

The Messianic Jewish Movement

An Introduction



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Introduction

The Messianic Jewish movement of modern times represents a re-appearance of a Jewish expression of the *ekklesia*¹. For the greater part of Christian history, the Christian Church did not allow for any specifically Jewish component, within which Jewish believers in Jesus could retain a Jewish identity. For this reason, the Messianic Jews see themselves as a “resurrection from the dead” in the words of Romans 11:15 that speak of God’s fresh acceptance of the Jewish people.

The Toward Jerusalem Council II initiative (TJCII) is a direct consequence of the rise of the modern Messianic Jewish movement, for the vision of TJCII is the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile within the one Body of Christ-Messiah. That is to say, the vision calls for full mutual recognition and acceptance by both Jewish and Gentile believers, personally and corporately. But the Christian churches can only recognize the legitimacy and the rightful place of the Jewish believers in Jesus, when they are familiar with the Messianic movement and have developed positive relationships with the Messianic communities. So an initial task in TJCII is to make the Messianic Jewish movement known in the Christian world. This booklet aims to present an introduction to the Messianic Jews for Christian leaders and theologians, who seek basic information about this movement: Who are the Messianic Jews? What are their distinguishing features? How did they come into being? What do they believe and practice?

¹ The Greek New Testament term *ekklesia* is used here deliberately, as the word “Church” often has a Gentile ring to Messianic Jewish ears. Messianic Jews often prefer to speak of the “Body of Messiah”.

1. Who are the Messianic Jews?

The Messianic Jewish movement proper comprises those Jews who have come to faith in Jesus of Nazareth – whom they normally call Yeshua – as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world - who hold this faith specifically as Jews, and who refuse assimilation into Gentile Christianity. That is to say, Messianic Jews challenge the received Christian and Jewish consensus that when Jews come to faith in Jesus they cease to be Jews and become Christians instead. They claim the same status in the Church that the first generation of Jewish believers in Jesus enjoyed, who expressed their faith precisely as Jews and whose faith in Yeshua in no way denied or compromised their status as part of the chosen people.

With the growth of the Messianic Jewish movement, many Jewish people who believe in Jesus but who still belong to Christian (Protestant) churches have also adopted the Messianic label. This has been true, for example, of many associated with Jews for Jesus, an organization strongly committed to Jewish evangelism. However, the designation “Messianic Jew(ish)” arose in relation to specifically Jewish expressions of faith in Yeshua, in contrast to the term “Hebrew Christian” used to denote Jewish believers within the various Protestant denominations.

Strictly speaking then, the Messianic Jewish movement is associated with the formation of Messianic Jewish congregations. Although a small number of Messianic Jewish congregations are affiliated with or belong to Protestant denominations (see later comments), a freedom from Gentile church control is very important for Messianic Jews. They generally see a connection between the restoration of Jerusalem to Israeli control in 1967 and the spiritual autonomy of the Messianic movement, that as a movement began to spread from that time. Messianic Jewish congregations seek to

promote a faith in Yeshua as Messiah of Israel, expressed in Jewish terms, with worship and a community life shaped by the Jewish Scriptures. This normally involves holding their weekly congregational worship on the Jewish Sabbath, either Friday evening or Saturday during the day, and an observance of the Jewish feasts described in the Bible. They see the Jewish feasts as fulfilled in Yeshua, with a frequent emphasis on their eschatological significance.

Messianic Jews receive the New Testament as canonical Scripture as well as the Old Testament, the TANAKH. However, in contrast to Gentile Christians, they begin from the fact of Israel's election as the people of the Covenant, and they then present Yeshua as the Messiah-Savior, who has fulfilled and who will fulfill all the promises in the TANAKH. Messianic Jews generally prefer to describe their faith in Yeshua in New Testament terms – Messiah, Son of God, Savior – rather than in the later terminology of the Church Councils. While they almost all believe in the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they do not easily embrace creeds that were drawn up by early Church Councils, that refused to allow any place in the Church for the Jewish believers in Yeshua, then called the Nazarenes.

The Messianic Jews all believe that in their movement the “fullness” of the Jews is beginning (Romans 11:12), a “life from the dead” (Romans 11:15). They see in this “resurrection” a sign that “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24; see also Romans 11:25) are coming to fulfillment, and the way is being prepared for the coming of the Lord.

Messianic Jews see the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy for the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. But they emphasize the prophetic link made, for example in Ezekiel 36 – 37, between the return

of the people to the land, the gift of the Spirit and their return to God in re-birth and spiritual transformation. The land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem are significant for all Messianic Jews, as they are for the Jewish people as a whole. But not surprisingly, the importance of Israel and Jerusalem is more strongly emphasized in the Messianic movement in Israel than in the Diaspora.

2. The Messianic Movement Today

The Messianic Jewish movement is perhaps best seen as issuing from two major centers: one in the USA, and one in Israel. The impetus for an international movement has come almost entirely from the USA, where there are more Messianic congregations and the resources are much greater. But the centrality of Israel and Jerusalem in Jewish faith confers a unique importance on the Messianic movement in the land of Israel, where the movement was called Messianic before the adoption of this terminology in the Diaspora. Jerusalem is the city of the great king” (Ps. 48:2; Matt. 5:35). For Messianic Jews, Jerusalem is the focal point of their eschatological hope and of their vision of restoration, both for Israel and for the Church.

One of the Israeli leaders, Dr. Gershon Nerel, has well expressed the potential significance of the Messianic movement in Israel. “It is particularly in Eretz-Israel, the land of Israel, that the modern Yeshua-movement has the full potential to revive and reshape the *Kehilah* portrayed in the New Testament within a Jewish majority and in daily life.”² The developments in the Diaspora necessarily have an orientation to Israel and to Jerusalem, whatever the size and growth rate of the movement in Israel. In fact, the Israeli movement has virtually tripled in size since the influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union during the 1990s and now numbers approximately one hundred congregations (*Kehilim*). The movement in Israel is remarkably diverse, reflecting the different countries of origin and different language groups (Hebrew, English, Russian, Amharic), being about half Messianic before arriving in Israel, and about half coming to faith in Yeshua in the land.

² “Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History and the Modern Yeshua-Movement: Some Comparisons”, *Mishkan* 39 (2003), p. 86.

At the present time there are approximately 300 Messianic congregations in the United States, though half their membership may well be Gentiles and at least one third of the congregations have thirty members or less. The majority relate to one of the two major Messianic Jewish organizations: first, the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS) which was formed in 1984 by the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA), renamed in 1975 from the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America; and second, the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC), founded in 1979.

The fastest growth in the Messianic movement is found in some of the countries formerly part of the Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus). In Western Europe, the Messianic Jewish movement has been longest established in England, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, though its numbers are not large. Just in the last few years, there are significant beginnings for the Messianic movement in Latin America, particularly in Brazil, Argentina and Mexico.

The development and present situation of the Messianic Jewish movement throughout the world is presented in more detail in a later section of this booklet.

3. How did the Messianic Jewish Movement Come Into Being?

The present day Messianic Jewish movement can only be adequately understood against the background of several long-term developments concerning Christian attitudes towards the Jewish people, and some more recent factors that helped to trigger the rise of the contemporary movement. We will look in turn at these background developments and contributing factors.

Historical Background Factors

The historical developments in the Protestant world that in varying ways prepared the way for the Messianic Jewish movement are: (1) the growing number of Christian scholars and leaders abandoning the “replacement” teaching and rediscovering the role of the Jewish people in the last days; (2) the rise of the Hebrew Christian movement, especially in Britain and the USA; and (3) the development of missions to the Jews.

1. The Rediscovery of Israel’s Ongoing Significance

Since the early patristic era, Jewish identity in Jesus faced a growing challenge in the form of replacement theology, which was based on the premise that God had rejected the Jewish people because of their unbelief, and that the Church had taken the place of the Jews as the covenant people of God. As this theological understanding developed and moved into the mainstream of Christian thinking, it meant that Jews who came to embrace Jesus as Messiah, Son of God and Savior had also to embrace Gentile identity and culture. Conversion meant total assimilation. The increasing repudiation of replacement theology in recent times has reversed this process and opened the

door for Jewish believers in Jesus to recover their place as Jews within the Body of Christ/Messiah.

The Protestant Reformation, with its call for a return to the Bible, provided an opportunity for theological reevaluation. While the Reformers' understanding of the Jews did not change, it was not long before some Puritan teachers came to clear conclusions concerning a positive destiny for Israel. In the first half of the seventeenth century this was reflected in the writings of Samuel Rutherford and Elnathan Parr in Great Britain and of Increase Mather in the American colonies. The poetry of John Milton asserts the same hope for Israel as these other Puritan writers. This hope spread to Lutheran Pietism in the beginning of the Eighteenth Century (Jakob Phillip Spener) and to the Moravian movement. The Moravians were an important influence upon the young Wesleys at the origins of their Methodist movement in the 1730s.

By the nineteenth century this understanding of biblical prophecy exercised a profound influence on British and Scandinavian Christianity. German Christianity was also influenced by such trends. Indeed, by mid century, many British Christians believed that it was part of Great Britain's destiny to reestablish the nation of Israel and to help the Jewish people to return to their homeland. It was in this climate that a Protestant bishopric, with a Jewish believer in Jesus as the first bishop, was established in Jerusalem in 1840. Christ Church, by the Jaffa Gate, is the ongoing testimony to this venture.

2. The Rise of the Hebrew Christian Movement

The assertion of a renewed role for the Jewish people in the "last days" led to a number of Jewish believers within the historic Protestant churches seeking to reclaim their Jewish iden-

tity. In 1860, the Hebrew Christian Alliance was formed in Brittain as a supplementary fellowship to bring together Jewish Christians from various denominations. They would discuss the needs of Jewish Christians, support Christian missions to the Jews, discuss theology and more. They insisted that they were not a church, nor did they seek in any way to usurp the authority of the church bodies, but were filling a need for fellowship and identity among Jewish followers of Jesus. This Alliance movement spread to the United States (1915) and then to many European Countries. In 1925, an International Alliance was founded. Generally the Hebrew Christians within the Alliance did not see themselves rooted in Jewish religious practices or in Torah, however interpreted and applied. Rather, their identity was a matter of physical descent, language (Yiddish), and cultural familiarity. They sought to bring a Christian testimony to their own Jewish people.

3. The Development of Missions to the Jews

Mission organizations and societies with the sole aim of evangelizing the Jewish people date from the first part of the Nineteenth Century, both in Europe and in North America. However, there was a sharp increase in mission activity toward the Jewish people from about 1880, at a time when anti-Semitic persecution was rising in the Russian empire, and when Jewish immigration, especially to the United States, was reaching unprecedented levels.

In Europe, missions to the Jews were founded in several countries, particularly Great Britain, Norway and Finland. The Norwegian and Finnish missions gave particular attention to the increasing number of Jews who were returning to the land of their fathers. As their work in Israel developed, there was a

growing desire to form indigenous Jewish/Hebrew-speaking congregations in the land.

By the early decades of the Twentieth Century, a number of well-organized missionary societies had arisen in the USA with the sole goal of Jewish evangelism: the American Board of Missions to the Jews (earlier known as the Williamsburg Mission to the Jews); the Presbyterian Mission to the Jews; the Chicago Hebrew Mission; the American Association for Jewish Evangelism (a 1940s breakaway from the ABMJ). The difficulty in integrating new Jewish believers in Jesus from Eastern European ghetto cultures into largely Anglo-Saxon Christian congregations led some to favor the establishment of Hebrew Christian congregations. The Presbyterian Mission to the Jews led the way, and established Jewish congregations in several U.S. cities (Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Baltimore). However, the motivation was more cultural than theological, and the Jewish character of these congregations was limited to elements such as the use of Yiddish.

4. The Factors Contributing Directly to the Rise of the Movement

Of the more immediate “trigger” factors, the one with worldwide impact was the reunification of Jerusalem through the six-day war of 1967. This was understood by the Hebrew Christians as a fulfillment of Luke 21:24 where Jesus said that “Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” The sense of entering a new phase in the “last days” with the political autonomy of Jerusalem under Israeli control increased the desire for a faith-autonomy among the Hebrew Christians.

The Jesus Movement

The actual rise of the Messianic Jewish movement in the USA was particularly triggered by the Jesus movement of the late 1960s, with its accompanying charismatic component. The Jesus movement, centered in California, made substantial numbers of hippies and Vietnam-war protesters, as well as less radicalized young people, into disciples of Jesus. Their jeans and long hair symbolized their anti-establishment mood. Many were young Jews; open to Jesus of Nazareth rather than to Christianity. It was not surprising that many young Jewish believers in Yeshua refused to join Christian churches, a move they regarded as assimilation among the Gentiles.

The move toward a Messianic Jewish rather than a Hebrew Christian identity came about through a strategic response to the Jesus movement made by several leaders in Jewish ministry. Moishe Rosen, of Jews for Jesus fostered a style of evangelism to fit the youth culture and asserted the compatibility of faith in Jesus with Jewish identity. Martin Chernoff, a Jewish missions leader in Cincinnati from a Baptist background, urged a change to Messianic Judaism within the HCAA on the basis of a vision (1970). In 1972,

Ray Gannon and Phil Goble, two young Assemblies of God ministers, pioneered a congregation in the Los Angeles area, where Jewish identity and faith in Yeshua were joined. Herb Links, leader of the Presbyterian Hebrew congregation in Philadelphia, came to the same convictions on Jewish life in Jesus and gave his congregation a new orientation and a new name (Beth Messiah). In Chicago, the pastor of the Presbyterian-related First Hebrew Christian Church, Daniel Juster, led the congregation to adopt a Messianic Jewish orientation and to change its name to Adat HaTikvah. Its worship times revolved around the Sabbath and Jewish calendar. In the Washington, D. C. area, the formation of Beth Messiah Congregation (1973) was a lay initiative, leading to the choice as leader of Manny Brotman, already an advocate of Messianic Jewish congregations. In 1976, Martin Chernoff relocated to Philadelphia and planted his second congregation (Beth Yeshua). The Chernoff family became a source of great creativity in evangelism, worship, music, and education, pioneering the first full time Messianic Jewish day school. In 1978, Daniel Juster became the leader of the Washington, D.C. congregation. These impulses, largely stemming from the Jesus Movement, shared the characteristics of the charismatic movement, with a focus on demonstrative worship, personal ministry and evangelistic fervor. Some venerable old time leaders, such as Rachmiel Frydland, Jerome Fleischer, and Eliezer Urbach, supported the new directions, as did Edward Brotsky of Toronto and Louis Goldberg of Moody Bible Institute.

The Change to Messianic Jewish Terminology

In 1975 the Messianic Jewish orientation gained a majority in the old Hebrew Christian Alliance of America. With the support of their new and younger members, the name was changed to the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. The new Messianic designation reflected a change of direction, whereby Jewish life in Jesus

and the formation of congregations was now explicitly affirmed as a major goal of the Alliance. By 1976, there was a move to form an association of congregations, but this effort did not succeed. However, in 1978, at a meeting in Chicago, delegates began to work toward the establishment of such an association. In 1979, nineteen out of the twenty-one congregations then existing formed the UMJC.

The two congregations that did not join the Union were key congregations with significant leaders. Differences of philosophy and of leadership style produced a sad division in the Messianic Jewish congregational movement that lasted for fifteen years. Nonetheless, the 1980s would see the mushrooming of the movement in America. In city after city, Jewish followers of Yeshua would form congregations and hope to find leaders or to see one of their own come into leadership. In 1984, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America formed its own association of congregations, the IAMSC. By the mid-1990s almost 200 congregations belonged to the two associations, UMJC and IAMSC, each about equal in size. During this time, the two associations entered into a cooperative relationship. The success of the American movement had produced international influence and some reaction as well. Significant Canadian congregations were also formed in this early period, and some joined the two associations.

The Changed Orientation of Missionary Agencies

The substantial change from Hebrew Christian to Messianic Jewish identity caused controversy in some church bodies, particularly in the older missions to the Jews. Some denominationally-based missions to the Jews had found their *raison d'être* undermined by the substitution of dialogue for evangelism. Those that remained committed to Jewish evangelism mostly rejected the Messianic Jewish orientation. However, the movement's continued growth

led to second thoughts, so that the surviving missions to the Jews mostly adapted to the new situation and came to support the Messianic Jewish orientation. However, these missions had also been suspicious of the charismatic dimension, so that their later support contributed to the formation of Messianic congregations that were evangelical, but not charismatic. This was also the case with the Messianic congregations affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, which has since officially endorsed the planting of Messianic Jewish congregations.

There was a variety of responses to the Messianic Jewish congregational movement from the wider Protestant world. In 1975, the Chicago Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. endorsed the new Messianic Jewish orientation for its Chicago Jewish congregation. Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission produced a statement of support (1976). The National Association of Evangelicals also gave space in its publications to show support to the new movement (1977).

The Messianic Jewish Movement in Israel

The Messianic Jewish movement in Israel reflects the typically Israeli combination of a strong-willed independence and a clear sense of belonging to one people. Thus, there is considerable variety and tension, yet a general recognition that they belong together. The Israeli Messianic Community now consists of more than 70 Hebrew-speaking, 25 Russian-speaking, and 5 Ethiopian Amharic-speaking congregations.

Among the early pioneers must be reckoned Moshe Immanuel Ben-Meir (1904 – 1978) and Hayim Haimoff [Bar-David] (1904 – 1991). Ben-Meir had attempted to found a Messianic congregation as early as 1925, and belonged to one of the half-dozen Messianic Jewish

families to remain in the land when the State of Israel was formed in 1948. He worked until the late 1950s for Christian missions to the Jews, of whose work he became very critical. He was a major contributor to the *Shir Chadash*, a songbook used by most Messianic congregations until its revision in 1976. The family of Haimoff, who had emigrated from Bulgaria in 1928, also stayed in Israel in 1948, and formed the nucleus of the mostly Bulgarian congregation at Ramat Gan founded in 1957. The six sons of Haimoff are all active in the Messianic movement, as is his daughter, married to Gershon Nerel, a scholar-historian of the movement and a leader of the Messianic Moshav at Yad Hashmona.

In the second generation of pioneers, important roles have been played by Victor Smadja, Joseph Shulam, and Menahem Benhayim. Smadja, born in Tunis, and his wife, immigrated to Israel in 1955 as young believers. Smadja has served the movement in teaching, publishing and pastoring, being senior elder of the Hebrew-speaking Messianic Assembly in Jerusalem for over twenty years. Shulam, born in 1946 and baptized in 1962, is still the leader of Netivya Bible Instruction Ministry and of the congregation Ro'eh Yisrael, a teacher-scholar, who has founded a Messianic college and authored a commentary on Romans. In 1963, Benhayim and his wife Haya were among the first American Messianic Jews to make aliyah to Israel. Benhayim was an elder, not a pastor, but played an important role as a teacher and writer, serving as Israeli secretary of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance from 1976 – 1993.

Over the years, some representative bodies and collaborative initiatives have emerged in Israel. There is the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel, which is not now tied to the International Alliance. By the mid-1980s, a Hebrew-speaking national elders' fraternal began to develop and hold forums for discussion and prayer. A national evangelism committee was formed, which included young

leaders. In 1997, a Messianic Action Committee was formed to counteract efforts to enact legislation in the Knesset hostile to the Messianic community.

Israel College of the Bible in Jerusalem is an indigenous institution for theological education for both Israelis and foreign students. The Caspari Center was founded through Scandinavian influence in 1982 as a center for Biblical and Jewish studies, with the primary goal of providing theological education for the Messianic movement. In line with these goals, the English-language magazine, *Mishkan*, is published jointly by the United Christian Council and the Caspari Center.

In the 1990s, the major influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union has contributed to the more rapid growth of the Messianic Jewish movement, both by Messianic believers making *aliyah* and by a greater openness to the Gospel among the new immigrants. Since the late 1990s, the second intifada, leading to greater insecurity and economic hardship, have made many Israelis more open to ultimate questions.

The growth during the 1990s is evident from the detailed report on the Messianic movement in Israel, edited by Kai Kjaer-Hansen and Bodil F. Skjøtt, that was published in 1999 as a special issue of *Mishkan* under the title *Facts and Myths About the Messianic Congregations in Israel*. But the movement has continued to grow quite remarkably, as can be seen from the following figures for the largest Messianic congregations in Israel as indicated in the *Mishkan* survey, complemented by the current statistics (June 2004) provided by Evan Thomas (year of foundation shown in parentheses):

Carmel Assembly, Mount Carmel (1991):

David Davis (160 members, 60 Jewish; now 300 and 120).

Peniel Fellowship, Tiberias (1982):

Daniel Yahav (180 members, 80 Jewish; now 320 and 150).

Grace and Truth Christian Assembly, Rishon Letzion (1976):

Baruch Moaz (200 members, 165 Jewish; now 450 and 350).

HaMa'ayan, Kfar Saba (1989):

Tony Sperandeo (90 members, 60 Jewish; now 150 and 100).

Ohalei Rachamim, Kiryat Yam (1995):

Eitan Shishkoff (85 members, 70 Jewish; now 280 and 170).

New Life Messianic Fellowship (1990), Central Haifa:

Victor Redko (95 members, 85 Jewish). Now no longer exists.

Beit Asaf, Netanya (1978/83):

Evan Thomas (80 members, 60 Jewish: now 190 and 120).

The Kjaer-Hansen -Skjøtt survey indicates that:

1. Almost all congregations celebrate the Jewish holidays in one form or another and understand the holidays to have their fulfillment in Yeshua. The pre-1990s congregations generally have a clear theology of what this means. This is true of some of the post-90s congregations, but not all. Some of the Russian groups simply see their meetings as an opportunity for believing immigrants to get together.
2. Most congregations do not celebrate Christian holy days, though individuals may do so. The exceptions are Russian congregations whose people observed Christian holy days in the former Soviet Union.
3. The older congregations have become more Jewish over the years, with a slow trend toward some incorporation of liturgy from the synagogue. Six would be described as liturgical. However, other congregations that do not see themselves as liturgical, still use some Jewish elements, though there is great vari-

ety. The Torah readings are found in some that are less liturgical.

4. The majority celebrate communion once a month. The majority do not follow a clear liturgy.
5. Only 20 of 69 responding congregations have a Statement of Faith. Others consider that the Bible is sufficient as their authority. Some said that they did not have a Statement of Faith yet, indicating that they would eventually have one. However, the doctrine in these groups is generally according to classical statements of faith. Those that have faith statements vary greatly as to what is or is not included.
6. As the congregations are more established, most have an eldership system of government, with a senior leader, and deacons assisting the elders. Only about 25% had formal membership.

In terms of outreach beyond Israel, the brothers Benjamin and Reuven Berger, who pastor the congregation meeting at Christ Church, in the old city of Jerusalem, have done much to make the Messianic movement known in Europe and in Africa, together with the challenges it poses to the Christian churches. The Berger brothers have also been active in reconciliation work with Arab Christians, as has the “Musalaha” (forgiveness and reconciliation) initiative, led by Salim Munayer and Evan Thomas, using desert encounters, seminars, prayer conferences, and literature, to break the cycles of distrust in the two communities.

The Messianic Jewish Movement in the Former Soviet Union

One of the most important witnesses to the need for Jewish believers in Yeshua to form their own Jewish expression for their faith comes from Kishinev, Moldavia. In 1882, a devout Jew named Joseph Rabinowicz from Kishinev, then part of Imperial Russia, came to faith in Yeshua during a visit to Jerusalem. On his return, he established a fellowship in Kishinev, called “The Israelites of the New Covenant”, which in retrospect appears as a forerunner of the Messianic Jewish movement. The movement launched by Rabinowicz did not survive his death in 1899. Because of the importance of this precedent and the genuine creativity of Rabinowicz, we recommend the book by Kai Kjaer-Hansen on the experiment in Kishinev (see Appendix)

The rapid growth of the Messianic Jewish movement in many of the republics of the former Soviet Union is one of the amazing stories of the last fifteen years. The first informal groups of Jews believing in Jesus within the existing Protestant churches started around 1987 in the Ukraine. Gorbachev’s perestroika from the mid-1980s, leading to the collapse of Communism in 1991, produced a new freedom and unleashed a deep hunger for meaning and identity. Many people with Jewish roots began to reaffirm or rediscover their Jewish identity. Some of these were Christians, and quite a number were pastors in Baptist and Pentecostal churches. Others with no Christian connections and no Jewish formation were open to hear about Jesus. From this time, the majority of new Jewish believers came to faith through direct encounters with Jesus or in other extraordinary ways. As a result, small groups of Jewish believers in Jesus began meeting in many towns, especially in the Ukraine. The first officially registered Messianic Jewish congregations were formed in 1993 – 1994, after the Baptists and the Pen-

tecostals refused to allow a distinctive Jewish presence within their organizations.

The fall of communism also opened the doors of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to evangelists from the West. In the early 1990s, Jonathan Bernis, then of Hear O Israel Ministries, had a vision for evangelistic music festivals in Russia, holding his first festival in St. Petersburg in 1993. His Hear O Israel festivals represented the first mass evangelism by Messianic Jews, and drew big crowds to major cities such as St Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Minsk, Kishinev and Novosibirsk. Over twenty Messianic congregations have been planted or significantly enlarged as a result of these festivals. The Hear O Israel festivals gave rise to major publicity, making the new movement more widely known to the Jewish population, especially in the cities, but also produced warnings against the Messianics in the synagogues. They also introduced praise and worship elements of Messianic Davidic dance and worship songs from the USA and from Israel into the Messianic Jewish movement of Eastern Europe, though there are also some instances of more indigenous Jewish music.

It is clear that the Messianic Jewish movement has been spreading with remarkable rapidity in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and western Russia. The situation is, however, very fluid, with great mobility. Many Messianic Jews are immigrating, both to Israel and to Germany. As a result, congregations are constantly fluctuating and leadership is not always stable. There is a confluence and sometimes a tension between the indigenous congregations and those related to networks sponsored through North American missionary work. The outside influence is probably having its most lasting impact in the foundation of Messianic Jewish Bible Institutes for the training of future leaders, initiated with the collaboration of American leaders from both Messianic Jewish associations. The first

school continues in Odessa, and it is hoped to resume a second school that was begun in Moscow, but which was forced to discontinue its work, at least for a short period.

Other Nations

The Messianic Jewish movement has remained relatively small in other nations compared to the three great centers of Israel, North America and the western part of the former Soviet Union. However, there are signs of significant new developments, particularly in Germany and in Latin America.

Germany now has the fastest-growing Jewish population in the world, largely due to the government policy of financial assistance to Jewish immigrants, nearly all of whom come from the former Soviet Union. In 1995, a Messianic congregation was founded in Berlin by Vladimir Pikman from Kiev, leading to the formation of Beit Sar Shalom and the planting of other congregations in Germany. There are now about twelve Messianic groups in Germany.

The newest developments in Messianic Jewish expansion are taking place in Latin America. Here there is a unique historical situation, with many millions of people of Marrano ancestry. (The Marranos were those Jews in Spain, and later in Portugal, who were baptized as Catholics under pressure, but who inwardly remained Jews). Many Latin Americans with Marrano ancestry are now reclaiming their Jewish roots, and for some whose faith in Jesus Christ had real meaning, the new Messianic Jewish groups represent a way of being both Jewish and believers in Jesus. They are not recognized by the rabbinical authorities as authentic Jews because they cannot produce the necessary documentation from their family history.

The largest Messianic Jewish congregation in Latin America, with several hundred members, is in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, where a Messianic Jewish Bible Institute has been founded to train leaders ready to plant new congregations. The same pattern of a thriving congregation, followed by a Bible Institute, is being repeated in Buenos Aires, Argentina. There are also Messianic Jewish groups in Central America, especially in Mexico.

In several European countries, there are national Messianic Jewish Alliances affiliated with the International Alliance. But in Holland and Switzerland, for example, the national alliance consists mostly of Hebrew Christians. The Messianic movement has developed somewhat more in Great Britain, organized around the London Messianic Congregation, led by Dr. Ruth Fleischer. The first European congregation was founded in Paris, France, in 1963, by Paul Ghenassia, who, with Marcel Beckrich, were the major pioneers in Western Europe. Ghenassia now leads the congregation in Brussels, Belgium that was founded in the 1980s by the woman who later became his wife. Both in Britain and in France, the Messianic Jewish movement has had a checkered history, not without scandals and quarrels, some involving moral failings and others concerning extreme theological views. The International Alliance has sought to provide support and stability for the national alliances, with particular local efforts focusing on formation and the establishment of yeshiva programs.

In Britain, there have been numerous fellowships of Jewish and non-Jewish believers with an interest in Jewish roots and Messianic Judaism, but which fall short as yet of regular congregational worship and a committed Messianic Jewish life-style. During the 1990s, a number of local congregations with an understanding of the necessary distinctives of a Messianic Jewish congregation/synagogue, have been formed.

In France, a Messianic center in Nice has not survived, but there are congregations in Strasbourg, Marseille and some other cities with large Jewish populations. A Messianic congregation, founded in Amsterdam in the early 1990s under a leader trained in the USA, now hosts an annual conference. In Eastern Europe, Hungary has seen efforts to start a Messianic Jewish presence, but to date with only limited success, and in Romania there are four Messianic congregations.

There are also Messianic Jewish groups in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

5. The Unity of the Movement

The Messianic Jewish movement has no overall authority structure or governing body. The International Messianic Jewish Alliance is a fellowship that brings together the leaders of the Messianic Jewish Alliances in those nations where the movement has a presence.

The patterns of Messianic Jewish fellowship are most akin to free church patterns of voluntary association (and sometimes of voluntary dissociation). This would seem to be partly the result of evangelical Protestant influence, particularly from the United States. But the free church pattern also reflects the instinctive resistance of most Messianic Jews to “church control”, which they identify with being under the dominion of the Gentiles (the teaching of Jesus on authority patterns in Luke 22:24 – 27 has quite a different ring in Jewish ears).

However, the one major difference is that all Messianic Jews are conscious of belonging to the one chosen people. Thus, even when there are major and apparently insuperable theological differences, there is often a tension not found commonly in evangelical circles between the tendency to disown the erring brother and the instinct to stick with one’s own people.

The Major Points of Tension

There are some major points of friction within the Messianic Jewish Movement which are unlikely to be easily resolved. These are listed here in descending order of importance and intensity: (1) the place and role of the Torah in the New Covenant era; (2) tensions between the movement in the land of Israel (Eretz Israel) and the movement in the Diaspora; and (3) tensions between the charismatic and the evangelical.

1. The Place and the Role of the Torah in the New Covenant Era

The Torah or the Law of God is a central theological issue for all Messianic Jews, because of the place of the Torah in Jewish life and identity. It is difficult to be a Messianic Jew and not have a position on the Torah. Within the Messianic movement, there are many approaches to Torah, which will be summarized below.

It may be easiest to understand the spectrum of positions among Messianic Jews in regard to Torah by citing the New Testament texts that are most important to them, and which they use as the basis for their overall theology. For most Messianic Jews outside Israel, the key text comes from Matthew 5, “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (5:17). Here Torah remains, and the key question is “What does fulfillment of the Torah mean?” This question in effect becomes: “How does one observe Torah in the New Covenant order established by Jesus and characterized by the gift of the Holy Spirit?”

Messianic Jews can and do give a wide range of answers to these questions. But for all who appeal first to Matthew 5:17, the affirmation of Torah plays an important role in their identity. Their identity is grounded in their belonging to the people of the covenant, and this is then understood as fulfilled or perfected through Yeshua. This position takes the Torah with greater seriousness, following the words of Jesus that “those who are great in the Kingdom of Heaven” are those who teach others to obey the least of the commands. Yeshua is understood as giving his disciples the greatest exposition of universal Torah in his teaching, beginning with the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew is very important for Messianic Jews, which

is not surprising considering that Matthew was written for first century Jewish believers in Yeshua.

The differences among Messianic Jews regarding the application of the Torah today are parallel in some ways to differences in the mainline Jewish community. All live in the same situation in which there is no temple, no sacrificial liturgy, no active priesthood. Most live in societies in which the full application of dietary and other laws is extremely burdensome. The difference is that the Messianic Jews take the *Brit HaHadasha*, the New Testament, as the authoritative guide for the application of the Torah today. Where the New Testament says nothing in relation to particular Jewish practices, Messianic Jews typically interpret these practices in the light of Jesus as fulfiller of the Torah. So in the New Covenant context, Messianic Jews still circumcise their infant sons, still keep the Biblical feasts, and still keep the Sabbath holy, but all unto Yeshua. They would normally observe the Torah regulations concerning unclean foods (Lev. 11) and forbidden degrees of relationship for marriage (Lev. 18). There is a wisdom of flexible application in the New Covenant according to Holy Spirit-led reflection. The Age of the Kingdom or the New Covenant also produces change in Torah. Most Messianic Jews, for example, would not preclude physically uncircumcised Gentiles, from being guests at their Passover Seders. The unity of shared heart circumcision is thought to have brought a change, whereby in our depth of New Covenant fellowship, such exclusion is no longer fitting. This dimension of reapplication in the New Covenant is akin to what is called *Halakhah* in Judaism, or the applying of Torah to new circumstances.

At the most conservative end of the spectrum in regard to the Torah, are those Messianic Jews, not more than ten percent in the

worldwide movement, who submit to the *halakhah* of the rabbis in all matters where there is no clear contradiction to the Scriptures. This minority understand Matthew 23 as implying the continuing authority of rabbinic *halakhah* for all religious and ethical practice, following what the rabbis require, but not doing what they do (v. 3). Messianic Jews of this persuasion thus basically live an Orthodox Jewish life, observing the rabbinic laws of *kashrut*, of hand washing, and the laws of prayer, including not riding in automobiles on the Sabbath. In contrast, the vast majority of Messianic Jews who emphasize the new covenant fulfillment of the Torah pay attention to rabbinic *halakhah*, but do not regard themselves as being under rabbinic authority. The Torah-observant Messianic Jews are, however, accepted within the Messianic Jewish community as long as they maintain the general biblical confessions that are common in the Messianic Jewish community.

At the other end of the spectrum are those for whom the key interpretive texts come from the letters of Paul, particularly for example “[Christ] has broken down the wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances” (Eph. 2:14 – 15), and “before faith came, we were confined under the law” (Gal. 3:23). There are some Messianic Jews, particularly in Israel, who teach that believers baptized into Messiah have died to the Law. It must be remembered by Gentile readers that even for those Messianic Jews who insist that the Law of Moses has been abrogated by the death of Jesus on the Cross, the Torah still has an importance that it would not have for Gentile believers with a similar theology. First of all, the promises of the covenant and of the land are first given to Abraham. The requirement of circumcision for Israelite/Jewish identity comes from the Abrahamic covenant, not that of Sinai. The observance of Shabbat is likewise not a matter of dispute.

2. Tensions between the Movement in the Land of Israel (Eretz-Israel) and the Movement in the Diaspora

There are quite significant differences between the Messianic Jewish movement in the land of Israel and the movement in the Diaspora. The issue of Jewish identity among Messianic Jews is experienced quite differently in the two situations. In the Diaspora, where Jews are a minority and the mainline Jewish community denies Jewish identity to the Messianic believers, there is a strong need in the Messianic Jewish community to affirm and demonstrate their Jewish identity. This situation predisposes Diaspora Messianic Jews toward forms of identity with Jewish customs and clothing. In the land of Israel, however, Messianic believers do not feel the same need to assert their Jewish identity. Despite the high court ruling that Jewish believers in Jesus do not qualify as Jews for the Law of Return, and despite the sometimes fierce opposition of anti-missionary Orthodox Jews, the majority of Israeli citizens see the Messianic community as fellow Jews. Messianic Jews in Israel are thus much less demonstrative than Diaspora Messianics in regard to dress and ritual.

Differences in outward expression are not perhaps the main ground for tension. The tension comes rather from different assumptions concerning the “heart” of the movement. For the Messianic movement in Israel, the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem in particular, form the prophetic center toward which history is moving. Of course, the Messianic movement worldwide has an orientation toward Israel, as does the Jewish world in general. But the shaping center of the Messianic movement in the Diaspora, one may say the power center, is in the United States. This is where the movement is the most developed and possesses the most institutional resources. Thus the North American movement exerts the greatest influence on the teaching and the politics

of the worldwide movement, particularly in the expanding situation in Eastern Europe. This difference generates some of the greatest tensions in the Messianic Jewish movement.

Another major difference concerns attitudes toward the past. The nation of Israel has been decisively marked by the Holocaust, and the experience of Israel as a new beginning. The Messianic movement in Israel experiences itself as a resurrection from the dead much more vividly than the movement in America, where this dreadful rupture was not experienced in the same way. This sharp contrast produces very different sensitivities.

One important issue here is the Messianic Jewish attitude to rabbinic Judaism in general. Messianic Jewish responses vary from those who endorse rabbinic Judaism as a wonderful and true, though incomplete, religious system to those who eschew it simply as an aberration. Most are somewhere between these two positions, seeing value in rabbinic Judaism but also voicing caution. The Messianic Jewish response is found at all points on a continuum between honoring and disdaining rabbinic Judaism. The American movement tends to be more positive to rabbinic Judaism, but divided on the issue. The majority of Israelis tend to be more negative. The largest concentrations of the movement outside of Israel and North America are somewhat in the middle.

3. Tensions between the Charismatic and the Evangelical

As in the wider Protestant world, the Messianic Jewish movement has experienced tensions between the charismatic and the evangelical. This tension has perhaps been more marked in Israel, where the first moves toward the formation of congregations of Jewish believers in Yeshua came from Protestant missions with an evangelical theology. In the United States, the origi-

nal thrust from the Jesus movement was strongly charismatic, so that the Evangelical – Charismatic tension showed first in the debate about the change from Hebrew Christian to Messianic Jewish. Once this was decided in 1975, it would be difficult for the Messianic Jewish movement to treat the charismatic as a deviation from true Evangelicalism.

This tension shows up in two particular spheres, that of worship and that of the prophetic. The charismatic element in most of the Messianic movement has favored bodily movement and expression, which itself has more similarities with forms of Jewish revivalism. One aspect is the widespread practice of dance within worship, more common among the Messianics than in the charismatic movement in general. By contrast, non-charismatic Messianic congregations are generally non-demonstrative, perhaps like many Baptist or free evangelical worship, or perhaps even structured on the Siddur, the Jewish prayer book with some Messianic adjustments.

The tensions are perhaps strongest in relation to the prophetic. The majority of Messianic Jews regard the rise of their movement as a prophetic reality of the last days. They see the establishment of the land of Israel and the return of the Jewish people as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. The plus-factor in the charismatic congregations and ministries is prophetic utterance today. Not surprisingly, the prophetic utterances coming from charismatic circles, both inside and outside Israel, often focus on the present-day political situation in an eschatological end-times framework.

6. Messianic Jewish Doctrine

How do Messianic Jews understand those doctrines that are understood as universal affirmations of classical Christian doctrine? For almost all Messianic Jews, the Bible, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Covenant Scriptures, is of unique canonical authority. Almost all would affirm that what the Bible intends to teach in context has authority for Messianic Jews. In addition, though most Messianic Jewish groups in North America, many in Eastern Europe and a quarter of those in Israel, have doctrinal or creedal statements, most of those who do not would agree with these statements. Some of the statements in these creeds are worth mentioning because they are of special concern in a Jewish context.

The doctrine of the Trinity is most noteworthy. Classical Orthodox Judaism in the Middle Ages defined the view of *shituff*, that God is a plurality of persons, but in complete unique unity, or that God is a composite being, as idolatry for Jews, but acceptable for Christians. Messianic Jews generally do not like to speak of the Trinity, but of the Triune nature of God. While this might seem a subtle distinction to Christians, for Messianic Jews, this is a way of emphasizing unity and not giving the impression to the Jewish community that they embrace tri-theism, or the belief in three separate gods. However, when the triune nature of God is explained, while avoiding the Greek terms of Nicea, the view of there being distinct personalities in one godhead is the consensus of the great majority in all nations. Messianic Jews prefer to simply quote the Bible and allow it to speak concerning this matter.

Few Messianic Jewish leaders are familiar with the Christological debates in the early centuries of Church history. There are excep-

tions. However, on this question, there has been enough teaching and training that almost all affirm that Yeshua is fully divine and fully human. Again, this would be seen as an implication from reading the passages of the New Covenant Scriptures. Those leaders with seminary and Bible school backgrounds who are called upon to teach in much of the movement are clear on the matter of Yeshua having two natures as one Person.

Recently a very important statement concerning the triune nature of God and the divinity of Yeshua was put forth in Israel by the fellowship of leaders mentioned above. To the surprise of many, a few leaders rejected the statement and some showed themselves to really be Ebionites, both rejecting the triune nature of God and the full divinity and humanity of Yeshua. However, those that rejected the statement were a tiny minority that are regarded as heretical. Almost all Messianic Jews therefore, knowingly or unknowingly, fall broadly within the doctrinal boundaries affirmed by the classical creeds.

The issue of the sacraments is also important. Most Messianic Jews immerse believers in water and do not practice infant baptism. This is seen as more in line with Jewish practice. Male children enter the Abrahamic covenant by circumcision, while the girls are dedicated. Baptism is thus reserved for those who have come to conscious faith. It is common in Messianic Jewish circles to see a sacramental value to immersion that would not be shared by many in the free churches. A real work of grace is understood to take place in immersion that applies the work of the Cross and resurrection to the person's life. There is an expectation of an experienced reality that has continuing effect for the rest of one's life. In addition, the practice of communion, partaking of the bread and wine of the Messiah's *Seder*, is understood really to convey the meaning of His death for us which actually renews His life in us. Most Messi-

anic Jewish leaders believe in a real efficacious power in the communion, though the explanation of exactly how or why this is the case varies. Most Messianic Jewish congregations worldwide celebrate the communion monthly, but a significant minority does so weekly. Some celebrate it on the Sabbath after the new moon. A very small number reserve this only for the Passover season. The meaning of the supper is definitely rooted in Passover meanings as was the original context.

The question of other sacraments is not usually raised. However, in many Messianic Jewish groups, it would appear that other practices are treated as if they were sacraments. Almost all Messianic Jews marry under a canopy or *chupah* with a prayer shawl on top of it. Blessings over red wine are spoken and the bride and groom seal the wedding vows with the wine. Anointing with oil is common in services due to the charismatic roots of the movement. This act is believed to convey the power of the Spirit for healing. Oil is frequently used with the laying on of hands for the ordination of deacons and elders. Again, this seems to be treated in a sacramental way, but has not been given theological attention. That the physical world conveys real spiritual meaning and power from God is a common Jewish idea, and thus these connections of physical acts and objects conveying real spiritual substance are quite natural for Messianic Jews.

7. Messianic Jewish Worship

There is a great variety in the worship patterns of Messianic Jews. They vary from quite structured liturgical forms to free and unstructured patterns very little different in shape and style from evangelical free church worship. Some combine inherited liturgical elements with spontaneous and new patterns in a flexible way.

Here again there are evident differences between Israel and the Diaspora. North American Messianic Jews are typically the most liturgical, and those in Israel the least liturgical. Most Messianic Jews in other nations fall somewhere in between. There are deep issues involved in these differences. Some are explicable by varied historical backgrounds and influences. In Israel, the less liturgical emphasis comes from the influence of free church missions in the origins of the movement, from a more intense focus on the prophetic, and an element of reaction against the rigidities of Orthodox Judaism. In North America, most congregations do use some of the most central parts of the liturgy, but supplement this liturgy with modern Messianic Jewish praise and worship music. In Eastern and Western Europe and South America, a moderate use of liturgy is common.

The strong charismatic element in much of the Messianic Jewish movement is most evident in the sphere of worship. The Messianic movement has been very creative in its production of music and texts for worship, with many songs being composed in Hebrew and sung throughout the world. This creativity is also evident in the forms of Israeli dance that are now quite common during times of praise in Messianic Jewish worship.

It is not perhaps surprising that Jewish believers in Yeshua face more strongly than most Gentiles the tension between appreciation for the traditions and values of the past and a deep dependence on the leading of the Holy Spirit in the present. In what is still a young and developing movement, it is in worship that this tension is most dramatically lived out. On the one hand, an approach to worship without any relation to inherited liturgy can easily lead to shallow rootlessness, while an emphasis on orthodoxy and tradition can equally diminish creativity and render more difficult any moving of the Spirit of God.

The Sabbath

Messianic Jews observe the Sabbath each week from Friday sundown to Saturday. The Sabbath worship in Messianic congregations may take place on the Friday evening or on the Saturday in the morning or the afternoon. The Sabbath service varies greatly. Some Messianic Jewish services, mostly in America, include the major elements of the liturgy of the traditional Jewish service, including introductory Psalms, the blessings before and after the *Sh'ma* (the great affirmation of Deuteronomy 6:4) and the *Sh'ma* itself including readings from Deuteronomy 6, 11, and Numbers 15). The Torah service with its blessings and readings are very common in America and in many Eastern European congregations, and are part of the life of a minority of Messianic Jewish congregations in Israel.

In addition, the great prayer known as the *Amidah* whose basic content reaches back to the time of Yeshua is also quite common. This prayer has seven benedictions for the Sabbath but nineteen for the days of the week. Other classical hymns such as *Adon Olam* and *Aleinu* are also common. These prayers enshrine the most basic Jewish hopes and confessions. The *Aleinu* expresses the Jewish hope of the full redemption of Israel and the nations who will all

be united in the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Aaronic benediction is almost universal.

The Messianic Jewish Year

Virtually all Messianic Jews observe the annual cycle of biblical feasts, both in communal and family practice. In the Messianic Jewish year, all feasts are interpreted with Yeshua as the center of fulfillment. Dating the feasts follows the Jewish biblical calendar and thus varies from both the calendar of the Christian churches, but also sometimes from the rabbinic calendar.

Beginning with Passover, both congregational gatherings and home *Seders* emphasize the events of the Passover Exodus and the events of the death and resurrection of Yeshua (First fruits). This is a season of very important extended family gathering and congregational gatherings. For Messianic Jews, emphasizing biblical practice, Passover is the beginning of the year.

The most common use of liturgy is the content of the Passover liturgy expressed at family or communal *Seders* where the story of Passover is retold. This order is contained in a booklet called the *Haggadah*. The basic features of the traditional *Seder* are kept by most Messianic Jews. This includes the elements of the *Seder* including eating *matzoh* (unleavened bread), four cups of red wine, bitter herbs (horseradish), green vegetables (lettuce or parsley), and *Charoseth* (an apple and nut mixture). The traditional blessings, the retelling of the story, the four questions concerning why this night is different than all other nights, and much more, are generally included. There are several Messianic Jewish versions of the *Seder* which both conserve the traditional elements and add the meaning of fulfillment in Yeshua.

Shavuot (Pentecost) is a celebration of the giving of the Torah on Sinai and of the day when the Spirit was poured out upon the disciples in the Temple at Jerusalem. Some Messianic Jews follow the Jewish tradition of all night Torah study.

The Fall Holy Days are very important in all Messianic Jewish communities. Beginning with the traditional, but not biblical new year (*Rosh Hashana*), Messianic Jews not only blow the *Shofar*, but connect its meaning with the return of the Messiah and all the biblical passages connected to his coming. *Yom Kippur* centers on Yeshua and His atonement. There is a wide variety of worship practice between communities in their observance of the Day of Atonement. Some use many of the traditional prayers for these days, whereas others who are less liturgically oriented only emphasize the biblical content and use the most appropriate Messianic Jewish praise and worship music.

The Feast of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) is understood as prophetic of the coming of the Kingdom of God in fullness. The events of Yeshua's life during this feast (John 7-9) are usually part of the teaching. The most visible practice is building a *sukkah*, the makeshift temporary dwelling that reflects the period in the wilderness in Exodus and Numbers. The family takes meals in the *sukkah*, and invites friends to share in the joyous celebration of God's provision. The building of the *sukkah* is a family event and children are especially encouraged to decorate the *sukkah* with homemade decorations. Many Messianic Jews believe that this was the season of the birth of Yeshua and some emphasize this in preaching.

In December, the Feast of *Hanukkah* is universally observed. Although this commemoration of the rededication of the second Temple is only mandated in the books of the Maccabees, not recognized as part of canonical Scripture, it is treated as biblical because of its

mention in John 10. Because this is the season for Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus, some Messianic Jews link Hanukkah to the Incarnation, believing that this was the season of the annunciation and the conception of Yeshua. Preaching and teaching would then not only note the deliverance of our nation, but the coming of the Messiah into the world and the events of the Incarnation.

Though a minor feast in the Bible, many Messianic Jewish communities observe the Feast of Purim as enjoined in the book of Esther. This is a time where an emphasis is given to educate children. There are humorous plays to recount the story of Esther, costume parties, and joyful gatherings for fellowship. Following the nightmare of the Holocaust, the story of Esther and the deliverance from the menace of Haman speaks strongly to all Jews, and to Messianic Jews foreshadows the final deliverance by Messiah Yeshua.

Messianic Jewish Rites of Passage

Jewish rites of passage, with much in the way of traditional observance, are almost universal among Messianic Jews. This is quite significant. We have noted that circumcision with traditional blessings is most common. Traditional *Mohels* from the Jewish community are often called upon to perform the ceremony, but where such is not possible, doctors are called upon to do the surgery while the father and the Messianic Jewish pastor/rabbi say the blessings. *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah*, where young people read or chant their *Torah* and *Haftorah* portions in Hebrew, are a most important part of transmitting the Messianic Jewish heritage to the next generation.

The wedding service includes most of the basic elements in the classic liturgy of the Jewish wedding service, including the blessing over the betrothal, which affirms that this is a biblically permitted

marriage, the ring vows, and the seven blessings over the bride and the groom.

In addition, the practices surrounding death are also quite different in Judaism than in Christianity. Avoiding embalming the body, simple caskets, and dressing the body in a white shroud, reflect the Jewish view of equality in death and in not seeking to preserve the present physical body. Redeemed people are destined for resurrection, which transcends the present physical body. Prayers during mourning affirm the goodness of God, and the saying of the *Kaddish* prayer as part of the funeral is considered essential. This prayer also affirms God's goodness and includes the hope that His Kingdom would be established upon the earth. It is quite parallel to the *Our Father* prayer taught by Yeshua. In Jewish practice, the friends provide food and comfort for the bereaved. The post-funeral ways of dealing with death vary, with some saying the *Kaddish* prayer daily and others saying this prayer only on the Sabbath following the funeral. Few maintain the practice of daily recital for the whole year, but there are some that have done so.

Appendix

Some Helpful Literature

This Appendix provides a brief bibliography of recommended books directly addressing the Messianic Jewish movement, together with a description of their contents.

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan *Messianic Judaism*
(London & New York: Cassell, 2000).

Cohn-Sherbok's book is one of the first sympathetic studies of the Messianic Jewish Movement by a leading Jewish rabbi. It is based on firsthand experience of the Messianic movement, but it is limited to the movement in the United States.

Juster, Daniel *Jewish Roots*
(Shippensburg, Pennsylvania:
Destiny Image Publishers, 1995).

Juster, one of the leaders of the Messianic Jewish movement in the United States, presents a Messianic Jewish understanding of the call of Israel and the establishment of the New Covenant in Yeshua, the relationship of the Church to Israel and what it means to be a Jewish follower of Yeshua today.

Kjaer-Hansen, Kai *Joseph Rabinowicz and the Messianic Movement* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1995 and Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1995).

This book presents the whole history of a significant precursor development to the Messianic Jewish movement, the group known as the Israelites of the New Covenant, founded by Joseph Rabinowicz in Kishinev, Moldavia, in the mid 1880s. Because of his pioneering visionary role, Rabinowicz has been called “the Herzl of Jewish Christianity”.

Kjaer-Hansen cites the significant contributions of Rabinowicz, including his thirteen theses of 1883 about Jesus as the Messiah, who alone can relieve the plight of the Jewish people; and four confessions of faith from 1884 and 1885, together with his Prayer Book for use in the congregation at Kishinev. These texts provide the first attempt in modern times to present a distinctively Jewish understanding of Jesus of Nazareth, in the fullness of His calling as Son of David and as Messiah-Savior.

Kjaer-Hansen, Kai & Skjøtt, Bodil F. (eds).

Facts and Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel (Jerusalem: The Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 1999)

This double-issue of *Mishkan* presents the most detailed study available on the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel. However, as indicated in the text above on page 21-22, the statistics are already out of date only five years later. Nonetheless, this study conveys better perhaps than any other the flavor and character of the Messianic Jewish movement in the land of Israel.

Pritz, Ray

Nazarene Jewish Christianity (Jerusalem: The Magnus Press and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988).

This is a scholarly study of what is known from literary and archaeological evidence concerning the Nazarenes of the first centuries of the Christian era, and the orthodoxy of their faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

Stern, David

Messianic Jewish Manifesto (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988, 1991).

A systematic defense of the necessity and rightness of a distinctively Jewish expression of faith in Yeshua of Nazareth by a Messianic Jewish scholar from the United States, who has lived in Jerusalem since 1979.

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