

**Excerpts from  
Collected Sermons & Writings  
On Subjects Useful for Bible Studies &  
Practical Godly Living**

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**Messianic Judaism**

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# Outline Explaining Messianic Judaism

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## The Way It Was in the First Century A.D.

- In the First Century, a minority of the Jewish community believed that Yeshua (Jesus) was the Messiah and they followed him.
- Belief that God was going to send a Messiah to save Israel was not foreign to Jews of the First Century and earlier. In fact, because certain Scriptures seemed to speak of a conquering Messiah and other Scriptures of a suffering Messiah, the idea developed that God was going to send two Messiahs.
- Yeshua was born in a miraculous way and, when he grew to manhood, he was recognized by many in the Jewish community as being the long-awaited Messiah; he was, however rejected by the Jewish leaders.
- Jews who followed Yeshua in First Century were not called “Messianic;” they were simply referred to as “Jewish followers of Yeshua.” Later terms that developed were “The Way,” and “Nazarenes.”
- Yeshua was a Jew, and never heard the name “Jesus.” All of his first followers, including those whom he personally disciples, were Jews as well.
- Gentiles in the First Century who followed Yeshua considered themselves to have become part of a Jewish sect. Jews in the First Century who followed Yeshua thought of themselves merely as Jews who had found their Messiah.
- Yeshua was arrested by Jewish leaders, brought before the *San Hedrin* (Jewish high court), and accused of blasphemy. When the court could not convict, they brought Yeshua to the Roman authorities who found him guilty of treason and executed him in the traditional manner of the time.
- The New Covenant Scriptures reveal that Yeshua’s execution was God’s plan to sacrifice his only begotten son – an innocent “lamb” – to procure forgiveness for all who would repent of their sins and adopt Yeshua’s sacrifice as their own. The Temple sacrifices of innocent unblemished lambs and goats covered sin over, whereas Yeshua’s sacrifice (if accepted by a repentant believer) resulted in a complete remission of sin and eternal life.
- In those early days, no one doubted that Jewish believers remained Jewish; in fact, the argument was whether Gentiles who were not circumcised could be saved (have eternal life with God).
- Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Yeshua met and prayed in homes, but also attended synagogue, and participated in Temple affairs until the Temple was destroyed by Rome in 70 CE. Some Gentiles did so as well, to the extent that they were allowed.
- There was no New Testament in the First Century – only the *Tanakh* (Old Testament); the New Testament writings were assembled and canonized later.

## Things Are Different Today

- Today’s Judaism is different than the Judaism of the First Century and earlier.



- First Century (Mosaic) Judaism can also be called “Temple Judaism” because its basis was sacrifice in the Temple, conducted by the Levitical priests. Today the Temple is long-gone, and the Levitical Priesthood is not functioning.
- Today’s “Judaism” is really several “Judaisms” that have things in common, but also differences. Among them are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Chasidic, Karaite, Messianic, and others.
- No Judaism today is the same as the Temple Judaism of old. The Rabbis in today’s traditional Jewish communities teach that blood sacrifice is conceptually and historically important, but not essential and not required by God today. They maintain that studying the sacrifices as they are described in the Talmud (writings that are defined later), and praying during the times of the Temple’s sacrifices, sufficiently connect us to them until the Temple is rebuilt and the sacrifices resume.
- Only Messianic Judaism retains an insistence on our continuing need for a blood sacrifice for our sins. For us, however, the authorized sacrifice is no longer an unblemished animal slaughtered in the Temple; it is Yeshua the Messiah, who sacrificed Himself for us once and forever.
- Rabbinical Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform) teaches that an oral law was given to Moses along with the written law of the *Torah*, and that both it and the *Torah* are inspired. This “Oral” Law was written down over several centuries, and came to be known as the *Mishnah*. The *Mishnah* was later joined by rabbinical content known as the *Gemarah*, and the two together came to be known as the *Talmud*.
- Rabbinical Judaism believes that Rabbis are invested by God with authority to interpret and, even on occasion, to circumvent the *Torah*.
- Messianic Judaism does not believe that there is an inspired Oral Law, and does not believe that Rabbis can countermand *Torah*. It therefore does not treat the *Talmud* as authoritative.
- Messianic Judaism also differs from Rabbinical Judaism by its belief in Yeshua, and in there being a New Covenant whereby we can relate to God with great intimacy through the Holy Spirit.
- Messianic Jews are serious believers in God and in the Holy Scriptures, which we understand to include both the Old Testament (*Tanakh*) and the New Testament (*K’vey B’rit Chadasha*).
- Messianic Jews consider obedience to God’s commandments to be of great importance. In this regard, we rely on the *Ruach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit) for help in interpreting and applying *Torah* (the teaching of God) to the conditions of today’s world.
- Various circumstances in history have resulted in a centuries-old break in relationship between Messianic Jews and Jews who do not follow Yeshua.
- Many Rabbinical Jews today refuse to admit that Messianic Jews remain Jews. We are often taught from childhood that we cannot believe in “Jesus” and also be Jewish, and that if a Jew comes to faith in “Jesus,” he or she stops being a Jew and becomes a *Goy*; this was not the way it was in the First Century. It is changing slowly, but in many quarters it is still the case.

## How It All Happened

- In the beginning when God created the first people, Jews had not yet been defined.
- The time of Noah – still no Jews.
- The time of Abraham – still no Jews. Abraham is not the first Jew (as some are fond of saying), but rather the first in a sequence of three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) through whom God’s covenant given to Abraham was conveyed. The first Jew, therefore, was Jacob.
- The covenant given to Abraham was: (1) Abraham to be the father of a great nation; (2) his name to be great (3) many descendants; (4) land; (5) circumcision; (6) blessings; (7) all people on earth blessed through him; (8) people cursed who are against him. (Genesis 12:3)
- The covenant made with Abraham was renewed through Isaac and again through Jacob. Jacob’s name was changed by God to Israel, and his descendants were thereafter called Israelites and (more recently) Jews.
- Israel had twelve sons who were the original “children of Israel,” a designation that became synonymous with “the Jewish people” or “being Jewish.”
- An Israelite (a Jew) is anyone who traces his lineage to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the lineage that defines who is a carrier and a generational conveyor of the covenant that God made with Abraham – a covenant of circumcision, blessing, and responsibility.
- A person can be a beneficiary of the covenant made with Abraham without being a carrier or conveyor of it. Such a person is known as a Gentile.
- All the Gentile nations of the world are the intended beneficiaries of the Abrahamic Covenant because God made Israel into a nation of priests to bring blessing to the world (Galatians 3:8-9).
- Much later on, God brought Israel its ultimate High Priest, Messiah Yeshua of Nazareth, who was High Priest not only to Israel, but also to the Gentiles of the world who would receive him (Hebrews 5:9-10).
- Gentile believers in Yeshua join their Messianic Jewish counterparts in becoming a New Covenant Priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:9-10).

#### **Back to Jacob!**

- Jacob (Israel) was an old man when God saved his family (the children of Israel) from famine by bringing them into Egypt under the protection of Joseph who was, by then, second in charge of the Egyptian government.
- Later, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites, and God liberated them by miraculously bringing them through the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses and his brother Aaron. Once on the other side, they were directed toward a land they would eventually possess, that was promised to them through Abraham.
- Gentile believers in God accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt, and the entire group of them (described in Scripture as a “mixed multitude”) was directed toward Mt. Sinai.
- After wandering through the desert, the mixed multitude arrived at Mount Sinai where the Israelites (and the Gentiles who accompanied them) received a complete set of commandments or laws that established their government that included a Levitical Priesthood headed up by Aaron and his sons.



- Upon arriving at Mount Sinai, the wandering Israelites were solely tribal in that they had no centralized government, laws, or land. Although they had not yet arrived at or taken possession of the land, it was theirs by promise. Therefore, once they received the *Torah*, they had land, a structured government, priests, prophets, and a Tabernacle (later a Temple) in which they could meet with God. In fact, they had everything they needed for Israel to be a nation. Hence, we can date the beginning of the Nation of Israel from when the Commandments were given at Mt. Sinai.
- We can also count this time as the beginning of Judaism (the religion of the Jews), because many of the commandments given by God directed the Israelites in how they were to relate to God, including how to cover over their sins through animal sacrifices.
- Who is a Jew has to do with ancestry and covenant – not belief. A Jew is anyone whose lineage is traceable to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and, if a male, is circumcised. A Jew can believe many things (even things that displease God), and he remains a Jew. “Judaism,” on the other hand, is a structured belief – a religion born of the covenant between God and the Israelites that began at Mt. Sinai and that has come to be known as the Mosaic Covenant. The religion of Judaism has, of necessity, changed over the centuries.
- The term “Jew” is a designation that today refers to all children of Israel, but is historically derived from the southern Kingdom of Judah. After the reign of King Solomon, the nation of Israel was split into two Kingdoms – the northern Kingdom was called Israel and the southern Kingdom was called Judah. The northern Kingdom was defeated and its inhabitants were dispersed by the Assyrians. Thus, only the kingdom of Judah was left with which the descendants of Israel could identify in terms of continuous land ownership in the area that we now call *Eretz Yisrael*.

### **A New Covenant was Prophesied and is Being Fulfilled**

- Over the course of history, Israel drifted away from God several times by being disobedient to his Laws, and thus violating the Covenant He made with them (the Mosaic Covenant).
- God punished Israel for its disobedience but, in his compassion and grace, God decided to give Israel a new and better covenant – one where God’s laws would be written on their hearts and minds. This was prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 31:30\(31\)-33\(34\)](#)).
- This prophecy of a New Covenant was partially fulfilled when God sent his only begotten son Yeshua, our Messiah and savior, to sacrifice Himself for the sins of Israel and the world. His sacrifice happened at Passover time, and the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) was sent soon thereafter.
- Final fulfillment of the New Covenant awaits Yeshua’s return and fulfillment of God’s promises that all Jewish people will come to know Yeshua, have their sins forgiven, and be restored to their Land.
- Even in advance of the New Covenant’s fulfillment, Yeshua’s sacrifice provides salvation (including eternal life) to anyone who receives Him as Lord. This is not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles.

- Yeshua died and was resurrected, and when he returned to heaven to be with his Father, he sent back the Holy Spirit to be our counselor, comforter, and personal connection with him and God the Father. This happened during the Feast of *Shavuot* (“Pentecost” in Christian vernacular).
- It is through the Holy Spirit living within us that God’s Law is written on our hearts, thereby enabling us to know God intimately; thus was the Jeremiah prophecy fulfilled.

### **The Origins of Rabbinical Judaism and Christianity**

- In the First Century there was no religion called “Messianic Judaism,” “Rabbinical Judaism,” or “Christianity.” There was just Judaism and heathenism.
- The First Century began with Judaism, as an institution, being protected by the Romans, but that changed when, in 70 AD, Rome destroyed the Second Temple of God, and the Jews had to flee Jerusalem. Thus began the dispersion of Jews throughout the world, a phenomenon known as the “Diaspora.”
- Jews who believed in Yeshua were among those who fled, but Gentile believers were able to stay safe so long as they did not profess connection with the Jews.
- In 132 to 136 CE or AD, the Jews mounted a military rebellion against Rome under a man named Bar Kochba who claimed to be the Messiah.
- The Jewish believers in Yeshua would not follow Bar Kochba, nor join the revolt, because they recognized that his messianic claims were false.
- The revolt failed and many Jewish men died. This exacerbated the already existing alienation between Jewish believers and Jewish unbelievers in Yeshua because the unbelievers blamed the believers for contributing to the revolt’s failure through their non-participation. They were called traitors, and that label of Jewish followers of Yeshua persists in the wider Jewish community even until today.
- Meanwhile, something else was happening among the Jews. With the destruction of the Temple, Judaism was thrown into a crisis because continued Jewish practice required animal sacrifices that could no longer be done.
- A prominent Pharisee and teacher named Yochanan ben Zakkai, based on 1 Samuel 15:22, influenced other Jewish leaders of the day to adopt the notion that God no longer wanted sacrifice but, instead, wanted obedience to Torah, and the doing of good works. Thus, was born a new Jewish religion that, over time, embraced these substitute values as well as the Oral Law (the *Talmud*). This new Jewish religion is what is known today as Rabbinical Judaism.
- Meanwhile, other things were happening among the Gentile believers in and near Rome. When Constantine became emperor, he confessed personal belief in Yeshua, which enabled the formation of a new and protected religion of Gentiles who believed similarly. Jews were not among those who were protected, even if they believed in Yeshua, so it continued to be dangerous for Gentile believers to characterize their faith as being a sect of Judaism.
- Over time, the Gentile followers of Yeshua, now called “Christians,” adopted practices that were designed to distance themselves from their Jewish brothers. They discontinued many of their former Jewish practices, and veiled certain Jewish practices that they did keep, such as the use of incense, an Altar (no longer for sacrifice), the seven-branch



*menorah*, the processional, an annual cycle of readings, blessings before and after reading Scriptures, and the eternal light.

- In the process, the new Christians departed from the Mosaic Law in some major ways, and adopted new practices to replace certain of the commanded ones; this included establishing Sunday as their major day of worship to replace the Sabbath, and establishing *Pasca* (Easter) as the day of resurrection, seeking to move away from the 14<sup>th</sup> of *Nisan* on the Jewish calendar. In doing so, they hid, to some extent, the resurrection's original connection to Passover and *Yom HaBikkurim* (Firstfruits).
- Continued denial by the Christians of their Jewish roots eventually led to their persecuting Jews which, in turn, resulted in an even a further separation between Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua.

### **The Lost Jewish Connection**

- When the Roman Christians separated themselves from their Jewish brethren, they cut themselves off from their historical and spiritual heritage in Israel.
- The result, even today, is that most Christians think they have no connection to the Jewish people other than historically.
- Christianity has falsely taught that Jesus converted from being Jewish to being Christian, that the apostles were converts to Christianity, and that Peter (whom the Catholics call St. Peter) was the first Roman Catholic Pope.
- Since the "Christian" Bible talked mainly about Jews, the Christian leaders found it expedient to develop theologies to show that Christians were, in a sense, "replacement Jews" – the new People of God, and that God had washed his hands of his former connection to Israel because the Jews rejected and then killed Jesus.
- The Christian Church established itself as the center of the Body of Believers and contended that whenever a Jew came to faith in Yeshua, he stopped being a Jew and became a Christian. This became the same understanding held within the Jewish Community.
- One of the challenges God has given Messianic Judaism, is to show both Christians and Jews alike that this is not so, and that the truth explained in Romans 11 is that, when Gentiles become believers in Yeshua, they are grafted into a life-long connection with the Jewish People, Israel.
- Similarly, when Jews who have rejected Yeshua regain their faith, they are re-grafted in such a way that the Body of Believers is really centered in Israel – not in Gentile Christianity (Romans 11:1-27).
- Although Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua are brothers in the faith and reside on the same Romans 11 olive tree (the tree belongs to the Jews), Jews remain Jews, and Gentiles remain Gentiles.

### **The Persecutions Continue**

- The Roman Catholic Church (the first Christian Church) was born out of the separation and political chaos previously described.

- Gentile believers in Yeshua began referring to themselves as “Christians,” while Jewish believers in Yeshua dropped out of sight when they fell into disfavor by both the Church and the Jewish establishment.
- Persecution of the Jews at the hands of Christians ensued and continued for centuries – right through the Middle ages when, ironically, they were received and protected for a time by Moslems who came under similar persecution by the Christians.
- A major Roman Catholic Inquisition in the Iberian Peninsula of Spain and Portugal resulted in many Jews converting to Christianity – some willingly and some not willingly.
- Some Jews confessed Yeshua publicly, but continued to practice Judaism in secret. These became known as *marranos*.
- Many Jews fled the European continent to begin a new life in the Americas. Among them were Jews who believed in Yeshua, and also those who did not. When they settled in the New World (principally in Central and South America), the Roman Catholic Inquisition followed them, and many hid their Jewish identities – even from their children.
- The result of this is that there are, today, many Central and South Americans who are discovering that they are, in fact, Jews or have Jewish ancestry.

### **Messianic Judaism Reappears**

- At about the same time that Israel became a modern state in 1948, Jews who secretly believed in Yeshua but had thus far kept it hidden began to find each other.
- Jewish believers in Yeshua naturally began to fellowship and gather in homes for prayer, but they experienced confusion about who they were (or had become), because both normative Judaism and the Christian Church were teaching that Jews who confessed Yeshua were no longer Jews.
- An evangelistic effort of some Christian Churches arose, whereby these churches began to sponsor Jewish “style” services under their oversight. This movement became known as “Hebrew Christianity,” and its admitted purpose was to make Jewish “converts” and bring them into their Christian churches.
- Jewish (but culturally Christianized) believers who led these Hebrew-Christian meetings eventually developed discomfort with what seemed to them to be shallowness in considering Jewish ways of life and worship as mere portals to Christianity. They began to see Jewish life as legitimate for Jews to embrace, and they became increasingly convicted that Jews who receive Messiah Yeshua truly remain Jews.
- This brought them into conflict with the Church leaders of Hebrew Christianity and, out of this conflict, Messianic Judaism was born as a movement of Jews who believe in Yeshua while continuing to live and identify as Jews.
- Messianic Judaism is not really a good term for the movement because all Judaism is “messianic” in the sense that it believes in a coming Messiah. However, most of Judaism does not believe that the Messiah has already come or that he is Yeshua.
- Messianic Judaism has since spread to being international, with Messianic synagogues having been established all over the world, including in Israel.



## What Modern Messianic Jewish Life is Like

Messianic Jewish belief and practice is not entirely uniform throughout the Messianic Jewish movement. What follows are my views, which I believe are also the views of Tikkun International.<sup>1</sup>

- We believe that Yeshua is our fully divine Messiah, who was made flesh for a season in order to sacrifice Himself for our sins, so that whomsoever of us repents and receives him as Lord, may have eternal life with God.
- We look to the Bible, both the *Tanakh* and the *K'tvey B'rit Chadasha* (New Testament) as inerrant authoritative guidance from God. We seek interpretive application of the Scriptures as well as prophetic guidance from the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit), who indwells all “born again” believers in Yeshua.
- We consult rabbinic literature (e.g. the *Talmud*, *midrash*, commentaries, etc.) for cultural information and to understand Jewish points of view and practices, but we do not consider rabbinic literature inspired, or authoritative in the same way as Scripture.
- We put a high priority on maintaining our relationship with God through prayer that is mediated by the *Ruach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit). We believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 28 are operative today, as are the five-fold ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11-12.
- We consider the land of Israel to be our home of prophetic destiny, and we consider our homeland in the diaspora to be a kind of ambassadorial outpost from where we serve both God and our fellow man.
- Messianic Jewish congregations such as ours are generally populated by both Jews and Gentiles who, while retaining their respective identities, worship and serve together in unity and spiritual equality. We refer to the Jews in our congregations as “Messianic Jews,” and to Gentiles who are permanently committed to Jewish community and a Jewish way of life as “*K'rovei Yisrael*” (close family members of Israel). We use the term “Christian” for brother and sister believers in Yeshua who identify more closely with Christian culture than with Jewish culture. Marriage between Jews and *K'rovei Yisrael* within our congregations is common, and the children they produce are considered fully Jewish.
- Although we acknowledge that there are certain covenantal obligations unique to Jews, we place no limitations on Gentiles regarding congregational participation, leadership, and other aspects of synagogue life.
- Our congregations are led by a senior leader (rabbi) who is accountable to a plurality of elders. The elders are, in turn, accountable to an apostolic network of five-fold gift ministers (Ephesians 4:11) and congregational leaders.
- Disputes among our congregational members that are not resolved privately are referred for mediation and/or adjudication (pursuant to Matthew 18:15-17) to our congregation’s elders, and their decision can, in turn, be appealed to our apostolic network.
- Our congregations provide us with a place in which to enjoy Messianic Jewish community life. They also provide us with spiritual protection through elder oversight, biblical teaching, discipleship training, and assistance in fulfilling our respective Jewish and Gentile covenantal responsibilities. They are also platforms from which we are able to serve others and preach the *B'sorah* (Gospel) of Yeshua.

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<sup>1</sup> Tikkun International is an apostolic Messianic Jewish network of “five-fold” gift ministers and congregations.

- We employ elements of the Hebrew *Siddur* (Jewish prayer book) in our prayers, and we pray spontaneously as well. Our services loosely follow a Jewish liturgical format, and include New Covenant elements as well, such as the “*Shulchan Adonai*” (the Lord’s Supper) and contemporary musical praise and worship. The *Sh’ma* and *Amidah* prayers are standard and, on *Shabbat* mornings, we read from the *Torah* and other parts of the Bible in a traditional ceremony known as a *Torah* service. The *Kaddish* is recited as a memorial prayer, and most of our services conclude with a biblical message given by a rabbi or elder.
- The practices in our homes and synagogues are culturally Jewish. We keep the Sabbath, observe the commanded Feasts and Holy Days, abide by the biblical food laws (some of us keep the rabbinical food laws as well), and keep such other biblical commandments as are applicable in the New Covenant. When it appears that we cannot or should not do so, we seek the *Ru’ach HaKodesh* for interpretive guidance.
- We seek to internalize and practice God’s standard of Holiness.
- Our communities observe the Jewish cycle of life, to-wit, *b’rit milah* (covenant circumcision), *pidyon ha-ben* (redemption of the firstborn Jewish male), *b’nei mitzvah* or its equivalent for Gentiles (coming of age recognition), *chupah* (marriage), burial following death, *shivah* (mourning), and *yahrzeiten* (annual remembrances).
- We do not celebrate the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, but we do recount the history of Yeshua’s birth and the biblical importance of his resurrection at other times of the year. We also do not display Christian symbols such as crosses, pictures of “Jesus,” etc., in either our homes or synagogues for Jewish cultural reasons.
- Our congregations seek to be active in Jewish affairs. We support the Nation of Israel, and oppose its enemies. We do not always agree with Israel’s political decisions, but we support its right to defend itself and to exist as the biblically prophesied Jewish homeland.
- Our primary outreach is to our Jewish people who do not yet know Yeshua as Messiah. We also seek to fulfill God’s expectation of us (as a Jewish community) to be a light to the Gentiles. This includes helping our Christian brothers to rediscover their connection to the Jewish people that was lost in the course of the Church’s early history.
- We offer to our Jewish people and Gentiles who are called to join us, congregational homes in which we enjoy supportive fellowship, study the Old and New Covenant Scriptures, worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, pray together in the name of Yeshua, and reach out to serve those whom we can.

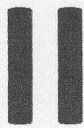
#### **For More Information**

- Three Messianic Jewish organizations of national and international prominence are the “Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations” ([www.umjc.org](http://www.umjc.org)), “Tikkun International” ([www.tikkunamerica.org](http://www.tikkunamerica.org)), and the “Messianic Jewish Alliance of America,” ([www.mjaa.org](http://www.mjaa.org)). Additional information about Messianic Judaism and Messianic Jewish congregations can be obtained at their web sites.

August 23, 2016

NKJ





## Messianic Judaism & We Who Practice It

Delivered October 27, 2007

Two weeks ago was Hannah's *Bat Mitzvah*, and there were members of her family and friends here who may not have known about Messianic Judaism before they were invited to come. I can only imagine what some of the Jewish guests might have thought when they accepted Hannah's invitation:

*"What is this mishegas of a congregation that believes in Jesus and calls itself Jewish? Impossible!"*

And I can only imagine what some of the non-Jewish guests might have thought when they accepted Hannah's invitation; something like:

*"Hannah told me she is in a Jesus-believing Jewish congregation that has both Jews and non-Jews in it. When I said to her: 'So they're Christians?' She said: 'Well, yes and no.' I'm glad she made this all very clear!"*

Sometimes these questions even perplex our own members because most of us were not brought up in Messianic Judaism; we came from somewhere else and we came with preconceived ideas. I, for example, came from Orthodox Judaism where even today, a Jew who believes in Jesus is considered a contradiction in terms and sometimes no longer a Jew. Others of us came from Christian backgrounds and are equally incredulous about how non-Jews among us can be Jewish in their religious practice but not be Jews. Because of our preconditioning, these concepts boggle the mind and it doesn't hurt for even us veterans in the Messianic Jewish movement to review who we are from time to time. In leading up to what I hope will clarify things, let me introduce you to a few folks:

First slide please!

(A man dressed in Clerical garb)

Meet the Right Reverend Michael Kane. He was born Manny Cohen – a Jew. If you ask him if he is a "Jew" he says yes, but if you ask him if he is "Jewish" he will say no. The reason is that by his inherited identity he is a "Jew," but by his chosen religion he is Roman Catholic. He will say "no" to his being Jewish, because he doesn't practice Judaism.

Next slide please!

(An American Indian Chief)

This is Chief Zalmann. His mother was Sheila Zalmann, a "nice Jewish girl" from Brooklyn who liked to hang out with native Americans. The chief is a Jew but there is one little detail. He is not Jewish in his religious practice and beliefs in that he doesn't worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Another Jewish boy who is not Jewish by belief and practice.

Okay, here's one more! Next slide.



Well, we don't seem to have the slide of this one, but we do have the man himself. Joe Gentile, would you please come forward?

Here is a man who looks like a Jew, talks like a Jew, dresses like a Jew, worships like a Jew, keeps *Torah* like a Jew, and is Messianic Jewish by belief and practice. So, he must be a Jew – yes? But no, he's not a Jew, because, so far as David knows, his ancestry does not trace back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

All of this is pretty complicated, isn't it? So, in the next few minutes, I will attempt to clarify it by giving you a short course (if you've never heard it before) or a reminder (if you have heard it) in who we are, and where we individually fit into the Messianic Jewish movement.

The first thing we must understand is that each of us has two kinds of biblical identities; one of them has to do with our ancestry, and the other with what we believe. First our ancestry! In Genesis 17:4-10, God says to Abraham:

*"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;"*

Later on in Genesis we read that Abraham's descendants to whom the covenant was given had to include his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob. So, the first aspect of our identity – the one of ancestry – has to do simply with whether our lineage goes back to Abraham, through both Isaac and Jacob. If it does, we are a Jew, and if it does not, we are a Gentile, which merely means we are not a Jew.

Now here is something that sometimes escapes us. By God telling Abraham that he would "be a father of many nations" and that nations would come from him, God's focus at that moment was on the future and blessing of those destined not to be Jews – in other words, most of the people in the world. Yes, God blessed the Jewish people also, but their lot was to be God's servants to bring His light to those who were the primary recipients of blessing – the Gentiles. The blessings bestowed on the Jews were not to remain with them but were to be passed along. And we know that the greatest of those blessings to be passed on to the world by the Jews was one of their sons (and God's only begotten son) Yeshua, the savior of all.

Now it happens that this congregation, like most Messianic Jewish congregations, pays a lot of attention to (and does a lot of talking about) its Jewish identity and, as a result, the Gentiles

among us who perhaps should know better, sometimes forget their own special identity both as recipients of blessing, and as full partners with the Jewish people in worldwide ministry. Gentiles called to Messianic Judaism are part of both the Messianic Jewish Community and, by extension, part of the greater non-Messianic Jewish Community as well. According to Romans 11, all believers in Yeshua are grafted into the Jewish-owned Olive tree and thereby have membership in the Commonwealth of Israel. We call most of the the non-Jewish ones of these “Christians” but we don’t use the term “Christian” for Gentile believers who are specially called to Messianic Judaism because they have the same blessing of covenant and responsibility in ministry as their Jewish brethren, the one exception being that they cannot convey the Abrahamic Covenant to their offspring through inheritance.

Now let me get back to talking about Jews. It is true that God chose Abraham’s descendants, the Jewish people of the future, to have a very special relationship with Him – one of service so that through them the whole world could come to know God and be blessed. But it is also true that throughout recorded history the Jewish people, time and again, did not obey God and therefore did not fulfill the calling of their covenant. Nevertheless, in terms of physical identity, one was a Jew who was born a Jew and he remained a Jew his entire life provided (assuming he was a male) that sometime during his life he received the sign of covenant sign circumcision. Such a person could believe in God, in pagan gods, or in no god at all, yet he was a Jew if he was descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And it is the same today and in this very congregation. Those of us who are Jews are carriers of the Abrahamic covenant along with all of its responsibilities, because we are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and for no other reason.

So, this part of our identity that has to do with ancestry is not difficult to understand. Individually we are either Jews or Gentiles but, as equal members of this congregation, we work together to help the Jewish people fulfill their covenant responsibilities to both God and their fellow man.

There is another part of our individual identities that has to do with what we believe, and that is independent of whether we are a Jew or a Gentile. It is the part of our identity that enables God to forgive our sins, to grant us eternal life with Him, to join us as equal citizens in the Commonwealth of Israel, and to makes us joint heirs to all His promises whether or not we are Jews. It is the part of our identity that is premised on our belief in the inerrancy of the entire Bible (both Old Testament and New), our faith in God the Father, and our faith in Yeshua the Messiah. In the first part of our identity that we spoke about – the inherited part – we are either a Jew or a Non-Jew. In this other part of our identity, we are either a Bible-believing believer in Yeshua, or we are not. Here and eternally, whether we are a Jew or not makes little difference because we can serve God in either identity. But whether or not we are a follower of Yeshua does make a difference. It is the difference between eternal life and eternal separation from God.

The *Torah* says in Deuteronomy 30:19:



*"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live..."*

And in John 5:24, Yeshua promised:

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."*

Also, in Acts 4:10-12 we read:

*"let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Yeshua of Nazareth, the Messiah, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Now I am going to say a very hard thing. While we who are Messianic Jews and Gentiles and practice Messianic Judaism are part of Israel and part of the wider Jewish Community, we are not part of the wider religion of Judaism. I am going to say that again in another way so there will be no misunderstanding. Messianic Judaism is not just Judaism with Yeshua tacked on. It is indeed a Judaism (by virtue of it being a religion of Jews), but it is one with a fundamentally different approach to God than all other Judaisms today (and there are several); the reason for this is that the covenant on which Messianic Judaism relies for its relationship with God is different from the covenant relied on by the others.

To understand this, let's analyze Romans 7:1-4:

*"Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Messiah, that you may be married to another -- to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God."*

Here, Paul refers to statutes of the Mosaic Law having to do with marriage and remarriage, and constructs an analogy to teach an entirely different lesson. He begins by showing us that, by law, a woman is bound to her husband for the duration of the husband's life; but, if the husband dies, she is released from her former marriage, and is able to enter a new marriage relationship. The analogy is that we were married to the Law (i.e. maintained our relationship with God through obedience to the Mosaic Law) until Messiah came. When Messiah came, we died to the Law, meaning that the Mosaic Covenant of Law no longer held us as in a marriage, and we switched our marriage affiliation to Yeshua who became our bride. Explained another way, before Yeshua came, died, and was resurrected, our covenant relationship with God was through

obedience to the Commandments of the Law. Now that Yeshua has come, our relationship with God is through Him – not through obeying statutes of Law. Notice that this does not release us from our obligation to obey God's Law or excuse us if we do not. It merely shows that the Law is no longer the vehicle of our relationship with God; Yeshua is now the vehicle, and our obedience to God's Law is a product of our relationship.

Perhaps now you understand why I said that Messianic Judaism has a fundamentally different approach to God than all other Judaisms. By not recognizing Yeshua and the New Covenant, the other Judaisms are still operating on the assumption that their relationship with and path to God are through the *mitzvot* – the Commandments of the Mosaic Law. We obey the Mosaic Law (where possible) as well as other law found in Scripture, as the Holy Spirit of God puts the desire in our minds, writes it on our hearts, and shows us how to accomplish it. And we do it, not to gain or enhance a relationship with God, but because we already have one through Yeshua.

I ask you, then, which is the true Judaism of God? The one that received God's Messiah, or the one that rejected Him and continues to rely upon the Law for its relationship? The answer for me is plain – ours is! Notice I didn't ask: "Which are the real Jews?" because all who are descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are real Jews. I am speaking now to not only the Jews in our congregation, but also to the Gentiles. Jew and Gentile alike, we are practitioners of Messianic Judaism (the true Judaism) into which all Jews everywhere will one day come. As Paul says in Romans 11:26-27:

*"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."*

Don't be intimidated by anyone who calls Messianic Judaism inauthentic because we are in the minority among today's Jews. Don't be intimidated by anyone who calls Messianic Judaism inauthentic because Gentiles practice it as well as Jews. And don't be intimidated by anyone who calls Messianic Judaism inauthentic because we reject the Jewish oral tradition (*Talmud*) as having compulsory authority.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century re-emergence of Messianic Judaism, we who are Jews fumbled when we tried to reconcile our Jewish identity with believing in Yeshua. Now it is the Gentiles among us who are having the greater difficulty so, in the time remaining, I would like to offer the following as a guide for Messianic Gentiles to use in explaining to others their identity and calling as a Non-Jew in a Messianic Jewish Congregation:

#### Guide for Messianic Gentiles

1. I am a Gentile and not a Jew because my physical lineage, so far as I am aware, does not go back to Abraham Isaac and Jacob.
2. I have been born-again through my faith in Yeshua; that means I was given a new spirit and eternal life with God when I confessed my sins and asked Yeshua into my heart. That also



means that I have been grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel (Romans 11:17-19) and have thereby become a citizen of the Common-wealth (Ephesians 2:11-13).

3. In addition to being born again, I have chosen or been called by God, to live out my faith in the same way and in the same congregational community as Jews who believe in Yeshua as I do.

4. The Jews in my congregation call themselves Messianic to distinguish themselves from Jews who do not believe in Yeshua, so I also call myself Messianic although I remain a Gentile.

5. Both Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles such as I am consider ourselves members in both the Jewish community and in the universal body of Yeshua.

6. Both I and the Jews in my congregation practice a Judaism called “Messianic Judaism.” It is a faith, a form of Jewish practice, and a way of life that looks exclusively to the Bible – both the Old and New Testaments – for final authority on God’s Word, and looks to the Holy Spirit for interpretation, application, and guidance.

7. Both I and the Jews in my congregation consider that whatever the Scriptures had to say to the ancient communities of Israel, they are saying to our community today as well, and so we seek to interpret and apply the Scriptures as literally as seems reasonable and as the Holy Spirit directs.

8. Because my congregation and I practice what we call Messianic Judaism, we call our congregation a Messianic Jewish Congregation. This name reflects our belief in Yeshua as well as our *Torah*-oriented practice that is often (but not always) expressed in similar ways as in non-Messianic Jewish Communities. By “*Torah*-oriented practice” we mean that we seek the Holy Spirit for understanding how to obey God’s Law in the New Covenant and in our individual and corporate circumstances. Our desire to obey *Torah* comes from our love for God and Messiah; we do not consider it the source of our relationship, nor do we seek our relationship through it.

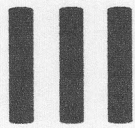
9. The Jewish practices of my congregation establish its primary culture and lifestyle, but we also incorporate practices that come to us from other traditions. These practices include contemporary praise and worship with instruments, dance, the bread and wine of Yeshua, speaking and receiving prophetic words, and spontaneous vocalized prayer. Because we do not accept outside rabbinic authority over us, we freely adopt certain cultural Jewish practices and not others.

10. My congregation’s mission is several-fold: First, we are a family of Jews and Gentiles who are committed to being an example of faith in Yeshua and in holy New Covenant Jewish living. Second, we are a community that is dedicated to upholding, strengthening, praying for, discipling, protecting, and providing for each other as each of us has needs, and as the Holy Spirit directs. Third, we are a community that seeks to pass on our faith and traditions to our children and their children. Fourth, we seek to provide a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for believing Gentiles called to serve Yeshua within our Messianic Jewish community. Fifth, we seek to reach out with the Word of God to all who do not yet know Yeshua – first to the Jew, but also to those of the nations. Sixth, we seek to help the Christian Church understand its connection to Israel and return to its biblical Jewish roots.

The list I have given you is not perfect, and perhaps some of you here today will improve on it. Still, it is tool that I pray will be useful. If time permitted, we could construct a second parallel list for the Jews in our congregation, since most of what has been stated applies to both.

NKJ





# Messianic Judaism and the Ideal Messianic Jewish Congregation

Written November 16, 2016

Messianic Jewish belief and practice is not entirely uniform throughout the Messianic Jewish movement. What follows are my views of the ideal:

- We believe that Yeshua is our fully divine Messiah who was made flesh for a season in order to sacrifice himself for our sins, so that whomsoever of us repents and receives him as Lord, may have eternal life with God.
- We look to the Bible, both the *Tanakh* and the *K'tvey B'rit Chadasha* (New Testament) as inerrant authoritative guidance from God. We seek interpretive application of the Scriptures as well as prophetic guidance from the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit) who indwells all “born-again” believers in Yeshua.
- We consult rabbinic literature (e.g. the *Talmud*, *midrash*, commentaries, etc.) for cultural information and to understand Jewish points of view and practices, but we do not consider rabbinic literature inspired or authoritative in the same way as Scripture.
- We put a high priority on maintaining our relationship with God through prayer that is mediated by the *Ruach HaKodesh*. We believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 28 are operative today, as are the five-fold ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11-12.
- We consider the land of Israel to be our home of prophetic destiny, and we consider our homeland in the diaspora to be a kind of ambassadorial outpost from where we serve both God and our fellow man.
- Messianic Jewish congregations such as ours are generally populated by both Jews and Gentiles who, while retaining their respective identities, worship and serve together in unity and spiritual equality. We refer to the Jews in our congregations as “Messianic Jews,” and to Gentiles who are permanently committed to Jewish community and a Jewish way of life as “*K'rovei Yisrael*” (close family members of Israel). We use the term “Christian” for our Gentile brother and sister believers in Yeshua who identify more closely with Christian culture than with Jewish culture. Marriage between Jews and *K'rovei Yisrael* within our congregations is common, and the children they produce are considered fully Jewish.
- Although we acknowledge that there are certain covenantal obligations unique to Jews, we place no limitations on Gentiles regarding congregational participation, leadership, or other aspects of community life.
- Our congregations are led by a senior leader (usually a rabbi) who is accountable to a plurality of elders. The elders are, in turn, ideally accountable to an apostolic network of five-fold gift ministers (Ephesians 4:11-12) and to their congregation’s members and other leaders that include *shamashim* and leaders of *chavurot*.



- Disputes (should they arise) among our congregational members that are not resolved privately are referred for mediation and/or adjudication to our congregations' elders (pursuant to Matthew 18:15-17), and the elders' decisions can be appealed to our respective apostolic networks.
- Our congregations provide us with a place in which to enjoy Messianic Jewish community life. They also provide us with spiritual protection through plural elder oversight, biblical teaching, discipleship training, supportive fellowship, and assistance in fulfilling our respective Jewish and Gentile covenantal responsibilities. They are also platforms from which we study the Old and New Covenant Scriptures, worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, pray together, serve one another, and seek to bless those on the outside through preaching the *B'sorah* (Gospel) of Yeshua, and through giving service of various kinds.
- We employ elements of the Hebrew *Siddur* (Jewish prayer book) in our prayers, and we pray spontaneously as well. Our services loosely follow a Jewish liturgical format but include New Covenant elements as well such as the "*Shulchan Adonai*" (the Lord's Table) and contemporary musical praise and worship. The *Sh'ma* and *Amidah* prayers are standard and, on *Shabbat* mornings, we read from the *Torah* and other parts of the Bible in a traditional ceremony known as a *Torah* service. The *Kaddish* is recited as a memorial prayer, and most of our services conclude with a biblical message and *Aleinu*.
- The practices in our homes and synagogues are culturally Jewish. We keep *Shabbat*, observe the commanded Feasts and Holy Days, abide by the biblical food laws (some of us keep the rabbinical food laws as well), and keep such other biblical commandments as are applicable in the New Covenant. When it appears that we cannot or should not do so, we seek the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* for interpretive guidance.
- We seek to internalize and practice God's standard of Holiness.
- Our communities observe the cycle of Jewish life, to-wit, *b'rit milah* (covenant circumcision), *pidyon ha-ben* (redemption of the firstborn Jewish male), *b'nei mitzvah* or their equivalent (coming of age recognitions), *chupah* (marriage), burial following death, *shivah* (mourning), and *yahrzeiten* (annual remembrances).
- We do not celebrate the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, but we do recount the history of Yeshua's birth and the biblical importance of his resurrection during those times of the year. We do not display Christian symbols such as crosses, pictures of "Jesus," etc., in our homes or synagogues for cultural reasons.
- Our congregations seek to be active in Jewish affairs. We support the Nation of Israel and oppose its enemies. We do not always agree with Israel's political decisions, but we support its right to defend itself and to exist as the biblically prophesied Jewish homeland.
- Our primary outreach is to our Jewish people who do not yet know Yeshua as Messiah. We also seek to fulfill God's expectation of us (as a Jewish community) to be a light to the Gentiles. This includes helping our Christian brothers to rediscover their original and biblical connection to the Jewish people that was lost in the course of the Christian Church's early history.

November 16, 2016  
CJB

**IV**



## Who We Are & What We Are About

Delivered May 2, 2015

We who practice Messianic Judaism are often challenged to explain ourselves – who we are, and what we are about. Questions that may be posed are: “What is Messianic Judaism?” or “What is a Messianic Jew?” Or, if we are a Gentile who worships in a Messianic Jewish congregation, a question to us might be: “How can your religion be Messianic Judaism if you are not a Jew?” Answering these questions is not always simple, and it is my hope is that this message will take us a step forward in being able to respond in a clear and coherent way when the need arises.

Whether we are a Jew or a non-Jew, our explanation of what Messianic Judaism is might be:

*“Messianic Judaism is a New Covenant Judaism that is practiced in a congregational context by Torah-observant Jewish and Gentile followers of Messiah Yeshua. Our inspired Scriptures are the Tanakh (called “the Old Testament” by some), and the Kitvei B’rit Chadasha (the New Testament); we do not consider the writings of Talmud inspired. Scripture teaches that if we repent of our sins, we are forgiven if we accept the vicarious sacrifice of Yeshua (who is Messiah), and today we are able to relate to God through the Ruach Hakodesh (the Holy Spirit) in a more intimate way than would have been possible (for most of us) had we lived during the time of Moses.”*

That was a little wordy, so we may prefer the UMJC’s basic statement:

*“The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) envisions Messianic Judaism as a movement of Jewish congregations and groups committed to Yeshua that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, and renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant.”*

The conversation is not likely to end with one question, and follow-up questions from both Jews and Christians might include:

*“How can you say that you are a Jew if you believe in Jesus? Haven’t you become a Christian?” Or if we are Gentile, the question to us might be: “If you practice Messianic Judaism (or any Judaism for that matter), haven’t you de facto become a Jewish convert?”*

Some questions might be more theological and even accusatory:

*“You say that those in Messianic Judaism believe in Jesus. Why then do you call your religion Judaism and not Christianity?”*

*“If your religious practice is a form of Judaism, surely you must know that the Talmud refers to Jesus in a disparaging way.”*

*“You say that Messianic Jews are a part of the wider Jewish community. How can you say that, when most of the Jewish world says that they are not?”*

*“What do you mean when you say that you believe in Jesus but are Torah-observant? In Romans 6:14 (NKJ), Paul says that we are “no longer under law but under grace.”*

I could continue to list the possible questions that we may be asked, but there is not enough time in this message for me to address them all. Permit me, therefore, to present a selective overview of Messianic Judaism in a way that I hope will be helpful.

The first thing on which we should be clear (or at least take a stand) is the difference between being a Jew (Messianic or otherwise), and being a practitioner of Judaism (Messianic or otherwise). Judaism (and there are several variations) can broadly be defined as the religion of the Jews, and a Jew is a person whose inherited identity traces back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Some say that Jewish inheritance must be through the mother, some say through the father, and some say through either. The predominant view within Messianic Judaism is that it is through either. There is also the question of whether a non-Jew can join the Jewish lineage through a process of adoption called conversion. Those who say “yes,” contend that Ruth of the Bible joined Israel in that way through her initial utterance to Naomi: “Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God” (Ruth 1:16), and through the Israelite leaders’ subsequent endorsement of her marriage to Boaz (Ruth 4:9-12). The logic of those who hold that view is that, had Ruth remained a Moabitess after she spoke those covenant words, the leaders of Israel could not have agreed to her marrying Boaz because, according to Deuteronomy 23:3(2), Boaz’s and Ruth’s offspring would not have been able to enter the Temple of God for ten generations (see also Nehemiah 13:1).

On the other hand, there are those who say “no” to conversion because they hold that a Jew’s lineage that goes back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has to be physical, and covenant words can’t accomplish that. They also point to Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24:

*“Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called. Were you a slave when you were called? Well, don’t let it bother you; although if you can gain your freedom, take advantage of the opportunity. For a person who was a slave when he was called is the Lord’s freedman; likewise, someone who was a free man when he was called is a slave of the Messiah. You were bought at a price, so do not become slaves of other human beings. Brothers, let each one remain with God in the condition in which he was called.”*

And there is also an in-between view of Jewish conversion, which is that conversion, while possible, should only be done in rare and specifically defined cases. Our congregation does not participate in the conversion process, but will acknowledge persons as Jewish proselytes if they have received their conversion through a reputable Jewish source.

Now, what about the matter of whether Messianic Judaism is, in reality, Christianity wrapped in a Jewish facade? That describes the Hebrew Christian movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but not the Messianic Jewish movement that arose from it; let me give you some of the history. Spurred by a zeal to “save” Jews through getting them to confess Jesus, Christian Missionary Societies and a few Christian churches began to sponsor Jewish-style worship services (led by Jewish Christians) that met separately and at different times from the churches.



The services contained a mixture of Jewish and Christian elements, and their purpose was to create an inviting Jewish environment (Jewish fly paper if you will) where Jews could be evangelized and later transitioned into a church. These Hebrew Christian leaders had no sense of the biblical importance of a Jew maintaining his or her covenantal Jewish identity, or of a Jew living a *Torah*-observant Jewish life. Hebrew Christianity was, at its inception, nothing more than an evangelistic ploy.

Over time, however, Jews who became believers in Jesus but remained comfortable with their Jewish life, resisted being assimilated and began to notice things in the Bible that appeared to validate the importance of maintaining Jewish identity. This spawned a competing movement that they called "Messianic Judaism," and it immediately came into conflict with those who were promoting Hebrew Christianity.

Messianic Judaism grew, developed congregationally, and in 1975 the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America that had previously published "We felt it is our duty to make it clear that we have nothing to do with this so-called 'Messianic Judaism, in any shape or form ...'" changed its name from the "Hebrew Christian Alliance of America" to the "Messianic Jewish Alliance of America." And from that point on, practically all Jews in Yeshua-believing Jewish congregations (not in the churches) referred to themselves as "Messianic Jews," and to their religious expression as "Messianic Judaism."

Messianic Judaism is not a comfortable religion of which to be a part because, whether we are Messianic Jews or Messianic Gentiles, we receive rejection from both Jewish quarters and Christian quarters alike. Rejection from traditional Jews because certain events in history have caused them to conclude that Christians are their persecutors; so, in their way of seeing it, Jews who come to believe in Yeshua have gone over to the enemy, and the Gentiles who join them are their accomplices. We also receive rejection from a goodly number of Christians because, throughout history, the Christian Church taught that those whose religious lifestyles were directed toward keeping the Mosaic Law in any manner, or to any degree, were either backslidden or had never received the grace brought by Yeshua in the first place. These ways of thinking have even gone so far as to cause some parents (both Jewish and non-Jewish) to disown their children for joining Messianic Judaism.

That's the bad news. The good news is that the bad news gives Messianic Judaism its ministry purpose and unique reason to exist. We believe that Messianic Jews and Gentiles are charged by God with the responsibility of bringing the Good News of Yeshua (including news of the New Covenant) to the Jewish people, and with helping the Christian Church return to its historic and biblically mandated connection to God's covenant people Israel. The need for both of these ministries arose because of two wrongful rejections. The majority of the Jewish people rejected their Messiah, and the Christian Church rejected the Jews and made a blue-eyed blonde-haired Gentile out of theirs. One has only to read the Book of Romans to see how out-of-whack with God's plan for humanity both of these are.

Now I would like to explain what we mean when we say that Messianic Judaism is "a Judaism," and that our congregations are part of the wider Jewish community. In saying this, we don't mean that we can freely walk in on the events and activities of a Jewish community that doesn't



accept us or want us; to do that would be arrogant and probably committing trespass. What we mean is that we are part of “God’s” wider Jewish community, which is the kingdom of priests and holy nation about which God spoke to Moses; in Exodus 19:5-6 God said:

*“Now if you will listen to Me and carefully keep My covenant, you will be My own possession out of all the peoples, although all the earth is Mine, and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.”*

When God spoke these words, He did not reveal to Moses that a Messiah would one day come that would cause a split in Judaism. God’s words were for all members of the Kingdom of Israel for all time, and today that means all Jews regardless of their belief in Messiah, and all Gentiles who have been called by God to join them. Indeed, it is the Kingdom of Israel that is the wider Jewish community of which we are legitimately a part.

Sadly, we hear next to nothing from the traditional Jewish community about their being a kingdom of priests with priestly responsibilities, but they and we together are, nevertheless, exactly that. And by the way, if we are a kingdom of priests, to whom are we priests? The answer is in God’s words to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 22:18:

*“And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring because you have obeyed My command.”*

So, our priestly responsibility is not only to our Jewish people, but to all the Gentile peoples of the world.

Now a word about our being *Torah*-observant. That claim garners us criticism from both the Christian Community and the Jewish Community, so it bears some explanation. First, no one today – not Jews and not Gentiles – can say that they are “*Torah*-obedient” if what we mean by *Torah* is the entire Mosaic Law. During the time of Moses, conditions were such that every commandment of the Law could be obeyed literally. There was a Tabernacle. There was an altar and an ark in the Tabernacle. There were Levitical *Cohanim* to perform and mediate the required sacrifices. The Spirit of God dwelt in the ark, and the government of Israel, being directly under God, implemented and enforced the Mosaic Law in every particular.

Those are not the conditions that we have today. There is no Tabernacle or Temple. There is no altar or ark. There are no working Levitical *Cohanim* and, even if there were, conducting animal sacrifices for sin would be unauthorized because Yeshua’s sacrifice in the first century replaced our need for them. What is more, if the *Ruach Hakodesh* on earth lives anywhere, h’e lives in us and not in an ark made of wood; and the secular governments under which we live feel no obligation at all to implement and enforce God’s laws.

So, we cannot be “*Torah*-obedient,” but we can be “*Torah*-observant” which means being knowledgeable of *Torah*, and making appropriate substitutions where needed. All the denominations of traditional Judaism make such substitutionary decisions, and Messianic Judaism does so as well. So why does our being *Torah*-observant get us into trouble with the rest of the Jewish community? It is because the way we seek to keep *Torah* is Jewish, and they



contend (albeit wrongly) that we are not. As for many in the Christian Church, it doesn't matter to them how we choose to observe God's Law – our mere attempt to do it is enough to cause a goodly number of church leaders to write us off as either backslidden Christians or un-regenerated Jews.

Now this matter of our Messianic Jewish communities being *Torah*-observant requires further discussion because it is not without some controversy among ourselves. To begin with, we are not all Jews in our congregations, we are Gentiles as well. The Jews among us rightly feel an obligation to the *Torah* because the Law that was given through Moses was spoken to Israel and not to the Gentile nations. That notwithstanding, Scriptures make it clear that the Mosaic Law (and indeed the Mosaic Covenant itself) were not only given to the Israelites, but also to the Gentiles who lived among them and were part of that early Jewish nation:

*Deuteronomy 29:9(10)-14(15): "Today you are standing, all of you, before ADONAI your God- your heads, your tribes, your leaders and your officers- all the men of Isra'el, along with your little ones, your wives and your foreigners here with you in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. The purpose is that you should enter into the covenant of ADONAI your God and into his oath which ADONAI your God is making with you today, so that he can establish you today for himself as a people, and so that for you he will be God- as he said to you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov. But I am not making this covenant and this oath only with you. Rather, I am making it both with him who is standing here with us today before ADONAI our God and also with him who is not here with us today."*

*Deuteronomy 31:10-12: "Moshe gave them these orders: "At the end of every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot in the year of sh'mittah, when all Isra'el have come to appear in the presence of ADONAI at the place he will choose, you are to read this Torah before all Isra'el, so that they can hear it. Assemble the people- the men, the women, the little ones and the foreigners you have in your towns- so that they can hear, learn, fear ADONAI your God and take care to obey all the words of this Torah;"*

The Scriptures I have just read say some important things about to whom the *Torah* applies, and to whom it does not:

1. It applies to all Jews everywhere.
2. It applies to *K'rov Yisrael* Gentiles who are called to be part of a Jewish community.
3. Except for the moral commandments, the *Torah* is not law to Gentiles who are not part of a Jewish Community.

By way of clarification, being called to be part of a Jewish community is more than just attending services. A Gentile who is genuinely called to be part of a Jewish community is also called to follow the lifestyle of that community.

You may recall that I previously pointed out that, due to our new circumstances, none of us can obey the entire Mosaic Law literally, and we therefore have to make substitutions. Well then, how do we decide what substitutions to make? There can only be two ways:

1. We adhere to the traditions of the Jewish communities of which we are a part.
2. We pray, and ask the *Ruach Hakodesh* to direct us individually.

There is so much more to say, but I will close with some remarks about Ohev's apostolic covering organization – Tikkun. In the same way as there are several flavors of traditional Judaism, there are also several flavors within Messianic Judaism. We are the Tikkun flavor, and you will not be surprised if I tell you that I think it is the best one. Here are some of the things that make Tikkun unique and best:

1. It provides rules for congregational governance.
2. It provides apostolic oversight of congregations and leaders.
3. It requires that congregational leadership be under a plurality of elders for safety.
4. It provides a process whereby congregational members can appeal upward from decisions and actions of their local leaders.
5. It maintains standards of biblical holiness to which local leaders are held accountable.
6. It promotes the gifts and power of the *Ruach Hakodesh* among its congregations and members.
7. It connects us to other Messianic Jewish congregations, and to Jewish-rooted churches that hold similar values.
8. It enables the inter-congregational sharing of financial and leadership resources.
9. It gives us a voice on the international stage, and connects us to Messianic Jewish congregations and ministries in Israel and elsewhere.

There is so much more to say, but we are out of time. If this message has perked your desire to know more about who we are and what we are about as Messianic Jews and Gentiles, please ask me or one of the elders and we will be happy to discuss it with you at length.

CJB



**V**

## Messianic Judaism Is Not for Everyone

Written February 24, 2013

I am not of the opinion that Messianic Judaism is God's preferred religious expression for everyone. Some Gentile believers are called to a lifelong affiliation within Messianic Judaism (we call these *K'rovei Yisrael*), and they have naturally brought their children up in it. But, as their children become older they develop their own sense of calling (as all must do), and some have chosen the Christian Church and Christian style of life instead. It is understandably disappointing to parents when children choose a different way of expressing their faith, but it should not be too much of a disappointment if their children retain godly values, join good biblical churches, marry believers, and otherwise follow the Lord. Ideally, Gentile believers seeking a Christian church home should select one that teaches correctly about biblical practices and about the Church's connection to Israel and the Jewish People.

It is not, however, the same for Jewish parents and Jewish children. For them, affiliation with a Messianic Jewish congregation should be considered essential because that is where we find Jewish believers living out the covenants that are intended primarily for Jews. Even "churched" Jews should maintain a secondary affiliation with a Messianic Jewish congregation (where possible), and the only real decision should be "which one?"

In cases where attending a Messianic Jewish congregation is not geographically possible, Jewish believers (also Gentile believers who perceive the need) can communicate (sometimes even affiliate) with a Messianic Jewish congregation at a distance in order to maintain a pastoral connection, and potential for Messianic Jewish fellowship. In metropolitan areas such as ours, Jewish believers are blessed to have the option of driving a little further, and affiliating with whichever Messianic Jewish congregation he or she finds especially pleasing. That is entirely acceptable, and transfers of membership between our various local congregations are not uncommon. What is not acceptable, however, is for a Jewish believer (of any age) to leave the assembly of Jewish believers altogether, and exclusively immerse himself or herself in a church and lifestyle that does not make it possible to pass on one's Messianic Jewish identity and covenantal responsibilities to the next generation.

Jewish and Gentile parents should understand these things, take them to heart, and bring up their children with appropriate biblical expectations for their future.

February 24, 2013  
CJB



**VI**

# Defining Our Communal Values

Delivered May 31, 2007

Awhile back, Gary K worked with some of our congregations to define and list our core values and goals, but what I have found is that many of us have not carried the process to completion and have not adequately communicated the result to our members. As a consequence, many of our members do not have a clear idea of their corporate identity that is rooted in communal values – especially their Messianic Jewish corporate identity. So today I will be talking about determining and clarifying our communal values.

The first thing we need to understand is that biblical communal values generally have personal counterparts that can be traced to the commandments of *Torah*. We call them communal values because we exhort our community's members to adopt them, but the common experience is that some do and some don't. And when our members don't personally adopt our community's declared values, we, the leaders, often do not know it because it is hidden from us by the privacy of their lives.

Now not all values are of equal weight, and when violations come to light, not all demand equal remedies. A member of our congregation who is discovered to be living in adultery and refuses to repent will almost certainly be censured and marked, but a member who eats pork in the privacy of his home is unlikely to receive more than a friendly talking to by his rabbi and friends. But our inability to ensure compliance with certain communal values is no reason for a community not to declare them and, to declare them we have to know them.

The *Torah* and other parts of Scripture contain the commandments from which our communal values are derived. A large number of these commandments date back to Moses and were given as part of what the book of Hebrews refers to as the "first covenant." But we are now in the New Covenant that was prophesied by Jeremiah as quoted in Hebrews 8:6-13:

*But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*



Now this is an unpopular passage among many Messianic Jews because, in saying that the Mosaic Covenant is obsolete and in the process of passing away, Hebrews seems to be challenging the very validity of Messianic Judaism that defines itself in relation to the *Torah* of the Covenant and, what's more, it seems to also be challenging our *Torah*-derived values. I don't want to side-track from my subject except to point out that it is the Covenant – the way in which man and God relate that has changed – not the *Torah* – for according to 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

So God's *Torah* and its derived values are valid in the New Covenant, but we *do* have a problem. It is that much of the *Torah*'s literal application was meant for a different time period and under different circumstances – a time when Yeshua had not yet been born and when the Holy Spirit had not yet become available to the common man. As a matter of fact, many of the commandments of *Torah* involve animal sacrifices that require a standing Temple and a functioning Levitical Priesthood, and we have neither. In fact, there is not one biblically prescribed Feast of the Lord that we can keep literally as commanded – not *Pesach*, not *Yom haBikkurim*, not *Shavuot*, not *Yom T'ruah*, not *Yom Kippur*, and not *Sukkot*. So what is the answer? The answer is that the Holy Spirit gives us inspiration on how to make valid New Covenant substitutions, and this makes all New Covenant believers (but particularly Messianic Jewish believers) highly reliant on the Holy Spirit for just about everything.

So back to communal values. How do we derive them? By studying *Torah*, the *Nev'im*, the *Ketuvim* and the *Kitvey B'rit Chadasha*, and by opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit for inspired guidance as to what our values ought to be.

Now you, as leaders of your respective communities, are responsible for discerning and formulating your community's values and no one can do it for you. Still, I have given this matter some prayerful consideration of my own, and would offer some ideas for you to consider. I am emboldened to present this by some of the teachings I heard over the past few days where Jewish life in the Holy Spirit was raised as an issue, and where I have a particular point of view or perhaps just an alternative way of expressing what has already been said.

I believe that a Messianic Jewish congregation's communal values are of two kinds – those that are common to all New Covenant communities and those that are peculiar to Jewish communities. Among these there is another division – values derived directly from Scripture, and values that, while not contrary to Scripture, are derived mainly from our Jewish culture and traditions.

All biblical values are historically Jewish but, since the formation of the Christian church, many if not most are viewed by the general populace as either generically biblical or Christian. They are values such as love, justice, honesty, mercy, forgiveness, kindness, compassion, hospitality, reconciliation, and other such things that are attributes of God Himself. There are many more in

this category but there are also some that are perceived as particularly Jewish. Consider, for example, the communal value of *dor l'dor*:

*Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." (Genesis 17:3-11 and verse 14).*

The Jewish concept of *dor l'dor* which is derived from this Scripture is a value that is only truly applicable to the Jewish people. It says to the Jew that his or her Jewish identity is not a matter of choice but rather one of inheritance that must be passed on to the next generation; it is a value that promotes the Abrahamic Covenant of circumcision in perpetuity in order that Israel can fulfill its various callings, including being a light to the gentile nations.

There are other communal values unique to Judaism as well. Zionism, for example, is derived from verse 8 of the Genesis passage I just read and is the call for Jews to return to *Eretz Yisrael* in order to receive their inheritance of the "Promised Land." And I believe that the Jewish communal value of *Talmud Torah* (study of the Scriptures) can be explained by Paul's rhetorical question and answer in Romans 3:1-2:

*What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.*

The oracles of God are the revelations of God preserved in Scripture.

If I have made an adequate case for determining and clarifying our biblical communal values, then permit me to go a step further and reclaim them all as the historically Jewish values that they are. I believe that presenting our congregations' values as "Jewish" is important because God considers Messianic Jewish congregations to be "Jewish," and letting our values be seen that way brings the truth of who we are home to the wider Jewish community.

Well, now I've gone and done it! I've admitted that I care what the wider Jewish community thinks of us, and that publicizing our communal values in Jewish terms is a good thing to do. Why do I think this? If it is because I am insecure in my Jewish identity and yearn to be accepted by the Jewish community then I am off base and had better repent. But I am not



insecure in my identity so that is not the reason. My reason is derived by combining two principles I see in Romans 11:16-27:

*For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."*

The first thing that impresses me here is that the cultivated olive tree is owned by all its natural branches – all Jews whether or not any Jewish individual is currently attached to the tree; so the tree is, without doubt, a Jewish tree. But all the Jews are not on the tree. Those who, in their blindness, do not recognize Yeshua as Messiah are broken off and are destined to remain off until they came to faith. That leaves the rest of us, the Messianic Jews, on the tree, so the cultivated olive tree is not only a Jewish tree, it is a Messianic Jewish tree that hosts both wild branches belonging to Gentile Christians, and the natural branches of all believing Jewish members of the otherwise unbelieving Jewish community. It is important to remember (and we often do not) that we who are Messianic Jews are Jews of the circumcision just like all other Jews and are therefore members of the wider Jewish community by dint of our inheritance. In being “born again” we receive a new spirit, but, as Jews we are the same as all other Jews in being carriers and conveyors of the Covenant of Abraham to the next generation.

The second significant thing I notice in the Romans Scripture is that, eventually, “all Israel will be saved. What this means to me is that Messianic Judaism is the Judaism of the future – the one to which all Jews will one day belong, and which some are ready to belong to right now. If that is the case, what we currently call the “wider Jewish community,” we will one day call the “entire Jewish community” and it will be us. It therefore makes good sense to me that we right now consider ourselves a Jewish community that is part of the wider one and, as such, formulate our communal values so that they will be recognizably Jewish both by the Jews who are already with us, and those who will join us later. Another way of looking at it is that we ought to build Jewish values into our communities now because they will come in anyway when the rest of the Jewish community joins us in faith, and we become normative Judaism.

The Jewish culture is a rich one and its communal values reflect that. To illustrate, here are some of them:

*Tikkun haOlam* – world restoration  
*Malachah* – hard work and completing tasks  
*S'liychah* – forgiveness  
*Emet* – truthfulness, honesty & propriety  
*Torah* – God's teaching and law  
*Gimilut chasadim* – acts of lovingkindness  
*Shabbat* – Sabbath rest  
*Moedim* – appointed times  
*Kavod horim umorim* – honoring parents & teachers  
*Rachamim* – mercy and compassion  
*Tzedaka* – Justice, righteousness, charity  
*Shalom* – Holistic peace  
*Kashrut* – Laws concerning foods and their preparation  
*Mitzvot* – The commandments of God  
*Mashiach* – Messianic belief (in our case belief in Yeshua)  
*Musar* – Ethical instruction  
*Lashon hara* – evil speech  
*Hachnasat orchim* – welcoming strangers  
*Eretz Yisrael* – the Land of Israel

These are but a few of the communal values traditionally associated with the Jewish world, and although each one by itself is not unique to Judaism, when operating together and especially when presented along with their Hebrew names, they mark a congregation as Jewish beyond a doubt.

In summary, I believe it is important for all Messianic Jewish congregations to discover, clarify, and come to terms with their biblical and cultural communal values. I believe it is also important that we embrace our place in the Jewish world by defining and emphasizing our Jewish communal values.

NKJ



**VII**

# The Torah of Messianic Judaism

Delivered May 27, 2017

For some time, I have thought that “Messianic Judaism” is not a good name for our movement because all of Judaism is Messianic; the distinguishing question between us and them has been: “Who is the real Messiah?” Judaism’s history has produced a number of false Messiah’s that include Simon Bar Kokhba in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Shabbetai Zevi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Menachem Mendel Schneerson of the *Chabad* most recently. But we know that Yeshua is the real Messiah, so perhaps “Yeshuic Judaism” or even “New Covenant Judaism” would be better terms for us but alas, we are stuck with “Messianic Judaism.”

More important than what we are called is what we believe as distinguished from other Judaisms. The most common differences spoken of are that we believe in Yeshua, and the other Judaisms do not. Also, we believe that the New Testament is Scripture, and the other Judaisms do not. Also, we believe we are in a New Covenant, and the other Judaisms do not. We also believe that the *Ru'ach Hakodesh* (the Holy Spirit) is active in our lives today, and the other Judaisms do not. Finally, most of the other Judaisms believe that God gave Moses an Oral *Torah* (known today as the *Mishnah*), and Messianic Judaism does not. Well, those are a lot of differences, but there is even one more that is related to the New Testament, and that is what we “Messianics” consider *Torah* (i.e. the teaching or law of God), and how we handle *Torah* that was given to us ages ago.

This latter matter of the *Torah* or law of God is also one of the things that distinguishes Messianic Judaism from most of modern Christianity. A key Scripture (often wrongly understood) that defines today’s Christianity, is Romans 6:14 which (rendered in the New King James and similar translations) reads:

*“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*

And here are a few other Scriptures that are similarly misunderstood (also in the New King James):

Romans 7:6: *“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”*

Galatians 2:19: *“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.”*

Galatians 3:10a *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; ..”*

So now that I have turned you away from Messianic Judaism by showing you these Scriptures, let’s see if I can rehabilitate you. How do I know that these passages of Scripture have been misinterpreted? It is because Yeshua himself exhorts us to keep the law of God – the *Torah*:

Matthew 5:17-19: *“Don’t think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass*



*away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” (CJB)*

Matthew 23:23: *“Woe to you hypocritical Torah-teachers and P’rushim [Pharisees]! You pay your tithes of mint, dill and cumin; but you have neglected the weightier matters of the Torah- justice, mercy, trust. These are the things you should have attended to- without neglecting the others!” (CJB)*

And Yeshua told this parable after “A man approached Yeshua and said, "Rabbi, what good thing should I do in order to have eternal life? Yeshua said to him in Matthew 19:16:

*““Why are you asking me about good? There is One who is good! But if you want to obtain eternal life, observe the mitzvot [i.e. the commandments of Torah.]” The man asked him, "Which ones?" and Yeshua said, "Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't give false testimony, honor father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself.”” (CJB)*

Why then do Yeshua’s words appear to contradict Paul’s words? Paul seems to be saying that we are no longer under the *Torah*, and Yeshua seems to be saying that obedience to the *Torah* is a component of our salvation. The answer is that I have switched translations on you – from the New King James Version to the Complete Jewish Bible.

Whereas the New King James translates Romans 6:14:

*“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*

The Complete Jewish Bible translates Romans 6:14:

*“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not under legalism but under grace.”*

Stern’s CJB translation of νόμον (*nomon*) as “legalism” rather than “law” is not accidental, nor is it inappropriately self-serving. It recognizes a frequent misuse of another Greek word in the verse, which is ὑπὸ (*hupo*) that is commonly translated “under.” The English word “under” is peculiar in that it has two meanings. One of them, “subject to,” is not the right meaning here because then Romans 6:14 would be saying that we are not subject to God’s law. The right meaning here is “underneath,” so that Romans 6:14 is more correctly translated:

*“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not underneath [the umbrella of] law, but underneath [the umbrella of] grace [for the forgiveness of sin and salvation].”*

In other words, while we are subject to God’s law, our salvation is no longer dependent upon it, which is a good thing because we have never fully complied with God’s law (nor can we ever). Instead, God has graciously provided his son Yeshua, our Messiah, whose sacrifice of himself

takes away our sin when we fail to obey God's law and subsequently repent. Hebrews 9:22 speaks to this as well, when it says:

*"In fact, according to the Torah, almost everything is purified with blood; indeed, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."*

I have had an interest in the commandments of *Torah* in the New Covenant for some time and have, in fact, been writing a book co-authored with our *Shaliach* Dr. Dan Juster, titled: "New Covenant *Torah*: The Law of Messiah Compiled as *Mitzvot*" (*mitzvot* are commandments). I had just finished covering the *mitzvot* listed by Maimonides and was beginning to search for *mitzvot* in the New Testament when I encountered a great surprise. I had long suspected that the New Covenant Scriptures contain law, but what I did not suspect was how much law there actually is. To date I have only gotten through the Book of Matthew and already I have identified eighty-nine commandments stated either explicitly or implicitly. Although I have read through the New Testament several times, it did not hit me that I was reading law, probably because I was not looking for law. For example, Matthew 5:13 states:

*"You are salt for the Land. But if salt becomes tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except being thrown out for people to trample on."*

What is the difference in meaning between that and the constructed *mitzvah*:

*"We are to be salt for the earth and not lose our saltiness?"*

Or the difference between Matthew 5:22 that states:

*"But I tell you that anyone who nurses anger against his brother will be subject to judgment; that whoever calls his brother, 'You good-for-nothing!' will be brought before the Sanhedrin; that whoever says, 'Fool!' incurs the penalty of burning in the fire of Gei-Hinnom!"*

and the constructed *mitzvah*:

*"We are not to nurse anger against nor despise our brother?"*

There is no difference, and paraphrasing *Torah* Scripture in these ways is how Maimonides and others compiled their 613 *mitzvot* – by going verse-by-verse, Genesis through Deuteronomy, looking for commandments.

It may astound you to know that there are eighty-nine commandments (both explicit and implicit) that I have found in the Book of Matthew – a book of the Bible that ostensibly tells us that we are no longer under law. So, I ask you: "Are we who are New Covenant believers no longer subject to God's law and given a free pass to heaven?" Jeremiah prophesied:

*"Here, the days are coming," says ADONAI, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt;*



*because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says ADONAI. "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says ADONAI: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:30(31)-32(33)).*

The New Covenant law referred to by Jeremiah consists of every word in the Bible that instructs us, and that is applicable to us. That notwithstanding, we understand that some commandments are applicable to Jews and not to Gentiles, some only to women and not to men, some only to parents and not to children, and some are not literally applicable to anyone today because today we have no working Levitical priesthood, and no Temple in which we are able to conduct animal sacrifices.

To summarize, the purpose of this message has been two-fold – (1) to put the lie to the prevalent Christian assertion that obedience to God's law (*Torah*) is not authorized for today's believers in Yeshua, and (2) to highlight the New Covenant distinctive of Messianic Judaism that it is still (as stated in Romans 3:2) entrusted for preserving and disseminating the "very words of God."

CJB

**VIII**



# Keeping Torah in the New Covenant

Delivered September 20, 2014

Earlier this month, I received an email from a believer (let's call him Thomas),"who read the introduction to my book "The Law of Messiah Compiled as *Mitzvot*," and wrote this to me:

*"I do not understand the basis for your argument that there are two types of law – "covenant-dependent," and "covenant-transcendent." I understand what you are getting at, and almost agree, but you offer no reasoning for your argument."*

My statement that Thomas referred to is:

*"There are two categories of statutes commanded by God under the Mosaic Covenant – those whose literal compliance depends upon the Covenant's continued existence, and those whose literal compliance does not. We shall call the first of these, 'covenant-dependent,' and the second of these, 'covenant-transcendent.'"*

The two terms that Thomas questioned ("covenant-dependent" and "covenant-transcendent") are expressions that are meant to explain commandments whose literal application and enforcement depend upon whether or not the Mosaic Covenant is still in effect. [Hebrews 8:13](#) says that it is aging and will soon disappear. I wanted to help Thomas understand, so I wrote back:

*"Commandments that I call "covenant-dependent" are the ones that can be obeyed to the letter of the way they are written, only so long as the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant have continued to exist. The key conditions that have to exist to support covenant-dependent commandments are (1) a standing Jerusalem Temple in which animals are sacrificed, (2) a functioning Levitical Priesthood to conduct the sacrifices, and (3) a government of Israel that is led by a man of God's choosing. The other commandments – those that do not need those conditions – those are the ones I call "covenant transcendent."*

I gave Thomas examples of both kinds of commandments. For a typical "covenant-dependent" commandment, I offered [Leviticus 7:1-5](#), which reads:

*"This is the law for the guilt offering: it is especially holy. They [meaning the kohanim (the priests) in behalf of individual Israelites] are to slaughter the guilt offering in the place where they slaughter the burnt offering, and its blood is to be splashed against all sides of the altar. He [meaning a priest] is to offer all its fat- the fat tail, the fat covering the inner organs, the two kidneys, the fat on them near the flanks, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. The cohen will make them go up in smoke on the altar as an offering made by fire to ADONAI; it is a guilt offering."*

It is obvious that we cannot obey this commandment literally today. We have no functioning Levitical priests, nor a functioning Temple or altar. And even if we had those things, we wouldn't be burning up animals as guilt offerings, because Yeshua's sacrifice has become our

guilt offering. Clearly, this commandment is "covenant-dependent" because it depends on the existence of the Mosaic Covenant.

I then went on to give Thomas examples of commandments that are "covenant-transcendent," and quoted Exodus 20:12-14:

*"Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land which ADONAI your God is giving you. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false evidence against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."*

This Scripture contains three separate commandments, each of which transcends the Mosaic Covenant because we can obey every one of them today exactly as written. None of them need the Temple or the priests or the altar.

Thomas then came back with an intriguing question; he asked:

*"I don't see anywhere in Scripture that tells us what is in the New Covenant. What, in your opinion, comprises the New Covenant?"*

I told him that his question was a good one, and I gave him an answer. But why am I telling you all of this? It is because the kind of questions Thomas was asking touches what I believe God wants us all to know about *Torah* in the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is best described prophetically in Jeremiah 31:30(31)-33(34), that I will read to you from the New King James Version because it is expressed there so beautifully; it says:

*"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (NKJ)*

During Mosaic Covenant times, all of the commandments given to Moses that he passed on to the Israelites were doable in every detail exactly as stated. However, Jeremiah prophetically foresaw a change in covenant where God's law would continue to exist, but where we would receive and respond to it differently than before.

The prediction in Jeremiah 31:33(34), "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more," can only be explained by Yeshua's sacrifice; there is no other event in



history that can explain it. According to Hebrews 9:24-26, Yeshua's sacrifice resulted in so complete an eradication of our sins that, for those who receive him, our "sins are remembered no more." The Hebrews passage that describes this reads as follows:

*"For the Messiah has entered a Holiest Place which is not man-made and merely a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, in order to appear now on our behalf in the very presence of God. Further, he did not enter heaven to offer himself over and over again, like the cohen hagadol who enters the Holiest Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer death many times- from the founding of the universe on. But as it is, he has appeared once at the end of the ages in order to do away with sin through the sacrifice of himself."*

Also, 1 John 2:2 informs us:

*"Also, he is the kapparah [covering] for our sins- and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world."*

And Romans 4:24-25 tells us:

*"They were written also for us, who will certainly have our account credited too, because we have trusted in him who raised Yeshua our Lord from the dead- Yeshua, who was delivered over to death because of our offences, and raised to life in order to make us righteous."*

So, I believe that the first New Covenant element that God sent to us was none other than God Himself (in the person of Yeshua), and that first element paved a way for the second – the Holy Spirit – also God Himself. We read of this second element in John 16:5-7:

*"But now I am going to the One who sent me. Not one of you is asking me, 'Where are you going?' Instead, because I have said these things to you, you are overcome with grief. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I don't go away, the comforting Counselor will not come to you. However, if I do go, I will send him to you."*

Also, in Acts 2:1-4:

*"The festival of Shavu'ot arrived, and the believers all gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from the sky like the roar of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them. They were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh [the Holy Spirit] and began to talk in different languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak."*

Now, jumping down to Acts 2:14-21 (refers to Joel 3:1(2:28)-5(2:32)):

*"Then Kefa stood up with the Eleven and raised his voice to address them: "You Judeans, and all of you staying here in Yerushalayim! Let me tell you what this means! Listen carefully to me! These people aren't drunk, as you suppose- it's only nine in the morning. No, this is*

*what was spoken about through the prophet Yo'el: 'ADONAI says: "In the Last Days, I will pour out from my Spirit upon everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my slaves, both men and women, will I pour out from my Spirit in those days; and they will prophesy. I will perform miracles in the sky above and signs on the earth below- blood, fire and thick smoke. The sun will become dark and the moon blood before the great and fearful Day of ADONAI comes. And then, whoever calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved.'"*

So, in response to the question, "What comprises the New Covenant?" My answer is that the New Covenant is a new way that God has provided for us to have a relationship with Him – a closer relationship – a one-on-one relationship; Hebrews 8:6 explains it this way:

*"But now the work Yeshua has been given to do, is far superior to theirs, just as the covenant he mediates is better. For this covenant has been given as Torah on the basis of better promises."*

What are those better promises? Well, instead of our having to communicate with God by way of prophets, statutes, and ordinances, we can now be cleansed of our sins by Yeshua's sacrifice, and then communicate with God directly through the Holy Spirit who, because of the cleansing, is now able to reside within us. We are told in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

*".. don't you know that your body is a temple for the Ruach HaKodesh who lives inside you, whom you received from God? The fact is, you don't belong to yourselves; for you were bought at a price. So use your bodies to glorify God."*

According to Hebrews, the two covenants – the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant are different. In the First Covenant, God spoke commandments to Moses from on high and, through Moses, told the Israelites:

Exodus 19:5-6: *"Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine."*

In response:

Exodus 19:8: *"All the people [of Israel] answered as one, [and said] 'Everything ADONAI has said, we will do.'"*

But, of course, Israel didn't do what they promised, and broke God's covenant.

In the New Covenant, God does not have different moral expectations of us than in the previous covenant. That notwithstanding, the New Covenant is indeed "new" in the way that God communicates His will to us. In the Mosaic Covenant, God was more distant, and His will was conveyed through His commandments and through the prophets. In the New Covenant, by comparison, God has made Himself near to us through the Holy Spirit who lives within us, and He speaks to us individually. In those two ways, the two covenants are indeed different.



God's expectation of us in the way we respond to the two Covenants is different as well. In the Mosaic Covenant, our response was:

*"Everything ADONAI has said, we will do."*

That is good, but in the New Covenant, our response should also be:

*"Lord, we now know you intimately because the Holy Spirit lives within each of us, and you speak to each of us as a father speaks to his son. In this new close relationship, we know your desire for us, and we obey you – not because we fear punishment – but because we love you and want to please you."*

In our seeking to keep God's Commandments, our approach should not be one of "rule-keeping" (as it likely would have been under Moses), but rather one of looking to His Commandments to guide us in knowing His will. The knowledge that is acquired through the Scriptures is interpreted and explained to us by the Holy Spirit, so we can understand God's will for us in each of our special circumstances. Although the statutes of the Mosaic Covenant are no longer enforced in the same way that they were in the old days, they are, however, exceedingly useful in helping us to know, understand, and appreciate God's law that has now (as Jeremiah prophesied) been put in our minds and hearts by the Holy Spirit.

One final thought:

"*Torah*" is too often thought of as consisting merely of the statutes and ordinances. Actually, "*Torah*" is much broader than that. The literal meaning of "*torah*" is "God's teaching" and, from a New Covenant perspective, it includes everything in God's written Word (i.e. the entire *Tanach* and New Testament), as well as everything He reveals to us by way of explanation and direction prophetically. A New Covenant believer in Yeshua cannot, therefore, separate the keeping of *Torah* from discerning the will of God through the Holy Spirit.

The "covenant-dependent" and "covenant-transcendent" commandments that I quoted earlier were clear and unambiguous, but that is not always the case. Consider (for example) Exodus 23:19:

*"You are not to boil a young animal in its mother's milk."*

Also, consider Deuteronomy 6:6 and 8:

*"These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart;" .. "Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead."*

Is the Exodus 23 commandment intended to be taken literally? The rabbis have broadened its meaning to not cooking or eating dairy and meat during the same meal or within hours of each other. I, on the other hand, think it was intended to be literal, in opposition to a perverted heathen practice. How can we decide? Consult the Holy Spirit.

Does the Deuteronomy 6 commandment mean that God wants us to pray while wearing *tefillin* (black boxes housing Scripture) on our arms and foreheads? That is the Orthodox interpretation. I, on the other hand, do not believe that the commandment is intended to be literal, but rather intended as an exhortation for us to think and do according to the Word of God! How can we decide? Consult the Holy Spirit.

There are many such commandments in the Bible that need interpretation from the Holy Spirit. We could simply adopt whatever practices we find convenient or embrace the practices of one authority or another, but I believe that God wants us to consult Him directly. There may, in fact, be different applications according to the communities in which we live, and each of our particular circumstances. We cannot know unless God reveals it to us, and He normally will not reveal it to us unless we ask Him.

That is the way I believe God wants us to keep *Torah* in the New Covenant. Relying on the Holy Spirit is the key. We cannot keep *Torah* by following rules without opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit for discernment and application.

CJB



**IX**

# Elephants in the Room

## What Paul Really Meant by His Comments on the Law

Delivered October 1, 2011

Messianic Judaism is similar to other “Judaisms” in seeking to apply the laws of *Torah* that God gave to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. Since those early days, many changes have occurred that impact our ability to keep the Law as our ancestors did. They include (1) a change in the Covenant, (2) Yeshua’s birth, ministry on earth, death, and resurrection, (3) universal accessibility to the Holy Spirit, (4) expansion of the Scriptures to include the New Testament, (5) lack of a functioning Levitical Priesthood, (6) absence of the Temple of God and, most important of all, (7) salvation through faith in Yeshua. These are the New Covenant realities under which we now live. Consequently, the way we keep the Law today cannot be solely according to the letter; rather, it must be guided by the Holy Spirit for both wisdom and application.

But as we seek the Holy Spirit for how to keep the Law, we are hindered by ever-present “elephants in the room.” The “elephants” of which I speak are the well-known writings of the Apostle Paul which seem to say that obeying the Mosaic Law is no longer profitable and may even cause spiritual harm. I knew it was not so, but because I have had to restudy and rethink Paul’s statements every time someone raised them to me in debate, I decided to write this short commentary in order to explain what I believe Paul really meant in his writings.

Each numbered caption that follows is a statement one often hears from opponents of observing Biblical Law. Then following each caption are Scriptures (translated in the New King James), authored by Paul, that are often used to support erroneous views of the Law, and after that comes my commentary. The New King James translation is used (with “Messiah” replacing “Christ” and “Yeshua” replacing “Jesus”) because it and the NIV are among the most popular, and the most egregious in misrepresenting Paul.

### 1. We no longer have to obey the Law because we are now under grace.

Romans 6:14: *“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*

This sounds like Paul is saying that God’s “grace” releases us to do anything we want, and from having to obey any of God’s laws. Why would the Apostle Paul, a confessed keeper of the Law (Acts 21:17-26), say such a thing? Did Yeshua’s appearance on earth and subsequent sacrifice cause God to change into a permissive liberal? I knew that couldn’t be the case, but still, what Paul said perplexed me, so I decided to pray and ask God about it.

What I believe I heard prophetically in reply is this: Being “under grace” is not automatically permissive as some would like it to be. Grace does sometimes imply permissive allowance or forgiveness, but being under God’s grace does not mean that He always grants it to us. Rather, it means that we are subject to the operation of God’s grace, and that He (and only He) decides when to extend it and when to withhold it.



Theologians often define “grace” (*kharis*) as “God’s unmerited favor” (which is correct) but, in his writings, Paul uses it metaphorically to mean God Himself, whose very person embodies grace. Romans 6:14 is therefore informing us that our accountability is no longer merely to the “statutes” of God’s written Word (His *Torah* or Law), but is now directly to God Himself through the living Word, who is Yeshua (John 1:14). Our being “under grace” is Paul’s way of saying that, in this direct accountability to God, God may either extend His grace to us or withhold it, on a case by case basis, according to His supreme sense of mercy and justice. Our being “not under law,” (the Greek word here for “under” is *hupo*, meaning “underneath”) connotes that we are no longer “underneath” the Law’s enforcement; that is, we no longer automatically receive the Law’s penalties for disobedience, but there is no doubt that we continue to be (and are now directly) subject to God’s correction and punishment (as well as His praise and reward) when we are deserving of them. Meanwhile, the commandments of *Torah*, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit, retain their relevance in being a main source for our determining God’s Will, but our “obedience” relationship with God is now direct rather than indirect. That is why Paul says in Galatians 5:18:

*“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”*

And similarly in Galatians 3:24-25:

*“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Messiah, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith [meaning “Messiah”] has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”*

What I have said about “grace” thus far has been in response to Paul’s juxtaposing “grace” and “law.” I would, however, be remiss were I not to mention another kind of grace that God never withholds. It is God’s empowerment, through the Holy Spirit, to do as well and as much as God, in His sovereignty, is willing to release us to. So it would seem, for example, that God always extends grace to a person who seeks His power for obedience, and to do good. We depend on God’s grace to perform His will.

## **2. We are justified by faith & not by the Law, so the deeds of the Law no longer have value.**

In Romans 3:20 and 28, Paul says:

*“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”*

And in Galatians 2:15-16 & 21:

*“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Yeshua the Messiah, even we have believed in Messiah Yeshua, that we might be justified by faith in Messiah and not by the works of the*

*law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. ... I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Messiah died in vain."*

These Scriptures and others like them are often quoted to deny the Law's continuing value in the New Covenant. After all (some think), if righteousness cannot be acquired from performing the deeds of the Law, then why do them? The answer is that, with the power and discernment that the Holy Spirit allows us, we perform the deeds of the Law because they are God's will – not in order to become righteous and acquire salvation.

Paul is very clear that no one is justified (i.e. made righteous – saved) through merely obeying commandments. Justification comes only through our reliance on Yeshua's sacrifice that expunges our sins if we receive Him and repent; that's why Galatians 2:16 states:

*".. a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Yeshua the Messiah.."*

Romans 3:28 says the same thing but differently; it says:

*".. a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."*

None of this contradicts Paul's contention that God's Law continues to have value in the New Covenant. We can be certain of this because in Romans 3:31 Paul says:

*"Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."*

### **3. We are now dead to the law, having been delivered from It.**

In Romans 7:4-6, Paul says:

*"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Messiah, that you may be married to another-- to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."*

Also, in Galatians 2:19-20, Paul says:

*"For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

The expressions "dead to the law," "died to the law," and "delivered from the law" have led many to believe that God's Law no longer applies to us. That is not at all what Paul is saying.



In Romans 7:4-6, Paul is comparing our relationship with God to the intimate relationship of marriage. Prior to the New Covenant, our “marriage” relationship with God was mostly through our obedience to the statutes of *Torah* because we did not yet have Yeshua’s sacrifice or the Holy Spirit to draw us closer. It was a wonderful relationship, but God made it even better by sending Yeshua who sacrificed Himself for us. This brought us into a “marriage” relationship with Yeshua that was more intimate than our marriage relationship through the Law. But because it is not God’s will that we be in two marriages at the same time, Paul explains that we died during our marriage to the Law in order to clear the way for our “marriage” to Yeshua. That is what Paul meant when he said:

*“you also have become dead to the law through the body of Messiah, that you may be married to another (Romans 7:4) –” and his other saying: “I through the law died to the law that I might live to God” (Galatians 2:19).*

Paul’s reference to being “delivered from the Law” and being “held” by the law is a continuation of his metaphor that we have moved from one marriage relationship to another. It is not as some believe – Paul stating that God’s Law held us in bondage. I said “God’s Law” instead of just “Law” purposely, in order to illustrate how much easier it is to accept that some nondescript “Law” held us in bondage, than to think that “God’s Law” held us in bondage, which we know cannot be true. Also, Paul’s reference to the “newness of the Spirit” and the “oldness of the letter” is completely consistent with the Scriptures and everything else Paul said because, in the New Covenant, our principal way of relating to God has changed. Paul recognizes our changed relationship to the Law, but at no time infers that the *Torah* has been done away with or has been rendered useless.

#### **4. The Mosaic Law is a curse, and those who seek to obey it are under its curse.**

Galatians 3:10-13: *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them. But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), ...”*

Once again, the words that Paul uses are often misconstrued – in this case, the word “curse,” which some would have us believe means that God’s Law is a curse. No, the curse to which Paul is referring originates in Deuteronomy 30:19, which reads:

*“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;”*

When these words were given by God to Moses under the previous covenant, the context was ‘covering over sin’ through obedience to the Law and animal sacrifice. Israel’s choice to either obey the Law and live, or disobey and not live, was a reference to salvation that, unbeknown to

the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, would be granted in the future as a result of Yeshua's sacrifice. Paul's words paralleling Deuteronomy were spoken many centuries after Sinai under the New Covenant, when our path to salvation had been transferred from conducting animal sacrifices to having faith in Yeshua, the ultimate sacrifice. Paul was warning the Galatians not to seek covering over of their sins in the old way of obedience to the Law with attendant animal sacrifices, but rather to seek salvation in the new way which was through Yeshua. Not only was the old way no longer authorized but, under it, even a single violation would result in the cursing referred to in Deuteronomy 30:19 that led to death. But Paul is clear in Galatians 3:11 (NKJ) that in the New Covenant:

*"no one is justified by the law,"*

and he quotes Habakkuk 2:4 (see also, Romans 1:7 and Hebrews 10:38):

*"the just shall live by his faith."*

Bottom line: It is not a curse to seek to keep the Law; the curse comes from trying to keep it as a means of acquiring salvation.

#### **5. It no longer matters what we eat, or drink, or whether we keep God's special days.**

Colossians 2:16-17: *"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Messiah."*

This Scripture is sometimes used to assert that God's food laws, appointed times, and other special days commanded in Scripture are no longer in effect, and that those who adhere to them are putting themselves back under the "Law of sin and death," and even denying Yeshua. Now that's a pretty ominous charge for merely resting on the Sabbath and abstaining from pork. To see what is actually being said here, let's widen our search to verses of Scripture that come both before and after:

**Before:** Colossians 2:8: *"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Messiah."*

**After:** Colossians 2:20-22: *"Therefore, if you died with Messiah from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using-- according to the commandments and doctrines of men?"*

Notice that the words in verse 16,

*"let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,"*



is sandwiched between verse 8 and verses 20-22 that warn against becoming captive to the traditions, commandments, and doctrines of men. But God's *Torah* regarding permissible foods and how to keep His festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths, are not the traditions of men, so Paul was not, therefore, advocating disregard for the *Torah*. Rather, he was warning us against being in bondage to "fences" that some would place around the *Torah* – rules promulgated by men that are beyond and more stringent than those commanded by God.

## **6. The Mosaic Law was defective & is now obsolete.**

*Hebrews 8:6-7 and 13: "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. ... In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."*

These verses of Scripture are sometimes used, in conjunction with others, to assert the Mosaic Law's inadequacy, defectiveness, and obsolescence. But if those making the assertion would look at the Scriptures carefully, they would see that what is being spoken of is the Mosaic Covenant – not the Mosaic Law. A covenant is a relationship – an agreement between parties. The Mosaic Covenant was the relationship that was consummated at Mt. Sinai between God and the Israelites, where God gave the Israelites His Laws (the *Torah*), and the Israelites promised to obey. Well, they didn't obey, and they consequently breached the Covenant; the word "breach" and "fault" are the same. The Covenant between God and the Israelites developed a fault that was not intrinsic to the covenant agreement, but rather one that was created by the Israelites' disobedience. We see this clearly in Hebrews 8:8 that says:

*"Because finding fault with THEM, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... ""*

Notice how the Scripture says "*finding fault with THEM..*" The fault was with the Israelites – not in the design of the covenant. And we read in both Hebrews 8:8 and Jeremiah 31:30(31)-31(32) that, rather than God leaving Israel without a covenant (which He could have done and which they deserved), He graciously gave them a New and different covenant that was based on better promises. In the process of doing that, He allowed the First Covenant to gradually pass into oblivion; that is what Paul means by the First Covenant becoming obsolete.

So, do we need to obey the Mosaic Law? Well, yes and no! Part of the Mosaic Law can no longer be complied with because it has lost its covenantal infrastructure. We have no operative Levitical Priesthood, no Jerusalem Temple in which to conduct animal sacrifices, and no unified leadership of Israel. Yeshua should be recognized by everyone as the King of Israel, and His sacrifice as the reason why many commandments connected to the Temple can no longer be performed. Still, there are many commandments that remain doable, but they have now come under New Covenant administration and are subject to New Covenant enforcement. When

added to other mandates of the New Covenant, they collectively become what Galatians 6:2 calls “the Law of Messiah.”

**7. The Mosaic Law is a ministry of death, so literal observance of it kills.**

2 Corinthians 3:5-8: *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?”*

Romans 7:6: *“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”*

The 2 Corinthians Scripture refers to the written Law as a “Ministry of Death,” and says that “the letter (presumably of the Law) kills.” It certainly appears to support the view of those who would preach doing away with the Law, yet the Scripture also says that the written Law was glorious – an apparent contradiction. What then is Paul trying to say? Paul is reflecting about the Old Covenant, when the Holy Spirit was not accessible to the average Israelite, and when literal obedience to the Law was indeed the prescribed path to life. But it ceased to be the path to life in the New Covenant when Yeshua’s sacrifice gave us direct access to God, and the Holy Spirit was given to us to be the Law’s interpreter. So Paul is warning us that today our approach to God’s Law must be through the Holy Spirit and not through mere literal observance. He is warning us that although literal obedience to the Law led us to life under the Old Covenant, bypassing the Holy Spirit to pursue literal obedience will lead us to death under the New. That is not to say that today the letter of the Law has no application. It does, but it must be the Holy Spirit who gives us the application.

**8. The Mosaic Law was done away with by Messiah, so all we need do now is love our neighbor.**

Romans 10:4: *“For Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*

Galatians 5:14: *“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.””*

These Scriptures have occasionally been used to teach that, when Messiah came, he brought an end to God’s Law because all God ever wanted was for us to love our neighbor, which is the Law’s fulfillment.



Romans 10:4 is easy to explain. Put simply, the word “end” in the verse does not mean “termination of existence,” it means “purposeful destination” as in the expression “the end justifies the means.” It tells us that Messiah is to whom the Law brings us. As for Galatians 5:14, both the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Yeshua stand for selfless sacrifice as against self-interest. When we “love ‘our’ neighbor as ‘ourselves,’” we fulfill the ultimate of what the Law stands for, but we are not released from obeying God’s specific and detailed Commandments. If we were, He would have told us.

### Conclusion

I hope this commentary helps to clear the “elephants” from the room. We can criticize Paul’s choice of words or the translations of his writings, but what we cannot do is believe that Paul would condone the myriad of anti-law statements that have been attributed to him.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches us:

*“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Let us keep in mind that the *Torah* (the Pentateuch) that contains the Law of Moses is Scripture, and is therefore profitable for all that 2 Timothy says it is. And by the way – take note of who wrote 2 Timothy – IT WAS PAUL!

NKJ

**X**



# The Priestly Calling of Messianic Judaism

Written September 22, 1987

## The Foundational Priestly Covenant

We read in Genesis that God made a Covenant with Abraham, promising to make him a "father of many nations" and bless him and his descendants (through Isaac and Jacob) with fruitfulness, with land and with the benefits of being overseen and cared for by God. This is what He said:

*Genesis 17:4-8; 22:18: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." ... "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."*

While most covenants require the covenanting parties' mutual agreement, it is significant that, in regard to this covenant, God dictated its terms without asking for or requiring Abraham's consent, and seemingly without requiring any response on the part of Abraham's descendants other than physical circumcision. Consequently, God provided no means by which the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could breach or otherwise abrogate the Covenant as a people. God did, however, provide that individuals would be cut off from the Covenant if they remained uncircumcized in their flesh.

## The Mosaic Priestly Covenant

It was God's desire and purpose that his people Israel would be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) – priests to each other and to the Gentiles, that the heathen might observe the people of God and choose to come to God by joining Israel. It was for the purpose of drawing the Gentiles – not excluding them – that God caused Israel to be set apart and to be distinguished through the Law that was given through Moses. For example, God gave Israel a weekly Sabbath of rest, unique annual feasts, food laws, special garments (fringes with cords of blue), a moral and civil code, and a sacrificial system for atonement of sin conducted by priests from one of its own tribes. Further, all of these distinguishing features were possessed and exhibited by those who also possessed the distinguishing mark of circumcision.

As part of this priestly covenant, God established a Tabernacle for sacrifice, within which were several open areas and chambers separated by partitions. Available modern sources indicate that only Israelites could pass through the outer partition into the inner court of the Tabernacle, from which position the burnt sacrifices could be observed. This is analogous to, and consistent with, what we know of the structure and function of the "Second Temple," where a wall or gate known as the "soreg" separated the Temple Mount (Court of the Gentiles) from the interior areas where

the sacrifices were conducted and which were prohibited to Gentiles.

Despite the lack of access by Gentiles, one can derive (both from Scripture and Rabbinical sources) that Gentiles were permitted to bring sacrifices to the Tabernacle and later to the Temple. For example, in referring to animals having certain deformities, Scripture says of Gentiles who might attempt to offer them:

*Leviticus 22:25: "Nor from a foreigner's hand shall you offer any of these as the bread of your God, because their corruption is in them, and defects are in them. They shall not be accepted on your behalf."*

The correct implication is that foreigners could offer animals for sacrifice if they were unblemished. Also, we read in *Hullin 13b* of the *Talmud*:

*"Perhaps this is the meaning [of the Baraitha]: As regards Israelites, you may accept sacrifices from the righteous but not from the wicked, but as regards gentiles you may not accept sacrifices from them at all? -- You cannot entertain such a view, for it has been taught: [It would have sufficed had Scripture stated], 'a man', why does it state, 'a man, a man'? To include gentiles, that they may bring either votive or freewill-offerings like an Israelite."*

There is a logical way to reconcile the prohibition against Gentiles entering the sanctuary and yet being able to offer sacrifices; that way is through the priestly intercession of Israelites.

The ordinary sacrifices took place daily, with Israelites offering sacrifices for themselves, for each other, and for Gentiles. They were assisted in their intercession by the Levitical priests who, in turn, were assisted in physical ministry by their fellow Levites. Once each year, however, the entire Levitical priesthood and all of Israel turned their attention to a special intercession. The High Priest began his spiritual and physical preparation on the third day of *Tishri*, and on the 10th of *Tishri*, on *Yom Kippur*, he donned special garments, selected a goat for blood sacrifice, another to carry Israel's sins into the wilderness, and entered the "Holy of Holys" for his once-a-year intercession to seek atonement for the sins of the nation.

### **The New Priestly Covenant**

It came to pass that Israel fell into significant sin, breached its Covenant given through Moses, and utterly failed in its priestly responsibilities. Even so, as long as even one Israelite remained who was circumcised, Israel as a nation was not capable of breaching the "Foundational Priestly Covenant" – the Abrahamic Covenant – and therefore, God gave Israel a replacement for the Covenant that they violated:

*Hebrews 8:6-13: "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: 'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not*



*according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them," says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days,' says the Lord, 'I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.' In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.'"*

Well, this new priestly covenant is now here, and in understanding it, one must be clear on several points. First, it is established with a new sacrificial system – a system which appropriates Yeshua's death and resurrection as the one for-all-time sacrifice, sufficient to atone for all sins – past, present and future. Second, this new priestly covenant is intended to replace the Levitical priesthood with the priesthood of "Yeshua," wherein both Jewish and Gentile believers together serve as priests under Yeshua our new High Priest. Third, the nature of this new priestly covenant is to “not” abolish God’s law, but rather to divinely establish it in our minds and on our hearts. God's complaint with Israel under the covenant that preceded it was that the people were "lawless; the new priestly covenant must therefore correct this and must re-establish Israel as a people of law based upon their knowledge of God and relationship with him. Fourth, the new priestly covenant was given to Israel –not to the church and not to the Gentiles nations. Since currently most of Israel rejects Yeshua its Messiah, it falls to the believing Jewish remnant (the Messianic Jews) to keep the new priestly covenant (which we call the New Covenant for short) until the remainder of Israel have their eyes of stupor opened (Romans 11:8).

### **Some Question a Continuing Role for Israel**

There are some who contend that, in the New Covenant, there is no longer a unique Jewish calling or role reserved for physical Israel, Messianic or not. Those who hold this view tend to consider anything (custom, prayer, lifestyle, apparel, etc.) which makes it possible to distinguish a Messianic Jew from a Gentile believer to be tantamount to re-erecting the middle wall of partition alluded to in Ephesians 2:14. The remaining sections of this paper will respond to this view with clear biblical proof of the continued calling and unique priestly role of Jewish believers in Yeshua.

### **Salvation Is of the Jews**

Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel served the Gentiles in two basic ways – (1) by being a physical people whom Gentiles could join if they wanted as complete a relationship with God as possible, and (2) by bringing the sacrifices of Gentiles before the Lord, thereby providing a means for Gentile atonement.

Since *"the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable"* (Romans 12:29), it should be no surprise to find Israel continuing these functions, with modification, under the New Covenant. The New Covenant opened to Gentiles a way to connect to Israel and receive all of its benefits without joining the Nation physically. The process for this is described in Romans 11, where the

Gentiles, described as branches of a wild olive tree, are able to graft into a cultivated olive tree and become partakers of the root. In my opinion, the trunk of the olive tree represents the "Commonwealth of Israel" spoken of in Ephesians 2:12 and the root Israel itself. This is likely because of the reference in Romans 11:17 to natural branches (circumcised Israelites) which were broken off because of unbelief, but having the potential to be re-grafted in (verse 23) if they return to faith (in Messiah). Also, verse 22, speaking of Israel, refers to the olive tree as "their own olive tree".

Clearly then, the wild branch being grafted into the cultivated olive tree, contrary to nature (verse 24), is the principal way that Gentiles come to God in the New Covenant – through the Jewish Messiah, and therefore through Israel. Scripture is plain as to our need to receive Yeshua as Lord in order to have eternal life (e.g. John 3:16), but the mechanism through which this is accomplished is not by a direct connection of each individual to God, but rather by the process of grafting into the nation of Israel which has been described.

In John 4:22 we read the words of Yeshua: "*for salvation is of the Jews.*" Certainly, this is so both because Yeshua who brought salvation was himself a Jew, but also because without Israel, without the cultivated olive tree, there is no possibility of New Covenant salvation for the Gentile. Consider this. If either every Israelite in the world refused circumcision and was subsequently cut off from his people or else every Israelite denied the Messiah and died in that condition, there would be no Israel, no olive tree, and consequently no salvation for the Gentiles. Gentile salvation depends upon connecting with Israel as much under the New Covenant as it did under the Mosaic Covenant. Salvation is, indeed, "of the Jews".

#### **Trustees of the Scriptures and Covenants**

The apostle Paul had no difficulty appreciating the special calling of Israel to be trustee of the covenants and of the written Word of God:

Romans 3:1-2: "*What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.*"

Romans 9:3-5: "*For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Messiah for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Messiah came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.*"

As has been shown previously, being the intended recipient and trustee of all of the covenants with God – the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the New Covenant (all the priestly covenants) – gives Israelites a very responsible role in priestly ministry in that their existence and identity is crucial to God's blessings finding their way to the Gentiles and to the outermost parts of the earth.

#### **A Beacon to Lead the Gentiles to God**

A decidedly priestly role for Messianic Jews (and one which requires that they be clearly visible



and distinguishable) is the role of reflecting Messiah's light so that the Gentiles can find Messiah by heading toward the light. The prophet Isaiah revealed this beacon-of-light ministry of Israel while Israel was still in darkness:

*Isaiah 60:1-3: "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and his glory will be seen upon you. The gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."*

Lest one now think that Israel's responsibility to the Gentiles was only under the Mosaic Covenant, let us consider carefully the words of Zechariah:

*Zechariah 8:23: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"*

### **A Loyal Witness in a Satanic War**

The Scriptures which follow identify Messianic Israel (today called Messianic Judaism) as a witness people, sealed by God, and called in the last days to stand firm in obedience to God even while the evil one launches a war against them.

*Revelation 7:2-4: "Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth, the sea or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.' And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four Thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed."*

*Revelation 12:13-17: "Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness to her place where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the Commandments of God and have the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah."*

This is the priestly calling and role of Messianic Judaism.

September 22, 1987  
NKJ

**XI**



## Gentiles in Messianic Judaism

Delivered January 30, 2016

A few weeks ago, our *shaliach* Dan Juster visited us and spoke on “Messianic Judaism – Restoring the Book of Acts.” He and I ordinarily see things the same way theologically, and his message was what I expected it would be. A few days later, though, I was surprised to hear that several among us were unsettled by the message because Dan seemed to be speaking to the Jews among us, and not so much to Gentiles. To these hearers, he made it sound as though Messianic Judaism was a religion for Jews who have come to believe in Yeshua, and not a movement of both Jews and Gentiles. The result was that some Gentiles among us that heard Dan’s message felt excluded, like “I thought I belonged here; was I mistaken?”

No, you were not mistaken that you belong here if God brought you here, but you may have been mistaken if you thought that Messianic Judaism is just a Jewish-styled expression of Christianity. Ohev’s vision statement on its web site states:

“We are a congregational home for Jewish believers in *Yeshua* and for Gentile believers called to serve *Messiah* alongside their Jewish brethren.”

The statement was worded “alongside their Jewish brethren” intentionally – not to offend, but to make it clear that Ohev Yisrael sees itself as a specialized kind of Jewish congregation – one that is primarily a home for Jewish believers who are joined by Gentiles called to serve Ohev’s covenantal Jewish vision. Not all Gentiles are called to live and serve within a Jewish community but, if you are, this is your home as well.

There have always been Gentiles who have come to Ohev Yisrael for other reasons – legitimate reasons – and who have stayed to become good and valuable members. Perhaps the reason they came was that they discovered that the church should be more Jewish-rooted than it is. Perhaps it was discovering that keeping the Sabbaths is God’s will for Gentiles as well as for Jews, and they could not find a church that would accommodate them (see, [Isaiah 56:1-12](#)). Or perhaps it was discovering that the Land of Israel is important to God, and their church did not see it that way. Or perhaps it was our musical worship or the presence of the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps it was my messages – yes, many Gentiles have come to Ohev Yisrael principally to hear my messages <Pause for laughter.> In any case, there may be completely legitimate reasons for a Gentile to attend (and even become a member of) Ohev Yisrael that is not squarely aligned with Ohev’s stated reason for being. That’s okay, but he or she should nevertheless keep in mind what the primary purpose of the Ohev Yisrael community is, and be willing to serve within its framework.

That notwithstanding, there are those Gentiles among us that have come and stayed because they discovered that their calling by God is to live and serve alongside their Jewish brethren believers in Yeshua. Their calling as Gentiles is the same as that of the Jews to which they are joined, which is first and foremost to minister Yeshua to the Jewish people who do not yet know him, and second, to assist the larger body of believers in regaining its biblical Jewish roots that it lost in history. These Gentiles we call by a special name. We call them *k’rovei Yisrael* (or “close

family members of Israel). If you are a *k'rov Yisrael* you know it, and you know that your covenant obligations are the same as those of the Jewish believers you have joined. But if you are not a *k'rov Yisrael* – no worries. Most Gentiles are not, and God will use you within Ohev Yisrael or elsewhere in whatever calling you have regardless.

Since I have said that there are Gentiles who are specially called to live and serve among the Jewish people, perhaps I should justify it with some biblical examples. The first example I would give would be the Gentiles who lived within Abraham's household and were circumcised along with Abraham's family; in Genesis 17:9-14 we read:

*"God said to Avraham, 'As for you, you are to keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. Here is my covenant, which you are to keep, between me and you, along with your descendants after you: every male among you is to be circumcised. You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Generation after generation, every male among you who is eight days old is to be circumcised, including slaves born within your household and those bought from a foreigner not descended from you. The slave born in your house and the person bought with your money must be circumcised; thus my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who will not let himself be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin- that person will be cut off from his people, because he has broken my covenant.'"*

And in verses 26 and 27 we read:

*"Avraham and Yishma'el his son were circumcised on the same day; and all the men in his household, both slaves born in his house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him."*

It seems to me that these Gentiles who lived in Abraham's household and were circumcised along with Abraham's family were the first *k'rovei Yisrael*.

Of course, when Israel went into slavery in Egypt they had no household servants, but *k'rovei Yisrael* surfaced again in the mixed multitude that left Egypt with the Israelites during the great exodus:

Exodus 12:33-38: *"The Egyptians pressed to send the people out of the land quickly, because they said, "Otherwise we'll all be dead!" The people took their dough before it had become leavened and wrapped their kneading bowls in their clothes on their shoulders. The people of Isra'el had done what Moshe had said- they had asked the Egyptians to give them silver and gold jewelry and clothing; and ADONAI had made the Egyptians so favorably disposed toward the people that they had let them have whatever they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. The people of Isra'el traveled from Ra'amses to Sukkot, some six hundred thousand men on foot, not counting children. A mixed crowd [NKJ: mixed multitude] also went up with them, as well as livestock in large numbers, both flocks and herds."*



That mixed multitude that accompanied the Israelites when they left Egypt were Gentiles of various kinds who had come to know the God of Israel, and knew that God was summoning them to make their lives among the Jewish people. Eventually, the Israelites with their mixed multitude arrived at Mount Sinai from where God spoke His covenant, and we read in Deuteronomy 29:9(10)-12(13):

*“Today you are standing, all of you, before ADONAI your God- your heads, your tribes, your leaders and your officers- all the men of Isra’el, along with your little ones, your wives and your foreigners here with you in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. The purpose is that you should enter into the covenant of ADONAI your God and into his oath which ADONAI your God is making with you today, so that he can establish you today for himself as a people, and so that for you he will be God- as he said to you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Avraham, Yitz’chak and Ya’akov.”*

Notice that they were not only Israelites who gathered at Mount Sinai to hear and receive God’s covenant, but also the foreigners who were the *k’rovei Yisrael* that had followed the Israelites out of Egypt. Notice also, that God specifically recognized their presence and, soon thereafter, similar to the Gentiles who lived in Abraham’s household, received the following command:

Exodus 12:43b-49” *“This is the regulation for the Pesach lamb: no foreigner is to eat it. But if anyone has a slave he bought for money, when you have circumcised him, he may eat it. Neither a traveler nor a hired servant may eat it. It is to be eaten in one house. You are not to take any of the meat outside the house, and you are not to break any of its bones. The whole community of Isra’el is to keep it. If a foreigner staying with you wants to observe ADONAI’s Pesach, all his males must be circumcised. Then he may take part and observe it; he will be like a citizen of the land. But no uncircumcised person is to eat it. The same teaching is to apply equally to the citizen and to the foreigner living among you.”*

And also in Numbers 15:14-16:

*“If a foreigner stays with you- or whoever may be with you, through all your generations- and he wants to bring an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for ADONAI, he is to do the same as you. For this community there will be the same law for you as for the foreigner living with you; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations; the foreigner is to be treated the same way before ADONAI as yourselves. The same Torah and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the foreigner living with you.”*

These are very significant passages of Scripture because they define this category of Gentiles who live with Israelites (that today we call *k’rovei Yisrael*) as having drawn so close to the Jewish people as to be considered close family members and subject to the same *Torah* and standard of judgment as apply to Jews.

Having said it as I have, I want to be quick to say that this is not the same as what has come to be known as the “one law movement” to which Messianic Judaism does not ascribe. The “one law movement” takes the same Scriptures that I cited (and, in fact, the entire *Torah*) and makes them applicable to all Gentiles whether or not they are *k’rovei Yisrael*. That is a serious

misunderstanding and an affront to God's faithfulness, because it denies His promise to the Jewish people recorded in Exodus 19:3-6:

*"Moshe went up to God, and ADONAI called to him from the mountain: 'Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya'akov, to tell the people of Isra'el: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.' These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra'el.'"*

And why are we so sure that God has not broadened His special promise made to Israel, to all believers in Yeshua? The apostle Paul answers the question concisely where in Romans 11:28-29 he speaks to Gentile believers and tells them:

*"With respect to the Good News they [meaning the Jews] are hated for your sake. But with respect to being chosen they are loved for the Patriarchs' sake, for God's free gifts and his calling are irrevocable."*

So, you may ask: "If Jews and *k'rovei Yisrael* are held to the same Law and have the same covenant obligations, is there any remaining difference?" Again we turn to Paul for an answer (at least in part) where, in Romans 3:1 he first asks rhetorically:

*"Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised?"*

And he then answers his own question in Romans 3:2 by saying:

*"Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God."*

I said "in part" because there is more, and it has to do with the entire subject of grafting that we read about in the Book of Romans, where Gentile believers in Yeshua receive their eternal and priestly connection to God – not directly, but through their connection to the olive tree that is Israel. In Romans 11:16-18 we read:

*"Now if the hallah [the bread] offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches [meaning the Jewish branches] were broken off, and you- a wild olive- [meaning a Gentile] were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you [meaning a Gentile] are not supporting the root [meaning the Jewish people], the root is supporting you."*

So, there is the main difference between Jews and *k'rov Yisrael* Gentiles; it is a matter of who supports who. If God withdraws his covenant promise to the Jewish people that they are to be priests to the nations of the world, then Gentile believers have nothing to graft into, and therefore no way to partake of their New Covenant relationship with God. Why did God choose to bring



the Gentiles into relationship with Him in this way? I don't know, but He did, so any theology that denies the special calling of the Jewish people threatens everyone's calling.

Several years ago, I distributed a ten (10) point paper to our Gentile members, to help them explain their participation in Messianic Judaism. It is written as though by a Gentile:

1. I am a Gentile and not a Jew because I am not a proselyte and, so far as I am aware, my physical lineage does not go back to Abraham Isaac and Jacob.
2. I have been born-again through my faith in Yeshua; that means I was given a new spirit and eternal life with God when I confessed my sins and asked Yeshua into my heart. That also means that I have been grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel (Romans 11:17-19) and have thereby become a citizen of the Common-wealth (Ephesians 2:11-13).
3. In addition to being born again, I have been called by God, to live out my faith in the same way and in the same congregational community as Jews who believe in Yeshua the same as I do.
4. The Jews in my congregation call themselves Messianic to distinguish themselves from Jews who do not believe in Yeshua, so I also call myself Messianic although I remain a Gentile.
5. Both I and the Jews in my congregation practice a Judaism called "Messianic Judaism." It is a faith, a form of Jewish practice, and a way of life that looks exclusively to the Bible – both the Old and New Testaments – for final authority on God's Word, and looks to the Holy Spirit for interpretation, application, and guidance.
6. Both Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles such as I am consider ourselves members in both the Messianic Jewish community and the universal body of Yeshua.
7. Both I and the Jews in my congregation consider that the commandments that were given to the ancient Israelites under the Mosaic Covenant have application to our community today as well. For that reason, we seek to interpret and apply the Scriptures literally when applicable and as the Holy Spirit directs.
8. Because my congregation and I practice what we call Messianic Judaism, we call our congregation a Messianic Jewish Congregation. This name reflects our belief in Yeshua as well as our *Torah*-oriented practice that is often (but not always) expressed in similar ways as in non-Messianic Jewish Communities. By "*Torah*-oriented practice," we mean that we seek the Holy Spirit for understanding how to obey God's Law in the New Covenant, and in our individual and corporate circumstances. We obey *Torah* out of our love for God and Messiah; we do not consider obedience the source of our relationship with God, and do not seek our relationship through it.
9. The Jewish practices of my congregation establish the congregation's primary culture and lifestyle, but we also incorporate practices that come to us from other traditions. These include contemporary praise and worship with instruments, dance, the bread and wine of Yeshua, speaking and receiving prophetic words, and spontaneous vocalized prayer. Because we do not

accept rabbinic authority over us, we are free to adopt certain cultural and Rabbinic Jewish practices while not adopting others, as we determine which of these practices are consistent with the Word of God.

10. My congregation's mission is several-fold: First, we are a family of Jews and Gentiles who are committed to being an example of faith in Yeshua and in holy New Covenant Jewish living. Second, we are a community that is dedicated to upholding, strengthening, praying for, discipling, protecting, and providing for each other as each of us has needs and as the Holy Spirit directs. Third, we are a community that seeks to convey our faith and traditions to our children and their children. Fourth, we seek to provide a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for believing Gentiles called to serve Yeshua within our Messianic Jewish community. Fifth, we seek to reach out with the Word of God to all who do not yet know Yeshua – first to the Jew, but also to those of the nations. Sixth and finally, we seek to help the Christian Church understand its connection to Israel and return to its biblical Jewish roots.

CJB



**XII**

## First Fruits: The Head and Not the Tail

Delivered April 7, 2007

Sundown marked the end of the Sabbath that fell within the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This makes today the biblical feast of *Bikkurim* or Firstfruits, for we read in Leviticus 23:9-12:

*“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of its firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the Lord.’”*

To be usable, fruit must be harvested, and firstfruits are those fruit that ripen first and are harvested before any other. But fruit referred to in Scripture is not always agricultural produce, for we read in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 about how Yeshua was the firstfruit of the resurrection:

*“But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the firstfruits, afterward those who are Messiah’s at His coming.”*

So, although *Bikkurim* (which is today) was given by the Mosaic Law as a celebration of the agricultural harvest, we see how God timed Yeshua’s death and resurrection so that He would rise from his tomb on this very day – the firstfruit of many more resurrections to come:

Mark 16:2-6: *“Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, “Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?” But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away -- for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.”*

And in Acts 26:22-23, Paul explained Yeshua being the firstfruit of the resurrection this way:

*“Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come -- that the Messiah would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”*

There are other fruits and firstfruits mentioned in Scripture as well. For example, Galatians 5:1-26 speaks of “Fruit of the Spirit” which are godly characteristics that the Holy Spirit produces in us. And in Genesis 1:28 we read that God commanded man to “be fruitful and multiply” – “fill



the earth and subdue it.” So, Cain may be thought of as the firstfruit of the union of Adam and Eve, and from him we learn that not all fruit – even firstfruit – is necessarily good fruit.

Now I want to use this occasion of *Bikkurim* to discuss another firstfruit. When God commanded the Israelites to keep *Bikkurim*, He also told them:

*“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.*” (Exodus 19:5-6)

God also told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 28:9:

*“The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.*

And in Deuteronomy 28:13 He said:

*“And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them.”*

The fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations began with Israel – the firstfruit of nations whose destiny it was, and continues to be, a kingdom of priests and a servant leader of all the other nations – “the head and not the tail.” Now we know that the firstfruit nation that is Israel has substantially rejected the firstfruit of the resurrection who is Yeshua, and so the majority of the Jewish people cannot, as of yet, take the place of their destiny, which is to be the head of nations. Yet Romans 11:5 makes it clear that:

*“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”*

And that remnant is, of course us – the Jewish followers of Yeshua. And since we are the first among our Jewish brethren to embrace Yeshua, we are the firstfruit of the firstfruit, and that means that we Messianic Jews, rather than the non-believing Jewish community, are positionally the head and not the tail of the Jewish people. Although they and we are joined covenantally as fellow Jews through circumcision, Romans 11:25-26 teaches that it is their destiny to join us – not ours to join them. Let us not be smug though, for while the greater Jewish community may currently be disabled from being the head due to its rejection of Yeshua, we who believe in Yeshua can also be disqualified if we do not walk with God in all the ways He requires of us.

Now being the head and not the tail carries with it not only a responsibility of leadership, but also of humility to remain connected to, and conduct ourselves as part of the Jewish people broadly. Furthermore, being the head and not the tail does not mean that we invent a new Judaism or that we do not receive the culture and wisdom of the ages that God has planted in the various Jewish communities. What it does mean is that we must not be mere copiers of

conventional Judaism because we have much to contribute to the rest of the Jewish world that is both good and profitable.

Our main contribution is, of course, being custodians of the truth of Yeshua and the New Covenant, but we can impact Judaism in other ways as well, and already have. We were among the first Jewish groups to employ modern instruments and celebratory music and dance as part of our services; several traditional synagogues have learned from us and have begun to do similarly. Messianic Jews were wearing *tzitzit* with blue threads long before Orthodox Judaism re-discovered the dye-producing snail and re-established the practice. We have been leaders in theological thought, in composing praise and worship music, in helping the Christian Church learn about its Jewish roots, and in offering a viable congregational option for families of mixed marriages. We have also been leaders in restoring the public's recognition that Yeshua was a Jew, in promoting the New Testament as a Jewish book, in emphasizing the importance of the *Ru'ach HaKodesh*, and in receiving Gentiles into our congregations as equal participants.

Messianic Judaism is a firstfruit movement and, as such, has challenged each of our identities at one time or another. Those of us who are Jews continue to be challenged by the Jewish community on one side and certain Christian critics on the other have found common ground in their belief that a Jew cannot believe in Jesus and remain Jewish. The Gentiles among us are challenged by this assertion as well, since the implication for them is that they have joined themselves to an illegitimate movement. The result for some of us has been that we have developed insecurities about the validity of our professed identities and of the Messianic Jewish movement itself. So, it is no wonder that many of us do not see ourselves as "the head and not the tail." On the other hand, if we understand and accept that Messianic Judaism is a firstfruit movement and that we are its first fruit, a pioneer movement, we will be emboldened to embrace our identities and clarify our callings.

Let's think of ourselves as fruit on a tree – let's say a pear tree. Now suppose we ripen and fall to the ground. We look around and see the fruit of other trees laying on the ground nearby – perhaps some apples that have fallen from an apple tree and peaches that have fallen from a peach tree. And, being the firstfruit of our tree, we naturally do not see any pears laying on the ground, so we conclude that we must be either apples or peaches. Logical "yes," but untrue, and if we expect to taste like either an apple or a peach we will be disappointed and consider ourselves defective fruit.

It is the same for many of us in Messianic Judaism. We are firstfruit and therefore have few role models. Some of us may look to our left, see Rabbinical Judaism, conclude that we must be them, and therefore set ourselves to be like them. Others of us look to our right, see the Christian Church, conclude that we must be Christians, and set about acting like Christians. And, when we find ourselves within the same Messianic Jewish congregation, we often clash.

But the truth is that neither of these identities is fully ours, for we are firstfruits in God's Messianic plan of redemption, and God expects us to be the head and not the tail. That means "yes," we adopt certain Jewish ways but not all Jewish ways, and we adopt certain Christian ways but not all Christian ways. Also, as the head and not the tail, God gives us unique



Messianic Jewish ways that are neither Jewish nor Christian, and he expects us to lead in those ways as well.

There is always a tension in developing our congregational cultures as to how Jewish we should be. Ohev Yisrael's vision statement speaks of "providing a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for believing Gentiles called to serve Messiah within the Messianic Jewish community." But we consider ourselves (at least I consider us) to be not only a Messianic Jewish congregation but also a Jewish congregation – a kind of Messianic outpost of Israel in the diaspora, and so we want all Jews to feel comfortable here and want to make it their home. We should try to provide that kind of Jewish comfort, but always as the head and not the tail.

NKJ

**XIII**



## Messianic Jewish Worship

Delivered July 16, 2011

For boys who were raised in an observant Jewish home, the emphasis of what we were taught probably had to do with obedience. Go to synagogue, keep *kosher*, keep *Shabbos*, go to Hebrew School, pray Hebrew prayers, study hard, be *Bar Mitzvah* 'd, marry a Jewish girl, and become a doctor. If not a doctor, then a dentist or, at the very least (may God protect us all), a lawyer. Girls brought up in an observant Jewish home had their counterpart of expectations as well – also having a lot to do with obedience.

Interestingly, this is not so different than the emphasis on obedience experienced by many young Christian boys. Dress up, go to church on the Lord's Day, observe Christmas and Easter, attend Sunday School, sing in the choir, read the Bible, keep the Ten Commandments, be baptized, don't smoke, don't drink don't dance, marry a Christian girl, and become a tele-evangelist.

Of course, these two scenarios are poking fun at the religious and ethnic superficialities that many of us have experienced in growing up, but they have a serious side as well. They point to the prevailing fact that we have been taught to relate to God more through doing things than through experiencing Him and submitting ourselves to Him heart and soul. But the two ways are both valid and go hand in hand, for as we read Sha'ul's words in Roman 10:8-13:

*"But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Yeshua is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"*

Confessing with our mouth is the obedience part, and believing with faith in Yeshua's Lordship is the heart-relational part. (NIV)

But once our salvation is assured, what then? We purpose not to sin and, if we do we repent, and that is a continuation of our commitment to obedience. But what about the relational part? How do we continue in that? Is our relationship with our heavenly Father limited to just obedience and devoid of human emotion? To help answer the question, let's ask ourselves this: What is our experience with other relationships that God gives to us? Do they not all have some emotional component to them? Of course they do, and so ought our relationship with our heavenly Father. God Himself told us how he wants us to relate to Him when He gave us Deuteronomy 6:5:

*"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (NIV)*

The words “All your heart,” “all your soul,” and “all your strength” are emotion-packed relational words.

Now this has been an introduction to what I really want to speak to you about today which is worship. Although it is technically possible to worship God without our hearts and souls being poured into it, that is not what God desires. I have heard “worship” defined in several ways – some ways that suggest emotional investment, and some that do not. For example, we could consider our worship of God as recognizing His deity; obeying only Him; putting Him on a pedestal for praise; kneeling before Him; revering Him; submitting to Him; sacrificing to Him; devoting ourselves to Him. None of these ways of worshiping God necessarily require emotion but, without the infusion of emotion, much is missing. Let’s therefore put emotion back in by adding to our definition of worship, concepts such as loving Him with all our heart, soul, and strength, adoring Him, experiencing ecstasy in His presence, and being sent to our knees by His glory. God’s overwhelming affect on men is clearly seen in Isaiah 6:1-5 (NIV):

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. “Woe to me!” I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’”*

Isaiah spoke these words after being overwhelmed by God, yet we do not usually associate such ecstatic emotion with Jewish worship. Pentecostal worship “yes,” but Jewish worship “no.” It is because, over the years, the expectation of emotion in Jewish worship has been lost, much in the same way as Jewish rootedness was lost in the Church. Here are some examples from the Bible of emotion in Jewish worship which, if they occurred today, would probably not be recognized as either appropriate or Jewish by many in the wider Jewish community:

Act 3:6-8: *“Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Messiah Yeshua of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them-- walking, leaping, and praising God.”*

2 Samuel 6:14-16: *“Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. Now as the ark of the LORD came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.”*

Psalms 150:1-6: *“Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp!*



*Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!"*

Psalms 42:2(1)-3(2): *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?"*

Psalms 84:2(1)-3(2): *"How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."*

Psalms 98:4-8: *"Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm, with trumpets and the sound of a horn; shout joyfully before the LORD, the King. Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell in it; Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together."*

Most Jewish worship today is essentially what is contained within the *Siddur*, which is praying, singing, bowing, praising, blessing, thanking, occasionally fasting, and once a year laying prostrate; of course, before 70 A.D, the Temple sacrifices were a major component of Jewish worship. Orthodox synagogues today use no musical instruments; Conservative synagogues generally do not, and Reform synagogues allow the use of organs. Dancing is not part of a Jewish service, but choirs are fairly common, and occasionally we hear about a contemporary Jewish group that employs modern musical instruments.

As you can see, modern Jewish worship is mainly liturgical, somewhat subdued, and typically lacking in spontaneity and emotion. By contrast, Jewish worship in days gone by, while also liturgical (because of the requirements of the Temple), contained a spontaneous and expressive component that was authorized by God, and was part of the normal Jewish experience.

So, has modern Judaism lost its spontaneity completely? No, it did not thanks to the *Chasidim* who seek to connect spiritually to God through animated, musical, and sometimes mystical ways. Their conservative way of dressing is in stark contrast to their exuberant way of worshiping that includes dancing, singing lyric-less *nigunim*, and generally making lots of noise. Their goal in this is to experience the presence of God, and they know that only through God's Spirit can that be accomplished.

Now I do not want to endorse the *Chasidim* beyond their style of worship because they are involved in some serious errors. For one thing, they reject Yeshua as being the Messiah. For another, some of their mystical approaches to God are patently unbiblical, and they are heavily involved in the study and practice of *Kabalah*. I will mention one more, which is that *Chasidic* communities are centered around a *Rebbe* whom they deem to have a special connection to God. The late Menachem Mendel Schneersohn is the *Rebbe* of the *Chabad-Lubavitch* movement, and is thought, by many of his followers to be the Messiah.

All that notwithstanding, Messianic Jews have something in common with the *Chasidim* that is very important. It is our common understanding of John 4:24 (although *Chasidim* would not acknowledge the Scripture), that:

*“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

We as they, believe that by giving ourselves fully to worship, we can experience the very presence of God. Of course, we do not agree with them on who is the Messiah nor with their other *shtick*, but we do agree that the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* is the essence of God's presence in the world.

I am telling you all this in order to illustrate, and to assure you, that our “charismatic” approach to praise and worship is thoroughly Jewish both in its history, and in what it seeks to achieve which is experiencing the presence of God. We use musical instruments, and our melodies are different than those of the *Chasidim*, but our expectation of experiencing God through music and dance is the same. Another thing we have in common with *Chasidim* is that both they and we believe we can actually HEAR FROM GOD – we through the *Ru'ach HaKodesh* directly, and they indirectly through their *Rebbe*. As do other Jews, Messianic Jews and *Chasidim* pray liturgically from our respective *Siddurim* but, more than other Jews, we are aware that we can experience the presence of God through fervent worship.

In the course of its development in the Twentieth Century, Messianic Jewish worship was significantly impacted by Christian culture and, in our desire to save it from assimilation, some of us began looking only to Orthodox and Conservative worship forms as being authentic. That was a mistake for those who did, and one that I want to avoid and correct if it exists among any of us. The traditional liturgical forms can be (and ought to be) a large part of our worship, but we must do two things as well; (1) we must adjust them to be consistent with the Messiah and other New Covenant realities, and (2) we must allow ourselves to also be participatory in Jewish charismatic worship that heightens our emotions and enhances our capacity to experience the presence of God.

So, what is Jewish charismatic worship and how do we distinguish it from the kind that is foreign to us? I can't give you a precise answer because we are in the middle of a movement of God and He is not yet finished moving us. What I can say is that, early on, God gave us worship leaders like Paul Wilbur, music groups like *Kol Simcha* and the “Wailing Wall,” and Jewish concepts of charismatic worship such as “Davidic Dance.” Our own Bruce Bakaysa, a refugee from Orthodox Christianity, was brought to our Movement by God and gifted to compose Messianic music and to lead in a contemporary charismatic form of Jewish worship. God is not finished developing Bruce either, but he is our gift from God, so let's open ourselves to follow his leadership.

That's pretty much all I have to say, but let me leave you with some key Scriptures that depict the biblical normalcy of expressive movement and emotion in Jewish worship:



### **Bowing Down and Kneeling**

*“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.” (Psalms 95:6-7)*

### **Laying Prostrate**

*“And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.” (Deuteronomy 9:18)*

*“So it was, that while they were killing them, I was left alone; and I fell on my face and cried out, and said, ‘Ah, Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?’” (Ezekiel 9:8)*

### **Clapping Hands**

*“Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph!” (Psalms 47:1)*

### **Lifting Hands**

*“Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.” (Psalms 63:4(3)-5(4))*

*“Behold, bless the LORD, All you servants of the LORD, Who by night stand in the house of the LORD! Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.” (Psalms 134:1-2)*

*“Let us lift our hearts and hands To God in heaven.” (Lamentations 3:41)*

### **Dancing**

*“Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!” (Psalms 150:4)*

*“Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.” (Exodus 15:20)*

*“Let them praise His name with the dance; Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.” (Psalms 149:3)*

### **Shouting**

*“Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (Psalms 32:11)*

*“Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!” (Isaiah 12:6)*

*“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.”*  
(Psalms 95:1-2)

### **Singing**

*“All the earth shall worship You And sing praises to You; They shall sing praises to Your name.”* (Psalms 66:4)

*“My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, And my soul, which You have redeemed.:*  
(Psalms 71:23)

*“And Miriam answered them: ‘Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!’”* (Exodus 15:21)

In conclusion, let's remember that Jewish charismatic worship is not merely a matter of style – of lifting our hands or dancing in the Spirit. It is a way of connecting with God that is compelled by our openness to the presence and power of the *Ru'ach HaKodesh*. So let's not label charismatic worship as “Christian” and shrink from it, but rather let us embrace it as fundamentally and historically “Jewish,” and help develop it and return it to its former place in the prayer life of the Jewish people.

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