



Messianic Jewish Perspectives

By Roni Mechanic

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A Historic Viewpoint

From a historic viewpoint, in speaking about Messianic Jewish perspectives, we are confronted with an exciting prospect of discovering how Jewish believing Jews have sought to give expression to their faith in the context of being Jewish. In Matthew's Gospel we are given significant insight into Second Temple Judaism, and the emerging streams of religious belief that were taking place during that formative period in history. Matthew regarded his community as a reformist Messianic movement within Judaism. James or Ya'akov as he was known in Hebrew, headed up the Jerusalem community of believers in Yeshua. Jerusalem was regarded as the centre for the burgeoning movement, with a council that resolved issues for the wider Jewish and Gentile communities¹.

Acts 15 gives us an insight into the discussion that took place in the early church regarding the observance of the Torah (Law of Moses), and its practical application. What aspects of the law should be kept by the Gentiles who have come to faith? Should Jewish believers still live as Jews? These and many other important matters were being asked.

It is significant today with the current debates concerning Christians exploring the Jewish heritage and roots of the faith that there is growing confusion particularly concerning the law, and how it fits into the broader picture. Some are saying if you don't keep the law, you are not saved. A significant subject that Luke raises in Acts 15 had bearing upon the new challenges facing the early believing community.

"There are some New Testament scholars that agree that an implication from Acts 15 is that this applied to Gentiles, who were the group under discussion and that Jews who believed in Yeshua were to remain practicing Jews. This continues to be a topic under discussion with implications for the development of modern-day Messianic Judaism."²

“You are no longer a Jew, you are a Christian now,” has all too often been said to Jewish individuals who openly profess faith in Yeshua as Messiah and Lord. The way that one responds to this accusation will in part be understood in the choices that an individual makes. How does one self-identify? Do these individuals call themselves a Christian Jew; Jewish Christian; Hebrew Christian; Hebrew Catholic; Hebrew Orthodox (as in Eastern Orthodox); Jesus believing Jew; or Messianic Jew? It is apparent to many, that by adding ‘Christian,’ to the name, ‘Jew,’ ‘Jewish,’ or ‘Hebrew,’ is both confusing and offensive to some Jewish people.

To call themselves Messianic Jews, makes a clear point that they are Jewish people who have embraced the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua HaMashiach, who during his earthly lifetime lived within the context of Second Temple Judaism. It is significant that the name ‘Christ,’ and ‘Christian,’ only came into use in the second century of the common era. It was at Antioch that the believers who by now were largely Gentile and in a Greek speaking environment, were referred to as Christians. Prior to that they were called, ‘the people of the Way.’ Tradition holds that the first Gentile church was founded in Antioch, (Acts 11:20-21). It was from Antioch that St. Paul started on his missionary journeys. He is referred to as the apostle to the Gentiles.

The name changes to *Christ*, and *Christian* both signified a shift due to the predominantly Gentile cultural context. The population spoke Greek, and those Greek speaking Gentiles had converted from a pagan background to the Christian faith. While many Jews resided throughout the whole of Antioch, it is unclear as to what percentage of these local inhabitants were Jewish believers. Hence, we cannot ascertain whether they were members of the local predominantly Gentile congregations. Messianic Jewish scholars such as Richard Harvey maintain that the use of the word Christian “with its jarring overtones to Jewish people of Christians as ‘other,’ and the legacy of Christian anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism excluded them [i.e. Jewish Christians or Hebrew Christians] from the Jewish community.”³

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says that titles like Hebrew Christian and Messianic Jew were interchangeable, and to make a difference in the terms is to make “totally false distinction.”⁴

Fruchtenbaum explains that following the destruction of Second Temple Judaism with its many streams, with the Temple gone, Judaism could no longer perform sacrifices. Additionally, following 70 CE the Jews were scattered throughout the Gentile world with the destruction wrought by Titus the Roman. Jerusalem was renamed. Three years later, in conformity with Roman custom, Jerusalem was “plowed up with a yoke of oxen,” and Judea was renamed Palaestina and Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina. In the dispersion there were two main groups of Jewish people that survived, namely, the Nazarene Jewish believers, and Rabbinic Judaism. There were also isolated groups of Ebionite and Elkanite Jewish people. The term Ebionite means the ‘poor ones.’ The Nazarenes disappeared as a distinctive group of Jewish believers and got absorbed into the mainstream Christian church, while the two minor sects eventually disappeared. Judaism became solely represented by the descendants of Pharisaic Judaism and today is known as Rabbinic Judaism with its Jewish rabbinic denominations and sects.

We should note that the Roman designated name *Palaestina* became the normative name for Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Christians sometimes refer to Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) as the *Holy Land*, and the *Bible Lands*, although *the Bible Lands* is in fact a much larger geographic area than just ancient Israel. Sometimes Biblical scholars refer to Jews living in the land and the faith that they practiced as *Palestinian Jews* and *Palestinian Judaism*. Significantly, in the early twentieth century under the British Mandate of Palestine, following the defeat of the Turkish Empire’s rule of Palestine at the end of WWI, Jews living in the Holy Land were called Palestinian Jews. Arabs living in the land were not referred to as *Palestinians*, until 1948, when Israel was re-established as a sovereign state.

Messianic Judaism as a Distinctive Faith

The question as to what makes Messianic Judaism a distinctive faith group within the Messianic body needs exploring. As mentioned, in the early era during the Second Temple Judaism period, it was not an issue whether Jewish believers should observe aspects of the Torah, but rather what practices Gentile believers should adhere to. How ironic that in the present age, with normative Gentile Christian customs and practices having been the established for nearly two thousand years, Jewish believers are marginalized and are constantly having to define and justify why they adhere to aspects of Torah beliefs and practices. The Book of Galatians together with the Book of Hebrews specifically addresses this question that at times had become very contentious. The Apostles Paul and Peter found themselves on different sides of the argument concerning the place of the law in the life of the believer.

Why are Jewish believers insisting on identifying themselves as a distinctive group within the community of faith? We have in these two millenia seen a complete reversal, so in the current situation Jews, Judaism, and Torah observances are in the spotlight.

How shall we then live begs the question as to what shape or form the life of a Messianic Jew should take? Should he or she be a member of a church? Do these Jewish believers attend synagogue? Are they to circumcise their male offspring and keep kashrut (eat only kosher or clean foods)? What about the celebration of the Jewish feasts, and keeping the Sabbath? Should they fast on the Day of Atonement? Can they wear Jewish religious clothing such as the Kippah, and tallit, and wear phylacteries, etc.? Should they learn Hebrew? Are they to be an active Zionist, fight against anti-Semitism, support Israel, and even live in Israel? These are just some of the important questions to consider in our attempt to define what Messianic Judaism is. This not a question of one size fitting all, as each Jewish believer is a

unique individual, and each individually needs to come to a settled place in defining their place in the believing community, and this multicultural and multifaceted world.

In exploring the *how* and the *what* that constitutes elements of a Messianic Jewish lifestyle, the answer to *in what way*, this may be worked out is complex. The Jewish home first and foremost sits at the top of the list of the *how*. I grew up in a Jewish home in Johannesburg, South Africa. My mother had come from an observant Jewish home in London. My grandfather Isaac was a lay rabbi. He led synagogue worship, and my grandmother Minnie observed a Jewish home. While they were poor, that did not inhibit their desire to live out their Judaism daily. Erev Shabbat was a weekly celebration, with the preparation of the sabbath table and special foods. Every week they had freshly baked challot (plural of challah) – two Jewish plaited white loaves of bread. A white tablecloth, two brass candlesticks, and the kiddish cup filled with sweet red wine, were all in place. When Isaac returned from work early on Friday afternoon he would bathe and put on fresh Shabbat clothes. Delicious smells of a kosher sabbath meal filled the air.

Once my mom, and her parents were ready they took their places at the table, and my grandmother Minnie, lit the Shabbat candles, saying the traditional blessing, followed by Isaac reciting the kiddish blessings over the wine, and bread. Each in turn took a sip of wine, followed by eating a piece of challah sprinkled with a little salt, to remind them of the salt of the covenant. Then a hearty greeting with words of ‘shabbat shalom.’ Minnie then served the sabbath meal. This pattern was replicated in my home in Johannesburg those many years later. To the enquiry of *what has kept the Jews?* The answer to this existential question is not, that the Jews kept the sabbath, but the sabbath has kept the Jews. This ‘Queen,’ of all festivals is celebrated weekly, fifty-two times a year.

Therefore, in the choices that one makes, the *how*, is given expression in practical lifestyle ways. Passover, called Pesach in Hebrew, is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the deliverance from Egypt, when God, through his servants, Moses, and Aaron, brought the Israelites out of the house of bondage, with a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm, with signs and wonders. This too is centred upon the Jewish home. The first two nights are observed with the *Pesach Seder*, with the family and invited guests. My wife Elisheva has written an extensive coverage of the Jewish feasts including Pesach in her new book entitled *Following the Jewish Jesus: A Cross Cultural Ministry*. An order of service for the Pesach seder is included in the book and has also been published separately as *A Messianic Haggadah for Passover*. This is ideal for anyone who wants to celebrate the Passover in their home and provides a background and the practical tips for the celebration.

The calendar year completes the cycle of observance with the eight-day festival of Hanukkah that recalls the Maccabean triumph over the pagan Seleucids. What takes place at Hanukkah? The Jewish Sages taught that on the twenty fifth day of the Jewish month of Kislev there is an eight-day festival called Hanukkah. It commemorates when the Greeks entered the Jewish Temple and they defiled not only the Temple altar, but also significantly the holy oils for the lighting of the giant menorah. When the Hasmonean dynasty called the Maccabees arose and defeated their enemies, they searched but only found enough oil to burn for one day. A purported miracle took place and when they lit the menorah it burned for eight days and not only the one day that the small quantity should have. This was one reason for the establishment of Hanukkah. An acclamation is made each time the Chanukiah menorah with its eight candles is lit:

Nes gadol hayah sham –A great miracle happened there!

The true miracle is that Judaism was able to regain sovereignty of its land and the Temple was cleansed and restored. This re-established the context into which Yeshua could be born. How different history would have been if the Maccabees had not triumphed.

What part does synagogue worship play in the life of the observant Jew? Conversely, what role does it play in the Messianic Jew's life? Like all believers, we are encouraged to be part of a congregation of believers. Church, or Messianic synagogue are two possible options that need to be considered to fulfil this important aspect of one's worshiping life. Much will depend on whether there is a viable Messianic Congregation in your area and whether you feel you fit in there. Otherwise attending a Biblically sound Church congregation is an option. The writer of the book of Hebrews said, "do not forsake the gathering together, as some do." (Hebrews 10:25). These words of godly wisdom make an essential contribution towards a healthy spiritual life. While our primary spiritual vitality and sustenance should be derived from our own personal relationship with God, secondly, and importantly, fellowship plays an equally important part in our wellbeing. Nurture, in a loving caring congregation is very important. While a Zoom, WhatsApp, or Google Meet forum may be good for receiving teaching and a place to discuss things that concern us, it is no substitute for meeting up personally with other believers.

There are also other organizations that you can join such as the BMJA (British Messianic Jewish Alliance). I head up the BMJA Jewish Ministers in the Churches forum for ordained ministers in the churches who come from a Jewish background. This is a forum for people to pray for one another and discuss any matters of concern for Jewish people in Christian leadership. My wife and I had the privilege of attending the IMJA – International Messianic Jewish Alliance Conference this year in Israel.

War broke out on the 7th October, 2023, and we were due to meet on the 8th October until – 11th October, at Yad HaShomna, Jerusalem. We went ahead with the conference despite the Israel – Gaza War. We had to run to the bomb shelter twice during our time there. After we all safely returned from Israel back to the UK, our Zoom meetings were an amazing opportunity to share and process what we had personally witnessed and experienced, and those members of the two groups who had not been in Israel at the start of the war were equally, wonderful in the support that they gave those of us that had been there. However, our Anglican congregation of St Paul's, Newbridge, Newport, Wales, was the place where we found a real sense of love and nurture too. Hugs, tears, and an outpouring of loving concern about our safety was expressed to Elisheva and I on our first Sunday in church. "Thank God you are back safely," one of the members said on our arrival. After two months certain people still ask about of the wellbeing of my Israeli family.

So, what shape and form may Messianic Jewish worship take? David Rudolph in his book, *An Introduction to Messianic Judaism speaking about Community Life says,*

"On a typical Shabbat (Sabbath) morning, prior to the main service, Messianic synagogues often have an adult education class that meets to study the *parasha* (the Torah reading for the week) and a related New Testament text. As the hour for the morning service approaches, musicians are heard finishing their practice, and prayer among the leaders typically takes place in the rabbi's office. The Messianic Shabbat service is more upbeat than the traditional synagogue service. Modelled after worship described in the Psalms of David, Messianic Jewish services commonly incorporate song, dance, and instrumental music, along with Hebrew liturgy from the siddur (prayer book)."

He says that this paradigm is not universal, with some Messianic synagogues, following a more classical synagogue service, which is also the case with the High and Holy Days that are closer to the traditional Jewish customs that are replete with liturgy related to that particular festival being observed⁵. Larger Messianic synagogues like larger Christian congregations, also may include mid-week meetings, house groups, Zoom meetings (following the COVID lockdown), youth groups, wives meetings, men's meetings, young people's clubs, and toddlers groups as well. (Ibid)

Elisheva and I pioneered a Messianic Jewish Congregation called Beit Ariel in Cape Town, South Africa. When we lived in Israel, we attended a Hebrew speaking congregation. What is most important is that Jesus or Yeshua, which is his Hebrew name, is central to the congregation. He is the focus that sustains the life of every dimension of synagogue or congregational activity.

As mentioned in the questions that I posed under the consideration of our exploring the *how* and the *what* that constitutes elements of a Messianic Jewish lifestyle, I spoke about the choices of how Messianic Jewish parents may choose to raise their children. What about a *brit milah* (circumcision)? This may be followed with a *baby-naming* ceremony in the synagogue when a Jewish boy is given a Hebrew name. I was called *Yitzchuk Chiam Ben Toviah* – Isaac, Hyman, Son of Tobias. Reform and Liberal Judaism also includes a baby-naming ceremony in the synagogue for girls. I fully support this in the case of a Messianic baby-naming ceremony in the Messianic congregation. Being baptized as a believer is also important and fulfils the instructions of Yeshua to his disciples to preach the good news and baptize those who come to believe in him.

Messianic Jews may wish to explore their Jewish heritage and familiarize themselves with Jewish history, learn Hebrew, discover the rich Jewish cultural life, in the realm of music, art, literature, etc.

Holocaust studies and the phenomenon of antisemitism is also an important dimension of gaining an appreciation of contemporary Jewish life. Equally, it is significant to learn about modern Zionism and the place that the State of Israel plays in Jewish life.

It is important to acknowledge that being a Messianic Jew offers its own challenges when it come to the matter of unbelieving Jewish people. Not all Jews readily welcome a Messianic Jewish believer into their society. Historically this was a major problem, with alienation and rejection of Jews who profess their faith in Yeshua as their Messiah and Lord. In more recent times there is considerably less hostility and rejection shown toward Jesus-believing-Jews. This has certainly been my experience, from family, friends, and Jewish associates. Wisdom needs to be exercised, and on the one hand it is important not to conceal one's Messianic faith, while on the other hand great care and sensitivity needs to be taken when talking about how as a Jewish person one is endeavoring to live out one's faith.

While living in County Durham, in the northeast of England, Elisheva and I were able to build a very close and meaningful relationship with the Darlington Reform Congregation. They knew that we were believers in Jesus but they allowed us to join them for Sabbath worship on a regular basis.

Approaches to Evangelism

Dialogue as a means to evangelism has proved to be a most helpful tool in sharing the good news with our Jewish friends and contacts, rather than a direct confrontational style that some have attempted. The former opens the opportunity to share ideas and enables one to listen to the viewpoint of the other person. A confrontational approach only serves to build barriers and leads to alienation and estrangement. The approach, that someone once said, "grab him or her by the necktie, or scarf and bash them

over the head with the gospel,” only turns out to be a disastrous enterprise.

R. T. Russel the founder of the JW's (Jehovah's Witnesses) is a case in point. He as a young person grew up in the United States and came under the influence of Protestant Presbyterian condemnatory preaching, during the nineteenth century, and he turned away in disgust, and ultimately developed his own religion. He is said to have studied the Scriptures on his own with no reference to the historic creeds and councils of the Christian church and through this intense personal study, he formulated a belief system that rejected the full deity of Jesus, referring to him as a *god*, and redefined the way of salvation according to his own understanding. Yeshua 'only paid the ransom price,' as part of our redemption. The significance of Jesus' sacrificial death is reduced to that of a great exemplar whose martyrdom stands out as a testimony of someone willing to pay the debt for human sin, and no more. This is an inadequate view of the atonement. Russell hated the notion of a *blood sacrifice*. Some critics refer to this as a *bloodless religion*. While he admired Joseph Rabinowitz's Israelites of the New Covenant Messianic Jewish movement, due to his independent pioneering spirit, however the outcome of Rabinowitz's endeavors was completely different to that of Russell. Rabinowitz established a fresh and unique expression of the Messianic faith in a Jewish context. In contrast, Russell produced at best a sub-Christian sect that proved to be defective in its definition of true biblical faith. Part of embracing the JW's faith, requires their adherents to be baptized into their *religious belief* alone.

The Consultation on World Evangelization Pattaya, Thailand

In our desire to lay a solid foundation for our testimony and witness to Israel, the Jewish people worldwide, and the church at large it is important that we develop a culturally proper

understanding of each of them as distinct groups. In 1980 I was invited to act for South Africa Jewish believers in the Southwestern Cape at the Consultation on World Evangelization Pattaya, Thailand. Among the delegates representing the Jewish people from the UK were David Harley (CMJ UK), and Murdo MacLeod (CWI UK). Tony Levin and I were the two South African delegates. This consultation laid the groundwork for Jewish evangelism up until this present time.

The conference was made up of 17 mini consultations, and our group was given the mandate of reaching the Jewish people. The Lausanne movement identified 17 'people's groups' in the world. A *people's group* is determined by several specific characteristics such as ethnicity, geographic location, religious affiliation and expression, cultural outward expressions such as art, music, dance, literature, food, and clothing, etc. A good example in the light of this current study is the present-day Hasidic Jews who are a subgroup of Haredi Judaism. The immediate thing that marks them out as a specific subsection of a people's group is their seventeenth century Eastern European clothes and the hairstyle of men with side locks (*payot*) as a distinctive marker.

The official document that was published after the consultation was the 'Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 7 – Christian Witness to the Jewish People.' It began by begging the question 'Why Go to Jews?' To quote from the final statement from our group will be extremely helpful in setting the stage for our current conversation that I am inviting you to take part in. The general theme of the Lausanne Conference was, 'How shall they hear?' This question was posed to all the participants who attended the event, and should be applied to all humanity, Jew, and Gentile alike. The Jewish people make up only 0.2% of 8 billion people and constitute approximately 16.1 million people. In this declaration the answer to 'Why Go to Jews?' continues: [W]e call attention to the fact that although application of this text is made to all people (Romans 12:1f), the context of the passage is Paul's

discussion of Israel. By Israel we refer to the people described in Romans 9:1-5 NIV:

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

The Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelization had as its primary focus how we, who desire to witness to a *lost humanity* concerning the saving grace of God in and through Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus Christ), may be more effective. In this instance we have in view our approach to the specific 'peoples group,' of the Jewish people.

To quote from the Working Paper No. 7:

Scripture gives the rationale for Jewish evangelism in John 14.6 and Acts 4.12 which indicates that salvation is only found in Christ. For Christians to know that Christ is the only way to be saved and then not proclaim the gospel to Jews presumes the exclusion of Jews from the need and possibility of salvation in Jesus Christ. It reflects an inadequate biblical and theological understanding⁶.

So, just as then in 1980, so too today we need to be equally focused and energised in our work of the propagation of the Good News (Gospel) to Jewish people whatever their religious or non-religious observance may be. According to the Scriptures the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to the Jew first and the Gentiles. This imperative should be motivated by a desire to share God's plan of redemption with the Jewish people. The great commission given in all four gospels does not make an exception for Israel. To decline to preach the gospel to Jews calls into question the credibility of the church's evangelistic activity.

Having been a member of this group that took an active part in helping to draft this document, which gives expression to the gospel imperative, this thinking lies at the very heart of my desire to communicate these truths with you.

Scripture not only gives the rationale for Jewish evangelism; it also speaks of its priority. Jesus stressed in his ministry, that he came first, “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” St Paul in his ministry followed that procedure for evangelism. In every city on his missionary journeys, he went first to the Jews, and then subsequently to the Gentile⁷.

Throughout the many years of my life from the age of twenty this is the continued pattern and passion that motivates me. “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9.16, KJV)

In Romans 1:16 the Apostle Paul unequivocally declares, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also the Greek.” (NRSV)

Romans chapters 9–11 is often referred to as Paul's understanding of Jewish evangelism. Anyone who wants a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of his heart's cry would do well to study these three most significant chapters in the whole Bible. Within these verses we discover his longing and passion for the salvation of his own people. To quote a few of these verses will illustrate this fact.

“I have great sorrow and anguish in my heart. For I could wish myself accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people ...” (9:2–3a NRSV)

“Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire, and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” (10:1 NRSV)

“Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you will be saved. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (10:9-10 & 12-13 NRSV)

“Now I am speaking to you Gentiles, in as much as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them.” (11:13-14 NRSV)

This is an appropriate point to further consider the discussion from the Consultation. God used the Jewish people to give the way of salvation to the whole world which included both Jews and Gentiles. Jeremiah 31:31ff and Isaiah 49:6 tell us that the Jewish people have a continuing covenant relationship with God. They are called to be a light to the world. We know that they cannot fulfil that responsibility without a relationship with the Saviour Yeshua. Paul also anticipates that when the Jews turn to their Messiah Yeshua this will have a life-giving impact on the entire church.

This concern of bringing the Jewish people to faith in the Messiah Yeshua lies at the heart of CMJ, having over 200 years of ministry to Jewish people. So, I together with CMJ, share this desire to appeal to Gentile Christians to have a greater understanding of God's plan for Israel and the Jewish people. We should equally appeal to Jewish believers wherever they are to live in such a way that they bear witness to the love of God for their fellow Jewish people. This is to provoke them to be jealous and therefore save some of them.

Alas, historically, and equally in the contemporary world in which we live, people have all too often succeeded in simply provoking Jewish people to anger and not jealousy. Those who profess to

be believers need to strive to show the love of Jesus/Yeshua to Jewish people through acts of kindness and words of loving support and understanding in an increasingly hostile world that targets Jews, blaming them for the recent Israel – Gaza war, plus many other ills in this world.

Regrettably, I meet both Jewish believers, and Gentile believers who express hostile attitudes towards rabbinic Judaism. While I am the first to acknowledge that the Pharisees rejected Yeshua, let us remember that the Apostle Paul was himself was 'a Pharisee of the Pharisees,' and he said in Romans 11, that blindness had come upon Israel in part so that the Gentiles would be enabled to come into the family of God's elect people. They in turn are to cause the Jewish people to become jealous, in order that they too may be saved.

Rabbinic Judaism developed out of Pharisaic Judaism, and in the 21st century it has many different shades and colours in its make-up. Some are more hostile, while others show a greater openness and willingness to discuss belief in Yeshua as Messiah and Lord. There are clearly different types of approaches to giving expression to the outworking of our faith in the context of various cultures and communities. Each people group,' will require its own unique expression. Yet for Jews to discover where they belong will differ for each individual Jewish person. The same can be said for the multitude of Gentile people groups.

Are we trying to reach out to secular Jews who have little if any interest or connection with the synagogue? Conversely, are we trying to reach religious Jews who are involved with one of the several streams of contemporary Judaism? Let us remember that 'one size does not fit all.' Often cultural and community-based projects may prove a place where Jewish people may show a willingness to participate without feeling threatened. Jews for Jesus runs a very successful drop-in centre in London for Israeli young people visiting the UK. Tea, coffee, light snacks,

music, and a place to meet are provided. In that non-threatening environment conversations concerning faith do take place. To expect a Jewish person to come with you to church generally is not a wise starting place. A meeting at a coffee shop for an informal chat, followed by a house group may well be a far less threatening environment to begin with when your contact is expressing a genuine interest.

A Word of Personal Testimony

A word of personal testimony illustrates the culture shock that I experienced on my first visit to a church service. I had already made my own personal commitment to Yeshua as my Lord and Messiah. This took place on the 29th May 1969. Peter Eliastam who had led me to faith was a member of the Plymouth Brethren, and he wisely decided that taking me to one of their meetings would be too much for me to cope with. He decided to accompany me to Norwood Assemblies of God, in Johannesburg, South Africa. I arrived just before the service began, having made the seven-mile journey from Northcliff on the other side of Johannesburg to Norwood, to be greeted by Peter who lived a short distance from the church. I was impressed to see that the building was full except for a few empty seats to which Peter and I were directed by one of the ushers. A few minutes later the service began with lively worship music being played by the organist Andy May, on an electronic organ. On to the platform stepped a smartly dressed man in a suit and Peter quietly said to me that his name was Dough Fisher, a man in his mid-fifties. After warmly greeting all present, the meeting was then set in motion with congregational singing from the red Redemptional Hymnal book that had been handed to me as we entered the assembly building.

As I sat there in my seat I was overcome with an overwhelming sense of conflict – I was a Jew, proud of my Jewish heritage and here I was being confronted with the personal question:

“What on earth am I doing here?” “Help!!” “Get me out of here.” Further, “these were the goyim / gentiles!” And “these were not my people.” And yet somehow, I had a growing sense, that “they have become my people.”

How was I going to understand this significant metamorphosis that was taking place within the very essence of my being? To put it simply, how can one remain true to one's Jewish heritage, and at the same time be a Jesus-believing-Jew? I discuss living with ambiguity, in my book that I published in September 2023 – ‘Encountering This Jewish Jesus,’ published by Amazon.uk.

My Paramount Objective

To quote from my book,

‘My paramount objective in writing this book is my desire to assist clearing up the multitude of issues that cloud our view and block the pathway to reconciliation. This is to enable Jewish and Gentile people to encounter not just *any Jesus*, but this Jewish Jesus in particular. The numerous and varied distorted images of Jesus that have been portrayed need to be corrected. Yet, to say that Jesus is a Jew may be viewed as stating the obvious, but this understanding of his personhood though it is a given, this clarity cannot be assumed.’ (p 23)

Steven Spielberg in his film, *A Close Encounter of A Third Kind* made in 1977, (an American science fiction film), tells the story of Roy Neary, an everyday blue-collar worker in Indiana, whose life changes after an encounter with an unidentified flying object - UFO). It is my hope that you may encounter the Jewish Jesus and discover for yourself who he really is. He is not a character out of some SCI-FI movie, nor a myth or mystic Eastern Guru - he is the Anointed One or Messiah of all the world. Part of this discovery is that he is much more than just an amazing human being, for he is God made flesh. He was born into a Jewish family.

As we approach Jewish people it is important to find out if their background is religious, semi-religious, agnostic, atheistic or just thoroughly secular? These questions are important in our understanding the religious outlook of those who we can share the Good News with. Each person is an individual and accordingly, we need to first discover what they believe before we proceed with our witness.

Worldview

The way that you perceive things is influenced by multifaceted stimuli and no two people view life in the same way. Jewish people are initially influenced by their family heritage. Is their background religious, semi-religious, agnostic, atheistic or just thoroughly secular? Are their parents and significant others conservative, liberal tolerant, or bigoted? Their political affiliation will also influence the way they view national and international affairs.

Personally, I came from a semi-religious orthodox Jewish family whose values were one of tolerance and acceptance of diversity. Through the influence of my family, the synagogue, schooling, and the Habonim (The Builders) a secular liberal Zionist youth movement, each played a very significant part in my personal development.

Growing up in Apartheid South Africa I became aware of the consequences of racist policy and attitudes. I increasingly loathed the discriminatory laws imposed by the white Nationalist South African government. I strongly objected to ethnic discrimination and everything that it stood for. I grew up determined to respect all people despite their religious, racial background or sexual orientation. I deliberately and intentionally sought out friends from other ethnic groups.

At the age of 20 years old as an art student I was confronted by the growing counterculture that manifested itself and popularised *sex, music, drugs, and rock 'n roll*. It was in that context that during my second year at art school that I became a believer embracing the Messianic faith. I was called 'a Jesus freak' by some of my contemporaries and this was a label that I gladly wore. (Mechanic, Roni. *A Quest for the Jewish Jesus*, 2020)

I increasingly grappled with the question of my personal identity as a Jew for Jesus - was I Jewish or Christian or could I be both? This struggle played a significant part in my personal development and performed a not insignificant part in my desire to discover the Jewish Jesus.

Introduction

“Messiah our cornerstone”

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners (sojourners, aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints (set apart ones and members of the household of God.
(Ephesians 2:19 NKJV

Most of humanity does not like living with ambiguity. We want things to be cut and dried, being either black or white. We find 'shades of grey' difficult, yet reality shows that ambiguity is one of those creative tensions that we must live with. This is particularly the case in our trying to make sense of the fractured relationship between Judaism and Christianity. While both share so much in common, there are several fundamental points of disagreement and divergence that continue to contribute to the division between these two great Abrahamic faiths. Personally, I have learnt to live with ambiguity as a reality of life. At the outset it is important to explain that Jesus' relationship with the Pharisees initially was congenial. They showed a genuine interest in finding out who he was, and they even warned him of the dangers that Herod posed towards Jesus.

There is no easy or simple answer to a very complex set of issues. In my recent trip to Israel on the Day of Atonement, I fasted, and attended a synagogue service at which I felt completely at home. I loved the worship and Hebrew prayers, singing and reading of the Torah – Five Books of Moses. I left the synagogue with a great sense of elation and closeness to God and my people. Yet uppermost in my mind was the thought that they have yet to meet their Messiah Yeshua.

In early October, we travelled with friends to the Upper Galilee to Tiberius and we visited Magdala, a World Heritage site, and home to a most beautiful church dedicated to the memory of Mary of Magdala the disciple of Jesus. While inside this most beautiful edifice as I moved from chapel to chapel and I then entered the main sanctuary and looked at the amazing mosaics and icons depicting scenes from the Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Yeshua/Jesus, I was deeply moved and had a profound sense of the awe and wonder of it all.

I have the experience of living in two worlds – the world of the Jew and the Christian. Not in a 'no man's land,' but in another realm of belonging to both people.

Religious Identity

Additionally, what is your own religious identity, and within the context of Jewish evangelism, what are you hoping to achieve? Who is your target group? What type of Messianic/Christian community are you intending to take your contacts to? Are you able to adapt to different cultural environments, and not let our own cause stumbling blocks to those who you are witnessing to? What message are you intending to impart to them?

Some would say, "You are no longer a Jew, you are a Christian now." And as Dr David Stern the writer of *The Jewish New Testament*, relates, when he professed faith in his Jewish Messiah Yeshua, someone said to him as way of a test to see if he was a *genuine convert*, "have a ham sandwich." What utter nonsense and a violation of his personhood. This type of mentality alas, displays a dismal failure to understand anything to do with culturally appropriate sharing of the Good News with Jewish people. And it also speaks of a nascent, deep rooted anti-Judaism, if not an outright antisemitic attitude.

Our Approach

As we are busy building our relationship with our Jewish contact, we need to stop and pause and ask ourselves, "What should our approach be in sharing the gospel with them?" Are we encouraging them to continue to identify themselves as Jewish, or are we effectively making them into Gentiles? Remember, 'salvation is of the Jews!'

Several important factors must come into play and need to be considered in order that we can be more effectual. We need to be building bridges and pathways towards Jewish people, and not erecting barriers, and laying stumbling blocks along the pathway. These different attitudes will be influenced by the way we share the Scriptures with them. Starting with the Jewish Scriptures is always the best way to proceed. Become conversant with the prophetic passages in Isaiah and the Psalms. Make a start with Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

When choosing what congregation to introduce your friend to, this will depend on where you live and what kind of church you are involved with. There may be a church that is sensitive to things Jewish, and this would be a good choice. You will need to take your contact along to the congregation and be there to explain everything about what is happening. A Messianic Jewish congregation or group is also a possibility. They may have Hebrew Messianic songs and some Hebrew prayers.

What's in a name?

When CMJ changed its name from The Church's Ministry 'to' Jews, to The Church's Ministry 'among' the Jews, this was more than a cosmetic tinkering with the name. It indicated a sincere desire to have a ministry among Jewish people. Jewish people overall don't want to feel that they are 'a target,' to be aimed and shot at. It is against the law in Israel to try to convert a young Jewish person under the age of eighteen. When I pioneered CMJ's ministry in South Africa in the 1980s I chose to call the work 'Messiah's People,' an Outreach of CMJ. My reasoning for this was that if Jewish people enquired as to who I worked for or represented, it was much easier to say Messiah's People, and not the Church's Ministry Among the Jews. I was also motivated by a desire to present a more 'user friendly' name to Jewish people. I note that in due course that CMJ SA ministry has dropped Messiah's People from the name. As part of the internationalisation of the organisation they dropped the name Messiah's People and became CMJ South Africa exclusively. What is CMJ's philosophy of ministry? From my experience it is firstly a vital ministry to the church in endeavoring to educate both the Anglican church worldwide, but also the wider body of Christ concerning its Jewish roots and heritage. Secondly it is an outreach to Jewish people. It is this second aim that I want to further explore with you, the reader. It is also a ministry of encouragement to help Jewish and Gentile people both to discover the richness of their inheritance though living a life of faith.

Sharing the Good News

How are we to share the Good News (Gospel with Jewish people?)

Evangelists actively look for culturally suitable ways to communicate the message of salvation with Jewish people. The question that faces each one who wishes to lead others to a saving

knowledge of Yeshua the Messiah, is how we are to be most effective? Just as we live and work in different contexts, we may meet secular Jewish people, who like secular Gentiles have no religious belief, and while they acknowledge that they have a Jewish heritage, they don't believe there is a God. They may be interested to learn that you know more than they do about what it means to be Jewish. Perhaps they may be willing to attend a Pesach seder being held in a home or a hall. This will open many opportunities to talk about what it means to be Jewish and what it means to be a believer in Yeshua the Messiah for much in the Passover ceremony points to Yeshua.

Personally, though I was raised in an observant Jewish home and regularly attended the synagogue, by the age of twenty, my synagogue attendance declined. Did I believe in God? In many ways I did but he did not seem to be close to me. He was more like an absentee landlord who created the world and then went off somewhere else and left us to muddle along. I later discovered this is the belief of Deism. I did not think of myself as an atheist, more like an agnostic - "Maybe there is a God, but I just don't know!" I was obviously curious and when my lecturer at art school in Johannesburg asked me if I wanted to study the Bible with him I was quick to say yes.

The Scripture says, 'that faith come through hearing the Word of God.' (Roman 10.17, KJV). I asked that we begin with the Jewish Scriptures, I was uncertain about the New Testament that I viewed as a book for Gentiles only. So, began a four-month intense study of the Tanakh which is the Jewish name for the Jewish Scriptures or Old Testament. I became enthralled with what we read together. Little did I realize that the Hebrew prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah.

What I have been striving to show you is that when we seek to lead a Jewish person to find their Messiah Yeshua, we need to do so through studying the Scriptures to come to a biblically

sound faith. We also need to pray daily for our contact that the Holy Spirit would draw them to faith and give us a sensitivity to them and wisdom to know what to say and when to be silent. Learning to listen to what they say is also vital to building a relationship so that they know that we are listening to them and understand what they are going through. It is not just about sharing a personal testimony, or what someone else has said, written, videoed, or blogged. While these other resources may be useful, it is by God revealing himself through his Word that they will come to faith.

What Scriptures are helpful to share with your contact? Someone once said, from Genesis to Revelation! While this is perfectly true, there are specific Scriptural texts that will be particularly useful. However, before we give these texts consideration, I want to outline some necessary steps that should be covered, as it were, the A to Z of salvation. The message of the Scripture is very clear. We have all turned away and sinned against God (Romans 3:23). Because of our sin, we are not able to enjoy fellowship with God (Romans 6:23). Due to his love for us (John 3:16), the incarnation took place with God taking on human form and Yeshua, God's only Son, grew to adulthood preached to crowds and healed the sick and then was crucified, buried in a tomb, rose again from the dead and revealed himself to his disciples before ascending to heaven to take his place in glory with the Father. Yeshua took the punishment that we deserve (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22; Romans 5:8; and 2 Corinthians 5:21). Consequently, God promises forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who receive him. We are told in the Scriptures that it is by grace through faith that we find Yeshua HaMashiach as our Saviour. Useful Scriptures are John 1:12, 3:16, 5:24, Acts 16:31, Romans 10:9-12. Look up these Bible texts and write them out on a piece of paper so that you can take them to heart.

Salvation is about taking certain steps towards God. Firstly, we need to hear the Good News. We need to recognize that there is a God-shaped void in our lives. In other words, we need to

invite Yeshua into our lives, asking him to become our Messiah, and Lord. This step involves saying a prayer in which we acknowledge our personal need, asking him for his forgiveness for all the wrong that we have done, and finally, thanking him for his mighty deliverance.

Follow 1000 Steps?

On the question of our discovering God's individual purpose for our lives it is an adventure, not into the unknown, but rather with Yeshua our Good Shepherd who will lead us step by step.

Those who desire to have their own personal encounter and want to explore the Jewish heritage of the Messianic walk will have a rewarding journey of discovery before them. Someone once said to me, "You don't know who you will become." When I asked for clarification, the answer that I was given filled me with hope and joy. "As you yield your life to Yeshua, he will turn the rocky places into a clear path. Instead of a veil of darkness covering your heart and mind, the pure light of God's glorious plan will become clearer." We could follow 1000 steps, and it would still not be enough, yet when we thrust our hand into the King of Kings, the Almighty, we discover that he will assist us to fulfill our life's goal.

If you are Jewish, I trust that this article has stirred your interest and desire to know more about your Jewishness, and that you are challenged to discover how you as a believer can harmonize your Messianic faith with your rich God-given Jewish heritage. As Gentile believers you are invited, not to become Jewish, but rather to stand together with the Jewish people and Israel, and that together you may embrace and celebrate the Jewish Messiah Yeshua who came for both Jews and Gentiles alike that the two may be one new person in him.

Do visit: Shalom Radio UK for Messianic Jewish Perspectives
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International).

End Notes

1. Mechanic, Messianic Jewish Art, 12.
2. Mechanic, Messianic Jewish Art, 12.
3. Harvey, Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology, 9.
4. Fruchtenbaum, Israelology, 746.
5. David Rudolf & Joel Willitts, An Introduction to Messianic Judaism, p 37-38.
6. Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelization, Occasional Paper No. 7, "Why Go to the Jews? 5.
7. Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelization, Occasional Paper No. 7, "Why Go to the Jews? 5.



If this booklet has inspired you to connect with your Jewish friends and neighbours, we would like to recommend the CMJ UK JET Course to you. JET (Jewish Engagement Training) is for anyone who wants to sensitively bring the good news of Yeshua to Jewish people by understanding more about Jewish culture and God's calendar. Ideal for individual learning as well as study groups, this online resource is available via the CMJ UK website www.cmj.org.uk/jet or by emailing office@cmj.org.uk



The Church's Ministry
among Jewish People