

HEBRAIC ROOTS
AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY

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**William Mark Huey
J.K. McKee**



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by William Mark Huey and J.K. McKee

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**Thus says the LORD,
“Stand by the ways and see
and ask for the ancient paths
where the good way is,
and walk in it;
and you will find rest
for your souls.”**

Jeremiah 6:16

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Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by TNN Press. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms unique to this publication that may be used have been provided in this chart:

| | |
|---|---|
| ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> | LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott) |
| AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i> | LXX: Septuagint |
| Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament | m. Mishnah |
| ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996) | MT: Masoretic Text |
| b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>) | NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977) |
| B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C. | NASU: New American Standard Update (1995) |
| BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) | Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i> |
| BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> | NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i> |
| C.E.: Common Era or A.D. | NIV: New International Version (1984) |
| CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman) | NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999) |
| CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> | NKJV: New King James Version (1982) |
| CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998) | NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989) |
| EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> | NLT: New Living Translation (1996) |
| ESV: English Standard Version (2001) | RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952) |
| GNT: Greek New Testament | Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament |
| Grk: Greek | Thayer: <i>Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> |
| HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner) | TDNT: <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> |
| Heb: Hebrew | TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005) |
| IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> | TWOT: <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> |
| ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> | UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition |
| IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i> | v(s). verse(s) |
| KJV: King James Version | Vine: <i>Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i> |
| LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986) | Vul: Latin Vulgate |
| | WBC: <i>Word Biblical Commentary</i> |
| | YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898) |

Preface to the Edited Edition

Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study has quickly become the most popular publication of TNN Press and Outreach Israel Ministries. Since its initial production, this workbook has been used by the Lord to present many people with an introduction to the Messianic movement and concepts such as Torah observance and Torah study. It has been used in group Bible studies, by small groups, and by individuals on their own who simply want to investigate what the Hebraic Roots of our Biblical faith are all about. The feedback we have received from others has been very encouraging, and has assisted with the production of other materials which address additional critical issues facing the Body of Messiah today.

Any good theological book takes into consideration the feedback of those who read and use it for teaching purposes. This new, updated edition of *Hebraic Roots* has built on the foundational information of the first edition, and has edited the material to make it more user-friendly for those in a Bible study setting, more outside references for those who prefer a scholastic approach to the issues at hand, and perhaps most importantly has taken into account the reality that this workbook may be the *first exposure* that some Christians, both clergy and laity alike, will have to the Messianic movement. This edited edition has been produced with the understanding that some people may hand it to a pastor or Sunday school teacher, who at the very least may be curious, but who also may be critical of Messianic things. As a result, some concepts in the book have been explained more thoroughly for Christian readers, while other concepts have been simplified.

By updating *Hebraic Roots*, it has also been brought to our attention that many of the people who are using this workbook are being used by our Heavenly Father to start Messianic home groups and fellowships, and these new Messianic teachers are unfamiliar with many of the resources and tools that are needed to perform an adequate job expositing on the Scriptures. For these people, and for the curious student who wants to learn more, we have added a short section of recommended research tools near the end of the book. We recognize that God can take a small Bible study and turn it into something more, and want to make sure that we have done our part in properly informing aspiring teachers and students of some of the things they need to accomplish their tasks well.

This updated edition of *Hebraic Roots* also considers the varied and diverse theological trends that have manifested themselves in the independent Messianic movement since its initial publication in 2003. Some of these trends are good, and some of them are not. A few of them are addressed directly or indirectly by us, either in the text or in some of the footnotes. This has been done because questions concerning these issues often do arise in a Bible study environment, or people that are just being exposed to the Messianic movement need to be aware of its theological diversity.

We are deeply indebted to each person who wrote us, commenting on the *Hebraic Roots* workbook, and how it helped them in their understanding of the Messianic movement. May this new edition reflect our desire to help others understand the material easily, but also thoroughly, as we all strive “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Messiah” (Ephesians 4:13, RSV), and truly attempt to grow in our knowledge and understanding of the God of Israel.

J.K. McKee
Editor, TNN Online

Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study

Introduction

Hebraic Roots: *An Introductory Study* has been written to be a primer for the emerging number of people who are being drawn to a more comprehensive grasp of the ancient roots of our Biblical faith. As a family that has been active in the Messianic movement since 1995, we came to the unanimous conclusion that a workbook on the subject was needed for the thousands that are being prompted into a pursuit and examination of the Hebraic Roots of the faith, and who want to truly live like those who love the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. An introductory guide to the many issues we have encountered is now available to help the many who are new to this walk.

When our family was first led into the Messianic movement, we initially began fellowshipping at a Messianic Jewish congregation. There we were incredibly blessed by the Lord as the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) began to reveal a more Hebraic perspective on how we could worship, understand, and experience Him more fully. From the very start, we were like dry sponges soaking up the “living water” from the teaching that we were receiving.

We were non-Jewish Believers with only a cursory understanding of Judaism, and were being exposed to a style of worship that in many respects was foreign to what we had been accustomed to as standard, Church going, evangelical Christians. Within weeks, we found ourselves attending the Friday evening and Saturday morning worship services. We were exposed to a Torah scroll, Hebrew liturgy and music, and Davidic dance. We learned what “kosher” was, and how we were not to work on the Sabbath. We learned about the Biblical holidays or *moedim*.¹ Our understanding of what God expected of us was changing, and our weekly routine was being radically altered. For a season, we attended this Messianic congregation while still going to our non-denominational church on Sunday. But after a while we realized that we were not being spiritually fed at Church as we once had been, and that the Father wanted us in the Messianic movement.

One of the first things that really ministered to my wife and me was the worship music. Many times during praise and worship, tears would well up in our eyes as we sensed that we had finally “come home” after a long journey and were at long last where we were supposed to be. It did not matter that we did not fully understand it at the time. We found ourselves singing the Psalms and actual texts of Scripture put to music. Many of the lyrics were in English and Hebrew. We started to learn the language of the Patriarchs through the repetition of songs. Our spirits soared as we sensed a more profound connection with the ancient saints who had gone before us.

We were also introduced to the study of the Torah, or the five Books of Moses (the Pentateuch),² on a weekly basis. We began to understand that reviewing the challenges of the Ancient Israelites in a systematic and consistent way enhanced our personal identification with them. After all, these were the forefathers of our faith, and what happened to them in the past adds great dimension and understanding to the whole of the Biblical narrative and our view of the entire Scriptures. It was logical for us to study their lives and analyze how they handled the circumstances of their respective walks. We believed we were finally receiving a long lost foundation to our faith that we had not received in mainstream Christianity, where our Scripture studies primarily focused on the Apostolic Writings (New Testament).

After a few months of attending this Messianic Jewish congregation on a regular basis, we were given the opportunity to become members. After praying about this, my wife and I concluded that the Lord wanted us to participate in the new members class, so we enrolled for the eight-week course. All of us in

¹ The Hebrew term *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים) is translated variably as “appointed times” (NASU), “appointed feasts” (NIV), “fixed times” (NJPS), and “appointed festivals” (ATS). *CHALOT* defines the singular *moed* (מוֹעֵד) as “meeting assembly,” and “appointed time, fixed day,” indicating that it is used in the Tanach (Old Testament) for the “tent of meeting” where the elders of Israel met with the Lord (William L. Holladay, ed., [Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1988], 186).

² Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study

the new members class were given two books to read: *Growing to Maturity* by Daniel C. Juster and *Our Hands Are Stained With Blood* by Michael L. Brown.

As hungry Believers who wanted to become involved with this congregation, we read through the materials and faithfully attended the new members classes. We were learning so much about the Jewish Roots of our faith that we really did not have the time to thoroughly analyze all of the material being presented. *Growing to Maturity*, for example, was written primarily as a tool for training new Jewish Believers in the faith. For the most part, we found the book to be very enlightening on a number of subjects, but also found ourselves a bit separated. Michael Brown's book was a lengthy exposition, as its subtitle suggests, of the "tragic story of the Church and the Jewish People." As a family that valued history, this book helped fill in some of the gaps in our thinking about varied aspects of the historical Church. With these two books as our primers to understand the Messianic movement, we began our journey with a commitment to this Messianic Jewish congregation.

Both of these books did an admirable job of igniting our family's interest in the Hebraic Roots of our faith. For the first time in our spiritual journey, we were beginning to look at the history of the faith through an Hebraic lens with a Torah foundation. As we progressed in those years, we were exposed to more resources that helped us search out the origins of our faith, and how the first Believers in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) actually lived. We spent a substantial amount of time analyzing the culture and times in which the First Century Disciples and Apostles lived, and how they approached their relationship with the God of Israel. We discovered some very basic things that had not necessarily been taught to us in Church settings.

For centuries, much of the teaching about the practices of the early followers of Yeshua had been altered because of the forces of history, and the transfer of the center of authority from Jerusalem to Rome in the early centuries of Christianity. With the Jewish revolt against Rome in 67 C.E. and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 C.E., anti-Semitism arose in the Roman Empire. Over time, the early Jewish leadership of the *ekklēsia*³ died out and was replaced by non-Jews, many of whom had no understanding of Judaism, and were instead trained in Hellenistic or Greek philosophy. Interpretations of the writings of the Apostles were no longer rooted in the Tanach (Old Testament), but were often based in the reason and logic of Plato and Aristotle. These things gave ultimate rise to the Roman Catholic Church. Its overwhelming influence on Western Civilization significantly changed the ancient ways of the Jewish Apostles. When the Protestant Reformation arose in Europe, Catholicism had so dominated Christian thinking that the Reformers could only go so far in their pursuit of the truth, because they often had no understanding or background knowledge of the First Century Judaism in which Yeshua and His followers lived.

The Holy One in His sovereignty allowed the Protestant Reformers to alter the Catholic approach to the faith. *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Only) and *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone) became battle cries for the faithful who were finally concluding that they could personally approach God for the forgiveness of their sins and justification without going through a priest. Men and women did not have to pay indulgences to receive salvation, as it was available freely through the sacrifice of Yeshua. But because the early Reformers were principally former Catholics, they could only do so much and there were limitations. There was still anti-Semitism in the Church, though reformed. It was obviously not the time for the final restoration back to the original practices of the First Century saints to occur.

Surprisingly, it was not until the Enlightenment of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries with the emancipation of Jews in Europe that reasonable Jewish-Christian dialogue would begin occurring for Christian theologians to start to understand what a rich heritage we have in Judaism. Hebraic studies, not

³ The Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) is most often rendered as "church" in our English Bibles, but more accurately means "congregation" or "assembly." In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word *qahal* (קהל) is frequently used for "convocation, assembly" (*CHALOT*, 314). *Qahal* usually "is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX" (Jack P. Lewis, "qāhāl," in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1980], 2790), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Whenever the Apostolic writers use the word *ekklēsia*, they use it with the understanding that it is referring to the assembly of Israel, not a separate and disconnected "Church."

only in the Hebrew language, but also in Rabbinics and in Jewish hermeneutics of examining the Scriptures, began being explored by Christians, and many now can truly see the Messiah for who He is in all of the pages of the Bible.

Today, after almost 500 years since the start of the Protestant Reformation, we see a new reformation taking place among followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It began with the rise of the Messianic Jewish movement in the mid-Twentieth Century. We are very grateful for the Messianic Jews that the Father has used in the past fifty years to take the faithful from the days of the Reformation to the prophesied end-time period of the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21), attested to by Peter when the Holy Spirit was poured out on those assembled at *Shavuot*.⁴ This movement has expanded substantially to include more than just Jewish people.

Since the late 1960s, Messianic Jewish congregations have been responsible for much of what is happening today as the Messianic movement grows in significant numbers. They have been planted all over North America and the world, largely as outreaches to evangelize the Jewish community with the gospel. Many Jewish followers of the Messiah Yeshua have endured considerable persecution and have often been ostracized by their physical Jewish brethren because of their faith, and in spite of this they have remained constant.

However, even though Messianic Judaism began as an evangelical outreach of Jewish Believers to fellow Jews, today it is important to understand that many Messianic Jewish congregations now have an increasing number of non-Jewish Believers. Over the years, as Messianic Judaism has grown and matured, many changes have occurred. The demographic profile has changed, as non-Jewish Believers have been investigating their Hebraic Roots and entering into the Messianic community. At many Messianic Jewish congregations, the actual Jewish population of some of these congregations is less than twenty percent. In some extreme cases, there are only a mere handful of Jews.

Is this only a coincidence? Or is it a sign from the Holy One that He is indeed returning us *all* back to the faith practices of the original Disciples of Yeshua? Obviously, this occurrence begs many important questions that will be asked in the coming years, and examined in further studies. For the first time since the First Century, we are witnessing Jews and non-Jews coming together in the unity of the Messiah Yeshua and worshipping Him in a way that is reminiscent of the early Believers. This transformation is not without its issues, both spiritual and theological. But today, we are discovering many people who are hungry for more information about the Hebraic Roots of their faith, and they are not afraid to change. **Are you one of these people?**

In our years of pursuing the Holy One of Israel upon entering the Messianic community of faith, we had never come across a book that could be used for basic instruction about many of the areas of life that often take a radical course change as the Messianic lifestyle is embraced. We could never find a publication that laid out in simplistic terms to the Christian layman or simple enquirer what the Hebraic Roots of our faith are all about, and what is happening at the grassroots level among many Believers today. With *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*—we have been led to put to paper our thoughts about a variety of topics that will inevitably be considered as you begin your walk with the Messiah of Israel as a Messianic Believer.

Hebraic Roots has been compiled with elementary information about the Messianic movement. Those coming into this understanding and who follow this study have a basic primer for proper instruction. This workbook has been arranged as an easy 12-week study, which you can use in a Bible study setting with other people, or as a personal study for yourself. Some may prefer to go faster, others may prefer to go slower, but however you read the material and examine the Scriptures, you will be challenged. When you complete this study, we guarantee that you will have much to think and pray about!

⁴ The Hebrew word *Shavuot* (שבועות) literally means “weeks,” and is the last of the Spring festivals of Leviticus 23, where the Israelites were commanded to count seven weeks plus one day from Passover, and make special offerings and sacrifices to the Lord (vs. 16-22). According to Jewish tradition, *Shavuot* was the same time when Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. Most Christians know *Shavuot* by its Greek-derived name of *Pentēkostē* (πεντηκοστή) or “Pentecost,” meaning “fiftieth.”

Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study

This workbook examines a number of areas for study and discussion. It is designed to be a study guide that will prompt questions for personal reflection or group discussion. In this publication you will be given answers to the following questions:

- Why should we study our Hebraic Roots?
- Why do we need the Torah?
- What happened at the Jerusalem Council?
- Why do we observe the seventh-day Sabbath?
- Why do we celebrate the Biblical festivals?
- Why do we eat Biblically kosher?
- How do we overcome the hurdles to the Messianic lifestyle?
- What about the Name of God?
- Are Israel and the Church separate?
- How do we approach the end-times?

We trust that as these questions are fairly, and above all lovingly answered, that you will want to further embrace the Messianic lifestyle. We trust that you will recognize that you need to prepare yourself, your family, and in the process posterity, for the return of the Messiah Himself. The end-time saints will both believe in Yeshua, and be keeping the Father's commandments (Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

We understand as a family that the narrow path toward a Messianic lifestyle has a number of challenges along the way. The departure from mainstream Christianity, and/or one's Jewish brothers and sisters who do not believe in Yeshua, creates a number of roadblocks and stumbling stones. Many do not understand what this is all about. Given time and patience and longsuffering, and the study and examination that is required of all of us as Believers, if we are truly in the will of God and we demonstrate being transformed more and more into His likeness, those around us will have no choice but to ask: "Why?"

We remember how useful books have been in our pursuit of truth. Our prayer is that *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study* will give you just enough information so that you will want more. You will discover that you are being drawn back to the origins of our faith. You will feel connected to Israel. You will begin to understand the greater blessings of knowing Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel and obeying His commandments.

William Mark Huey
Director, Outreach Israel Ministries



Why Should We Study Our Hebraic Roots? WMH

Around the world there is an incredible move of the Holy Spirit that has attracted many Believers desiring to grow in their relationship with God. It does not matter if you call this move of the Holy Spirit the Hebraic Roots movement or the Messianic movement or some other description. There is no doubt that increasing numbers of Believers in the Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus), who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are studying more and more about the Hebraic Roots of their faith. Something is happening among people as the Bible is being reexamined to dig for ancient truths that have often been overlooked by the masses of Christianity. Thousands are being encouraged to return to the foundations of our faith in the Tanach (Old Testament), and it is deepening their walk and commitment to the Lord.

Probably one of the first questions that comes to mind when one begins to pursue the Hebraic Roots of our faith is: **Why should we study our Hebraic Roots?** There are a number of excellent reasons to study the Hebraic Roots of our faith. In this chapter we address some of the obvious reasons, such as:

1. The Patriarchs or fathers of our faith were called Hebrews or *Ivrim* (עִבְרִים). Abraham was considered a “Hebrew” (Genesis 14:13). The other Patriarchs throughout the Scriptures are likewise referred to as Hebrews (Joseph, Moses, Jonah, David, Paul).¹ By understanding what it means to be a Hebrew, we will be better prepared to walk in a like manner spiritually.
2. Almost two thirds of the Bible, the Tanach or Old Testament, Genesis to Malachi, is written in Hebrew. The Holy One of Israel entrusted the oracles of God to the Jewish people (Romans 3:2). An understanding of Biblical Hebrew and the full definitions of Hebrew words is important to how we view the Scriptures and theology.
3. Yeshua (Jesus), the Messiah of Israel, was Jewish and raised in a culture that was Torah observant, meaning that it adhered to the Law of Moses. Since we are being conformed to Yeshua’s image (Romans 8:29), we must understand how He was obedient to the Father’s commands.
4. The First Century Disciples and Apostles were Torah observant just like their Master. They walked in a manner consistent with Yeshua, and the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) reflect this walk.
5. The Apostle Paul, author of almost half of the New Testament, was a Pharisee and a Jewish scholar trained by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Paul’s personal theology and letters are deeply rooted in his Torah observance and Pharisaical training.

¹ Joseph: Genesis 39:14, 17; 41:12; Moses: Exodus 2:7, 11; Jonah: Jonah 1:9; David: 1 Samuel 29:3; Paul: 2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:5.

Our Spiritual Ancestors

When you begin to pursue the Hebraic Roots of your faith, one of the first things you discover is that the Biblical Patriarchs are often called “Hebrews” throughout the narrative text. From Abraham to Paul, the term “Hebrew” is used to describe these giants of the faith, and it should naturally lead one to want to understand just what it means to be a “Hebrew.” Abram, later renamed Abraham by God, was called the first Hebrew in the Book of Genesis: “Then a fugitive came and told Abram **the Hebrew**” (Genesis 14:3).

The word for “Hebrew” is *Ivri* (עִבְרִי). As B.J. Beitzel notes in *ISBE*, “It is suggested that ‘*ivri*’ derives from the root ‘*br*, ‘cross over, go beyond.’”² *BDB* says that *Ivri* comes from the root word *ever* (עֲבַר), meaning “one from beyond, from the other side,” “used to distinguish Isr[aelites] from foreigners,” or “from beyond the Jordan,”³ which has generally come to mean “one who has crossed over.”

Abraham is considered the first Hebrew in the Bible. The Holy One called out to Abram to leave his own country, Ur, with his family. He had the faith to depart and cross over the Jordan River into Canaan. In the life of Abraham, we see him doing exactly this: he first had to cross over spiritually and follow a God whom he had never seen, abandoning the life of polytheism that his father Terah had followed (Joshua 24:2). He then had to cross over physically into the Promised Land that God promised to give both him and his descendants after him.⁴

Understanding that the Patriarch Abraham, the first Hebrew, had to leave a pagan environment in order to move toward the full worship and service of the One True God, and also cross into the Promised Land, is important for us to understand as Believers in the Messiah. For us as Believers, the term “Hebrew” and what it encompasses should bear witness with us spiritually as we all too have had to cross over. The Apostle Paul writes the Colossians, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (1:13). We have all had to make choices like Abraham did, crossing over when we made the decision to receive Yeshua into our lives and be cleansed from our sins, and the inevitable sacrifices we had to make as new, born again Believers, removing ourselves from the ways of the world and adopting the ways of God. By understanding the meaning of the term “Hebrew,” we realize that we are indeed crossing over from darkness into the light. The life of Abraham speaks to these critical concepts that many of us as Believers have often taken for granted:

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed’” (Genesis 12:1-3).

We are all familiar with God's promise of blessing Abraham, and the fact that his descendants are to bless all in the world. But did the Lord simply decide to bless Abraham because He just chose him randomly? Or is there something that we have been possibly missing? As the *ArtScroll Chumash*, an Orthodox Jewish commentary, notes, Abraham “was on one side of a moral and spiritual divide, and the rest of the world was on the other...Abraham and Sarah were now given the challenge of moving to the *other side*—not only of their native river, but of anyone who preferred not to acknowledge the sovereignty of God.”⁵ Abraham, when leaving his previous land, country, and lifestyle, had to cross over the Euphrates River, and by doing so he made a critical spiritual choice. Genesis 12:6 says, “Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite *was* then in the land.”

² B.J. Beitzel, “Hebrew (people),” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. et. al., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 2:657.

³ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 720.

⁴ The Jewish translators of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanach produced approximately three centuries before Yeshua, for the most part rendered the Hebrew *Ivri* by the transliteration *Hebraios* (Ἑβραῖος). A notable exception is Genesis 14:13 where *Avram halvri* (אַבְרָם הָעִבְרִי) is rendered as *Abram tō peratē* (Ἀβραμ τῷ περάτῃ), literally translated as “Abram the wanderer,” indicative of his crossing a foreign boundary.

⁵ Nosson Scherman, ed., et al, *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 12.

Why Should We Study Our Hebraic Roots?

From an Hebraic perspective, “to cross over” often means crossing over from death to life, or having to make a very important decision regarding one’s life and relationship to God. *TWOT* notes, “Moses used this phrase often to indicate how the hindrance or barrier was to be overcome by Israel, in realizing the fulfillment of the covenant promise concerning the land...The idea of passing over appears also...where Jacob crosses the river Euphrates as he begins his flight from Laban.”⁶ Doing a word search on the verb *avar* (עָבַר), “*pass over, by, through, alienate, bring, carry, do away, take away, transgress*” (*TWOT*),⁷ the root for *Ivri* or “Hebrew,” will reveal some very important dimensions to the Scriptures and the God we serve.

Abraham is also considered the father of our faith. Studying his life and the life of his descendants is critical for understanding our own life of faith as Paul notes in Romans 4:16:

“For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”

The Patriarch Joseph, one of youngest sons of Israel, is directly referred to as a “Hebrew” in his encounter with Potiphar’s wife:

“[S]he called to the men of her household and said to them, ‘See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed’” (Genesis 39:14).

The Patriarch Moses, often considered to be the giver of the Law, is referred to as a “Hebrew”:

“Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren” (Exodus 2:11).

The future King David was a “Hebrew,” recognized as such by his prime antagonists, the Philistines:

“Then the commanders of the Philistines said, ‘What *are these Hebrews doing here?*’ And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, ‘Is this not David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or *rather* these years, and I have found no fault in him from the day he deserted *to me* to this day?’” (1 Samuel 29:3).

Finally, the Apostle Paul, the emissary to the nations, refers to himself as a “Hebrew” in his letter to the Philippians:

“[C]ircumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5).

As a person begins to dig into our Hebraic Roots, he or she discovers that being a “Hebrew” is an integral part of the walk of faith that all followers of the God of Israel have been undertaking. All have had to “cross over” and make difficult decisions and choices. All have had to turn their backs on what they have known, or felt comfortable with, and walk into an unknown frontier. All have had to make sacrifices and have faith in the Lord that He has their best interests in mind.

The Hebrew Language, Culture, and Mindset

Once a Believer has become consciously aware that his spiritual ancestors are Hebrews, and in fact that he can identify with them and their struggles rather easily, the spiritually hungry person often turns to the subject of the Hebrew language, wanting to conduct more word studies and to understand the voluminous depth of the original text of almost two-thirds of Scripture. Most Believers recognize that the Tanach or “Old Testament” was written in Hebrew,⁸ but that is about all the knowledge they have on the subject. More information is needed for you to begin to understand the complexities of the Hebrew Bible and the significance that it entails.

An alternative term that is often used, rather than the term “Old Testament” in reference to the Hebrew Bible, is Tanach (or Tanakh). This is a Jewish acronym for *Torah*/Law, *Nevi'im*/Prophets, and

⁶ Carl Schultz, “עָבַר” in *TWOT*, 2:641.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Note that a few parts of the Tanach or Old Testament were written in Aramaic, a Semitic relative of Hebrew and a widely used ancient language in Ancient Babylon and Persia. Jews who returned to the Land of Israel from the Babylonian exile either spoke Aramaic, or integrated many Aramaic words into their existing Hebrew vocabulary.

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Ketuvim/Writings (כתובים). These divisions were identified by Yeshua and were in existence in His day (Luke 24:44).⁹ The traditional Jewish book order of the Hebrew Tanach differs from that of the “Christian Old Testament,” which comes from the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible,¹⁰ but they are the same books. Also, if you use a Jewish translation of the Tanach, its verse order is slightly different than in Christian versions, even though in most cases the verse deviation is often different by only a few verses.

The following is a list of the Hebrew names of the books of the Tanach in order:

TORAH—THE LAW

Bereisheet / Genesis
Shemot / Exodus
Vayikra / Leviticus
Bamidbar / Numbers
Devarim / Deuteronomy

NEVI'IM—THE PROPHETS

Yehoshua / Joshua
Shoftim / Judges
1 & 2 Sh'muel / Samuel
 Sh'muel Alef / 1 Samuel
 Sh'muel Bet / 2 Samuel
1 & 2 Melachim / Kings
 Melachim Alef / 1 Kings
 Melachim Bet / 2 Kings
Yeshayahu / Isaiah
Yirmayahu / Jeremiah
Yechezkel / Ezekiel
Hoshea / Hosea
Yoel / Joel
A'mos / Amos
Ovadyah / Obadiah
Yonah / Jonah
Mikhah / Micah
Nachum / Nahum
Chavakuk / Habakkuk
Tzefanyah / Zephaniah
Chaggai / Haggai
Zekaryah / Zechariah
Malakhi / Malachi

KETUVIM—THE WRITINGS

Tehellim / Psalms
Mishlei / Proverbs
Iyov / Job

⁹ The Apocryphal Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), compiled in approximately 180 B.C.E., likewise identifies the tripartite division of the Hebrew canon: “On the other hand he who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients, and will be concerned with prophecies” (Sirach 39:1, RSV). As the *New Interpreter's Study Bible* notes, “The threefold division of the Bible is alluded to here: the Law (38:34), Wisdom, and the Prophets (39:1)” (Dianne Bergant, “Sirach,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, NRSV [Nashville: Abingdon, 2003], 1500). This attests that it was in existence a minimum of two centuries before Yeshua's time. It was not until after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and with the formation of Rabbinical Judaism that the order of the Hebrew canon reached its present form.

¹⁰ The Greek Septuagint (LXX) was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible produced approximately three centuries before the Messiah. By the First Century, it was widely disseminated in the eastern Mediterranean basin, and it was the Scripture primarily used in Jewish synagogues in Greek-speaking lands. It helped prepare many non-Jewish Greeks and Romans for hearing the gospel, as they would have been able to read about the God of Israel from it. Rather than following the order of Law, Prophets, and Writings, the LXX was divided into: Pentateuch (Law), Histories, Poetical/Wisdom Books, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets.

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Shir HaShirim / Song of Songs
Rut / Ruth
Eikah / Lamentations
Qohelet / Ecclesiastes
Ester / Esther
Dani'el / Daniel
Ezra
Nechemyah / Nehemiah
1 & 2 Divrei-HaYamim / Chronicles
 Divrei-HaYamim Alef / 1 Chronicles
 Divrei-HaYamim Bet / 2 Chronicles

As you ponder these new terms and structure of the Old Testament, you might be reminded that the Holy One specifically gave His Word to different members of Israel, who in turn were responsible for bringing it to the world. The First Century martyr Stephen specifies Moses as the recipient and principal compiler of the words of the Most High in the Torah:

“This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN’ [Deuteronomy 18:15, 18]. This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was* with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you” (Acts 7:37-38).

Over the centuries the remnant of Israel did its best to preserve these writings, often in spite of being a cloistered community in danger. The Apostle Paul reminds the Roman Believers that the oracles of God were entrusted to the Jewish people, because God knew that they would be able to endure the trials that He would have them face:

“Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1-2).

The Jewish people, the recognizable remnant of Israel, have been faithful to their calling in spite of the division of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, their dispersion to Babylon, and the subsequent occupation of the Land of Israel by the Greeks and Romans. Their language was Hebrew, and their culture had maintained its distinctiveness even during the seventy years of Babylonian captivity. Even though Israel was divided and dispersed, God has always had a remnant that He could call “Israel.” Of course, things did change when Yeshua the Messiah entered the scene in the First Century, and the story of His redemption went beyond this small remnant to the entire world, but God did not cast them aside.

For millennia, the descendants of Adam passed the revelation of the Creator God from generation to generation orally. The written record of the Creation, Garden of Eden, Noah and the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and the trials and tribulations of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was first officially compiled by Moses. This written record constitutes most of the Book of Genesis. The Book of Exodus describes the Israelites’ bondage in Egypt at the hands of Pharaoh, their deliverance into freedom by God, and their establishment as a nation. Leviticus and Numbers describe the challenges that Ancient Israel faces on their journey through the wilderness, and the laws that the Lord gives them to make them a holy people. Deuteronomy repeats the story of the Israelites’ deliverance by God, and the blessings that He promises to give them as they enter into the Promised Land if they obey Him.¹¹

It is important to note that the Hebrew language employed in Scripture is very action oriented. One of the best examples of this comes from the *Shema*, or the watchword of our faith:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

While many people examining these verses may conclude that the command here is only to “hear,” the Hebrew reveals much more. The verb *shama* (שמע), used throughout the Hebrew Bible, has a variety of definitions, including: “hear of, concerning,” “hear with attention, interest, listen to,” “listen, give heed,” “listen to,

¹¹ Consult the workbooks *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* and *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee, for information relating to the composition of the Torah and other books of the Bible.

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yield to,” and “be regarded, obeyed” (BDB),¹² obviously contingent on context. All too frequently, we as Believers consider “hearing God” to just “hear Him,” but this is not entirely the case. When we hear what the Holy One tells us, we are to likewise obey—*we are to act*. The *Shema* finishes with this clear admonition:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:5-9).

As you can see from this text, God is very expressive and wants us to demonstrate our devotion to Him by our actions. It is always beneficial to perform word studies, and survey how words are used in the context of a passage. When you study the Hebraic Roots of our faith, it is important to understand that when you read the English translation of Hebrew words, the meanings often change because of the actions involved. An English translator has to choose a particular rendering for the English translation to flow properly. For those who desire a greater depth of understanding, the study of the Hebrew language itself is very beneficial, because of the wide array of definitions for words available, and the theological significance that they often have in multiple texts.

Hebraic culture itself is widely centered around the Torah or the Law of Moses, commonly called the Pentateuch. In Judaism today, the Torah sits at the forefront of all other writings. As Warren Zev Harvey notes in *EJ*, “In rabbinic literature, it was taught that the Torah was one of the six or seven things created prior to the creation of the world (Gen. R. 1:4; Pes. 54a, et al.). Of these preexistent things, it was said that only the Torah and the throne of glory were actually created, while the others were only conceived, and that the Torah preceded the throne of glory (Gen. R. 1:4).”¹³ Whether you agree with these remarks or not, it indicates how important the Torah is viewed in the minds of many Jews. Since Moses compiled these texts, the inheritors of these writings have considered them the most sacred of the entire Scriptures. Moses had a very special relationship with the Holy One of Israel, unlike any other human being who has ever lived:

“Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:9-11a).

From a number of different references in the Tanach, we are told that the public reading of the Torah or Law was required, or at least encouraged, by various leaders throughout the history of Israel. It was a requirement that it be read every seven years at the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles or *Sukkot*:

“So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them, saying, ‘At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess’” (Deuteronomy 31:9-13).¹⁴

¹² BDB, pp 1033-1034.

Shama can mean “to obey,” as in Ex 24:7; Isa 42:24 ‘obey his law’; Neh 9:16, ‘They did not obey Thy commandments’; and Jer 35:18, ‘You have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab’ (Hermann J. Austel, “שמע,” in *TWOT*, 2:938).

¹³ Warren Zev Harvey, “Torah, Origin and Preexistence,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica. MS Windows gx*. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

¹⁴ Note that within Judaism there is a debate as to what the reference to *haTorah* (הַתּוֹרָה) in Deuteronomy 31:11, 12, “this Torah” (ATS) or “this Teaching” (NJPS), actually means. Some view it only as a reference to the Book of Deuteronomy, while others believe it is the entire Torah.

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Joshua read from the Torah to the Israelites after crossing over the Jordan. Joshua was likely the author of the final few words of the Torah which speak of Moses' death:¹⁵

"Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them"(Joshua 8:34-35).

King Josiah himself actually read from the Torah to the people and elicited a vow of allegiance to the words of Moses, when a scroll of Deuteronomy was uncovered in the Temple after having been lost:

"Then the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all *his* heart and all *his* soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant" (2 Kings 23:1-3).

Ezra the Priest reads from the Torah to the Israelites who returned with him from Babylon:

"And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law...Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground" (Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6).

From these few examples, you can see that reading the Torah of Moses, publicly, was quite important for the community of Ancient Israel. Following the Babylonian exile, the Jewish Rabbis developed a yearly cycle to study the Torah faithfully. The concept of Torah study consequently became an integral part of Jewish culture. The local synagogue, much like the local church is for many Christians, is the focal point of the Jewish community. Like a hub on a wheel, everything in a Jew's life seems to focus on the activities associated with the synagogue or place of worship.

Even with all of the theological differences that developed over the centuries within Judaism in the years prior to the Messiah's First Coming, the study of the Torah was critical for establishing and maintaining the Hebrew culture. Different methods for reading the Torah were established among the Jewish community. *EJ* comments that "The triennial cycle was practiced in Palestine and in Egypt as late as 1170 C.E., whereas in Babylonia the reading of the Pentateuch was completed in one year, from Tishri to Tishri. The latter became the accepted traditional custom the world over (Meg. 29b; Maim. Yad, Tefillah, 13:1)."¹⁶

There is some variance in Judaism today. As the same entry in *EJ* notes, "In traditional synagogues, the Pentateuch is read in one year. Reform Judaism (and some Conservative synagogues) has, however, reverted to the ancient Palestinian custom of a triennial cycle. It was done in response to the spiritual need

¹⁵ Among liberal theologians, there is the belief that Moses could not have written or compiled the Torah because it speaks of his own death. While some, in response, believe that Moses as a prophet could have prophesied this, it is doubtful. Instead, "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," in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], 587).

¹⁶ Editorial Staff Encyclopaedia Judaica, "Triennial Cycle," in *EJ*.

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of the congregants most of whom do not understand Hebrew, and consequently, cannot follow—with proper attention—the lengthy reading in Hebrew of the entire weekly *sidrah*. The weekly reading was shortened to approximately one third. In order that the portion should not be different from that read in traditional synagogues, the first part of each weekly *sidrah* is read in the first year, the second in the next and the third in the last year of this triennial cycle.”¹⁷

This variance is determined by the needs of the congregation, and is also present in the Messianic movement today among Believers who study the Torah. In spite of the different reading patterns of studying the Torah, the majority of Messianic congregations follow a one-year cycle, as many new people who are unfamiliar to the Torah enter in. Others find it more useful to use a three-year cycle, but again, this is always a result of the spiritual needs of the local body.¹⁸

Our Jewish brethren who have been following a systematic pattern of Torah study have some advantages in their relationship with the Holy One of Israel. Many of them have been attempting to conform their lives to what it says the servant of God is supposed to do. The one critical component that they have been missing is a Divine Savior who can redeem them from their sins. Conversely to this, there are many Christians who know that Yeshua (Jesus) is the Messiah, but often have no way of understanding who He is from the Torah, and may not be able to recognize Him from the Hebrew Scriptures. This is contrary to Philip’s words to Nathanael, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Yeshua of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). Yeshua Himself said to the Disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

The “Torah” made Flesh

As born again Believers, we know that one of the goals of the separated life we are called to live is to be conformed to the image of the Messiah Yeshua. We are to live like Him and emulate Him in our daily lives. The Apostle John says that Yeshua is the Word made flesh:

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

If you understand the basic fact that we are being conformed into the image of the Messiah of Israel (Romans 8:29), then it is logical that we would do the things that Yeshua did during His lifetime on Earth. When you search the accounts from the Scriptures, you will discover that He was perfectly Torah obedient. Yeshua kept the Father’s commandments (John 14:21; 15:10). Yeshua had to follow the Torah perfectly and without fault, *or without sin*, in order to be the sacrifice for our sins.

When you examine the Messiah’s infancy and childhood, God the Father chose a Torah obedient Jewish family in Joseph and Mary to raise His Son. The patterns of Torah obedience were modeled to Yeshua by His Earthly parents. They circumcised Him on the eighth day, beginning His time on Earth by adhering to the commandment to dedicate Him before the Lord:

“And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was *then* called Yeshua, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD’)...When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth” (Luke 2:21-23, 39; cf. Exodus 13:2, 12; Numbers 3:13; 8:17).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The Torah cycle, with appropriate dates for the weekly readings, are available online at the Outreach Israel Ministries website (www.outreachisrael.net).

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Later on Yeshua grew in wisdom and stature. At the age of twelve when He went with Mary and Joseph to keep the Passover in Jerusalem, the teachers sitting around the Temple complex recognized that He had wisdom:

“Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up *there* according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Yeshua stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers” (Luke 2:41-47).

The Scripture says that “all those hearing Him were amazed at His intelligence and His answers” (LITV). He was demonstrating this wisdom to the “teachers” or “rabbis” (CJB) gathered there. While the Greek word *didaskalos* (διδάσκαλος) does mean “*teacher*,” it is often used in conjunction with the word *rabbi* in the Apostolic Scriptures. John 1:38 records two disciples asking Yeshua, “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?” As *TDNT* notes, “The addressing of Jesus as *didaskalos* shows that outwardly he fits the picture of a rabbinic teacher.”¹⁹ When the Scripture says that Yeshua was discussing matters with the teachers—what He was actually doing in all likelihood was discussing the Torah with them. He was, in contemporary terminology, debating theology with them. After all, Yeshua Himself was our Rabbi!

From these and other references you will discover that Yeshua not only taught from the Torah, but likewise fulfilled all of its requirements. In order to fully understand this when reading the Gospels, the challenge is that you must have a strong foundation in the Torah in order to see it practiced in the narratives of the Messiah's Earthly life.

Torah Observant Apostles

In a like manner after their Master, the First Century Disciples and Apostles of Yeshua were also Torah observant. Each of the writers of the New Testament was a follower of the Torah or Law of Moses. If they were not Torah observant, then they could not have been considered disciples or *talmidim* (תלמידים), *taught ones*, of their Rabbi. They would not have been following the example that He laid out for them, as a good *rabbi* in First Century Judaism was considered good by the exemplary conduct of his students.

A classic example of the obedience of Yeshua's Disciples to the Torah is when they all gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover (*Pesach*) just prior to His crucifixion (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22). All of them participated in what is commonly called the Last Supper. After the events of the Passover, the resurrected Yeshua then taught them for forty days prior to His ascension. Then they waited as instructed in Jerusalem for *Shavuot*, or what is traditionally called Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

Many examples describe how the Apostles and the First Century Believers continued to follow the Torah. The adherence of the early Jewish Believers to the Law of Moses created some of the first controversies that are described in the Book of Acts. James the Just attested to Paul in Acts 21:20, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law.” The Jewish Believers, once saved, did not all of a sudden become “Christians” as we know them today, casting aside their Jewishness that was embodied in the Torah.

One issue that arose was what the leaders of this new sect would do with non-Jews coming to faith in the Messiah. Were they supposed to follow the Torah as well? Was it required for their salvation? Was it required for their training and discipleship? Did they have to follow it at all? These questions still permeate the Messianic movement today.

¹⁹ R.H. Rengstorf, “*didaskalos*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abrid. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 164.

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Paul: a Torah Observant Apostle

One of the principal writers of the Messianic Scriptures, Paul the Apostle, was also a Torah observant follower of the Messiah. As Paul himself attests in Acts 22:3, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.” Paul’s credentials as a Rabbi and student of Gamaliel are well-founded statements regarding his Torah obedience. Gamaliel was so highly valued in First Century Judaism that the Talmud says of him, “Our Rabbis taught: From the days of Moses up to Rabban Gamaliel, the Torah was learnt only standing. When Rabban Gamaliel died, feebleness descended on the world, and they learnt the Torah sitting; and so we have learnt that ‘from the time that Rabban Gamaliel died, [full] honour ceased to be paid to the Torah’” (b.*Megillah* 21a).²⁰ Paul proclaimed before the Sanhedrin, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees” (Acts 23:6), identifying with them theologically on the issue of the resurrection.²¹ A statement such as this could only be made if Paul considered himself Torah observant, meaning that the Law of Moses maintained some level of relevance for him.

If you read his résumé, you will discover that a number of times Paul’s Torah obedience is described. Paul writes in Philippians 3:5 that he was “circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee.” Even though he articulately argued the Biblical realities of justification through faith and salvation free from any human works in his writings (Ephesians 2:8-9), there are times when he was compelled to show his peers that he had not given up the practices of the Torah. One of the most obvious came when he paid for a Nazirite vow during his return to Jerusalem:

“Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law” (Acts 21:23-24; cf. Numbers 6:13-21).

There are many other times throughout the writings of Paul where it is very clear that he was a Torah observant Jew. In order to more fully understand the writings of Paul, we all need to have a more comprehensive understanding of the Torah. It is imperative that when reading his letters, we understand their First Century Jewish context, and the fact that when he seems to be arguing against the Torah, he is actually arguing *against its improper usage* to those who have abused it, regarding the new, non-Jewish Believers, who are maturing in their faith. We also must keep in mind how the early followers of the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) fit in among the diversity of First Century Judaism.

Why should we study our Hebraic Roots?

Having a comprehensive understanding of the Hebraic Roots of our faith is critical for Believers to have a mature and sound spiritual life. We have looked at the ancestral fathers of the faith. We have considered Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and other key figures in the history of Israel. We know that each considered themselves a Hebrew. Their lives and experiences speak much to our spiritual condition today.

- We have just discovered how critical it is to recognize the Hebrew language and the nuances of studying it, since it is the language of the Tanach (Old Testament).
- We have found out that the Messiah Yeshua was raised in a Torah observant environment, and obviously was Torah obedient without fault in order to become the blameless sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

²⁰ *The Soncino Talmud. Judaic Classics Library II.* MS Windows 3.1. Brooklyn: Institute for Computers in Jewish Life, 1996. CD-ROM.

²¹ The Greek text of Acts 23:6 records Paul as saying *egō Pharisaios eimi* (ἐγὼ Φαρισαῖός εἰμι), literally, “I myself a Pharisee am,” appearing in the present active indicative tense.

Why Should We Study Our Hebraic Roots?

- We found out that the Apostles were also Torah observant, and that their writings reflect their obedience to the Torah within the First Century Judaism in which they were a part.

Now we look forward to delving deeper into understanding additional aspects of the Hebraic Roots of our faith. What aspects of your faith in Yeshua will be enlightened to perspectives that you have possibly not considered? What aspects of your present belief system will be challenged? Are you eager to learn more and submit yourself to the authority of God's Word?

Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study

CHAPTER 1 STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain some of the reasons why Believers should study their Hebraic Roots.

2. What does being a Hebrew or *Ivri* mean? What are some spiritual applications of it?

3. In what context were the Patriarchs “Hebrews”? What did Biblical characters such as Abraham, Moses, and David do to make them “Hebrews”?

4. Explain some of the similarities and differences between the Jewish book and verse order of the Tanach, versus that of the Christian Old Testament. Do you think these are significant? Why or why not?

5. Explain how Hebrew is an action-oriented language. Look up several passages in the Tanach and how they reflect our relationship to God.

Why Should We Study Our Hebraic Roots?

6. Using the examples discussed in the chapter, how reverent were the people when the Torah was read publicly? What are some applications that can be drawn?

7. Have you ever been taught in your denominational tradition that Yeshua (Jesus) was a Torah observant Jew, or that He at least followed some of the Old Testament commands? How might this change your perception of what you have been taught in the past?

8. Have you ever been taught that the Disciples and Apostles were Torah observant, First Century Jews? How might this change your perception of what you have been taught in the past? What challenges does it present to you reading the Book of Acts and the inclusion of non-Jews in the early congregations of Believers?

9. Using the examples given in the chapter, why do you think so many people believe that the Apostle Paul opposed the Torah? What challenges relating to Paul's letters do you foresee when reading them?

10. How do you think that studying the Hebraic Roots of the faith will change various aspects of your spiritual walk?