

THE MESSIANIC MISSION

by J.K. McKee

Why are any of us involved in today's Messianic movement? The answers that we might provide to this question are likely varied, and they each involve a number of distinct life circumstances and encounters. Hopefully the main answer that each of us would have to this question is: *God wants us here.* If you are a Jewish person raised with a knowledge that your ancestors definitely stood at the base of Mount Sinai, hearing the Ten Words from the Almighty, then you have found your promised Messiah and may be considered a completed Jew. If you are a non-Jewish person, likely raised in an evangelical Protestant home, then you have connected with your Hebraic Roots in the ancient Scriptures of Israel, your Jewish Roots in the Synagogue, and have joined with your Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters in an important move which will culminate in the return of Israel's Messiah.

My family has been involved in the Messianic movement since 1995, has been called into full time Messianic educational ministry since 2003—and in the process we have encountered many valuable, but also varied, approaches to what the Lord is doing in this hour. For many of today's Messianic Jews, the modern Messianic movement has been a significant lifeline, not only as a faith community where they do not have to give up on their Jewish heritage as Believers in Israel's Messiah, assimilating into the larger pot or tossed salad of non-Jewish Christianity—but where they can anticipate being part of a significant salvation historical trajectory, involving not only the salvation of many more of their fellow Jews, but the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel as anticipated by the Disciples (Acts 1:6). For many of today's non-Jewish Believers, specially called by the Lord into the Messianic movement at this phase of its development, the Messianic movement has provided them a venue to not only tangibly partake of things like the Passover *seder* or a weekly *Shabbat* rest, but for them to connect with the Tanach (Old Testament) and the ways of Yeshua and His first followers in a very significant manner.

The Scriptures direct us regarding the truth of how, "Without a prophetic vision, the people throw off all restraint" (Proverbs 29:18, CJB/CJSB). At the close of the 2010s, it is fairly witnessed that many people across the Messianic spectrum have their own view(s) about what the Messianic movement is all about, or will become. Far too frequently, the perspectives that people have regarding the future vision, mission, or purpose of the Messianic movement are a bit too *individualistic*, meaning that they do not tend to take into account what God is doing with the *corporate* Body of Messiah. Many of us are conditioned by a modern Western mindset which is so hyper-individualistic, that we think that our faith in God only concerns our individual selves and God—and not our individual selves, our fellow brothers and sisters in the Messiah of Israel, and God's Kingdom purposes for this hour. In Romans 12:1, the Believers were actually admonished to look at themselves *not* as *individual* living sacrifices, but as individuals making up a *corporate* living sacrifice: "I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice" (TLV). If there is any big difference between Judaism and

Protestantism, it is that the former will emphasize the interconnectivity of the people of God involved in the purposes of God, as they anticipate the world to come.

The Prophet Habakkuk was communicated Divine messages from the God of Israel, who directed him to record His word, with it stressed that what was to take place would take place: "Write down the vision, make it plain on the tablets, so that the reader may run with it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time. It hastens to the end and will not fail. If it should be slow in coming, wait for it, for it will surely come—it will not delay" (Habakkuk 2:2-3, TLV). This *chazon* (חֲזוֹן) or vision would only take place at the Lord's pre-determined "season" (YLT), yet it would be up to the people of God to have the perseverance for God's plan take shape on God's timetable. Many of us, Jewish and non-Jewish alike—with our many gifts, talents, and skills endowed by our Creator—are indeed part of *the end-time move* of God. But it is also required of us to know how we got to this point in history, so that we can be affective and not grow weary, with the work and labor that are necessary as we see this unique and special Messianic movement enter into its own.

The First Century Believers

One of the most significant "revelations," as it were—not only to evangelical Protestant people investigating their Jewish Roots, but even Jewish people reading the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament—is that Yeshua of Nazareth and His first followers were all Jewish. Many evangelical Protestants, when they read the Gospels, at least subconsciously transfer a Western (particularly conservative, Southern American) experience into what the Messiah and His Disciples are saying and doing. This is reflected in a great deal of contemporary Christian preaching and teaching, which contemporary Jews—even those who are open-minded to hearing new ideas—consider to be largely irrelevant and unimportant to them and their religious and cultural heritage. However, the accounts are vast and diverse from many of today's Messianic Jewish Believers, that when they finally read the sayings of Yeshua and His interactions with the Jewish religious leaders and ancient contemporaries, that Yeshua was obviously acting and speaking quantitatively indifferent than many of the Rabbis of His time. For certain, Yeshua spoke and acted with the same authority and presence as one of the Prophets of Ancient Israel. Yeshua also frequently employed colloquial expressions such as "Whatever you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven" (Matthew 16:19, CJB/CJSB), which may require some investigation with Second Temple Jewish literature.

So what has been the disconnect between many of today's Jewish people, not frequently seeing the Jewishness of the Gospels and Messianic Scriptures—and most especially today's non-Jewish evangelical Protestant Believers not seeing the importance of a spiritual heritage going back to Second Temple Judaism, Mount Sinai, and the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The factors that play into this are broad and diverse, some of them involving an ignorance of Biblical history, some of them involving poor and errant decisions made by religious leaders in the past, and some of them involving a close-mindedness and prejudice that need to be jettisoned.

One of the biggest mistakes that does not get challenged enough is that the First Century C.E. followers of Yeshua of Nazareth were not the Sunday, church going "Christians" that many people automatically assume them to be. The first group of First Century C.E. followers of Yeshua of Nazareth were Judean and Diaspora Jews, raised in a society that recognized the One God of Israel, and were trained in the Scriptures of Israel, the Tanach (תנ"ך; an acronym for *Torah*/Law, *Nevi'im*/Prophets, *Ketuvim*/Writings) from birth. They remembered the weekly *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת) or seventh-day Sabbath, the annual appointed times or *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים) of Leviticus 23, they followed the kosher dietary laws, and they circumcised their sons. Many of them were also fiercely protective of their integrity as a community, wanting to keep pagan influences out.

The second group of First Century C.E. followers of Yeshua of Nazareth were mainly Greeks and Romans, who were raised in a polytheistic society that worshipped the gods and goddesses of classical antiquity. Because of their paganism, they were frequently derided by the Jewish community for their sexual immorality (cf. Romans 1:26-28). Many of them were notably attracted to the Jewish Synagogue, its morality, and its monotheism, and as God-fearers were among some of the first non-Jews who would receive Israel's Messiah. Many of them were attracted directly to Israel's Messiah from paganism (1 Thessalonians 1:9). And many of them, when encountering Israel's Messiah, found it difficult to adhere to the four, non-negotiable requirements for entry into the assembly as issued by the Jerusalem Council: abstinence from idolatry, fornication, things strangled, and blood (Acts 15:20, 29). Clearly *if followed*, the Apostolic decree would serve the purpose of seeing the new Greek and Roman Believers severed from their old spheres of social and religious influence, hence making their new sphere of social and religious influence one where the Scriptures of Israel were honored (Acts 15:21).

The First Century *ekklesia* or assembly in the Land of Israel, was exclusively Jewish, and centered around Jerusalem. James (Jacob) the Just, Peter, and John were recognized as being pillars of the Judean community of Jewish Believers (Galatians 2:9). As James would report of many of the Jewish Believers in and around Jerusalem, "{Look at} how many myriads there are among the Jewish people who have believed—and they are all zealous for the Torah" (Acts 21:20, TLV). While some of this may have involved some of the fierce Jewish nationalism and Zealotry of the mid-First Century, what is seen is that belief in Yeshua as Israel's Messiah hardly meant casting aside one's Jewish heritage. In later centuries, Church leaders considered that if a Jewish person professed faith in Jesus, that he or she would become a "Christian," and have to give up on his or her Jewish heritage completely.

In view of the Great Commission given by Yeshua to go out and make disciples of the nations (Matthew 28:19-21; Acts 1:8), Bible readers' understanding of the First Century Believers widely comes from the letters of Paul, with significant background often witnessed in the Book of Acts. Paul had a distinct assignment from the Messiah to go out into the Mediterranean, and witness to Jews, Greeks, and Romans (Acts 9:15). The assemblies planted by the Apostle Paul, often first involved his traveling to a city where there was a Diaspora Jewish synagogue, he would declare the good

news of Israel's Messiah, a group of Messiah followers from among Jews, God-fearing Greeks and Romans, and perhaps also pagans from the local community, would steadily form. Sometimes after a period, Paul and his company would be forced to leave the local Jewish synagogue, but not always. Each of the assemblies and groups of Messiah followers established or influenced by Paul, had their own advantages, disadvantages, and challenges. While Paul is seen to have a significant Jewish heritage and pedigree (Philippians 3:5-6), he is also one seen to emphasize the centrality of placing one's faith or trust in the sacrificial work of Yeshua (Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:9).

First Century Warnings Gone Unheeded

While the good news or gospel message of salvation in Israel's Messiah going out to the whole world, was a critical imperative issued by the Lord Himself to His first followers—the good news going out to the whole world was actually a critical component of the restoration of Israel's Kingdom. The steadfast word of Isaiah 49:6 proclaims, "It is too trifling a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved ones of Israel. So I will give You as a light for the nations, that You should be My salvation to the end of the earth" (TLV). Yeshua the Messiah did not simply come to restore Israel proper, but also to be the *or goyim* (אור גוים). **The restoration of Israel's Kingdom is something which is to affect the entire world.**

Ancient Israel's obedience to God's Instruction, and hence their being blessed, was to serve as a testimony to others and consequently draw others to the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). At the construction of the First Temple, Solomon prayed that foreigners would hear of it and come to a knowledge of the God of Israel (1 Kings 8:41-43). Themes of Israel being a light to the nations, the Messiah being a light to the nations, and the restoration of Israel affecting the entire world, are all detectable throughout the Apostolic Writings and the evangelistic works undertaken in the First Century Mediterranean. In Ephesians 2, those of the nations who came to faith in Messiah are described as being a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12), "brought near" (Ephesians 2:13; cf. Isaiah 57:19), and being "fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19, PME). Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah, purged of the effects of sin, were to come together as one in Him, forming a one new man or one new humanity (Ephesians 2:12), able to accomplish the purposes of God in the Earth.

A figure like Paul believed that those of the nations, having received the Jewish Messiah, were indebted to help their fellow Jewish Believers in the First Century in their material needs (Romans 15:27). As he puts it, "For it is not relief for others and hardship for you, but as a matter of equality. Your abundance at this present time meets their need, so that their abundance may also meet your need—so that there may be equality" (2 Corinthians 8:13-14, TLV). Jewish and non-Jewish Believers were to come together as one in the Lord, equals in the Messiah (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 2:11), and pooling all of their gifts, talents, and resources—becoming steadily inter-dependent, reliant, and mutually respectful of each other.

While it can be recognized that in the Second-Fourth Centuries, some terrible, and indeed damning, anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish statements were made by leaders of the emerging Christian Church, as Roman Catholicism began to form—it has to also be acknowledged that the warnings issued by a figure like the Apostle Paul, in Romans chs. 9-11, were largely not heeded. When Paul wrote the Romans, he recognized that more people from the nations were receiving Israel's Messiah than his fellow Jews. This, he concluded, was a part of God's plan, and that "by their transgression salvation *has come* to the nations, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11, PME). With non-Jewish people receiving the Jewish Messiah, and hence benefitting from promises originally given to Ancient Israel, Jewish people should be provoked to jealousy *to want* what these various Greeks, Romans, and others have—which they had an ancestral claim to. Yet, Paul had to warn against possible arrogance issued by non-Jewish Believers to the Jewish people who had widely dismissed their promised Messiah. As he says in Romans 11:18-21,

"[D]o not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, it is not you who support the root but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' True enough. They were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but fear—for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you" (TLV).

Non-Jewish Believers, by their faith in Israel's Messiah, might be grafted-in to Israel's olive tree (Jeremiah 11:16-17; Hosea 14:1-7), but that does not give them any right to be arrogant or boastful of the Jewish people who have widely dismissed their Messiah. Instead, as Paul directs in Romans 11:30-31, "For just as you once were disobedient to God but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, in like manner these also have now been disobedient with the result that, because of the mercy shown to you, they also may receive mercy" (TLV). The non-Jewish Believers were told to be vessels of mercy and kindness to Jewish people who had not yet encountered their Messiah, in an effort to see them saved from their sins!

Unfortunately, in the many centuries of Christianity that have taken place since Paul wrote some of these words, his instruction has never been fully implemented, at least until today. . . Today, via the emergence of the modern Messianic movement in the past half-century or more, we have seen Jewish people come to faith in their Messiah in significant numbers, and we have seen non-Jewish Believers embrace their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures. Most importantly, we have seen the words of Ephesians 2, Romans 9-11, and even Yeshua's prayer of John 17:22—"The glory that You have given to Me I have given to them, that they may be one just as We are one" (TLV)—take on dimensions which have not been seen since the First Century. Much of original setting and issues witnessed in the Apostolic Writings or New Testament, does not seem so abstract any more—because Messianic congregations and fellowships indeed have Jewish Believers and non-Jewish Believers present within them, with each sorting out what it means to place their trust in Israel's Messiah, desiring to see Him return and reign from Jerusalem.

Breaking With Judaism

While in the First Century C.E., there was a noticeable and sizable number of Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah, following the death of the Apostles and many of their second generation successors, the numbers of Jewish Believers dramatically decreased. Some of this was caused by the outcome of the Jewish Revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. to the Romans. Anti-Semitism flared up significantly in the Roman Empire, and did not help the burgeoning assemblies of followers in Israel's Messiah, especially among Greek and Roman Believers who may not have been too keen on Jewish sensitivities. By the Second and Third Centuries, though, leadership of the now emerging Christian Church was almost entirely non-Jewish, and far from the Apostle Paul's direction of Romans chs. 9-11 being heeded, supersedionism or replacement theology began to take significant hold. It was widely believed that God had rejected Israel and the Jewish people, replaced Israel with a new "Church" entity, and had transferred His promises to Israel to this new entity. Here is a small summary of some Second Century Christian views of the Jewish people:

"This is He who was put to death. And where was He put to death? In the midst of Jerusalem. By whom? By Israel...O Israel, transgressor of the Law, why have you committed this new iniquity" (Melito c. 170).

"Inasmuch as the former [the Jews] have rejected the Son of God, and cast Him out of the vineyard when they slew Him, God has justly rejected them. He has given to the Gentiles (outside the vineyard) the fruits of its cultivation" (Irenaeus c. 180).

"Thus has the 'lesser' people—that is, the elder people—overcome the 'greater' people. For [the lesser] have acquired the grace of divine favor, from which Israel has been divorced" (Tertullian c. 197).

"Let the Jews recognize their own fate—a fate which was constantly foretold as destined to occur after the advent of the Christ. This fate was on account of the impiety with which they despised and slew Him...Thereafter, God's grace desisted among them. And, 'the clouds were commanded not to rain a shower upon the vineyard of Sorek,'—the clouds being celestial benefits" (Tertullian c. 197).¹

Witnessing the fall of Jerusalem to Rome, a widescale Jewish dismissal of Yeshua of Nazareth, and scores of Greeks and Romans recognizing Israel's Messiah in some way—far from being moved with mercy and empathy for the Jewish people, Christian leaders of the Second-Fourth Centuries instead believed that God was finished with them. If you were a Jewish Believer in Yeshua in the early Second Century, you would find yourself not only a minority in the *ekklesia*, but you would not find your commitment to your Biblical and ethnic heritage in the Torah something to be too honored. Concurrent with the idea that God was finished with Israel, was also that He was finished with the Law of Moses and its rituals. Christian leaders like Justin Martyr did think that Jewish Believers could continue to practice things like

¹ "Jew, Jews," in David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 375, 376.

circumcision or the Sabbath, and that non-Jewish Believers could join with them in fellowship, although the former were weak-minded:

“There are such people, Trypho,’ I answered; ‘and these do not venture to have any intercourse with or to extend hospitality to such persons; but I do not agree with them. But if some, through weak-mindedness, wish to observe such institutions as were given by Moses, from which they expect some virtue, but which we believe were appointed by reason of the hardness of the people’s hearts, along with their hope in this Christ, and [wish to perform] the eternal and natural acts of righteousness and piety, yet choose to live with the Christians and the faithful, as I said before, not inducing them either to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or to observe any other such ceremonies, then I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 47).²

In such an environment—where one’s ethnic and cultural heritage *in Israel’s Scriptures* would be barely tolerated—it was far easier for Jewish people to not have anything to do with the emerging Christianity of the Second-Fourth Centuries. Of course, even though various religious leaders and ecclesiastical authorities would have their negative words to issue against Judaism and the Jewish people, there were many individual non-Jewish Believers who would, in various ways, be drawn to the Jewish community and Synagogue. Church councils, however, would make it illegal for any Christian person wanting to commemorate the Resurrection of Yeshua in association with the Passover, or remember the seventh-day Sabbath.

The Council of Antioch (341 C.E.) decreed that anyone caught celebrating the Lord’s resurrection (“Easter”) at the same time as the Jewish Passover would be excommunicated from the Church, and be considered to be causing destruction to his soul:

But if any one of those who preside in the Church, whether he be bishop, presbyter, or deacon, shall presume, after this decree, to exercise his own private judgment to the subversion of the people and to the disturbance of the churches, by observing Easter [at the same time] with the Jews, the holy Synod decrees that he shall thenceforth be an alien from the Church, as one who not only heaps sins upon himself, but who is also the cause of destruction and subversion to many; and it deposes not only such persons themselves from their ministry, but those also who after their deposition shall presume to communicate with them (Canon 1).³

The Council of Laodicea (363 C.E.) decreed that Christians should not rest on the Sabbath, but instead observe “the Lord’s Day”:

Here the Fathers order that no one of the faithful shall stop work on the Sabbath as do the Jews, but that they should honor the Lord’s Day; on account of the Lord’s resurrection, and that on that day they should abstain from manual labor and go to church. But thus abstaining from work on Sunday they do not lay down as a necessity, but they add, ‘if they can.’ For if through need or any other necessity any one worked on the Lord’s day this was not reckoned against him (Canon 29).⁴

² *The Post-Nicene Fathers*, P. Schaff, ed.; [Libronix Digital Library System 1.0d: Church History Collection](#). MS Windows XP. Garland, TX: Galaxie Software. 2002.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

These kinds of sentiments, most lamentably, have not gone away, and are still alive and well in the hearts and minds of many of today's evangelical Protestant theologians, ministers, and laypeople. Yeshua, the Messiah and King of Israel, decreed the ongoing continuance of the Torah or Law of Moses and its commandments—albeit centered around His interpretation and application (Matthew 5:17-19)—yet throughout too much of Christian history, many purported followers of Israel's Messiah have wanted little to do with Israel's Scriptures and its instruction.

Today's Protestants would be fair to recognize that the forced conversions and baptisms of Jewish people, often on the threat of death by Roman Catholic leaders, is a Middle Aged tragedy that does not reflect on the love of Jesus and the character of those truly born again. Likewise, the social oppression and discrimination of the Jewish people throughout European history, for certain, is something that today's evangelical Protestants would likewise eschew and treat with disdain. At the same time, even though Protestants have been keen to recognize the anti-Semitic stain of Medieval Catholicism on the Jewish people and Jewish-Christian relations—social and religious anti-Semitism are still alive and well throughout many denominations and theological traditions of Protestantism. Many of today's evangelical non-Jewish Believers are of the mindset that they have replaced Israel and the Jewish people in the intentions of God. They actually consider the Scriptures of Israel, the Tanach, to be something foreign and alien—and no different than some of the Church Fathers of the Second-Fourth Centuries, would at best tolerate today's Jewish Believers remembering the Sabbath or circumcising their sons as some part of their (backward) cultural heritage.

A Movement Reborn

With the death of the original Messianic Jewish Disciples and their second generation successors, and the emergence of Roman Catholicism by the Fourth Century C.E., the numbers of Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah for many centuries were scant at best. Catholicism, in no uncertain terms, demanded that Jewish people who profess belief in Yeshua of Nazareth, quantitatively abandon their Jewish heritage. Perhaps during the Middle Ages, various religious and political authorities were ignorant of the Scriptures, and were grossly misguided. But, their negative legacy has left its impact.

While hardly perfect, the Protestant Reformation was a necessary and required step forward. Seeing the corruption and opulence of Roman Catholicism reach intolerable levels, figures such as Martin Luther and John Calvin were used by the Lord, in the Sixteenth Century, to help the Body of Messiah return to a foundational grounding in the Holy Scriptures, and that faith in the Messiah alone is what provides salvation to a person. The Reformation exposed many of the non-Biblical and pagan traditions of Catholicism, and helped to formulate an ideology where individual people did not have to rely upon Catholic priests and rituals in order to have redemption. To be sure, when individual people can read the Bible for themselves, many unique and diverse interpretations arise—hence the wide number of Protestant theological schools and denominations.

Because of the diverse number of Protestant denominations—with huge dividing lines emerging by the Seventeenth Century between Calvinists and Arminians—there have been different approaches witnessed in the relationship that Protestant Christians have had with Judaism and the Jewish people. Many have continued to promote supersessionism or replacement theology, the belief that God is finished with Israel and the Jewish people, and that “the Church” has inherited all of Israel’s promises. At the same time, there have been Protestant Christians who have interpreted the Tanach or Old Testament more literally than not, and who several centuries ago made efforts to oppose anti-Semitism, establish dialogue with their Jewish neighbors, and reach out to the Jewish people with the good news of the Messiah. From the period of the American Revolution, the Great Reform Bill of 1832, and even the Napoleonic Wars—the Jewish community in the West was afforded social emancipation and equal rights along with their Protestant Christian neighbors. Exchanges of theological ideas *and* religious literature, which had been limited or even prohibited before, was now permitted.

The Nineteenth Century saw the rise of the different Protestant evangelistic societies, aimed at seeing Jewish people come to faith in Israel’s Messiah. At the turn of the Twentieth Century, the Hebrew Christian movement saw many Jewish people express faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The Hebrew Christian movement was mainly an association of enclaves of Jewish Believers, who attended mainline Protestant denominations and who were integrated into Christianity, but who did maintain some cultural association with their Jewish heritage and traditions. The Hebrew Christian movement certainly was an important step forward—especially with the Zionist movement, promoting a Jewish homeland in the Middle East also arising in the late Nineteenth Century—but there were many limitations. The Hebrew Christian movement encouraged a large amount of intermarriage between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, and since fidelity to a Torah lifestyle was perceived in only cultural terms, many of the children and grandchildren of the Hebrew Christian movement assimilated into non-Jewish Christianity, eventually forgetting their Jewish heritage.

The modern State of Israel was created in 1948, in the aftermath of the Second World War and Holocaust of Nazi Germany. As Isaiah 66:8 declares, “Who ever heard the like? Who ever witnessed such events? Can a land pass through travail in a single day? Or is a nation born all at once? Yet Zion travailed and at once bore her children!” (NJPS). This is commonly viewed as being a prophecy detailing the establishment of modern Israel. Certainly with the State of Israel on the scene, many things shifted spiritually, as many Christian people who looked forward to a Jewish homeland being recreated—as a definite sign of the Messiah’s approaching return—were vindicated. Other Christians, holding on to replacement theology, viewed the State of Israel as only important for Jewish self-determination, but nothing involving prophecy or the Second Coming. Many of them now consider the State of Israel as a great danger to world peace.

Much of what we are witnessing today in the Messianic movement, can trace its path back to the late 1960s, and Israel’s recapturing of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967. Many are of the opinion that with Jerusalem and the Temple Mount fully in Jewish hands, that the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) were concluded, and that

some end-time countdown has started, eventually to culminate in the Messiah's return. Once again, many things shifted spiritually, the most significant being the transition of the Hebrew Christian movement into the Messianic Jewish movement. The Messianic Jewish movement, unlike many of its Hebrew Christian forbearers, would be a movement which would hold its congregational services on *Shabbat*, it would observe the Biblical festivals and Jewish holidays, it would keep (some form of) kosher, it would circumcise its sons, and it would encourage participation of Jewish Believers in the Jewish community. Most importantly, the Messianic Jewish community would maintain fidelity to the commandments of the Torah as a part of the prophesied New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27), not just as something as a part of their ethnic or cultural heritage.

The 1970s-1990s saw a significant expansion of Messianic Jewish congregations throughout the world, with congregations in Israel, Europe, the former Soviet Union, North and South America, Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere. The main bulk of the Messianic Jewish movement is in the Diaspora, and in North America at that. Common estimates to our present time is that there are over one-hundred thousand Messianic Jewish Believers. The salvation, and the unique testimonies, of today's Messianic Jewish Believers who have come to faith in Israel's Messiah, is a sure sign of fulfillment of Romans 11:15: "For if their rejection leads to the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (TLV).

The Messianic Jewish mission has always been rightly focused around Jewish outreach, Jewish evangelism, and Israel solidarity. But the Messianic Jewish mission would not be possible without a strong basis of support, both spiritual and material, from non-Jewish Believers, who have been called to join in common cause and unity, with today's Messianic Jewish Believers. From the 1990s to our present, large numbers of non-Jewish Believers have entered in to the Messianic movement. The main, overarching reason for this, is that these people have come to a conscious recognition of the Jewishness of Jesus the Messiah. Messianic Jewish rabbis and teachers frequently go to evangelical churches during the season of Passover, to teach on how the Last Supper meal of Yeshua was actually a Passover *seder*. Wanting to experience "Jesus in the feasts" of Israel, is *the significant magnet* for non-Jewish Believers entering into the Messianic movement. And, just as a massive salvation of Jewish people is to be anticipated in the end-times, so too it is prophesied that the nations will come to Zion to be instructed in God's Law, resulting in worldwide peace (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3). This is a conscious reality present in today's Messianic movement as well.

What is the Messianic Jewish movement? You will certainly receive a wide number of answers from the people involved in today! The workbook *Messianic Judaism Class* offers the following fair summation:

"Messianic Judaism is a movement that gets its motivation from the Spirit of God. . . [It involves] Jewish people following Yeshua while retaining their Jewish lifestyle, traditions, and culture. It is not a new sect of Christianity. There are a few churches from Christian denominations that have adopted a Messianic Jewish flavor, but in these cases it is them who are joining us. Messianic Judaism has never been Jewish people joining Christianity. There are many people who class themselves

'Jewish Christians' who are Jews who have joined Christianity, but that is not Messianic Judaism."⁵

Those who are involved with today's Messianic movement might indeed benefit from a shared Judeo-Protestant spiritual heritage—but they are part of something that surely *transcends Christianity*. It is something that focuses one's spiritual attention on Israel, the Jewish people, and on the return of the Messiah to Jerusalem. It is something that has definite origins in the experiences of Yeshua and His first disciples.

The Messianic Mission and Our Future

All of us who have been called into today's Messianic movement, have a distinct witness of the Spirit that we are involved in something very, very big. We know that the Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are relevant instruction for each follower of Israel's Messiah. **We know that God's promises to, and purposes for, Israel, remain true.** We know that we are part of an end-time move of God, which is going to culminate in the Messiah ruling and reigning over this planet. So significant are God's promises to Israel, that He declares that the rules of space-time which govern the universe would have to be altered, in order for there to be no seed of Israel:

"Thus says ADONAI, who gives the sun as a light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars as a light by night, who stirs up the sea so its waves roar, ADONAI-Tzva'ot is His Name: Only if this fixed order departs from before Me—it is a declaration of ADONAI—then also might Israel's offspring cease from being a nation before Me—for all time" (Jeremiah 31:35-36, TLV).

Yeshua Himself declared in His Olivet Discourse on the end-times, "Yes! I tell you that this people [this race, PME; *hē genea*, ἡ γενεά] will certainly not pass away before all these things happen" (Matthew 24:34, CJB/CJSB), a sure word on the continuity of the Jewish people to the time of the end. In spite of the anticipated disobedience of Ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 31:16-17) and a reduction of their numbers (Deuteronomy 28:62-64), the Lord promised a regathering of His people to the Promised Land (Leviticus 26:38-45). There will be a great victory and a vindication by the Lord, for His people (Zechariah 12:1-9), resulting in a great salvation (Zechariah 12:10-13).

Although more is coming in the future, we have seen the rebirth of the State of Israel in 1948, the recapturing of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967, and the emergence of the Messianic Jewish movement in the late Twentieth Century.

Many of those who are involved in Messianic Jewish congregations and fellowships, have the distinct impression that not only are we part of something special and important—which will culminate in the return of Israel's Messiah—but that the Body of Messiah is actually getting a "second chance" to do things the way that the original Disciples and Apostles wanted them to take place. As my own local congregation, Eitz Chaim of Richardson, Texas, considers itself: "Our community seeks to be like the first Jerusalem congregation where both Jew and non-Jew are as one new

⁵ James Appel, Jonathan Bernis, and David Levine, *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book (Copenhagen, NY: Olive Press, 2011), 10.

man, equal before G-d (Acts 2).” While we are all equal in the Messiah, whether we be Jewish or non-Jewish, we are hardly all the same—but **we have far more in common than not**. Our differences of background or perspective on the issues of life, from our shared Judeo-Protestant heritage, will need to be considered as we anticipate the challenges coming for the final stretch of human history.

The Messianic movement is a restoration movement, as we recapture a First Century theology and faith experience, in the Twenty-First Century. As the Messianic movement gets larger and expands, it is a sure sign that we will be getting closer and closer to the Messiah’s return. The original Messianic Jewish pioneers emphasized a mission of **Jewish outreach, Jewish evangelism, and Israel solidarity**. Today, this is a mission which must remain at the forefront of what the Messianic movement is, because it decisively places each of us on the salvation-historical trajectory of Romans 11:26-27: “in this way all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, **THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM [Isaiah 59:20-21], WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS’ [Isaiah 27:9; Jeremiah 31:33-34]**” (PME).

Getting closer to the Messiah’s return, it is hardly an enigma why many non-Jewish Believers have been called into the Messianic movement as well, with a dual mission now having emerged, as these people need to be trained and educated in the importance of their Hebraic and Jewish Roots. But seeing non-Jewish Believers come to an appreciation of their faith heritage in the Tanach Scriptures and practices of Yeshua, should not only be for the purposes of their personal enrichment and enlightenment; it must be done with the expressed intent of joining in to the purposes of Jewish outreach and evangelism, and standing with Israel and against anti-Semitism. Frequently, the presence of non-Jewish Believers—who understand their faith heritage in the Tanach and in Judaism—can at times be most vital for the purposes of seeing Jewish people come to Israel’s Messiah. I can testify to how the extended family members of my Messianic Jewish friends, who do not know Yeshua, have asked me, a non-Jewish Believer, about my faith and why I am in the Messianic movement—more than they would have the courage to ask their relatives about Yeshua, who are Jewish Believers. But in order to answer their questions and communicate properly, I have had to learn a great deal about not only the Tanach and Second Temple Judaism, but also the Jewish experience and struggle throughout history since.

Being a part of the Messianic mission, joining into the Messianic Jewish outreach to Jews who need to know the Messiah of Israel, and seeing all Believers educated and trained in the practices of the Messiah of Israel—is **something which will give you a dynamic faith, challenging your heart and mind in new and wonderful ways!** You will have your spiritual hunger satiated, and your spiritual thirst quenched. *We sincerely hope that each of you has indeed been called to join!*