

Outline Explaining Messianic Judaism

by Michael Rudolph

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 discipled, 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 and also differences.
- No Judaism of today is the same as Temple Judaism. The Rabbis in today's traditional Jewish communities teach that blood sacrifice is conceptually and historically important, but not essential. 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 the sacrifices until the Temple is rebuilt.
- 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 as previously described.
- Rabbinical Judaism 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'tvey 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, 15, 17)
- 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 31:31-34).
- 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 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 14th 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:¹

- 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 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.
- 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.

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

- 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 priests to the Gentile nations of the world. 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 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), "Tikkun International" (www.tikkunamerica.org), and the "Messianic Jewish Alliance of America," (www.mjaa.org). Additional information about Messianic Judaism and Messianic Jewish congregations can be obtained at these web sites.

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