

Messianic Movement: Yeshua Kosher Style

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It's Friday at Beth Messiah Synagogue, the beginning of the Sabbath. A candle is lit. The Torah is read. A rabbi chants.

Members of the congregation, clad in their yarmulkes and veils, break into a song of praise to Messiah Yeshua.

Did they say Yeshua, Jesus, at a Jewish synagogue?

More and more Jews are discovering today what a remnant has always known that is kosher to believe in Yeshua (the Hebrew spelling of Jesus) as their promised Messiah.

Through a tremendous move of His Holy Spirit, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is renewing his ancient covenant with the Jews and fulfilling His promise to "pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication."

The movement recognizes no boundaries of age, class, education or background. Whether they are part of the young, evangelical Jews for Jesus, the "mainstream of Judaism" that is a target of the Messianic Jewish Movement International, or a dozen other Messianic Jewish organizations, they share a love of Jesus as the promised Messiah and a zeal to introduce Him to their Jewish brothers many Gentile Christians would envy.

Messianic Judaism has become so widespread it is now being given serious consideration as a fourth branch of Judaism, beside the three traditional branches—Orthodox, Reformed and Conservative. Members prefer to refer to it as "a movement within Judaism," however, insisting they have no desire to

separate themselves in any way from the traditions of the Jewish faith.

Messianic Jews also refer to themselves as “completed” or “fulfilled” Jews, citing Matthew 5:17 where Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”

Messianic Jews are nothing new, of course. A movement bumper sticker proclaims that “Jesus was born in a kosher home.” The New Testament church was founded by Jews and the early Christian worship certainly had a Jewish flavor.

The present day roots of the movement can be traced back to the mid- and late 1960s. It was then that Jews for Jesus, a large evangelical group, was born out of the Jesus movement in Southern California.

The Messianic Jewish Movement International was also gaining strength as was Jewish Voice Broadcast and numerous other organizations.

It was also in the late 1960s that the national news media begin taking notice of the “completed” Jews, giving them greater publicity and at least a tacit legitimacy.

What is new about these Messianic Jews, besides their numbers, is their fervor to share their newfound faith with other Jewish people. In an effort to echo that fervor, the American Board of Missions to the Jews, has, in the past, run ads crowing about the number of Jews wearing “that smile” nowadays.

Among these new completed Jews there is a greater appreciation of the traditions of the faith. They celebrate the traditional holidays, study Hebrew and attend the synagogue.

The “Jewish holidays are teeming with the Gospel,” says Joseph Finklestein, a Messianic Jew in Philadelphia. “Jesus fulfills

them."

The observances are a matter of cultural identity for many young Jews raised out of touch with their past and in spiritual void, yet not wanting to be assimilated by the Gentile culture associated with the average church.

Youths usually study the Bible in Hebrew and in the synagogue prayer books are used. Since Jewish bibles are difficult to obtain, many Jewish homes do not have one. Many Jewish young people are completely ignorant of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament prophets who spoke of the coming of the Messiah.

Elliot Klayman, a Messianic Jewish attorney whose story is told by Jewish Voice Broadcasts, is fairly typical.

Klayman grew up in a traditional Jewish home, received a Hebrew school education and Bar Mitzvah at the traditional age of 13. The rituals of his faith were simply that to him—rituals.

Seeking recognition and security he turned to weightlifting, karate, gymnastics, education, sex and drugs. Nothing worked, however, so after graduating from Harvard University with his Master's degree in law, he got on a plane for Europe, alone, seeking truth. In Finland, spiritually and physically lost, he cried out to God who answered with a revelation of Jesus as the Messiah.

For Klayman, raised in a strict Jewish home, it was difficult to accept Jesus as the Messiah, but his vivid personal experience with Him destroyed doubt and steadied him in the face of opposition from friends and family.

Opposition from Jewish friends and family is a common problem for Messianic Jews. One Jewish youth who was a former drug addict and dope dealer joyously related his newfound faith to his parents. They replied they would rather have him back on drugs than be a believer in Christ.

A 1974 report in *A.D.* magazine raised another personal problem among young completed Jews.

Many of them are at a marriageable age and foresee getting married and raising a family. They tend to seek mates who are also Messianic Jews, but many of them are scattered throughout the country in areas where no other fulfilled Jews can be found.

The problem may be lessening some through the efforts of young Messianic Jewish Alliance. Reports of romances blooming at its conventions and regional meetings are growing.

Messianic Jews often face more serious opposition from organized Judaism. In 1972, the Massachusetts Rabbinical Court, ruling on three cases of Christian conversion, ruled that a Jew who joins the "so-called Hebrew-Christian movement" has betrayed his people and has no right to a Jewish marriage or burial.

However, the court also ruled that a person may not "at any time be exempt from responsibilities which membership in the Jewish faith imposes on him ..."

The court has therefore taken the position that Messianic Jews have all the responsibilities but none of the rights of Jews.

The *National Courier* newspaper recently reported on James Yaacov Hutchens, who took the same question—can a Jew believe in Jesus and still be a Jew?—to the High Court of Justice in Israel when he sought to immigrate to Israel after converting to Judaism. He was refused.

His conversion was rescinded by the Chicago Rabbinical Court, which charged he had been dishonest in his statement of belief concerning Jesus at the time of his conversion.

Many Messianic Jews in Israel supported Hutchens' cause, and one fulfilled Jew who attended the trial said that Messianic

Jews in Israel are fighting for the same freedoms as Soviet Jews.

But Rabbi Meir Kahane of the Jewish Defense League has called Jewish believers in Christ anything from “obscene” to “ignoramus.”

Organizing a group in Israel he sarcastically calls “Christians for Moses,” Kahane and his helpers are trying to have Israel ban all missionary work in that country.

Not all opposition, however, is that destructive. Some members of the Jewish community are genuinely concerned with the spiritual cries among Jewish youth and are trying to meet the need.

A 1974 Jews for Jesus publication reported on Esther Jungreis, a Jewish community leader who initiated a “Hineni” campaign. Hineni is Hebrew for “Here am I.” Mrs. Jungreis hoped to counteract Messianic Judaism and call Jews back to Judaism and urged them to study the Scriptures to gain an appreciation of their Jewishness.

Much to her chagrin, Jews for Jesus supported the campaign and wrote Hineni posters, songs, and slogans such as “What’s a nice four letter word you can say to God’s face? Hineni. Here am I.” (Hineni in Hebrew has only four letters.)

But in the face of such opposition, Messianic Jews have responded with love and continued insistence that accepting Jesus as the Messiah has actually made them *more* Jewish.

Most Messianic Jews continue serving worthwhile Jewish causes such as securing freedom for Soviet Jews and supporting Israel.

The majority of Messianic organizations encourage their members to continue worshipping at a synagogue. To meet the unique needs of completed Jews, Messianic synagogues are

springing up wherever there is a sizable population of Messianic Jews.

A group of twelve messianic synagogue leaders recently met to organize a Union of Messianic Jewish Synagogues.

David Chernoff, campus director for Messianic Ministries, which sponsors Beth Yeshua Synagogue in Philadelphia, believes it is virtually impossible to have a strong Messianic Jewish ministry without the support of a Messianic synagogue.

"You must have a place where Jews can come to hear the message of Jesus in a Jewish framework, and where they can worship as Jews," he says, "A congregations should be the center of Messianic Judaism."

Services in Messianic synagogue are basically the same as in a non-Messianic synagogue, with readings from the Torah, lighting of candles, singing, and even a sermon delivered by a rabbi. The main difference is in the content of the message and the music presented. "The Messianic synagogue tries to retain its Jewishness, but in the Scripture readings, songs and message, Yeshua is lifted up and there is edification," Steve Solomon, a Messianic Jew in Orlando, Florida, said. "In most synagogues there is little teaching."

Tradition is very important but little attention is given to the Scriptures. A Messianic synagogue gives one hundred percent backing to the Word, both the Old and New Testaments.

Solomon thinks the church needs to become more Jewish.

"The early church was very Jewish," he said, "Its worship had a definite Hebrew flavor. The Gentiles were grafted on to the Jewish tree, but most churches today are very Gentile, and this is what often turns off a Jewish person."

The problem of semantics is a major one.

The average Jew equates "Christian" with "Gentile." His

ancestors were persecuted by Christians bearing the cross. The Hebrew concept of the Messiah is not linked in the Jewish mind with the Christian Christ. For centuries Jews have been taunted as "Christ killers" but never "Messiah killers."

"God has shown me the most beautiful symbol I can wear to identify with my Messiah is the Star of David," says Sandra Sheskin of the Messianic Jewish Movement International. "He gave me a beautiful Scripture for this, Rev. 22:16, I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star."

An enlightening report entitled: "What Evangelical Christians Should Know About Jews for Jesus" outlined some of the problems which have existed in sharing with Jews.

"The existing means of witnessing to Jews tended to Gentilize the new Jewish believer so that his friends and family could no longer recognize him as a Jew. Hence the value of his testimony to other Jews was greatly diminished.

"For the most part," the report continues, "missionaries to the Jews and those engaged in Jewish evangelism had been trained in Bible college and seminaries."

"Hebrew Christians were taught the techniques of communication that were effective within the (Gentile) church, that fell short in the world outside the church, and that completely missed the mark in the Jewish community."

The search for new, more effective techniques for sharing with Jews has produced a large network of literature, music, drama, and communication techniques with a distinctly Jewish flavor.

Because, as one Messianic Jewish publication put it, "Christians often get caught up in their own jargon and, in essence, are talking to themselves, not the unsaved," Messianic Jewish organizations have developed a number of sharing techniques designed to minister specifically to Jews.

"Broadsides," an evangelistic device used by Jews for Jesus, were first created with this in mind.

The broadsides use contemporary language, humorous illustrations, and eye-catching titles such as "Christmas Is A Jewish Holiday," "Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Jesus But Were Afraid to Ask Your Rabbi," and "Jesus Made Me Kosher." Beneath the humor there is always a serious discussion of Jesus as the Messiah.

Jews for Jesus uses broadsides in sharing with people in shopping centers, malls, college campuses, and street corners.

The Messianic Jewish Movement International (MJMI) has also developed a comprehensive program with a complete set of literature for sharing with Jews.

One of the most popular tools, and one of the simplest, is a tract entitled: "The Five Jewish Laws," which is very similar to the "Four Spiritual Laws," the Campus Crusade for Christ tract that has been so effective in ministering to Gentiles.

"The Five Jewish Laws" was developed by MJMI President Manny Brotman while he was a student at Moody Bible College. "I realized if I had tools simple enough, even Gentiles could get out and share with Jews," he says.

From that simple beginning, MJMI, which is now headquartered in Washington, D.C., has developed a whole catalogue, of sharing aids, including a cassette course on how to share the Messiah, a training brochure, taped testimonies of Messianic Jews, studies in prophecy, the Jewish Bible (which consists of the Old Testament only and has been officially approved), record albums, and bumper stickers such as "Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem."

In addition, Brotman, Sid Roth, Sandra Sheskin, and other MJMI members travel on weekends giving seminars and holding "Jewish Emphasis Weekends" teaching how to share the Messiah.

The first night of a typical Jewish Emphasis Weekend, Sandra performs a mini-concert of Jewish music and a Passover Seder is celebrated.

The Seder is fascinating not only because of the insight it provides into Jewish culture and traditions, but because the parallel between the Jewish use of the sacrificial lamb for atonement and the atonement provided by Jesus as the Lamb of God are so exact as to stun even Christians familiar with the basic idea.

As the meal progresses, team members are careful to explain the significance of each ceremonial act.

The second day, packets are provided which contain the training brochure and a brochure on the "Jewish Bible approach." In the day-long session, Brotman and Roth go through the training brochure with the audience, providing personal examples and insights into how to make the suggestions provided in the brochure actually work.

A concentrated attempt is made to raise the "Jewish consciousness" of Christians, and much emphasis is placed on terminology.

Christians are told to refer to Jesus not as Christ but as Messiah Yeshua. Emphasis is also placed on using the Jewish Bible. Brotman feels using the Jewish Bible eliminates the greatest fear of many Jews of becoming "goy" or Gentile.

The concluding address is delivered by Brotman who appeals to Christians to support Jews financially, to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and to share with their Jewish neighbors.

The shorter, day-long MJMI seminars usually eliminate the Seder, and pack a mini-concert by Sandra and the seminar on sharing the Messiah into a one-day program.

Jewish Voice Broadcasts is another Messianic Jewish

organization with a worldwide outreach.

Starting in 1966 with one radio station in Phoenix, Arizona, the broadcast is now carried on nearly 70 stations including three broadcasts in Spanish to South America. Broadcasts in French for Canada and Yiddish for Russia are being prepared.

Broadcasts are 15 minutes long and include messages on Biblical prophecy and Israel and testimonies of Jewish housewives, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, drug addicts and college students.

The organization publishes *The Jewish Voice Magazine* monthly which contains news of Israel and the Middle East, Jewish testimonies, and devotional articles.

Jewish Voice also sends young Jewish and Christian believers on short-term Bible School and Witnessing trips to Israel.

The Messianic Jewish Alliance of America is one of the oldest Messianic Jewish organizations. It has been trying to bring together all factions of Messianic Judaism since its founding in 1915.

To promote its aims, it conducts national and regional conferences, provides scholarships for needy Messianic Jewish students, publishes a monthly newsletter which keeps Jews abreast of the latest news about Messianic Jewish people and events and national and international events which involve Jews, and sponsors a vibrant youth movement, the Young Messianic Jewish Alliance.

Messianic Ministries, Inc., another organization with a wide outreach to both Christians and Jews, was officially founded in 1974 by Martin M. Chernoff and his wife Yohanna Naomi, two of the earliest leaders in the Messianic Jewish movement.

In 1970, the Chernoffs founded Beth Messiah synagogue, one of the first independent Messianic Jewish synagogues, in

Cincinnati.

They later moved the headquarters of Messianic Ministries to Philadelphia, where it is now, and opened Beth Yeshua synagogue there.

The Chernoffs feel Philadelphia is the ideal place for their ministry since it has one of the largest Jewish populations of any city in the world. Nearly 400,000 Jewish people live in the greater Philadelphia area.

. operates a successful and growing campus ministry under the name Messianic Jewish Movement. Last year it ministered on six campuses and plans to expand this fall.

. has a complete catalogue of sharing aids available, including tapes, books, broadsides, t-shirts, pins, etc. They also conduct training seminars on how to share the Messiah.

Messianic Jewish music has also developed as a powerful tool for ministering to Jews.

The need for music that's distinctly Jewish was well expressed by a Jews for Jesus tract.

"Many Christian hymns and songs ... grate on Jewish sensitivities. For example, when a Jew hears the words, 'The Old Rugged Cross,' his initial response is, 'That cross has meant persecution of my people throughout history.' He does not see its beauty, only its misuse."

Messianic Jewish music is gaining popularity in churches everywhere. But more importantly, unsaved Jews are hearing, through music, about a Messiah that is not alien to their culture.

Among the many musicians and groups God is raising up to minister to Jews are Sandra Sheskin, the Liberated Wailing Wall, and Lamb.

Sandra Sheskin, sometimes called the “sweet singer of Israel” is the secretary of the Messianic Jewish Movement International. She has sung in Jerusalem, on the *Today Show*, before the Congressional Wives Prayer Group in the Capitol and has been a frequent guest on *the 700 Club* and PTL network. She has also recorded an album.

The Liberated Wailing Wall is an arm of the Jews for Jesus. It is a touring group and has produced several albums, but it is more than just a singing group. It is a team of six evangelists. When they arrive in a city, they function as an arm of the local church to the Jewish community. They conduct rallies on local university campuses, hand out literature, and lecture at Bible colleges and evangelical seminaries.

Two young Messianic Jews, Joel Chernoff and Rick “Levi” Coghill, make up the group known as Lamb.

They took the name from the scriptural references to the Lamb of God who was to bring perfect sacrifice and atonement for man.

They met at Beth Messiah Synagogue in Cincinnati, and recorded their first album together, *Lamb*, in 1972. That was followed by *Lamb II* and *Lamb III*.

Joel’s composing and singing are complemented by Rick’s musical ability and talent as a producer. They have performed in a variety of atmospheres from the Academy of Music in Philadelphia to campuses such as the University of California at Berkeley and Columbia University. Many churches and synagogues are also on their itinerary.

Drama is another tool being used effectively to share with Jewish people, who have always used drama to portray spiritual truths.

The Passover Seder is a dramatization of the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt. Likewise, the Book of Esther is

dramatized in the Purim celebrations.

The New Jerusalem Players, also sponsored by Jews for Jesus, uses choral speaking, pantomime and playlets to communicate the gospel in a Jewish way.

Like the Liberated Wailing Wall, they seek to serve as an arm of the local church.

Among Messianic Jews, there is widespread belief that events occurring in the Middle East today are fulfilling Biblical prophecies of the last days.

Zealous supporters of Israel, they are concerned with the capitulation of many Western nations to Arab pressures during the 1974 oil boycott, and recent action of the U.N. branding Zionism as racism.

In speaking to Christian groups, Manny Brotman often reminds them that Israel is the apple of God's eye and that He has promised to bless those that bless the Jews and to curse those that curse them.

The concern for Israel has spawned a rash of posters "We need Israel," "God will supply the oil," and "Jesus Loves Israel."

But the real impact of world events is to increase the urgency that Messianic Jews feel for reaching their unsaved brothers, to convince them that the hope of Israel is the intervention of God through the promised coming of the Messiah.

"And I will pour out my Spirit upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication and they shall look on me whom they have pierced ..." (Zech 12:10, KJV).

That outpouring has begun.

Although the number of Jewish believers in Israel is still quite small, the Spirit of God is moving among His chosen

people, preparing them for their day of national salvation when they shall say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:38, 39).

And for that, Messianic Jews the world over are saying, "Baruch Ha' Shem Adonai."

Praised be the name of the Lord!