

## **“The ‘Messy’ Part of Messianic Judaism”**

Boy, I never thought I’d be talking about the “messy” part of Messianic Judaism in a weekly message format. By no means is it my desire to offend or discourage the many dedicated and sincere people who are investing their heart and soul into the furtherance and betterment of the Messianic Jewish Movement. You, as the reader may look at this message as a cynical gripe-session from a disgruntled pessimist, but I assure you, I am thoroughly optimistic that HaShem is in control and that whatever is “messy” within the Messianic Jewish Movement is part of the growing process necessary for its spiritual health – *of that I am convinced*. I have thought and prayed about this writing for some time, and that it would be appropriate as Messianic Judaism continues to emerge as more than a “blip” on the radar screen. Truly, Messianic Judaism is becoming for many people (Jewish or not) a Biblically viable means of celebrating Yeshua.

Computers have made all kinds of information electronically available at the click of a button. And the more one surfs the internet for Messianic teachings and congregations, the more one will be exposed to various doctrine – views of every sort that are, frankly, way off the beaten path of common sense and sound Biblical teaching. Which begs the question: *what is* “sound” teaching (doctrine) when it comes to Messianic Judaism,<sup>1</sup> and why isn’t “common sense” common across the board?

For a moment, let’s talk about Messianic Judaism as a “Judaism.” Who would define this? I know plenty of well-meaning people who have tried – gentile Christians; Christian Zionists; Baptists, Catholics; so-called “Ephramites”; and even Jews with no real heart-connection to Judaism other than their assimilated parents.<sup>2</sup> Etc., etc., etc. – the list goes on and on. Who would define Messianic Judaism? How about “Jews for Jesus” who have no problem paving the way for identity assimilation through the placement of Jewish believers into churches? Or, how about the MJAA/IAMCS whose conferences and teachings often look and sound more like a TBN production than anything that would depict a Jewish Movement? Or how about the UMJC who straddle ethnocentric ideas in how Torah should be applied and lived out by non-Jews?

You think this is confusing? Wait, it get’s better! Today, the list of those who would define Messianic Judaism is being rapidly populated by non-Jews of every persuasion who have a legitimate gripe against the anti-Jewish and often anti-Biblical direction the universal church has taken over the centuries.<sup>3</sup> You may think that these church “misfits” are just hypercritical (some are) and that the charges of “pagan roots” and “syncretism” are overblown or invented, but the truth is, many of these charges are not

---

<sup>1</sup> The “universal church” has had hundreds of years to hammer out dogmatic positions and split into the many and varied denominations in the world today. And sadly Messianic expressions of faith, although closer to a first century belief system, also seem to be fragmenting into different expressions with a variety of emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> A genetic link from a distant relative, or the often stated, “G-d told me so” does not qualify a person to define Messianic Judaism – it simply doesn’t.

<sup>3</sup> No, I don’t have a “chip on my shoulder” against the church, but even common encyclopedias reveal a history of “replacing” through translation and practice. Google: “replacement theology” or “supersessionism.”

overblown or invented. Therefore, if the believing community is to “come out of Babylon,” what does that mean other than examining the origin of certain traditions that have become the warp and woof of the church community today? The people of G-d (Jewish or otherwise) passionately desire to celebrate G-d’s appointed times on the days sanctified and designated by His Word, and Messianic Judaism is the logical way to fill that need. But issues remain on the table with Messianic Judaism in its efforts to reach out to all people as a Jewish Movement. Here are a few points to consider:

**Point number 1:** In order to even be considered as a “Judaism” – Messianic Judaism needs to be defined by those who are Jewish. This G-d ordained Movement of Jewish people who are coming out of the closet to proclaim the Messiahship of Yeshua needs to be encouraged and supported, not lorded over by those who are not from this background. Non-Jews need to step back and let the Jewish Movement take place through the Jewish people. In some fashion, this attitude should influence Messianic mixed marriages as well as the leadership structure in local congregations.

**Point number 2:** If Messianic Judaism were to be filled with nothing but Jewish people, and even if every aspect of Jewish life was followed meticulously, Messianic Judaism will never be accepted by Orthodox Judaism – never. Why not? In a word – Yeshua. Messianic Judaism, by nature, is antithetical to traditional Judaism. Even so, many leaders in Messianic Judaism feel the Messiah would be more palatable to our Jewish friends and relatives if the life and practice of our Messianic congregations were more “Orthodox” by today’s standards. Even if this were true, and I’m not convinced that it is, my sense about Yeshua is that He was Orthodox in an unorthodox manner. Allow me to explain. When He walked this earth over 2,000 years ago, and as He redefined orthodoxy to the Jewish world He was part of, He was subsequently vilified because He didn’t fit certain ideas and traditions of the ruling elite. If we follow in His footsteps, doesn’t it make sense that we will also be vilified by the ruling elite for not adhering to traditional views of the Messiah or Jewish halacha as defined by modern Judaism?<sup>4</sup>

**Point number 3:** Living out a Messianic Jewish faith is not a “one-size fits all.” Just as Judaism includes several branches of faith and expression all the way from orthodoxy to more liberal forms, so too, Messianic Judaism needs to realize that not all Messianic communities are going to apply the Torah in the same fashion. Moreover, not all people in any particular Messianic Jewish assembly are going to live out their Torah identity in the same way.

In humility we must realize that we are as humanly fallible as anyone else. We must allow room for our own spiritual growth as well as for others in the application of Torah truths. As long as the desire of a person’s heart is directed toward Yeshua and keeping G-d’s ways, you can rest assured that HaShem will work out the details in His perfect timing. Grace must prevail over any tendency toward judgmentalism.

---

<sup>4</sup> “Halacha” or “halachic” has to do with the manner of “walking” or living out the Torah.

Jewish halachic practices are largely defined by the community or demographic of an area. In areas that are not heavily concentrated with a Jewish population, there is a greater tendency toward more liberal expressions. More specifically, not all are going to listen to the Talmudic writers with the same level of interest. Not all are going to view the oral traditions in the same light. To quote Sandi’s Uncle Norman, not all are going to be as “frum”<sup>5</sup> as the next. Messianic Judaism must hold all commentary to the light of G-d’s written Word, and wherever Scripture is silent, it is wrong to impose dogmatic positions of any commentary, Talmudic, Mishnaic, or otherwise.

**Point number 4:** Many people in Messianic Jewish congregations are not Jewish but are still exerting tremendous influence on the “flavor” of teaching and the general halachic practices of the community. While at times these “influences” can be decidedly Jewish, at other times these “influences” can be anything but Jewish.

Many people enter Messianic Jewish congregations straight from the dominant culture of Evangelical Christianity. These people (I am one of them) find a home in Messianic Judaism for a number of reasons, and, depending upon the attitude of their heart, they can either reinforce the vision of Jewish identity, or negatively, they will unwittingly promote assimilation and ultimately destroy any vestiges of Jewish uniqueness within the community. Furthermore, even though a new appreciation for Hebrew roots does not qualify a gentile to define Messianic Judaism for Jewish congregations, some have wrongly (presumptuously) assumed that role.

One prominent Messianic leader said that some Messianic communities have a tendency to “make up their own stuff.” And I do agree that this is a problem, especially when the leader of a Messianic Jewish congregation has no real connection to the heart of Jewish life and culture. Can you imagine Benny Hinn waving a tallit over an arena of people to “receive the Holy Ghost?” Or Kenneth Copeland wearing a kippah at a sausage, egg, and pancake breakfast for men? Of course this is hypothetical, but things like this are going on, and people with the same (or similar) mentality are leading Jewish Messianic congregations! Personally, I believe this mishigas<sup>6</sup> comes from none other than HaSatan himself, who, we all know is the author of confusion.

If one is not Jewish by heritage (either mother or father), but Messianic Judaism has become the chosen expression of that person’s faith, this author believes it is entirely appropriate and even necessary to hear the Jewish voices leading this Movement. We may not agree on some points (who in Judaism ever does?) but if a Jewish Messianic congregation is mostly not Jewish, and especially if it is led by someone who is not Jewish, it is important to remain humble rather than arrogantly becoming the judge and jury that would define Messianic Jewish practice.

---

<sup>5</sup> “Frum” is a Yiddish expression meaning those who are “devout” or “pious” in their response to Orthodox Judaism.

<sup>6</sup> Mishigas – craziness

Perhaps instead of “Beth \_\_\_\_\_”, or “Adat \_\_\_\_\_”, or “Kehilat \_\_\_\_\_”, it would be better to identify non-Jewish congregations as the “First Assembly of Hebrew Roots,” or something along those lines. I think you get the point. There are many Hebrew names tossed around that are misleading many people because the vision of the congregation is anything but Jewish.

**Point number 5:** Just as Judaism is not for everyone, in like manner, Messianic Judaism is NOT for everyone. I believe that for one to be involved in a Messianic congregation is first and foremost a calling of the heart initiated through diligent study of G-d’s eternal, unchanging Word. A non-Jewish person becoming involved in Messianic Judaism can be compared to a gentile in the first century going to a synagogue to learn of the G-d of Israel. It took some chutzpah and a definite move of the Spirit to draw someone like Cornelius<sup>7</sup> to explore the G-d of Israel. He wasn’t grafted in because he bulldozed through the established norms of G-d’s people! In Messianic Judaism there are cultural hurdles that some are unwilling or unable to clear, but those hurdles do not go away as a result of ignorance or the imposition of one’s Evangelical / Hellenistic / European will.

**Hebrew Roots:** Today, if you are from a church background and you are looking to follow the Torah and the commandments it contains, how far will you have to drive to find a church that honors the Sabbath and keeps the feasts? For many communities, these places are hard to find. Today there is a growing presence of Torah-centered congregations that minister to a mostly non-Jewish population. These Hebrew Roots assemblies sometimes do “make up their own stuff” calling it Jewish or at least giving the appearance of a Jewish identity. While some of these assemblies do provide a Torah environment for people, they should not (in my opinion) identify themselves as Messianic Jewish.

**Conclusion:** I do realize that I’ve probably generated more questions than answers in this writing, but that being said it is important to be aware of what’s out there (on the internet and otherwise) so that you can be confidently led by the Spirit and discerning in your judgment. We must hold fast to the Scriptures as the foundation of life and practice for the believer. Perhaps Sha’ul’s letter to Timothy says it best:

*“If anyone teaches differently and does not agree to the sound precepts of our L-rd Yeshua the Messiah and to the doctrine that is in keeping with godliness, he is swollen with conceit and understands nothing. Instead, he has a morbid desire for controversies and word-battles, out of which come jealousy, dissension, insults, evil suspicions, and constant wrangling among people whose minds no longer function properly and who have been deprived of the truth . . .”* 1 Timothy 6:3-5 (CJB)

In conclusion, if seeking to follow Torah seems challenging, then certainly learning family ways as branches that are either grafted (gentiles) or *re-grafted* (Jews) into the

---

<sup>7</sup> Acts 10

Romans 11 Olive Tree can result in tremendous misinformation about what Messianic Judaism is all about.

Yeshua said His yolk (or burden) of Torah is easy, and I choose to take Him at His Word. I think the human nature of all mankind is prone to taking a simple Truth and piling onto it rules and regulations that are both exhaustive and unnecessary (just take a look at the bureaucracy of our national government for instance). Biblical religious expression in any form is no different. That being said, Scripture is always consistent; it is always inspired and authoritative, 100% of the time – man is not. Only the written Word is ever valuable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.<sup>8</sup> While holding this to be correct, some are “romanticized” by Judaism and make it their quest to search out a *form* of Messianic Judaism that *fits their experience*, whatever it may be.

*“For the time is coming when people will not have patience for sound teaching, but will cater to their passions and gather around themselves teachers who say whatever their ears itch to hear.”*

2 Timothy 4:3 (CJB)

Isn't it amazing that G-d's will is accomplished . . . *in spite of us*? Historically and mercifully, He has used the fallible ways of mankind to draw imperfect people into His Kingdom. Today He is using the imperfect vehicle of Messianic Judaism.

The prophet Zechariah said, *"Thus says the L-RD of hosts, 'In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that G-d is with you.'"* Zechariah 8:23 (NASB)

Actually, in many Messianic Jewish congregations today, I think the ratio of 10/1 is pretty optimistic! And the good news is that even as Messianic Judaism is an authentic movement from G-d among the Jewish people, Messianic Judaism has never excluded involvement from the nations.

Psalms 82:8 says that HaShem possesses all nations and Zephaniah 2:11b says that all the coastlands of the nations will come to bow down before Him *“everyone from His own place.”* Truly, the G-d of Israel is the Redeemer/G-d of all the earth (Isaiah 54:5). What really blows my mind and should be an encouragement to all those who are not Jewish, is that even non-Jewish believers will receive an inheritance along with the people of Israel (Ezekiel 47:21-23).

Is there a “mess” in Messianic Judaism today? Yes, there is – but only in part. Several people have commented to me that, “Ever since I was introduced to Messianic Judaism, there is no other option that now qualifies as an alternative!” So, rather than an indictment against Messianic Judaism, the “messy” part of Messianic Judaism exists

---

<sup>8</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17

more as a statement of the fallenness of our human condition. Perhaps, until Yeshua returns, it is supposed to be this way.

What I am convinced of, is that Yeshua told us not to be discouraged. In John 14 He said, *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."* John 14:27 (NASB)

May we all have this attitude as we pursue His Truth both individually, and in our communities of faith.

Baruch HaShem!

At Kehilat Mashiach we consider ourselves Messianic Believers who closely identify with the Jewish people in the chosen expression of our faith. And, to the best of our ability, we practice the religion that Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel practiced in community life, Torah-faithfulness, and involvement with His people. Moreover, we are unashamed of the gospel message, to the Jew first, and also to those who are not Jewish.

Shalom, and may HaShem anoint you with all good things at this time and always!

Pat Adamson  
Congregational Leader