

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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6,000 Year Teaching: Do you believe that we are rapidly approaching the Biblical year 6,000?

In the past ten to twelve years in the Messianic movement (1996-2008), there has been a great number of predictions released relating to the so-called “Biblical year 6,000.” All of these predictions relate to the Second Coming of Yeshua, and as of today almost all of them **have failed to one degree or another**. While the Bible itself is completely mute about a year 6,000—and instead focuses on various spiritual and/or sociological phenomena as being the clues to consider regarding the Second Coming—this still does not stop people from running numbers and releasing new and revised time charts.

It is undeniable to anyone who examines Jewish history that the 6,000 year teaching is a teaching of many of the ancient Sages (b.*Sanhedrin* 97a-97b). The premise for the 6,000 year teaching comes from the seven-day week, and that man has been allotted six 1,000-year periods since Creation, with the seventh 1,000-year period picturing the Sabbath and/or the Millennial reign of the Messiah. But is the 6,000 year teaching an implicit teaching of Scripture, or is it too “packaged” or even artificial? How do some of the passages used to support the 6,000 year doctrine stand under some scrutiny?

Psalms 90:4 proclaims, “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or *as* a watch in the night.” The Psalmist could be declaring something about Biblical chronology, but it seems much more likely that he is speaking of God’s timelessness. A thousand Earthly years do not seem that long at all to the Almighty, Eternal One. The Apostle Peter builds on this sentiment when he writes, “But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Is Peter talking about a date calendar on which the Lord operates, or might he also be speaking of His timelessness? Certainly while Peter has the judgment of God in mind (2 Peter 3:10-14), too many overlook these critical words:

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Our Heavenly Father is very patient when it comes to judging the human race. While He is absolutely faithful, “not slow about His promise,” He still desires all to come to repentance. It is perfectly valid for one to ask whether or not Peter would allow God to be held to a 6,000 year time calendar, when his own view is that God is going to be patient for as many as possible to be allowed an opportunity to be saved.

Hosea 6:2 is also commonly offered as support for the 6,000 year teaching, as the Prophet says, “He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him.” Using the one day=1,000 years presupposition, many assume that this refers to the past 2,000 years since the First Coming of Yeshua and that we stand on the brink of the “third day,” i.e., the Millennium. But we do have to ask ourselves whether or not this view is consistent to the larger scope of Hosea’s prophecies, which specifically concern the redemption and salvation of Israel:

“Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn *us*, but He will heal us; He has wounded *us*, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him. So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth” (Hosea 6:1-3).

The answer of “He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him” is given regarding how Ephraim and Judah (Hosea 6:4) are to be restored before the Lord. Hosea is clear to say, “like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me” (Hosea 6:7), indicating that Israel stands before God as a representative of all humanity. The issue in Hosea 6 is not the Second Coming and some long term future end-time scenario, it is rather *how* Israel can be restored to faithful covenant status

before God no different than how Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, whose descendants (all mankind) also must be restored.

The answer to Israel's deliverance is found in two days, and a third day. Many historical interpreters have never associated Hosea 6:2 with some end of the world timetable, but instead upon the need for Israel to be identified with *the Messiah* in His death, burial, and resurrection. This would be akin to the Apostle Paul's words, "do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Messiah Yeshua have been baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3). The answer for the salvation of Israel is to be found in the Messiah's resurrection and atonement for not only Israel's sin, but sin going all the way back to Adam!

The common passages used in support of the 6,000 year doctrine can be demonstrated to have alternative meanings that do not at all require Yeshua the Messiah to return on, or even around, the so-called "Biblical year 6,000." But there are other things that need to be considered regarding a 6,000 year chronology for human history.

Many point to the genealogical charts of Genesis chs. 5 and 11, add up the lifespan numbers of the people listed, and believe that human history extends for approximately 6,000 years. But the Biblical text itself does not add up any of the numbers, and the actual numbers for the ages of these people differs substantially among the witnesses of the Hebrew Masoretic Text, Greek Septuagint, and Samaritan Pentateuch. Furthermore, if Genesis chs. 5 and 11 are two telescoped genealogies as is consistent with Ancient Near Eastern forms of reckoning, how many actual people are missing from the lists? If parts of these lists go from great-great-great grandfather to great-great-great grandson, human history can be considerably longer than 6,000 years. (Consult the FAQ entry "**Genesis 5, 11 Genealogies.**")

The validity, or non-validity, of the 6,000 year teaching is also a very difficult subject to consider in today's Messianic community, particularly as it relates to different forms of Creationist cosmology. Are we dealing with 6,000 years of just human history, or a 6,000 year old universe? While the significant majority of Messianics today are advocates of Young Earth Creationism which posits a six 24-hour day Creation cycle, a growing minority of Old Earth Creationists is beginning to assert itself in the Messianic movement (including the editor). These people strongly repudiate the Darwinian theory of evolution, but do acknowledge the antiquity of the universe as created in six *yamim* (יָמִים) or "days" equaling long periods of time. Such views have the capacity to change much of today's Messianic thought regarding the validity of the date setting for Yeshua's return, which we currently witness en masse. (Consult the FAQ entry "**Creationism.**")

Almost all of the people in today's Messianic movement are pre-millennialists, believing that Yeshua the Messiah will return before His Millennial reign on Earth. No one argues that the reign of Yeshua on Earth during this time will be at least 1,000 years (cf. Revelation 20:2ff). Yet, there is much that is not given to us regarding this time, and the Lord Himself will be present among us to answer many of our presently unanswered questions about it. For the present, let us not find ourselves slacking off in His Kingdom's work *now* looking for an elusive "Year 6,000," which may not come *because it has already passed*. Let us, rather, be earnestly considering our mission and calling as His people, and how we are to change the lives of men and women who need to enter into His Kingdom—by experiencing His salvation!

Regarding future developments of the 6,000 year teaching, too many Messianics have used the so-called "Year 6,000" coming as an excuse not to plan or prepare for the future, and this has not helped the long term growth or viability of this movement. As a movement, we are behind where we need to be spiritually and theologically. (Consult the editor's article "**Where Should the Messianic Movement be in 2107?**") Due to the scores of failed end-time predictions associated with a 6,000 year chronology and date setting, it is entirely valid to re-examine, if not severely question, whether the 6,000 year teaching really does have Biblical support. In the future, while more predictions are likely to be formulated, there will also be Messianics who abandon the 6,000 year teaching altogether.

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Abomination of Desolation: What do you believe the Abomination of Desolation will be? Do you believe the Temple will be rebuilt?

Yeshua indicates in His Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24:15, that the Abomination of Desolation is the key sign that will occur indicating that His return is near. We believe that the Abomination of Desolation is when the antimessiah/antichrist “will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” (Daniel 9:27) on the Temple Mount, will proclaim himself to be a god (2 Thessalonians 2:4), and the false prophet will erect an image of him (Revelation 13:14). The antimessiah will demand worship, and those in the city of Jerusalem at this time are commanded by Him to flee (Matthew 24:16-20).

Some in the Messianic community believe that the Temple does not have to be rebuilt in order for these prophecies to take place, and only an “altar” will be erected. They view the Temple as only being the “holy place” of the Temple Mount. This, however, is not what the Apostle Paul says, as specific vocabulary is employed in his letter to the Thessalonians. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Temple of God is usually called the *beit ADONAI* (בֵּית־יְהוָה), literally “House of the LORD,” and the Tabernacle is called the *mishkan ADONAI* (מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה). The Greek LXX renders *mishkan* as *skēnē* (σκηνή), “tabernacle” or “dwelling,” and *beit* as either *oikos* (οἶκος), meaning “house,” or as *naos* (ναός), “temple.” Paul says that the antimessiah “will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Paul says that this takes place in *ton naon* [accusative masculine singular] *tou Theou* (τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ), or the Temple.

Given the differences between *skēnē*, *oikos*, and *naos*, Paul chose *naos* meaning “Temple.” It is thus a prerequisite that in order for the Abomination of Desolation to occur the Temple should be rebuilt in Jerusalem. In many cases, those claiming that the Temple does not have to be rebuilt are making hastily drawn conclusions about prophecy, and are trying to force current events to fit the Biblical text, rather than let events play out naturally.

updated 06 April, 2006

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

Approximate date: after Gospel of Luke, late 60s to early 70s C.E.

Author: Luke the doctor

Location of author: Rome

Target audience and their location: Theophilus, and broad groups of Jews and non-Jews

The Acts of the Apostles, the Greek title of which is *Praxeis* (ΠΡΑΞΕΙΣ) or “Actions,” is the second book in a set written to Theophilus (1:1). Traditional authorship is given to Luke the evangelist, also author of the Gospel of Luke. Conservative theologians generally hold to Acts being written several years after the Gospel of Luke, and as Luke's Gospel takes us from Yeshua's birth to His crucifixion in Jerusalem and subsequent resurrection, Acts takes us from Jerusalem to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to Paul's trial in Rome. The events in the Book of Acts span almost thirty years from Yeshua's ascension into Heaven to Paul's trial, from approximately 30-60 C.E. (*ISBE*, 1:43). Consequently, any dating for Acts must begin at least at 60, ranging perhaps to the early 80s.

The early Christian Church recognized Lukan authorship of Acts. Eusebius writes in his *Ecclesiastical History* in the Fourth Century, “That Paul preached to the Gentiles and established churches from Jerusalem and as far as Illyricum is evident both from his own expressions and from the testimony of Luke in the Book of Acts” (3.4.1). We know that Luke was a traveling companion of Paul, thus any reference to “we” in the text referring to Paul's company would by necessity include Luke (16:10-17; 20:5-21:19; 27:1-28:16). Like his Gospel, Luke was immediately directing his account to Theophilus, likely a Roman official or his patron. As Acts ends with Paul in Rome, it may be safely assumed that Luke wrote Acts from Rome, and from Rome it was disseminated throughout the congregations of Believers in the Eastern Mediterranean.

There are two distinct schools of thought concerning when Acts was composed. Those who advocate that Acts was written prior to 70 C.E. appeal to the fact that Paul's trial is not mentioned and that the text ends abruptly. Speculating on this, it is believed that Acts was composed just prior to Paul's trial, and possibly that Luke was executed or died shortly thereafter. The fact that the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 C.E. is not mentioned is likewise used as evidence in support of a pre-70 C.E. composition. A post-70 C.E. composition of Acts is not impossible considering the fact that the author may have been hurried to get the history of the early Messianic community written down. Due to all the turmoil, he would not have known how the early "Messianic movement" would last, and would want to get something written down. While Acts is described by some as an "incomplete story," what it addresses is historically accurate, thorough, and demonstrates that it was written for a wide audience of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers (Guthrie, 371-372).

Some believe that in addition to Acts having been written to simply attest to the history of the early community of faith, that it was actually written as a defense for the gospel message. Guthrie explains, "The author appears to go out of his way to show the close connection between Christianity and its antecedents in Judaism. The Christians, and particularly Paul himself, still observe Jewish ceremonial requirements: Timothy is circumcised and Paul takes a vow, while James, both at the Council of Jerusalem and on the occasion of his later meeting with Paul, draws attention to the relationship between Jewish practices and Christian procedure. The appeal to the Old Testament as predicting events which were happening in the Christian church would influence Jewish readers in the direction of a favorable view of the church. But it is in its approach to official relationships with the Roman Empire that Acts becomes most clearly apologetic" (Guthrie, 367). This viewpoint attests that Luke knew his historical account was going to be read by a broad group of people, and it had to be accurate regarding Jewish theological expectations, and be factual for Romans regarding the placement of the events in their historical and geographical locations.

Considering that Luke was likely in Rome when he composed Acts, and the target audience of this book of history, it is impossible that it was written in Hebrew or Aramaic. A few Messianics espouse Hebrew or Aramaic origin of this text, but it is an opinion not based on fact. Like his Gospel, the Book of Acts demonstrates a vocabulary of a very high level of Greek, but certainly includes Semitic influences via the Septuagint and "perhaps Aramaic or Hebrew documents relating the early events of Christianity in and around Jerusalem" (Gundry, 296). These documents would likely have been second-hand notes regarding historical events. Bruce explains, "It is noteworthy that the clearest evidence of an Aramaic substratum beneath Luke's Greek appears in the first five chapters of Acts" (*ISBE*, 1:39). Of course, the events of Acts 1-5 are contained to Jerusalem and the immediate vicinity, easily explaining oral Semitic influences on the written Greek. As the events of Acts spread beyond the Land of Israel, less and less Semitic influence is seen in the text. Beyond a doubt the Greek text has a grammar consistent with the LXX (*EXP*, 9:222-223). *IDB* comments on this in more detail:

"On the one side it has been argued that the whole first part of Acts is based upon a lost but coextensive Aramaic composition, which shows through the present Greek text by both overliteral translation and mistranslation. On the other hand, it is supposed that both the book of Acts and any written sources which it used were composed exclusively in Greek. If Semitisms appear, they then are to be attributed to the oral stage of transmission, and are echoes of the original speakers and narrators in Palestine...It is, however, not to be forgotten that the final author of both volumes could vary his style and was not incapable of importing, under the influence of the Greek OT which he knew, 'Septuagintisms' while composing himself in Greek" (*IDB*, 1:35).

Acts was composed to create a history of the early Messianic community, bridging the narratives of Yeshua's life to the spread of the good news throughout the First Century world. It gives us a defense of the early Messianic faith, depicting Believers' endurance through persecution.

The Book of Acts is historically accurate in its detail, and the author uses speeches from the early Apostles to communicate his main points.

The storyline of Acts begins with the ascension of Yeshua into Heaven, and the events that followed shortly thereafter with the giving of the Holy Spirit at *Shavuot* or Pentecost. From there we see how the Believers in Jerusalem grew in number, and how indeed many Jews came to faith in the Messiah of Israel and were Spirit filled. A rabbi from Tarsus, Saul, has an encounter with Yeshua on his way to Damascus to persecute Believers. Following his conversion to faith, he is commissioned by the Messiah to spread the good news to the nations. Non-Jews of the nations begin to come to faith in massive numbers and debate arises as to how they are to be incorporated into the fold. One of the book's most important events is the Jerusalem Council, which laid the groundwork for the inclusion of non-Jewish Believers into the assembly, and what they were expected to do.

Acts contains much internal Biblical background information behind Paul's epistles to the new congregations of Asia Minor, Greece, and the Aegean basin, and the missionary journeys which he undertook. In the second half of Acts, we see Luke's account from him accompanying Paul on these journeys. Acts ends with Paul being tried in a religious court in Jerusalem, him testifying to his Jewish brethren about the Messiah, and then with Paul traveling to Rome with the intention of going before Caesar and testifying of Yeshua before him as well.

Christian theologians have often considered Acts to represent the "beginnings of the Church," whereas Messianic Believers should consider it to be the starting point for the good news to go out to the nations, a critical part of the ultimate restoration of the Kingdom to Israel.

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Acts 15:24: Acts 15:24 says that the non-Jews in Antioch were not expected to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. I understand that your Messianic interpretation of Acts 15:21, "Moses is preached in the synagogue every Sabbath," is that they were expected to keep the Torah. What do you do about this verse?

Acts 15:24 appears the Greek Textus Receptus or Received Text, the source text for the King James Version (as well as for Young's Literal Translation and Jay P. Green's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible), as "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment" (Acts 15:24, KJV). The statement "Be circumcised and keep the Law" (LITV) *does not appear* in the oldest Greek manuscripts of the Apostolic Scriptures that our at our disposal. Newer translations, based on older Greek manuscripts, will read "Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls" (NASU).

The phrase *humōn legontes peritemnesthai kai terein ton nomon* (ὑμῶν λέγοντες περιτέμνεσθαι καὶ τηρεῖν τον νόμον) is omitted from the oldest extant Greek texts. In its explanatory notes which demonstrate the alternative reading among extant texts of the Apostolic Scriptures, United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* indicates that this phrase first appears in the miniscule 1175 (p 476), which dates from the Tenth Century C.E. (p 17). The phrase *terein ton nomon* (τηρεῖν τον νόμον) or "keep the Law" first appears in quotations

of Acts 15:24 in the Apostolic Constitutions and in the writings of Amphilochius (p 467). In its list of the Greek Church Fathers, Amphilochius is listed as having died “after 394,” and the Apostolic Constitutions are dated “about 380” (p 31).

We believe that the phrase “keep the Law” was added to the text of Acts 15:24 by the Fourth Century C.E., at the same time that Roman Catholicism was getting its start. The last thing that this new religious establishment wanted was for its members to be following the Torah or Law of Moses. By the Tenth Century, “be circumcised” had been added to the text as well. Thankfully, due to textual criticism, that is the science of examining and comparing ancient Biblical texts and translations of texts to determine the original reading of them, we have discovered that “be circumcised and keep the Law” was not in the original reading of Acts 15:24.

(It is notable that the phrase “You must be circumcised and keep the Law” [Lamsa], or “you must be circumcised and observe the Torah” [HRV], *does appear* in the Aramaic Peshitta version of Acts 15:24. In our opinion, this is internal theological evidence that the Aramaic Peshitta is a translation of the Greek New Testament, and is not primary to the Greek New Testament like some in the Messianic movement believe.)

The Jerusalem Council ruled that circumcision and Torah observance were not prerequisites for salvation in Acts 15. But, as James recognized that all Israel was in the process of being restored (Acts 15:16-18; cf. Amos 9:10-11), and in that restoration process the Torah would be written on the hearts of the people, it was necessary for the non-Jews to become Torah obedient. This would not come immediately, but would come as these new Believers matured in their faith and were properly trained and disciplined. They needed to enter into the community of faith *first*, before they were taught the truths of the Scriptures, amending their pagan ways. On the contrary to what many Christian theologians would like us to believe, the first non-Jewish Believers in Messiah were indeed told to obey the Law of Moses. The Jerusalem Council ruled in Acts 15:19-21 that those from the nations coming to faith were to go to the local synagogue on the Sabbath and learn the Torah.

For a further discussion of textual issues, we recommend you consult *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* by Bruce M. Metzger.

(This entry includes adapted quotations from the editor's book *The New Testament Validates Torah*.)

updated 21 November, 2006

Alcohol: Do you believe it is acceptable for Believers to consume alcoholic beverages?

We do not see any specific prohibition in the Bible against the drinking of alcoholic beverages, including wine, beer, or other forms of liquor. Wine was used in the Tabernacle and Temple service by the Levites, and the consumption of alcohol in moderation is not prohibited in Judaism. However, there are many sins in the Bible associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages, mostly the consumption of wine in extreme excess.

There are various Christian denominations which consider drinking alcohol to be a “sin,” on the basis of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, which tells us that our bodies are the Temple of God and the habitation of the Holy Spirit, and that we are not to harm our bodies. Certainly, we can harm our bodies by drinking alcohol, but we can also harm our bodies by eating too much, failing to exercise, or working in toxic environments. We understand how this Scripture has been applied by some to prohibit drinking alcohol, but do not entirely agree with it. Yeshua's first miracle was forming water into wine at Cana, and the Apostle Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for his frequent stomach ailments (1 Timothy 5:23).

While there are no Scriptures that directly prohibit the consumption of alcohol, we are told in Ephesians 5:18, “do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” We are also told, “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy” (Romans 13:13). Drunkenness is not a quality becoming of Believers in Messiah Yeshua, as Paul asks the Corinthians, “do you not

know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, **nor drunkards**, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). There are no Scriptures which tell us that we "must drink," and there are repeated warnings against becoming drunk with alcohol.

We do not think that the Bible tells us that we cannot drink, but we do not believe that it is entirely appropriate for us as Messianic Believers to always drink in public, either. There are Messianics who come from Christian backgrounds which prohibited drinking alcohol, who sometimes go to an extreme with their "newfound freedom" when they enter into the Messianic community, which by-and-large does not discourage drinking. We urge caution and consideration of outsiders' opinions of drinking, and believe that if you do drink alcohol occasionally, that you do it in the privacy of your home or solely around trusted friends in public.

updated 21 November, 2006

All Israel: What do Two-House teachers do with references from the Tanach or Old Testament that seem to indicate that "all Israel" was reunified after the Babylonian exile?

Ezra 8:25 is sometimes used as a proof text to show that "all Israel," those of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, were present in the Land of Israel after the Babylonian exile. Certainly, we do believe that individuals from the Northern Kingdom, who were loyal to the Lord, became a part of the Southern Kingdom after the death of King Solomon. Likewise, we believe that there were individuals, who in spite of the Diaspora forced upon them by Assyria, remained faithful to their Israelite heritage and remembered their tribal designations. However, in the dedication of the Second Temple in Ezra 8:25, the text clearly describes "all Israel present *there*" or "all Israel who were present" (NJPS), *kol Yisrael ha'nimetzaim* (כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּמְצְאִים). It is specifically talking about those who were at the dedication ceremony. It is not categorical proof that "all Israel" was reunited after the exile, and the glory of Israel that was to be revealed in the eschaton has been made manifest.

Ezra 10:5 clarifies who was at this ceremony, stating, "Then Ezra rose and made the leading priests, the Levites and all Israel, take oath that they would do according to this proposal; so they took the oath." All Israel present, and the Levites, who were attending this dedication ceremony had to make the vow to God to put away any of the foreign wives they had married, and follow His commandments as laid out in the Torah (Ezra 10:3).

Perhaps what some Two-House teachers have failed to note is that there were those of the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim who were not assimilated into the nations, and became part of the Southern Kingdom or Jewish people. This would include individuals like Anna the prophetess who was from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36). However, individuals like this appear to be the exception, as corporately the Northern Kingdom was assimilated into the nations.

updated 30 March, 2006

All lies: I heard a Messianic Bible teacher speak on Jeremiah 16:16-20 and tell me that everything that Christianity teaches is a complete "lie." This is disturbing to me, especially as my Christian family is very godly and they minister for the Lord.

A few Messianics in the Two-House community readily quote Jeremiah 16:19 which speaks of the nations saying, "O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of distress, to You the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, 'Our fathers have inherited nothing but falsehood, futility and things of no profit.'" These teachers apply this Scripture as meaning that *everything* that Christianity stands for is one big lie and *everything* that they have come out of as (so-called) "returning Ephraim" is likewise a big lie. As has been our unfortunate observation, if all of Christianity is a big lie, then so is the idea that Yeshua is Messiah. This is something that we cannot accept, **or will ever accept.**

But let us understand the context of the entire Scripture passage, so we do not misapply Jeremiah's words:

“Therefore behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when it will no longer be said, “As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,” but, “As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.” For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers” (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

If we have a proper understanding of the Last Days, then we know that there will be a return of the people of Israel, both of Judah and scattered Israel/Ephraim, to the Land of Israel prior to Yeshua returning. After this occurring, the Lord is going to send out fisherman and hunters to gather the remainder of the lost people:

“Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen,’ declares the LORD, ‘and they will fish for them; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and every hill and from the clefts of the rocks. For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes. I will first doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted My land; they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable idols and with their abominations.’ O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, and my refuge in the day of distress, to You the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Our fathers have inherited nothing but falsehood, futility and things of no profit.’ Can man make gods for himself? Yet they are not gods!” (Jeremiah 16:16-20).

Who are the fishermen and hunters in these verses? Who are those people who go out and search for the nations who say that their fathers have accepted all lies? We believe these to be the 144,000 sealed servants spoken of in Revelation 7:4-8, of both Houses of Israel and the twelve tribes, who will be responsible for spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 24:14) prior to Yeshua returning. (Consult the editor's commentary in Chapter 12 of his book *When Will the Messiah Return?*, “The Gospel of the Kingdom.”)

We cannot assert that Christianity has accepted “all lies” because certainly the Bible is not a lie and Christians do follow much of the Bible. On the contrary, the Koran, the Vedas, and the writings and practices of other false religions are the lies talked about here. The false gods are Allah, Buddha, and the millions of deities of Hinduism. Those of “Christian” Ephraim have *not* accepted “all lies.” It is those of “Islamic” Ephraim, “Hindu” Ephraim, “Buddhist” Ephraim, and the other nations that have accepted the complete lies and have continually rejected Messiah Yeshua as Savior. It is to them that the 144,000 fishermen and hunters will go.

Those of “Christian” Ephraim have *not* inherited all lies. For as Hosea 7:8-9 attests of these, “Ephraim mixes himself with the nations; Ephraim has become a cake not turned. Strangers devour his strength, yet he does not know *it*; gray hairs also are sprinkled on him, yet he does not know *it*.”

If we believe what this verse says, then returning “Christian” Ephraim has *sevah* (שִׁיבָה) or has “old age” (ATS). “Gray hairs also are sprinkled on him.” Ephraim is partially “gray-headed,” meaning that he is not as immature as is sometimes perceived. *He does have wisdom*, although he is definitely still maturing. While “Christian” Ephraim must return and repent of his sins and embrace his Israelite heritage, if he rejects everything of his Christian past, including forgetting that Yeshua is indeed the Anointed One, “the Christ” or *Messiah*, then the proper reunification of all Israel will not take place. All of Israel must be reunified with Yeshua being the focus of it, as opposed to man.

For a more detailed explanation, consult the editor's complete commentary in Chapter 2 of his book *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, “Maintaining Balance in Our Quest Into the Torah.”

updated 21 November, 2006

Amos, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Amos?
Approximate date: 760-750 B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate); 587-539 B.C.E. (Left)

Author(s): Amos and/or a close associate (Right, conservative-moderate); Amos and anonymous others (Left)

Location of prophet/author(s): Bethel (Right, conservative-moderate); somewhere in the Land of Israel (Left)

Target audience and their location: primarily Northern Kingdom Israelites, but also Southern Kingdom Israelites

Even though Amos (Heb. *Amos*, עַמּוֹס) is listed in the Hebrew book order as the third of the Twelve Prophets, he was likely the first chronologically. Amos was from Tekoa (1:1), a small town just south of Bethlehem. He was not from a priestly family, but instead earned his living from the flock and a sycamore fig-grove (1:1; 7:14-15). It is unknown whether he was the owner or just a worker (*ISBE*, 1:114), and today some scholarship leans toward Amos being some kind of a civil servant involved in their maintenance (*ABD*, 1:203-204; Dillard and Longman, 376). Regardless of which he was, he certainly witnessed the hardships of many such workers.

Amos was certainly not an ignorant peasant, given his skilled words that indicate he was well informed of the issues of his day (Harrison, 886-887), notably the great prosperity of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (*IDB*, 1:117; Harrison, 884-885; *NIDB*, 43; *ISBE*, 1:114-115; *ABD*, 1:205-206). Amos probably did the bulk of his prophesying in Bethel (7:10-13; cf. 1 Kings 12:28-30), at the location of one of the Northern Kingdom's primary worship centers. Consequently, most of Amos' prophecies concern the Northern Kingdom, although there are warnings issued to the Southern Kingdom.

Questions are asked as to whether or not Amos was a writing poet, or whether his prophecies were later collected and written down by those who followed his ministry. Conservative theologians generally favor Amos writing the text (*EXP*, 7:269), or some of his close followers composing the text (Harrison, 890). Amos' initial composition is often dated to some time in the Eighth Century B.C.E., perhaps around 760 (*NBCR*, 726; *ISBE*, 1:115; *EXP*, 7:275). Perhaps the only parts of Amos that were likely appended by someone other than himself are the superscription (1:1) and biographical section (7:10-17), probably by his disciples.

Liberal theologians have tended to favor the Book of Amos being some kind of anthology of prophetic oracles, some of which are authentic to Amos, but not all. They have frequently argued that the text of Amos must post-date the Babylonian exile, and also commonly claim that the oracles delivered against the Southern Kingdom of Judah (9:11-12) must have been added at a later date, as it implies the fall of the monarchy—which liberals assert has already occurred (*IDB*, 1:118).

Many liberals have also doubted whether Amos even considered himself a prophet, on the basis of his words "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs" (7:14). It should be noted, though, that this may be a response to Amos being a prophet outside of the "mainline" prophetic guild of his time (*IDB*, 1:116), which often incurred monies for its prophesying. Some also suggest that "I am not a prophet" is just a common response of Amos to God's call upon him (*ABD*, 1:204; Dillard and Longman, 377).

Fortunately, it does appear that more critical scholars, on the basis of some linguistic and historical grounds, are beginning to lean more toward Amos' authenticity (*ECB*, 690).

The authorized Hebrew text of Amos probably emerged some time during the Babylonian exile, or the immediate post-exilic period. The current MT is in fairly good condition, with few minor variants when compared to the Greek LXX (Harrison, 897; *ABD*, 1:211).

Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah (792-740 B.C.E.) and Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 B.C.E.; *IDB*, 1:118; *EXP*, 7:269-270; Dillard and Longman, 375), and his words affect both the Northern Kingdom and its subsequent judgment via Assyria, as well as the Southern Kingdom. Amos addresses the prosperity of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, as well as their religious disobedience. Likewise, Amos delivers rebukes against eight different external powers. The Book of Amos can be largely divided into three sections: (1) oracles against the nations (chs. 1-2), (2) a series of judgments against Israel (chs. 3-6), and (3) a group of visions

culminating in ultimate salvation (chs. 7-9; cf. Dillard and Longman, 379; Harrison, 887-890). In Amos, one sees that God is sovereign over the affairs of the universe (Dillard and Longman, 382).

The Book of Amos contains a very strong message of social justice (5:24; *IDB*, 1:120-121; *NBCR*, 727; *ISBE*, 1:116; *ABD*, 1:206; Dillard and Longman, 382-383). While there are similarities between the message of Amos when compared to Hosea, Amos is more concerned about the social conditions inflicted upon the poor of the Northern Kingdom (*NIDB*, 43), listing them as a major reason for the coming judgment. God's Torah is upheld as a standard of proper conduct for His people. Those who were rich and opulent (3:15), having earned their luxurious wares through cheating and extorting the poor, were to be judged severely by God (*NBCR*, 726).

The answer to the Northern Kingdom's severe sin would be swift, national destruction (4:6-11). Throughout Amos, we see that God will use outside powers to judge Israel (6:14), being the King of the whole world (4:13; 5:8; 9:5-6). Amos also criticized "prophets" who only spoke what the people hearing them wanted to hear (cf. 7:14-15).

Throughout the Book of Amos, one should see that the responsibility of Israel is intensified because they have had God's Law and should have known better (3:2; *ISBE*, 1:114), especially compared to other nations who did not have the Torah. Amos does have a concern for the religious life of the people, every bit as much as he does their conduct regarding the oppressed (*IDB*, 1:120; Harrison, 886; *IDBSup*, 22; *ISBE*, 1:117). In spite of the judgment that was coming, there would be a remnant that could repent (5:15), and in due time the House of Israel would be restored as it was during the life of David (9:11-15).

Amos emphasizes what many would consider the "weightier matters" of the Torah, particularly the ethics of Deuteronomy (*ISBE*, 1:117). The themes of Amos are undoubtedly seen throughout the Apostolic Scriptures, and form a considerable part of the mission of the Apostles. There is no reason to discriminate between rich and poor in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:22; James 2:1-10). The poor need care (James 1:27; 5:1-6). Luke's Gospel itself notices the plight of the destitute (Dillard and Longman, 284). Amos is quoted by Paul where the evil of Ancient Israel is to be considered (5:15; cf. Romans 12:9). And, the most significant quotation of Amos (9:11-12, LXX) appears in Acts 15:16-16 when James compares the expanse of the gospel among the nations as involving the restoration of all Israel (Dillard and Longman, 384).

The Book of Amos is an extremely important text today for both Jewish and Christian social activists, especially as it concerns the destitute and those who cannot help themselves (2:6-7; 5:10-12; 6:3-7, 12; 8:4-6). Of course, these are some of the major concerns of the Torah that Amos insisted his audience remember. Interestingly enough, the Labor movement in the early State of Israel took many of the themes of Amos very seriously (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1176). Likewise, the current trend of Christian "liberation theology" in Latin America and other parts of the third world appropriates a great deal of Amos.

There is presently not a great deal of Messianic examination regarding Amos, except for some of the promises relating to Israel's restoration. The Book of Amos has a difficult social message for today's Messianic community, much of which tends to isolate itself from the world at large, rather than being involved in the welfare of the larger community (or global community). Amos asks us some questions that on the whole, we are largely unprepared to answer today.

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posted 16 August, 2007

Annihilation (eternal punishment): Do you believe that the condemned suffer eternal torment in the Lake of Fire or are destroyed?

We believe that the condemned who do not receive Yeshua the Messiah as their Personal Savior will spend a conscious eternity separated from God. This period will be never-ending and is described all throughout Scripture by a number of descriptions such as separation, outer darkness, torment, banishment, etc. It is possible that Biblical language describing fire and smoke in the Lake of Fire may be figurative, or would only be part of the scenery of the dimension that those who are condemned are consigned to. Many conservative Bible scholars who defend an ongoing eternal punishment actually consider the diverse images we see in Scripture to point to them serving as metaphors—so while the punishment goes on forever, the idea that sinners will writhe in fire and brimstone, and have to drink molten lead, would be an inaccurate or an exaggerated conclusion of the wider picture.

We consider an annihilation or extinction of the condemned to not be a viable punishment because it does not substantiate a viable penalty for sinners. Atheists and agnostics who deny the place of an Eternal Judge do not believe in an afterlife or that they will face any kind of penalty or reward for their deeds. They simply believe in eternal non-existence. And, eternal non-existence is precisely what annihilation advocates.

Exegetically speaking for Messianics, saying that "eternal punishment" is not eternal is also problematic. Messianics who advocate that the Sabbath, the Biblical holidays, the kosher laws, and that God's Torah is eternal and relevant, meaning never-ending, but then who advocate that eternal punishment is not eternal, are being inconsistent with the word "eternal." If they were consistent in their application of something being "eternal," then it would mean that the Torah and punishment for sinners are *both* never-ending. This selective usage of the term "eternal" reveals that Messianic annihilationists do not like the concept of a never-ending and ever-lasting punishment for the condemned, and that they are probably applying their own humanistic character traits to God.^a

updated 23 February, 2010

Antimesiah/Antichrist: Who do you think the antimesiah/antichrist is?

We believe that the man of lawlessness will be of Roman ancestry considering that the prophecy of Daniel 9:26 speaks of "the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary," in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. More than likely, this man will be European, but by no means can he be limited to Europe. The only way we will know whether or not a person is the antimesiah/antichrist is when he receives a deadly wound (Revelation 13:3, 12, 14), which some believe will result in blinding of his right eye and loss of mobility in one of his arms (Zechariah 11:17), and whether or not he initiates the Abomination of Desolation. We do not want to pinpoint any individual that might later prove not to be the one.

updated 17 April, 2006

Antimesiah, Makes or Confirms Agreement: Do you believe that the antimesiah/antichrist makes or confirms the covenant with Israel?

In recent years there has been a substantial amount of discussion of the premise that the antimesiah "signs a treaty with Israel" initiating the Seventieth Week, in light of some of the events that we have seen throughout the history of the Middle East peace process. As these are

^a For a further discussion, consult William V. Crockett, "The Metaphorical View," in *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp 43-76.

things that have yet to occur, we would like to present several plausible interpretations of how the Seventieth Week will begin from Daniel 9:27.

In the KJV, Daniel 9:27a is translated as “he shall **confirm** the covenant with many for one week.” Some have interpreted this as meaning that the antimesiah will not initiate a peace treaty or agreement, as is commonly interpreted, but rather give his assent to an already existing one. The interpretation of “confirm” is also resonated in the NIV translation of Daniel 9:27a: “He will **confirm** a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’” The verb translated as either “forge a strong covenant” (ATS) or “make firm” (NASU) or “confirm” (KJV, NIV) in these passages is *gavar* (גָּבַר), appearing in the Hifil stem (casual action, passive voice) meaning, “be strong, mighty,” which *BDB* indicates means “confirm a covenant” in this context” (p 149).

Considering the fact that we are dealing with future events in this text, we must consider several interpretational possibilities. It is clear that the Seventieth Week either begins when this leader makes an agreement with the government of Israel, or confirms and gives his support to an existing treaty and strengthens it. Either way, the overwhelming conclusion we must draw from this is that the Seventieth Week *does not begin with the rapture* as so many falsely believe.

posted 10 April, 2006

Anti-Semitism, Luther: What can you tell me about the anti-Semitism of Martin Luther? How can this great man who started the Protestant Reformation be responsible for ungodly sayings about the Jewish people?

First of all, it can be debated whether or not Martin Luther was actually the person who “started” the Protestant Reformation. The need for radical change in the Church was recognized by many Catholic scholastics who saw the high level of corruption and political intrigue, at the expense of the work of helping the common people. Martin Luther had difficulty with the Catholic practice of selling indulgences, and while he originally intended to simply reform the Catholic Church from within, he eventually had to break from it being declared a heretic.

Luther, as one of the early Reformers was challenged left and right from many of his former Catholic colleagues. Some accused him of denying the Divinity of Yeshua, and claimed that he only said that He was a human. In the course of the accusations levied against him, Luther published many works. One of his early works, published in 1523, was the booklet *Jesus Christ was born a Jew*. This was specifically intended to show that Luther believed in the virgin birth, but he had also hoped to convert Jews to his beliefs as a secondary result of this. His comments in this work demonstrate that early on Luther was very gracious toward the Jews in Germany, recognizing many of the errors made by the Church, and hoped to see them come to faith. He wrote,

“Our fools, the popes, bishops, sophists, and monks—the crude asses’ heads—have hitherto so treated the Jews that anyone who wished to be a good Christian would almost have had to become a Jew. If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian. They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. When they baptize them they show them nothing of Christian doctrine or life, but only subject them to popishness and monkery. When the Jews then see that Judaism has such strong support in Scripture, and that Christianity has become a mere babble without reliance on Scripture, how can they possibly compose themselves and become right good Christians? I have myself heard from pious baptized Jews that if they had not in our day heard the gospel they would have remained Jews under the cloak of Christianity for the rest of their days. For they acknowledge that they have never yet heard anything about Christ from those who baptized and taught them.

“I hope that if one deals in a kindly way with the Jews and instructs them carefully from Holy Scripture, many of them will become genuine Christians and turn again to the faith of their fathers, the prophets and patriarchs. They will only be frightened further away from it if their

Judaism is so utterly rejected that nothing is allowed to remain, and they are treated only with arrogance and scorn. If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among the Gentiles. Since they dealt with us Gentiles in such brotherly fashion, we in our turn ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner in order that we might convert some of them. For even we ourselves are not yet all very far along, not to speak of having arrived."

Perhaps the most important statement to take note of are Luther's words, "If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian." He recognizes that the Church of his time had failed in its job to provoke Jews to jealousy, and actually uses some very crass words to describe this.

Some twenty years later, though, in 1543, Martin Luther published another work on the Jewish people, called *On the Jews and Their Lies*. In this publication he treats the Jews as a cursed people and worthy of nothing less than God's wrath. While there are many damning excerpts from this publication, the following quote sums up his thoughts fairly well:

"I brief, dear princes and lords, those of you who have Jews under your rule—if my counsel does not please your, find better advice, so that you and we all can be rid of the unbearable, devilish burden of the Jews, lest we become guilty sharers before God in the lies, blasphemy, the defamation, and the curses which the mad Jews indulge in so freely and wantonly against the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, his dear mother, all Christians, all authority, and ourselves. Do not grant them protection, safe-conduct, or communion with us.... With this faithful counsel and warning I wish to cleanse and exonerate my conscience."

Luther specifically writes in this publication that "wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in which sheer self-glory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and veheming his eyes on them."

(The complete text of *On the Jews and Their Lies* is available to read at fordham.edu/halsall/basis/1543-Luther-JewsandLies-full.html)

How could Martin Luther have gone from being a supporter of the Jewish people to one who advocated that the German princes burn down their synagogues and eject them from their lands? What were the series of circumstances that precipitated these terrible things said by Luther? Did Luther experience a great deal of rejection from the Jews, and that is why he lashed out against them? Was Luther under political pressure from the German princes to write a treatise against the Jews? Did Luther possibly suffer from dementia, a mental disorder that would not have been able to be diagnosed by Sixteenth Century medicine? Sadly, we will never know the answer.

What we do know for certain is that Martin Luther died three years after the publication of *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Luther was born and lived in a society that had anti-Semitic currents, as the Christians and the Jews seldom interacted and people were subjected to a great deal of Jewish stereotypes. Near the end of his life, Luther had fallen prey to all of the stereotypes and urban myths circulating about the Jewish people. He made a foolish and egregious error in writing *On the Jews and Their Lies*, which the Nazi party was able to use for anti-Semitic propaganda in the 1930s.

The challenge with Martin Luther and today's Messianic community is that many fall into the reverse errors that Luther did. Luther fell for much of the unsubstantiated prejudice against Jews that was present in Sixteenth Century Germany, and some in today's Messianic community have invented their own prejudice against today's Christian Church. Martin Luther was by no means the only Reformer, and he was clearly a human who made mistakes. In spite of his mistakes, God was still able to use him, just as He is able to use any of us in spite of our own weaknesses.

Much of the anti-Jewishness that we see in any writings of Luther and any of the other Reformers are largely the result of men like Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, and others never having any kind of interaction with Jews. Many are simply repeating the prejudices that

they grew up with in the culture they were born into. We need to understand Luther and the Reformers for the times and culture in which they lived.

Interestingly enough, it was not until after the Napoleonic Wars that anti-Semitism in Europe began to change. With Napoleon providing equal citizenship for all in France, and then moving throughout Europe, particularly in the German states, Jews began to receive equal rights with their Christian neighbors. They began to be integrated into society and religious ideas began to be shared between Jews and Christians. Today in the Twenty-First Century, those of us in the West are the product of a society that encourages tolerance and diversity, but we still fall prey to many stereotypes about the Jews or any other ethnicity. But when it comes to the errors of Martin Luther, both the Lutheran Church and many of its clergy have been very repentant in denouncing his anti-Semitism.

In the Messianic movement today, we do have a great deal of maturing to do. We have a shared theological heritage with both the Church and Synagogue. **Both groups of people have made errors.** Jews have fallen prey to anti-Christian prejudices because of the religious culture they have been born into, just as Christians have fallen into anti-Jewish prejudices. And it does not just stop with the Jews, because Christians have been guilty of holding onto many other racial prejudices, all of which are ungodly and unacceptable in the Body of Messiah. Each of us has been guilty for holding to prejudice at one time or another in our lives, so to point fingers at Martin Luther without pointing fingers at ourselves is judging with an unfair scale. There is a great deal of prejudice in the Messianic movement toward Arabs and Muslims today, and on the whole we seldom pray for their salvation. Messianics need not have any prejudice, and let God be the final judge of all human beings—including Martin Luther. We have to make sure that we are faithful to the work that the Lord has given us, and learn from the mistakes of history.

For a further discussion of this issue, consult the article “**Luther and the Jews**” by James Swan <[ntrmin.org/Luther%20and%20the%20Jews%20\(Web\).htm#b8](http://ntrmin.org/Luther%20and%20the%20Jews%20(Web).htm#b8)>.

posted 20 July, 2006

Apocrypha: What is your position concerning the Apocrypha?

Protestants do not consider the books of the Apocrypha to be canonical because Jews do not consider them to be canonical. Jews do not consider these books to be canonical because the principal copies we have of them are written in Greek, and not Hebrew, and were an adjunct part of the Septuagint. The Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican traditions, however, do consider these books to be canonical. The principal books of the Apocrypha include:

- 3 Esdras
- 4 Esdras
- Tobit
- Judith
- The Additions to Esther
- Wisdom
- Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
- Baruch
- The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Youths, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon
- The Prayer of Manasseh
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees

The Eastern Orthodox Church adds 3&4 Maccabees to its Apocryphal canon.

We would not consider the books of the Apocrypha to be “inspired Scripture,” per se, but do believe that they should be consulted as a valuable historical and cultural reference. They do

play a significant role in historical Christian theology, and certainly cannot be ignored. The traditions and points of view that the Apocrypha often records do make their way into many parts of the Apostolic Scriptures, so the Apocrypha should have some secondary place after Scripture in determining one's theology. You will see Apocryphal books quoted from time to time with this purpose in mind. Generally speaking, we quote from the Revised Standard Version translation of the Apocrypha, as it is literal and in modern English.

updated 14 August, 2006

Apocrypha, Versions of: I know that the Apocrypha is not considered canonical Scripture by Jews or Protestants, but I am interested in finding a suitable modern English translation to use for reference. Which one(s) can you recommend?

There are five main versions of the Apocrypha included with some major Bible versions that our ministry employs in our research. These include the following in the order of their publication, along with a brief description of the Bible they are included with. This same order happens to be the order in which we generally use them for study:

1. **Revised Standard Version (1952):** This is considered today to be a centrist-liberal Bible version, even though about 95% of it is reproduced word-for-word in the more conservative New American Standard. Its Apocrypha translation is somewhat literal, and true to the Septuagint Greek text behind it. It represents an ecumenical Protestant perspective, with some Anglican and Catholic influences.
2. **New English Bible (1970):** This was the first modern Bible translation produced for Christians in the United Kingdom, and represents an ecumenical perspective including the Church of England, British Protestant denominations, and British Catholicism. Its Apocrypha translation represents a more "dynamic equivalency" translation, than the RSV Apocrypha. Overall, the translation is left of center.
3. **New Revised Standard Version (1989):** This is the revised edition of the RSV, which primarily updates the RSV to include new scholarship unavailable when the RSV was produced. The NRSV represents a liberal ecumenical perspective, and employs the concept known as "inclusive language," whereby terms relating to "man" or "mankind" are replaced with "human" or "humanity." The NRSV Apocrypha, while not being as literal as the RSV Apocrypha, notably includes the Eastern Orthodox Apocrypha, and texts that neither Roman Catholicism nor the Anglican Church consider canonical.
4. **Revised English Bible (1989):** This is the revised edition of the NEB, produced primarily for Christians in the U.K. It employs inclusive language, and represents a liberal ecumenical perspective.
5. **New Jerusalem Bible (2000):** This is a Catholic Bible translation that is Catholic-conservative in its approach, but employs a total dynamic equivalence. Its Apocryphal books are not organized between the Old and New Testaments, but instead are sorted in with the Old Testament books.

added 01 January, 2006
Virtual Chanukah

Aramaic Peshitta: What is your position concerning the Aramaic Peshitta?

We consider the Aramaic Peshitta, the Aramaic version of the Bible, often called the Syriac, to be a valuable supplementary tool like the Greek Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, or Aramaic Targums (paraphrases of the Tanach Scriptures widely used in the First and Second Centuries). Textual critics of the Bible make extensive use of the Peshitta, dating from the Fourth Century, in

determining what the original reading of a Hebrew or Greek text was. They also use the Septuagint and Vulgate for the same purpose.

The Aramaic Peshitta includes one of the earliest translations of the Apostolic Scriptures that was made. Bruce M. Metzger notes in *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* that “Until the beginning of the twentieth century it was commonly held that the Peshitta Syriac translation was one of the earliest versions, if not the earliest, of the New Testament to be made. The constant tradition among Syrian Christians has been that it was the work of one or more of the original Apostles or Evangelists, some naming Mark and others Thaddeus as the translator. Among European scholars there was general agreement that the Peshitta was in existence by the end of the second century, and certainly by the beginning of the third. Several went so far as to suppose that it was made near the close of the first century or early in the second” (p 56).

There are some in the Messianic community today who believe that the Aramaic Peshitta New Testament is primary to our Greek New Testaments, even though this is not what the scholarly community believes. While Aramaic was a widely spoken language in First Century Israel, there are problems to this belief. First and foremost, the Peshitta New Testament does not include the entire canon of the Apostolic Scriptures, and it excludes 2 Peter, 2&3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Secondly, the Aramaic Peshitta reads more consistently with the Greek Textus Receptus, the source text used for the King James Version, Young’s Literal Translation, and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green. As Metzger notes, “It has been frequently stated that the type of text represented by the Peshitta is what Hort designated the Syrian text and Ropes the Antiochian—a form of text which also appears in the writings of John Chrysostom and which eventually developed into the Byzantine Textus Receptus” (p 61).

The Textus Receptus has problems in many places because of its handling of the validity of Torah, as opposed to the critical Greek texts used today in modern Bible translations like the RSV, NASB, or NIV. Consider the following example from Acts 15:24:

“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, **Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law:** to whom we gave no *such* commandment” (KJV).

“It has been heard by us that men from us have gone out and disturbed you with words and have upset your nefeshot while saying that **you must be circumcised and observe the Torah,** which we did not command them” (Hebraic-Roots Version “New Testament”).

“Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls” (NASU).

Notice what the KJV and HRV versions have. It implies that the non-Jews in Antioch were **not** required to go to the Synagogue to learn the Torah, even though James the Just plainly ruled it in Acts 15:19-21. The NASU, based on older Greek texts, does not have this. The NASU and the critical Greek text it is based on fits with a conservative Messianic theological position.

This is one critical example that we have given in favor of the Greek text. Our ministry has a conservative Torah perspective that favors the Sabbath observance, that all of the early Believers were keeping the appointed times, that all of the early Believers were eating kosher, and that circumcision, while not required for salvation, is something that should be looked upon favorably and be encouraged as a part of one’s spiritual growth. We by no means have a liberal theological position regarding the Torah, and being critical to this have found the Aramaic Peshitta to fall short in some key areas.

The Aramaic primacy argument will be determined more on theological value judgments, as opposed to textual criticism, than anything else. Many Aramaic primacists will base their claims on so-called colloquial expressions in the text, many of which do not have a substantial historical basis.

Two primary “idiomatic” criticisms of the Greek New Testament text usually deal with Simon the Leper (Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3) and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27). Since the Torah prohibits lepers living in a community, and eunuchs worshipping at the appointed place, it

is assumed that the Greek text is in error. However, we believe that those who advocate this are forgetting one of the primary rules of Biblical interpretation: let Scripture interpret itself.

John 21:25 attests that there are many more miracles of Yeshua that were not recorded. We must assume that Simon was called “Simon the Leper” because of a miraculous healing that occurred and that he was living in the city because he had already been healed. Matthew 19:12 gives us a varied context of one being a “eunuch.” One does not have to have his sexual organs removed to be a “eunuch.” One can merely be destined from the womb to never be married. Richmond Lattimore’s New Testament translation uses the rendering “sexless men.” We are not told what context the Ethiopian was a “eunuch,” but we may assume based on Yeshua’s words that he was probably celibate due to his position in the Ethiopian court, not that he necessarily had his testicles cut off.

Another attestation being made is that that the Aramaic Peshitta uses the name of YHWH. This is an assumption, and not a fact. Where some English translations of the Peshitta New Testament are using YHWH, the Aramaic text uses the title *maryah* (ܡܪܝܗ). It is assumed that *maryah* can be used as a placeholder for the name YHWH, and that the proper name YHWH originally appeared in the Aramaic Peshitta. To say that the tetragrammaton appeared in the early versions of the Aramaic Peshitta is a serious stretch. The title *maryah* could just as well be translated as “Master,” as the Hebrew title *Adonai* is translated as “Lord.” The fact that some need to see “Yeshua is YHWH [*‘maryah’*]” in Scripture, is evidence that somewhere along the line they of have doubted His Divinity. Yeshua very clearly demonstrates His Divinity in His teachings, actions, and deeds more than anything else, which we believe are being ignored by too many people, and many Messianics who deny the inspiration of the Greek New Testament often only accept the Aramaic New Testament for a season, before later denying the Messiah altogether.

These statements should not be viewed as an attack on the Aramaic Peshitta by any means. We have found the Peshitta to be an excellent supplementary tool to use in Scripture research. We certainly do not deny that there is a rich Hebraic background behind the Apostolic Scriptures, and that Yeshua was a First Century Rabbi in the Land of Israel and spoke Hebrew as His primary language, and likely Aramaic as well. But He also existed in a larger world, and that larger world spoke Greek as its primary language. Greek is what was used by God to transcribe the good news when the Gospels were finally written in the latter half of the First Century. Greek was a language no different than English is today. If we believe that God can use languages like English to restore the truths of the Torah to His people today, then He could have most certainly used Greek in the First Century to spread the gospel message.

Sadly, most criticisms of the Greek New Testament by Messianics today are being made on the basis of antiquated English translations like the King James Version, as opposed to the Greek itself. Many people are repeating the statements and teachings of others without confirming them as the Torah requires. We believe that the critical Greek New Testament supports our conservative Torah beliefs, and that the Aramaic Peshitta falls short of it. This is one of the reasons why we believe it is so important for us to continue producing our “for the Practical Messianic” commentaries, so these issues can all be addressed in a more detailed, verse-by-verse manner.

For a summary on the Peshitta and related Aramaic literature, consult the article “Versions, Ancient (Syriac),” by S.P. Brock, in *ABD*, 6:794-799.

For a further discussion of some of these issues, consult the publication *Scripture Under Scrutiny: Was the New Testament Really Written in Hebrew?* available from TNN Press.

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