not consulted by New Testament textual critics and is not considered a legitimate text. This organization is highly credible, and involves textual critics from many Christian denominations and all major branches of Judaism. This text, while being extant as part of an anti-missionary work, is presently not recognized as a legitimate text to use in textual criticism by either the United Bible Societies or the American Bible Society, who publish the critical texts used for most modern Jewish and Christian Bible versions.

Messianics will often justify their belief in a written Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, that pre-dates our Greek copies of this Gospel, from quotations of the Church Fathers. Papias was the bishop of Hierapolis in the early Second Century, and is quoted by the Fourth Century historian Eusebius as stating, “Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able” (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16). This may be an attestation that by the end of the First Century, there was a Hebrew text from Matthew that existed, but whether or not this is primary to our Greek Matthew is conjecture. Michael L. Brown points out in an unpublished article entitled “Recovering the ‘Inspired Text,’” “With the exception of Jerome, none of the other church fathers seemed to have any first hand knowledge of Matthew’s ‘original’ gospel; they were simply repeating what they had heard. Moreover, the statement of Papias is open to widely divergent interpretations, and Jerome’s own testimony is difficult to evaluate, since he makes reference to either *two* or *three* gospels, called by various names, which he either saw, translated, or transcribed, and apparently *none* of these gospels is our canonical Matthew!” (pp 8-9). Howard validly recognizes in his *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, “Whether Papias’ ‘oracles’ is a reference to the canonical Matthew or to some other document has been vigorously debated” (Howard, 157). We cannot conclude with any accuracy at all if this text being spoken of by Papias pre-dates the ancient Greek text, although it is an attestation that a Hebrew or Semitic document from Matthew may have existed in the late First or early Second Centuries.

If the Gospel of Matthew had indeed originally been written in Hebrew, and this text alluded to had been a primary document, there would have been extreme care taken to preserve this text by early Christians, and it would exist, or fragments of it would exist today. What is possibly being spoken of here is that this version of Matthew was used for the evangelization of Hebrew-speaking Jews, and is a translation of the ancient Greek text, which would have been composed first, and primarily for a larger Jewish audience which did not speak Hebrew, especially considering how Matthew wrote his Gospel. Many conservative scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was written before Matthew, in the late 50s or early 60s C.E., and was written by John Mark (*Exposition on Oracles of the Lord* 6.13; *Against Heresies* 3.1.1) based on Peter’s account of Yeshua’s life on their way to Rome and that Matthew became an expanded Gospel based on Mark. This would place Matthew’s being written probably in the mid 60s C.E., prior to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans, or possibly even after the destruction of

Jerusalem in the early to mid 70s C.E. We are not discounting the possibility that Matthew may have originally been written in Hebrew (and certainly not denying that Mattityahu or Mattai is a Hebrew name), but we do not have any extant text that has proven to be older than our current Greek texts, of which there are hundreds of codices, and thousands of extant fragments. One only needs to look at the opening index of a critical edition Greek New Testament to discover this.

The current Hebrew text of what is commonly called the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* is not a text that was discovered by the early textual critics of the Nineteenth Century, neither was it discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1946 or at Qumran in Israel in 1947, the two major discovery sites of ancient Biblical or related texts in the past century. There are no ancient fragments of any Hebrew text of Matthew, as the source of this Hebrew Matthew is Medieval in origin.

It is clearly documented that the so-called *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* does not come from sources that would advocate a belief in Yeshua. It comes from a work refuting a belief in Yeshua, and there is some errant theology in this text that is often not recognized by proponents of it. This may come because some proponents of a Hebrew Matthew are blinded out of a desire to want to have a “Hebrew New Testament,” so that they are willing to accept a text that has errant doctrine in it, and because they are not objective enough so as to test it theologically against the Greek texts of Scripture. Howard, however, is quite honest by commenting, “In regard to theology, Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew is heretical according to the standard of traditional Christianity. It never identifies Jesus with the Messiah. John the Baptist is given an exalted role (even takes on messianic traits)...Shem-Tob’s text envisions the salvation of Gentiles only in the Messianic era” (Ibid, 234).

For the purpose of proper comparison, we will be comparing George Howard’s English translation of the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (HGM) against the New American Standard 1995 Update (NASU). This is only a selection of the problems that our ministry has with it:

#### Matthew 1:1

“These are the generations of Jesus the son of David the son of Abraham” (HGM).

“The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* does not identify Yeshua as “the Messiah” or “the Christ” as the Greek version does, from its opening lines. If this is an anti-missionary work, we would expect most references to Yeshua being the Messiah to be removed.

#### Matthew 1:18

“The birth of Jesus was in this way:) It came to pass when his mother was betrothed to Joseph, before he knew her, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit” (HGM).

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* does not speak of the birth of “Yeshua the Messiah” or “Jesus Christ,” but instead the birth of *Yeshu*. *Yeshu* is a shortened Hebrew form of the name *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ), which means “Salvation,” purposefully designed to eliminate the Messiah’s ability to save people from their sins. The Messiah’s name in the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew is spelled as יֵשׁוּ, with the specific intent of the reader not to pronounce it as “Yeshua” or “Salvation.”

Howard notes that “The explanation given for this change is that יֵשׁוּ stands for שְׁמוֹ וּזְכוּרוֹ שָׁמַיָּה [yimach sh’mo u’zikro], meaning: ‘may his name and memory be blotted out.’ Whatever can be made of this story, the spelling יֵשׁוּ for the name of Jesus became common in medieval Jewish polemics and can be found even in the Talmud (cf. b. Sanh. 43a)” (Ibid., 207).

**Matthew 1:21**

**“She will bear a son and you will call his name Jesus because he will save my people from their sins” (HGM).**

**“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (NASU).**

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* says that Yeshua “will save my people” as opposed to “save His people.” This is a direct attack against the Messiah’s Divinity, because only God and He alone can save people from their sins (Psalm 79:9). The clear reference to the Messiah as saving “His people” is a reference to the Messiah’s ability as God to redeeming human beings and a people called out for God’s own possession (Deuteronomy 4:20; cf. Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9).

**Matthew 3:11**

**“John answered all of them: Behold I truly baptize you in the days of repentance, but another comes mightier than I, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten. He will baptize you with the fire of the Holy Spirit” (HGM).**

**“As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (NASU).**

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* says that the Holy Spirit is a fire, when in context John the Immerser (Baptist) tells those assembled that the Messiah will immerse some with the Holy Spirit, meaning that they will be exalted and given the gift of the Spirit, and others He will immerse with fire, meaning that they will be judged. V. 12 clarifies this by saying, “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Contextually speaking, to be immersed with fire is to be judged eternally, i.e., in the Lake of Fire.

**Matthew 6:9-10**

**“But thus you shall pray: Our father, may your name be sanctified; may your kingdom be blessed; may your will be done in heaven and on earth” (HGM).**

**“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’” (NASU).**

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* does not include the promise of God’s coming Kingdom to Earth in the Lord’s Prayer. Why is this the case? We can only conclude that since this Hebrew text is in the form of an anti-missionary document, then the intent of its author is to present Yeshua as *not* being the One who is to usher in the Kingdom of God upon Earth. The Greek text of Matthew, in contrast, presents the Messiah commanding His followers to pray that God’s Kingdom come to and thus be established on Earth.

**Matthew 7:28-29**

**“While Jesus was speaking these words all the people were greatly astonished at his conduct, because he was preaching to them with great power, not as the rest of the sages” (HGM).**

**“When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes” (NASU).**

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* makes Yeshua as one of “the rest of the sages,” as opposed to One with “authority,” that being God Himself. Yeshua is made as though He is just another scribe or sage or rabbi, as opposed to being higher than them as He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

**Matthew 9:2**

“They brought to him one who was sick with contractions, that is, paralytic, lying upon his bed. Jesus saw their faith and said to the sick man: Have courage my son. It is by the faith of God that your sins have been forgiven” (HGM).

“And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, “Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* has Yeshua telling the paralytic, “It is by faith of God that your sins have been forgiven.” In the Greek version from the NASU, Yeshua directly forgives the man’s sins Himself. The testimony of some Pharisees who criticized Yeshua was that He was a blasphemer because He forgave sins, something that only God Himself could do (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21). The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* skews Yeshua’s Divinity once again.

**Matthew 10:5-6**

“These twelve Jesus sent; he commanded them saying: to the lands of the Gentiles do not go and into the cities of the Samaritans do not enter. Go to the sheep who have strayed from the house of Israel” (HGM).

“These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: ‘Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* prohibits the spread of the gospel to anyone who is not an Israelite. It says not to enter into *eretzot ha'goyim* (אֶרֶצוֹת הַגּוֹיִם), “lands of the Gentiles,” as opposed to not going *eis hodon ethnōn* (εἰς ὁδὸν ἔθνων), “*the* way of *the* Gentiles.” There is a clear difference between the Hebrew word *eretz* (אֶרֶץ) or “land,” and the Greek word *hodos* (ὁδός), meaning “road,” “way,” or “manner” (the equivalent of the Hebrew *derek*, דֶּרֶךְ). The HGM limits the gospel only to those who are physical descendants of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. Howard recognizes this, stating, “This is said only in reference to the Jews. Nothing is said about teaching the Gentile nations or baptizing them. Israel’s superiority over the Gentiles, with no hope in the present world offered to the Gentiles, is maintained to the very end of the Hebrew gospel” (Ibid., 214). The Greek text, in contrast, allows for Yeshua’s followers to go out into the nations, provided they do not follow in the nations’ manner. Yeshua only specifically prohibits His followers from entering the cities of the Samaritans, because the Samaritan religion was a gross mix of Torah-keeping and paganism.

**Matthew 11:4-5**

“Jesus answered them: Go and tell John that which you have seen and that which you have heard: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are revived and the poor are acquitted” (HGM).

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John what you hear and see: *the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, and *the* POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* clearly eliminates the phrase “the Good News is being told to the poor” (CJB), which is a direct quotation from Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners,” with the Septuagint rendering the latter clause as “to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind” (LXE). This is plainly a Messianic prophecy, as He quoted it to the synagogue in Capernaum in Luke 4:18. As Luke 4:28 attests, “And all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things,” and Yeshua was almost thrown over a cliff as a heretic in response to applying this Scripture to Himself. Why does the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* remove this critical Messianic phrase? It is clear that the HGM does not want to present Yeshua as the Messiah, and instead perhaps exclusively as a good person who was just doing good to others, but nothing more.

#### Matthew 12:6

“Truly I say to you that the temple is greater than this” (HGM).

“But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, commenting on the place of the Torah and the Temple, attests that only the Temple is greater than the bread of the presence (12:4). Yeshua, in the Greek versions, attests that He is that which is greater than the Temple. Yeshua can make this statement because He is the Messiah and is God Incarnate, whereas we must assume again that the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* purposefully attempts to downplay who He is.

#### Matthew 16:9-12

“Do you not remember the five loaves and four thousand men how many seahs were left over? Therefore you should understand that I am not speaking of natural loaves but I am saying to you that you should (beware) of the behavior of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (HGM).

“Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets *full* you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets *full* you picked up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* removes Yeshua’s the explanation of criticism of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It only says to beware “of the behavior of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” whereas the Greek version says to beware of their “leaven,” which is defined as “the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” The HGM no doubt removes these references to the Pharisees and Sadducees so as to present them as being relatively innocent in comparison to Yeshua, who had frequent critiques of both parties, both of their teachings and their actions. However, in proper historical context, while Yeshua had criticism of the Pharisees and Sadducees, His theology nevertheless, was closest to that of the Pharisees who believed in the authority of all Scripture (more than just the Mosaic Pentateuch), the resurrection, afterlife, angels, demons, and the Holy Spirit. But, why is there so much missing in the HGM, if not to castigate the Pharisees and Sadducees as not having *anything* wrong with them?

#### Matthew 16:16

“Simon, called Petros, answered and said: You are the Messiah, that is, Kristo, the Son of the Living God, who has come into this world” (HGM).

**“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (NASU).**

If the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* is an authentic Hebrew source written by Matthew, the tax collector Levi, himself, then it has Simon Peter clearly calling Yeshua what appears in its Hebrew text as *Qristo* (קריסטו). *Qristo* is undoubtedly a Hebrew transliteration of *Christos* (Χριστός), the Greek word meaning “Anointed One” that is frequently rendered as “Christ” in most Bibles. Why would Peter be referring to Yeshua as *Qristo* in a Hebrew document supposedly written by Matthew? This is an internal proof of the fact that the HGM is a Fourteenth Century translation from Greek, and possibly Latin, sources. It does not date from the First Century.

**Matthew 17:11-13**

**“He answered them and said: Indeed Elijah will come and will save all the world. I say to you, he has already come, they did not know him, and they did to him according to their desire. (So) they will do to the Son of Man. Then the disciples understood that regarding John the Baptizer he was saying this” (HGM).**

**“And He answered and said, ‘Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist” (NASU).**

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* says that “Elijah will come and save all the world,” whereas the Greek text says “Elijah is coming and will restore all things.” This makes Elijah, or the spirit that Elijah functioned in (which is later applied to John the Immerser), as a precursor to the coming of the Messiah who will save, as opposed to the one who will save. Howard notes that “John the Baptist in the Hebrew text...plays a more exalted role than in the canonical gospels” (Ibid., 219). Later on, he states quite candidly, “John the Baptist is given an exalted role” (Ibid, 234), in contrast to Yeshua who is downplayed. In this passage, Elijah becomes the savior as opposed to Yeshua, who is the Savior. Why is this the case, if not to disprove the Messiahship of Yeshua?

**Matthew 18:11**

**“Take heed lest you judge one of the small lads. I say to you, their angels always see the sons of my father who is in heaven, and the Son of Man has stopped saving the angels” (HGM).**

**“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. *For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost*” (NASU).**

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* completely eliminates the phrase “*For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.*” This may be because of the fact that it does not appear in all Greek texts, but nevertheless it is the principal emphasis of salvation available to all who are spiritually lost. The HGM changes the Scripture around entirely, emphasizing the guardian angels of individuals, and how not all angels can be saved, perhaps a reference to the fact that there are indeed fallen angels that cannot be allowed back into the presence or service of the Creator God. However, the emphasis of Yeshua’s words on the redemption of human souls, and His eternally saving work, is entirely gone from the HGM in these verses.

**Matthew 19:28**

**“Jesus said: Truly I say to you who follow me, in the day of judgment when man sits upon the throne of his glory you also will sit upon the twelve thrones of the twelve tribes of Israel” (HGM).**

**“And Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’” (NASU).**

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* eliminates the final authority of the Messiah as the ruler of Planet Earth, saying that “man sits upon the throne,” whereas the Greek text says that “the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne.” Yeshua, as the Son of Man, is able to dispense authority to His Twelve Disciples, giving them the twelve thrones over the twelve tribes of Israel. In the HGM, this authority of Yeshua over the world is not present, neither is Yeshua’s place of grand exaltation in the Kingdom to come.

**Matthew 20:30**

**“Behold, two blind men came out beside the road. They heard the noise of the multitude and (asked) what this might be. It was said to them: The prophet Jesus from Nazareth is coming. Then they cried out saying: Son of David, have mercy on us” (HGM).**

**“And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’” (NASU).**

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew*, recording the healing of two blind men at Jericho, only says that the men cry out “Son of David, have mercy on us.” Completely eliminated from their declaration is the title “Lord.” The HGM, however, uses the title “prophet.” Why is the title “Lord” removed and replaced with “prophet”? Perhaps it is because the author of the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* wants his readers to think that Yeshua is, *at best*, a “prophet,” and not “the Lord,” that being God who is able to heal people of their infirmities.

**Matthew 23:1-2**

**“Then spoke Yeshua to the crowds, and to his talmidim, saying, ‘On Moshe’s seat sit the scribes and P’rushim. And all that he says to you observe and do. But do not you according to their works, for they say, but do not” (vs. 1-2, HRV).**

**“Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*’” (NASU).**

There is some debate as to the correct rendering from the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* of Matthew 23:1-3, as Howard’s version has “Now all which (they) say to you keep and do,” as opposed to “And all that he says to you observe and do,” as not all versions of the Hebrew Matthew are in agreement. Nevertheless, this verse is used by some as a denial of Pharisaic authority, and that Yeshua was condemning the theology of the Pharisees. This text is used by some in the Messianic community, from divergent versions of the HGM, to deny Pharisaic, and now any traditional, mainline Jewish applications of the Torah, in favor of their own primitive interpretations of the Torah consistent with Karaite Judaism, which today is vehemently anti-Messiah and pro-anti-missionary. The divergence in the Hebrew Gospels of Matthew may be because of poor scribal preservation, or may be because the HGM’s author is trying to prove that Yeshua is not in agreement with the theology of the Pharisees, thus proving Him to be a “rebel,” just like Karaite Judaism is often considered a rebellious form of Judaism by Orthodox and Conservative Judaism today, as it arose in the Eighth-Ninth Centuries C.E. against Rabbinic authority.

**Matthew 24:14-16**

“And this gospel, that is, evungili, will be preached in all the earth for a witness concerning me to all the nations and then the end will come. This is the Anti-Christ and this is the abomination which desolates which was spoken of by Daniel [as] standing in the holy place. Let the one who reads understand” (HGM).

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* identifies the proclamation of the good news or gospel to the whole world as being “the Anti-Christ” and “the abomination which desolates,” whereas the Greek text says that the good news or gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed to the whole world, and this is a sign of the soon to come end-times. The HGM, aside from its heretical theology here equating the preaching of the gospel as being “Anti-Christ,” actually says *zeh anti-qrastos* (זה אנטיקריסטוס) or “this is the *anti-qrastos*” in the Hebrew text, using a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek word *antichristos* (ἀντίχριστος). Howard remarks, “The Hebrew text is difficult, it appears to mean that preaching the gospel to the Gentiles before the end-time is the Anti-Christ and the abomination which desolates. No stronger statement against the salvation of the Gentiles in the present age occurs in Shem-Tob’s Hebrew Matthew” (Ibid., 215).

In response to this, some claim that the HGM author, Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, inserted the term *anti-qrastos* in Hebrew as a textual gloss. This would mean that when readers would examine *Evan Bohan*, they would be pointed to a selection of Scripture that is referred or associated with the “Anti-Christ” by Christian theologians. But this is problematic, because the text of the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* is compiled from this much larger work along with Shem Tov’s commentary against Christians. If this were only a gloss, then this reference to the *anti-qrastos* should have been included exclusively with commentary concerning Matthew 24:14-16, and not in the text itself. This reinforces the thrust of the text which is that salvation is excluded from non-Israelites.

If the theology of this statement is not problematic enough, the fact that the HGM, again supposedly written by Matthew Levi the tax collector in Hebrew, uses a Greek word, proves that its origins are not First Century and it is derived from Medieval Greek and Latin sources.

**Matthew 28:9**

“As they were going Jesus passed before them saying: May the Name deliver you. They came near to him, bowed down to him, and worshipped him” (HGM).

“And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him” (NASU).

The *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* has added the phrase “May the Name deliver you” when the Marys see Yeshua in His resurrected body. This is not in the Greek text. “The Name” very clearly appears in the Hebrew text as *HaShem* (השם), which is a Jewish term that is used to refer to God. But why does this not appear in the Greek text, which simply has Yeshua greeting the Marys and then has them worshipping Him? This is no doubt to prove on the part of the HGM’s writer that Yeshua is not God, and that Yeshua did not resurrect from the dead because He was God. In other words, rather than the worship being focused directly on Yeshua at this time, it is instead focused elsewhere.

**Matthew 28:19-20**

“Go and (teach) them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever” (HGM).

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (NASU).**

By failing to include the phrase, “go and make people from all nations into *talmidim*, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the *Ruach HaKodesh*” (CJB), the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* does not recognize the plurality of the Godhead, as plainly revealed to us in the Scriptures in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is not surprising by any means, because the HGM continually tries to deride the Divinity of the Messiah, the Son of God.

Our opinion of the so-called *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* is the same as the textual critics who work with the ancient manuscripts and manuscript fragments of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, as well as the many ancient translations that are extant such as the Greek Septuagint, Aramaic Targums, Latin Vulgate, Aramaic Peshitta, and related Jewish and Christian extra-Biblical writings. They do not consult the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* for usage in textual criticism, and we believe, as the Jewish sources plainly attest, that this piece of writing is anti-missionary in origin—and *will not confirm* Yeshua as being the Messiah. The theology of the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* greatly diminishes Yeshua’s authority, Divinity, and His Messiahship in critical passages, in addition to using terms derived from Greek and Latin which prove that it cannot be a Hebrew text written by Matthew Levi the tax collector, but rather a Jew in the Fourteenth Century consulting available Christian sources to use for the purposes of proving against who the Messiah is, just like history has recorded for us.

Until an ancient Hebrew Matthew is discovered, which can be validated by objective textual critics such as those of United Bible Societies or the American Bible Society, we are no more convinced of the validity of the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* than they are. We do not believe that this text has any validity to it, and believe that with the available extant texts of Scripture that Matthew originally wrote his Gospel in Greek. This Greek text may have been translated into Hebrew by the late First Century for dissemination to a small group of Jews. The Church Fathers do attest that a Hebrew Matthew may have existed in the early Second Century, but whether this is primary to the Greek Matthew that is used in Bible translations today cannot be proven. We must use the extant Greek texts we have, which can be reliable and which clearly present the good news of salvation in Yeshua—demonstrating His authority, Divinity, and Messiahship.

Messianics who are not historically objective, and do not understand that the gospel message is available to those of all nations, are those who will accept the *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* as being primary to our Greek Matthew. Instead, we must use spiritual discernment and recognize the errant theology in its pages. We also must understand that the God of Israel is much bigger and can inspire His Word in whatever language He wants, and the Greek Matthew presents God as wanting to save all of mankind through the Divine Messiah, Yeshua.

updated 13 November, 2006

**Matthew 10:28:** How can your ministry adhere to an ongoing punishment for the condemned in the Lake of Fire, when Yeshua Himself clearly says that the condemned will be destroyed?

In Matthew 10:28 Yeshua says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” The emphasis of His remark is clearly that we are to fear God, versus fearing human beings. While human beings might have the power to kill a person, God has the power to do something much worse. What this something actually is, however, is debated among expositors.

The traditional view of eternal punishment is that the unrighteous condemned will be eternally tormented in a literal Lake of Fire, concurrent with Revelation 14:11, “And the smoke of

their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” Many evangelical interpreters believe that the unrighteous condemned will be punished in a literal Lake of Fire, with literal fire and smoke and brimstone. Many others, however, believe that the images of fire, smoke, and brimstone are only representative, and that they were the worst images that a First Century Jew could conjure up in regard to God’s punishment on sinners. The metaphorical view of eternal punishment that has arisen in the past few decades, *while adhering to the Lake of Fire as an ongoing punishment*, holds that the images of the Lake of Fire are often representative of the separation that the unrighteous will experience, not to be pressed too literally.

Annihilationism is the idea that the process of being eternally condemned is not something that is ongoing. Rather, what is ongoing is only the affect of being eternally condemned, and the unrighteous are merely snuffed out of existence. The primary Scripture that annihilationism is based on is Matthew 10:28, and annihilationists make the strong point of indicating that Yeshua says to fear Him “who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Since it would seem that God will *destroy* the condemned, it is assumed that this means that rather than punish them indefinitely forever, that He will simply annihilate them from existence. Hence, this is why proponents of this view are often called annihilationists. There are annihilationists present in the Messianic movement, but there are also annihilationists in evangelical Christianity and liberal Christianity as well.

Advocates of annihilationism pay particular attention to the English word “destroy,” and insist that God will “destroy” sinners in the Lake of Fire, when in English itself “destroy” has a wider variety of definitions than just “wipe out of total existence.” Indeed, the main English definitions of destroy include: “to tear down, demolish,” “to ruin,” “to do away with,” and “to kill” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary and Thesaurus*, third edition, p 170). “Destroy” in an entirely English context need not be what annihilationists insist it means. “Destroy” can very well mean existing in a completely decrepit and demolished or ruined state—as opposed to meaning completely gone.

Not surprisingly, the Greek verb *apollumi* (ἀπόλλυμι), used in Matthew 10:28, likewise has considerable variance. Some possible definitions of this verb include: “‘To destroy,’ ‘kill,’ in battle or prison;” “to suffer loss or lose,” “to perish,” and “to be lost” (A. Oepke, “*apollymi*,” in *TDNT*, 67). A related noun, *apōleia* (ἀπώλεια), likewise means “destruction,” “ruin,” “perishing,” or “loss” (Ibid.). AMG notes that in many cases, “the verb must not be thought of as indicating extinction, but only change from one state of being to another. Nothing actually becomes extinct, but everything changes” (p 230). So, when we apply the definition of “*ruin, destroy*” (*BDAG*, 115) for *apollumi*, we cannot insist on a strict definition of “destroy” as meaning “wiped out of total existence.”

On the contrary, when we take into consideration the varied usages of *apollumi* throughout the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, including references to ruined wineskins (Matthew 9:17), lost sheep (Matthew 15:24), and rotten food (John 6:27), it is perfectly valid for one to interpret Matthew 10:28 as meaning something *other than* complete and total annihilation. Synthesizing all of the varied applications of *apollumi*, Matthew 10:28 can be rendered with “fear Him who is able to **utterly ruin** both soul and body.” With this rendering, the reality of an ongoing, eternal punishment is maintained—while recognizing that the condemned sinner is going to undergo a severe change for the worst.

Many are agreed that the closest Hebrew equivalent for *apollumi* is the verb *avad* (אָבַד), as *avad* is typically rendered with *apollumi* in the Greek LXX. *Apollumi* is rendered as *l'avdan* (לְאָבַדְנָה) is used in the UBSHNT in Matthew 10:28, and gives us some clues as to what Yeshua may have orally spoken.

In the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), *avad* can mean “become lost,” “go astray,” “perish,” “be ruined,” or “be carried off” (*CHALOT*, 1). In the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), *avad* can mean “give up as lost,” “let perish,” “destroy,” and “dissipate” (Ibid.). These definitions provide us with the same array of options that *apollumi* gives, regarding how we are to

consider the “destruction” of the wicked as either a complete annihilation, or utter ruin/devastation. In the Hebrew Scriptures, *avad* is used to represent utter defeat (Joshua 1:7), the overthrow of a nation (Deuteronomy 28:51), as well as the taking of a life (Exodus 10:7; Leviticus 23:30; Deuteronomy 7:10, 20; 2 Kings 10:19). *Avad* can likewise refer to the enslavement or loss of a people (Numbers 21:29), as well as broken objects (Psalm 31:12).

*Avad* has the same basic array of meanings as does *apollumi*. From this connection and the uses of *avad*, must we likewise insist upon an annihilation of the unrighteous condemned?

While exegetically, both the verbs *apollumi* and *avad* allow for the “destruction” of the wicked to be something other than annihilation (namely being “utterly ruined” for eternity), the question of what will actually occur is **ultimately one of ideology**. If one believes that a loving God would not eternally torment people, then one’s examination of the Scriptures will reflect this belief. Likewise, if one believes that a loving God would not allow sinners to only be “snuffed out,” and that an ongoing punishment is the only just punishment, then one’s examination of the Scriptures will reflect this belief. But note that the One who will dispense such punishment is God Himself. The punishment that is meted out upon the unrighteous condemned *can only be* something that an Eternal Being can deliver. Are there things worse than being dead for eternity, meaning snuffed out of existence and annihilated? This is a question that will continue to be debated, as each interpreter has to decide for himself which value judgment to make.

**The message of the gospel, though, is that no one has to experience such punishment.** All of us can eternally commune with the Lord and be spared from the eternal fate that awaits those who reject Him.

For a further discussion of this issue, the editor recommends you consult the book *Four Views on Hell*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

posted 29 August, 2007

### **Messianic: What does it mean to be “Messianic”?**

Aside from the fact that semantically, the terms “Messianic” and “Christian” mean the same things—both detailing a belief in the Anointed One or Messiah/Christ—probably the biggest difference between the belief systems of “Christianity” and “Messianism,” if the latter can be termed that, is that being *Messianic* entails a much stronger connection to the practices of the Hebrew Bible or “Old Testament,” such as the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, the appointed times of Leviticus 23, the kosher dietary laws, and regular (often weekly) study of the Torah.

When we refer to being “Messianic” on this website, it is to identify with a readily available movement within the “Christian world” which places a very high emphasis on the Hebraic origins of our faith, most of which are not necessarily emphasized in many Christian churches. Although we would certainly point out that doctrinally there are many similarities between mainline evangelical Christianity and the Messianic movement, there can be differences in regard to ecclesiology (the study of God’s elect) and Torah application. But just as Christianity itself is quite diverse, so is the emerging Messianic movement.

Consult the editor’s article “**Introduction to Things Messianic**” for a more detailed discussion.

updated 13 November, 2006

### **Messianic Judaism, Negativity Toward Two-House Teaching: Why do you think that Messianic Judaism exhibits a great disgust and disdain toward the Two-House teaching? Why can I not get my Messianic Jewish friends to be reasonable and sit down and examine the Scriptures?**

The question of why today’s Messianic Jewish movement is largely negative toward the Two-House teaching of Judah and Ephraim is very complicated. On the one hand, many Messianic Jews feel that Messianic non-Jews who believe themselves to be “returning Ephraim” are trying to usurp the position of being Israel from them, and by extension Judaism as a whole. When a Messianic non-Jew enters into a Messianic Jewish congregation and possibly claims that

he is of the “Tribe of X,” when no proof is given and the Jewish person knows that he is of the Tribe of Judah or Levi, some extreme skepticism is rightly displayed. Furthermore, there are many independent Messianic non-Jews who in a quest to become Torah obedient, disregard or are hostile to a great deal of Jewish custom and tradition as though it has no validity. This negativity toward Judaism is only responded in kind by Messianic Jews who will disregard any Scriptural reference to the restoration of all Israel.

The solution to these problems is not difficult to see on paper, but is rather difficult to emulate in practice. When any of us emphasizes the Two-House teaching of Judah and Ephraim, we must first recognize the Jewish leadership of Israel. Without Judaism and the Jewish people, almost all of us would be lost without any form of Israel, a Bible, and most significantly Yeshua the Messiah. What any of us read about the Two Houses of Israel regarding the division of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms is undeniably written from the perspective of the Southern Kingdom. The Biblical Books of 1&2 Kings and 1&2 Chronicles were compiled from the royal annals of the Kingdom of Judah. It would be best for anyone teaching about the Two Houses of Israel to have it rooted in the history of Scripture and the traditions that we see in Judaism.

If emphasized as a part of the Jewish eschatological expectation, Messianic Jews should hopefully not have a problem with the Two-House teaching—or at least not casually disregard it as “heresy.” Unfortunately because of a great deal of sensationalism, both on the pro- and anti-Two-House side, Messianic Judaism today widely discounts the Two-House teaching as having any validity. This may be in response to the fact that proponents of the Two-House teaching largely *do not emphasize* the unification of the House of Judah, scattered House of Israel/Ephraim, *and* the nations as **eschatology**—ultimately being the message of the restoration of God’s Kingdom on Earth via the return of the Messiah—but instead as some newfound “identity.” Furthermore, Messianic Judaism’s inability to want to discuss this subject in a reasonable manner may be symptomatic of the fact that it does not have a very developed eschatology, as the Two-House teaching is firmly rooted in an understanding of the Last Days.

The only major solution to the negativity that exists in Messianic Judaism today is for Two-House proponents to see how they can refine their understanding so it does not become any kind of “racial teaching,” but rather one that is consistent with how mainline Judaism expects to see all Israel reunited. God is the only One who can identify anyone as “this tribe” or “that tribe,” and ultimately as people from all over the world, whether native born of Israel or not, are involved in the restoration of all Israel. Messianic non-Jews in the Two-House movement need to become more sensitive and appreciative toward Jewish custom and tradition related to the Torah, and recognize the Jewish leadership of Israel. Perhaps then some of the rhetoric that we see against this teaching from Messianic Judaism can be toned down, and we can realistically examine it from the Bible.

For a further discussion of this issue, consult the editor’s article “**The Ephraimite Error: Critical Errors.**”

posted 11 December, 2006

### **Messianic Renewed Covenant: Why does your ministry no longer offer or use the Messianic Renewed Covenant translation?**

The MRC project was originally started in 2002 to produce a viable alternative to some of the Messianic Bible translations that are used today that are either not translated literally (i.e., the Complete Jewish Bible) or from a questionable theological position (i.e., *The Scriptures* by ISR). On the whole, the MRC was originally produced as a hybrid RSV-NASB version, with a great deal of Hebraic terminology added. It was produced from a pro-Torah position, rendering verses such as Romans 10:4 with “Messiah is the goal of the Torah,” as opposed to the more common “Christ is the end of the law.”

It was the original goal of the MRC project to produce a “Field Edition” that would gain the attention of other Messianic teachers and leaders, so that in the future a more definitive translation could be produced with a larger group of consultants. Unfortunately, this did not take place in the 2003-2004 timespan of the MRC’s production and initial publication, and no one has expressed this kind of interest. Because we did not reach our original goals, coupled with some doctrinal changes from TNN Online and Outreach Israel Ministries—the foremost of which is our no longer using the term “Renewed Covenant”—led us to discontinue the project. Furthermore, we do not wish to be accused by any Christian critics of “rewriting” the Bible to fit a particular doctrinal agenda, which some fringe Messianic “versions” produced since the MRC are precisely doing (i.e., *The Restoration Scriptures*).

Many of the issues that the Messianic community presently faces will not be solved with “another Bible version.” In fact, it could be easily argued that another Bible version will only confuse people even more. Our ministry has shifted to produce tools and resources that people can use in effectively interpreting and applying the Scriptures for their lives. A Bible translation can only go so far, because one’s theology is often determined by historical context of a passage, comparison with other Scriptures, and related literature, reasoning with the issues of the text, and Hebrew and Greek grammar. Our energies are now focused on publishing the commentaries in the “**Practical Messianic**” series, which we believe accomplishes these goals very well.

It may be safely observed that until a more definite Messianic theology can be established, with distinct opinions and commentaries developed on books of the Bible, that producing a Messianic Bible version is not something that today’s Messianic community is ready for. It may take one or two decades (or even longer) until this is something that can be done, as this would need to be a broad-based project incorporating a sizeable part of the Messianic community, and leaders who have been trained in the Biblical languages, hermeneutics, and Jewish and Christian history.

posted 28 August, 2006

**Messiah, Confirms the Covenant:** How do you respond to the teaching which says that the Messiah confirms the covenant of Daniel 9:27?

There has been a particular interpretation of Daniel 9:25-27 circulating among many Christians, and to our deep concern, among some Messianic Believers as well. This interpretation claims that it is not the antimessiah/antichrist that makes or confirms the “covenant with many,” but rather that it is actually Yeshua the Messiah. A careful reading of the Biblical text will show this interpretation to be flawed and actually *supportive of antinomianism*. Let us review these verses.

To set the stage, Daniel 9:25-26 tells us “you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.”

The occurrence of the first seven weeks and then the sixty-two weeks took place from the decree issued to Nehemiah that the Temple in Jerusalem was to be rebuilt to the point of Yeshua’s “cutting off.” This cutting off was His crucifixion and death. After this, we are told that “The people of a prince yet to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary” (Daniel 9:26, CJB).

It is important that we understand that the prince who is to come in the future *is not the Messiah*. He is a descendant of the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E., a destruction that took place after the Messiah’s being “cut off.” It is not the Messiah that makes or confirms the covenant in Daniel 9:27, but it is this other leader, for “He will make a strong covenant with leaders for one week of years” (CJB).

The alternative view held by some today is that the Messiah confirmed “the covenant” through His ministry on Earth. Because Yeshua’s ministry lasted roughly three-and-a-half years, it is said that the first half of the Seventieth Week has already occurred. All that remains now is a three-and-a-half year Great Tribulation where the Holy Spirit will be poured out incredibly upon Believers so they can perform miracles greater than He did.

Although we will not deny the admonitions in Scripture of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the saints in the Last Days (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18), Yeshua warns us very strongly that “False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect” (Mark 13:22, NRSV; cf. Matthew 24:24). Adherents of this interpretation, many of whom are found in charismatic or Pentecostal-type arenas, are usually led more by their emotions of wanting to see “the Spirit poured out,” rather than rationally and realistically exegeting the Scriptural text. There can be a danger in wanting to see “the Spirit poured out” that can cause misinterpretations.

In addition to not accepting this interpretation because the “he” of Daniel 9:26-27 is the prince of the people who destroyed Jerusalem (the Romans), we as Messianics must not accept it even more so on the basis of what Yeshua’s “cutting off” is believed to be. As it is commonly asserted that if it is Yeshua who confirmed “the covenant,” likewise then He is the One who will put “a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” (Daniel 9:27b). According to most adherents we have encountered, who are in mainstream Christianity, this means that He terminated all the functions of the Torah or the Law of Moses from the animal sacrifices to the Sabbath to the Biblical holidays to the dietary requirements. This, as should be obvious, is a position that we, as Torah obedient followers of the Lord, must reject.

If we accept this interpretation, then who are the people that destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E.? Adherents of this belief run into a serious problem here. The pagan people who destroyed Jerusalem were the Romans who had no regard for the God of Israel and who were not “Yeshua the Prince’s people.” More notably, the Messiah Himself tells us to look for the Abomination of Desolation in Matthew 24:15-21. If we follow through, are we to assume that He, Yeshua, is the One who commits it in Daniel 9:27? Surely not.

If we accept the belief that it was the Messiah who confirmed the covenant of Daniel 9:27, then the logical end is that we also dispense with the Torah, as have many proponents of this interpretation. We must likewise conclude that it is Yeshua who commits the Abomination of Desolation, and not the antimessiah.

The Messiah’s words in Matthew 5:17-19 stand very clearly against this. Yeshua said that the authority of the Torah stands until Heaven and Earth pass away. Even more important, we must understand that animal sacrifices *will be occurring* in the Millennial Kingdom, so it is impossible that He has terminated the validity of the Torah—including these ordinances. (Consult our FAQ entry **Sacrifices, in the Millennium**.) The sacrifice of Yeshua is certainly superior to the animal sacrifices of the Temple, but the Book of Acts is clear that the Apostles continued to participate in the Temple service as long as the Temple stood, and would have understood the animal sacrifices as a memorial of the Messiah’s final sacrifice. It is obvious here that it is the antimessiah/antichrist who stops the sacrifices during the middle of the Seventieth Week, not the Messiah.

The assertion that there is a “Seventieth Week of Messiah” is misguided and as Messianic Believers we should not accept it—unless we are prepared to become antinomians against the Torah and believe that Yeshua the Messiah commits the Abomination of Desolation.

(This entry has been adapted from the editor’s book *When Will the Messiah Return?*)

posted 13 April, 2006

**Messianic Terms, not exclusively used:** Why do you not exclusively use Messianic terms in your writings?

TNN Online is a large website with information detailing a wide range of Biblical subjects. As such, we receive an incredibly large amount of visitors whose Scriptural views range from the far Left to the far Right, with many views expressed in-between. We receive many inquiring Christian visitors in addition to Messianic visitors. With this understood, we find it necessary to meet many people *where they currently are* in their walk with the Lord.

Some Messianic Believers with whom we fellowship wonder why we do not exclusively use Hebraic terms or names in our writings. There are many Messianic websites on the Internet which have the same kind of outreach to Christians as we do and find that if they do not use familiar English names and titles such as Jesus, Christ, Lord, and God then they will “lose” their readers. We have kept the use of the English name of our Messiah, Jesus, to a minimum, but believe that it can be a major stumbling block to people to use terms that they are entirely unfamiliar with. The principal Messianic terms that we use are: Yeshua, Messiah, and Torah. With some notable exceptions, we have limited ourselves to only these three.

Certainly, we have no hesitancy to talk about Yeshua the Messiah or Jesus Christ, because they are both the Same Person. However, we do need to be “all things to all people” and if we were to exclusively refer to both our Savior and Biblical figures by Hebrew names many would not understand us. So, we do find it necessary to use, even at a minimum, our Messiah’s English name so we can readily emphasize to mainline Christians who access TNN Online that we do worship the same God and serve the same Lord.

updated 13 November, 2006

**Micah, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Micah?**

**Approximate date:** 700s B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate); 400s-200s B.C.E. (Left)

**Author(s):** Micah (Right, some conservative-moderate); Micah and/or anonymous other(s) (some conservative moderate); Micah and anonymous redactors (Left)

**Location of prophet/author(s):** somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

**Target audience and their location:** Jerusalemites

The name Micah (Heb. *Mikah*, מִיכָה) means “who is like the LORD”? We know very little of the prophet who bears this name, other than the fact that Micah was from the village of Moresheth (1:1; cf. Jeremiah 26:18) in southern Judah. Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (750-686 B.C.E.), making him a contemporary of Isaiah and Amos. The birthplace of Amos, Tekoa (Amos 1:1), was less than twenty miles from Moresheth, and this would likely have had an influence on Micah’s message (Harrison, 920; *ISBE*, 3:344). In the traditional Jewish order of the Tanach, the Book of Micah appears sixth among the Twelve Prophets, but in the Greek LXX Micah is placed third after Amos and Hosea, likely because of the time period it was composed or its length (Harrison, 919).

It is unknown whether Micah actually wrote his prophecies, or whether someone else wrote them down for him (Harrison, 925). Conservatives widely hold to some kind of unity for Micah (*EXP*, 7:397). It is possible that chs. 5-7 may include some expansions of genuine Micah material (*ECB*, 703), but nothing so substantial so as to alter the original prophecies. These slight expansions could reflect the thoughts of those who received his initial prophecies. However, likewise important to note is that many conservatives hold to Micah’s uniqueness in thought and language as being a direct result of his authorship, not the compilation of some of his followers and/or supporters (*EXP*, 7:398). But regardless of which option is the case, the most important factor to keep in mind is that “If one grants the possibility of predictive prophecy...there are no persuasive reasons for denying Micah authorship of any part of the book” (Dillard and Longman, 398).

Liberals, in stark contrast to conservatives, have often felt that only certain sections of the Book of Micah are authentic to the prophet, namely those sections that are negative and deal with God’s judgment. This view is commonly supported with Jeremiah’s quote from Micah (Jeremiah

26:18) of Micah being a prophet of doom (*NIDB*, 647). The more positive sections of Micah (2:12-13; chs. 4-7) are often believed to have been added at a later date (*IDB*, 3:371; *IDBSup*, 593; *EDB*, 894) after the Babylonian exile (Dillard and Longman, 399). Liberals also commonly argue that the reference to “Babylon” (4:6-13) must also be a later interpolation, but conservatives often respond by pointing out that “Babylon” could be viewed as a general reference to the East, and that “Against a poetic background of the kind employed by Micah, both ‘Assyrian’ and ‘Babylon’ would be perfectly acceptable surrogates” (Harrison, 924).

When encountering liberal views of Micah, one will see that critical scholarship has widely held the text to be made up of short poems and oracles strung together by a later editor (*ABD*, 4:807-808). Some liberals today, though, primarily on the basis of literary grounds, are acceding more unity to the text of Micah. “This hypothesis permits one to see many of the disparate elements in Micah as united by the common psychological or social situation from which they arise” (*ABD*, 4:809), including a great part of it actually originating in the Eighth Century B.C.E. Still, another current avenue in liberal scholarship is to simply analyze Micah for its theology and message, as often no liberal consensus can arise as to how the text came to exist in its present form (*EDB*, 895).

Conservative and liberal presuppositions of the composition of Micah undoubtedly affect how the integrity of the text is viewed. Some liberals feel that the Hebrew MT of Micah is in bad condition. They insist that usage of secondary resources such as the Greek LXX, Syriac, and most recently the DSS is often necessary for understanding it (*ABD*, 4:809). Conservatives, in contrast, often feel that the Hebrew MT of Micah is in relatively good condition, and that the witnesses of the DSS indicate that there has been little problem in Micah’s textual transmission (Harrison, 925).

The Prophet Micah does not demonstrate the same political knowledge of Judah as does Isaiah, even though they both demonstrate some level of affinity (4:1-4 and Isaiah 2:2-4 are affectively the same Scriptures). Micah reflects the position of someone from the villages (*IDB*, 3:369; *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 1303) and his message does concern the social injustices of the common people (Harrison, 921). As a result of what has happened, Micah predicts the fall of Samaria (1:5-7) and the eventual defeat of Judah (1:9-16). While Micah attacks the idolatry of Israel, he is actually more concerned about the state of the people who had suffered as a result of its ensuing corruption (*EXP*, 7:395). The important historical backdrop to consider when examining Micah includes the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria, and the near destruction of the Southern Kingdom by Assyria (*ISBE*, 3:344; Dillard and Longman, 398-399). Two major periods are covered: the last years of the Divided Monarchy, followed by the monarchy of Judah alone. One can certainly see some parallels between the style of Micah and the style of Isaiah.

Micah’s prophecies alternate between a message of judgment and a message of hope (Dillard and Longman, 401-402). God hates idolatry and injustice (3:8), but will pardon the repentant (7:18-19). Chs. 2-3 largely deal with Judah’s sins, and its oppression of the poor. But in spite of the judgment that God will inflict, Zion will be afforded a position of greater prestige (4:1-2) in the future, and a Deliverer will be sent (5:1-4). A unique thrust of Micah is that in spite of God’s judgment upon Israel and Judah, this would nevertheless be used by Him for His redemption to be accomplished in the whole world (*ISBE*, 3:346; *EXP*, 7:339).

Micah 5:2 is a very important passage relating to the prophetic expectation embodied in Yeshua the Messiah, as quoted in Matthew 2:6. Micah 4:1-5 depicts the elevation of the mountain of God, and 6:6-8 lists the traits that God desires of His people (Dillard and Longman, 397, 402). The eschatological message of Micah undoubtedly affected the worldview of the Apostles.

There is currently not a great deal of Messianic engagement with the Book of Micah, even though Micah 5:6-6:8 is the Haftarah reading for *Balak* (Numbers 22:2-25:9). Micah does play a role among various Jewish traditions in the traditional readings of the Fall high holidays (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1205-1206). Micah, similar to Amos, asks Messianics today difficult questions regarding social engagement. More importantly, Micah asks us questions about the punishment meted by God upon Israel, and the promises of redemption via a Messianic King.

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**Mixed Fibers: What do you think about Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11 and wearing clothes of mixed fibers? These Scriptures do not seem very clear.**

Leviticus 19:19 says, "You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together." It lists a variety of forbidden mixtures, not only pertaining to kinds of materials or cloth, but also breeding different kinds of cattle and different kinds of seed. The challenge in interpreting this text correctly does not relate to the principle that we are not to mix things or have an imbalance of them, but how we apply this today in the clothes we wear. Based on this verse alone, it would seem that we can only wear clothes that are of one type of fabric.

Many Messianics can get confused from this verse, because of the simple reason that many clothes today are made of mixed threads or different types of fabrics. One of the most common types of mixed fabric today is cotton and polyester. Does this mean that we are to throw out all of those clothes that have synthetic fabrics in them?

It is important that we let the Scriptures interpret themselves here. Deuteronomy 22:11 clarifies what is said by telling us, "You shall not wear a material mixed of wool and linen together." Here, the text is specific and indicates that a mixture of wool and linen is prohibited. This is because the combined fibers of wool and linen are a poor combination and that garments made of this mixture will wear out very easily. This is to be contrasted with mixtures today such as cotton and polyester, which is actually very strong and versatile.

We need to interpret these verses together, noting that they forbid us from mixing wool and linen. We do not believe that it forbids the mixing of organic and synthetic fabrics. This commandment was originally given in an Ancient Near Eastern context where linen and wool were the two major fabrics. It was not given in a time when more diverse organic fabrics, in addition to synthetic fabrics, would exist.

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**Moses, Write the Entire Torah?: Do you honestly believe that Moses wrote the entire Torah or Pentateuch? How could Moses have written that he was the "humblest man who ever lived," or have written about his own death?**

There are two points of view which are often espoused relating to the written origins of the Torah. Among fundamentalist Jews and Christians, it is believed that the Written Torah that exists, Genesis-Deuteronomy, was entirely written by Moses himself, and has been preserved perfectly since the Ancient Israelites were in the wilderness. The exact opposite of this, believed by liberal Jews and Christians, is that the Torah was compiled after the Babylonian exile, by the Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly (P) classes of, or sources from, Israelite society. This theory, commonly called the JEDP documentary hypothesis, advocates that Moses did not write the Torah, but rather these writings are attributed to Moses and that the Torah as it

exists today is largely a product of the post-Babylonian exile. The majority in the Messianic movement believe that Moses wrote the entire Torah, whereas most in liberal Judaism and Christianity believe that Moses did not write it.

We believe that Moses is the principal author or compiler of the first five books of Scripture, the Chumash or Pentateuch, himself. There are parenthetical phrases that were likely written at another date. Genesis 14:14 is a glaring example of this, appearing very early in the text, where Abraham pursues Lot's kidnappers "as far as Dan." This appears long before the Israelites enter into the Promised Land and ascribed geographical place names to where they settle. Some would say that since Moses was a prophet, he prophesied this into being, but that is doubtful given the fact that this is a place name, and not an event. This was obviously a textual addition added at a later date to clarify for readers where Abraham actually pursued. It does not subtract from the value of the text, nor the event that takes place, nor does it subtract from essential Mosaic composition.

Numbers 12:3 says, "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth." In the NASB and NIV translations, the text actually appears in parentheses ( ). Truly, if Moses did live as the most humble man on the face of the Earth, at least at the time of writing this, then Moses' being so humble would have prevented him from ever having written this. This likewise appears to be a textual addition to the Torah from a later date. In a similar vein, the final chapter of Deuteronomy details the death of Moses and how the Lord buried him. This is something that Moses could not have written about in such detail, but it does not immediately mean that it was written many centuries later as liberal critics of the Bible often claim. The *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* notes,

"Such scholars as R.D. Wilson, Merrill Unger, Douglas Young, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and R.K. Harrison easily accept that the final chapter of Deuteronomy was likely appended by Joshua or someone else in Moses' inner circle. This, in fact, supports the view of the continuity of the writing prophets, a theory that each successor prophet writes the last chapter of his predecessor's book. The addition of a chapter on Moses' funeral by another prophet is in accordance with the custom of the day in no sense takes away from the belief that Moses was the author of everything up to that final chapter" ("Pentateuch, Mosaic authorship of," p 587).

There have been parenthetical additions to the Hebrew text of the Torah since the time of Moses. This does not subtract for the value of the text, the events that took place, and certainly not the message of the text. It also does not mean that Moses did not write or oversee the writing of the vast majority of the Torah, but it is to say that textual additions have been made along the way. We do not believe that Moses wrote that he was the humblest man on Earth, or about his own death. These were statements added by either someone in his inner circle, perhaps one of the seventy elders, or Joshua who succeeded him.

For a further discussion about these, and related issues, consult our FAQ entries on the composition of the books of the Bible. Also recommended is the article "Source Criticism," by D.W. Baker, in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, pp 798-805.

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