

What Does the Jewish Community Want From Jewish Followers of Jesus?

Back in April, the Jewish world was shocked to learn that a Gentile Christian couple was living in an ultra-Orthodox section of Jerusalem, claiming to be Jews, with the husband serving as a rabbi. In response to that scandal, I wrote an article titled, "As Jewish Followers of Jesus We Deplore Deceptive Techniques."

As Messianic Jews, we too were shocked to read this report. This is not who we are, and this is not how we operate.

But now another report has rocked sectors of the Jewish world, especially the religious community in Israel. The anti-missionary group Yad L'Achim has drawn attention to Messianic Jewish leader Boaz Michael, who lives in Jerusalem and is open and unashamed about his faith in Yeshua. He also believes in a living a Torah-observant life and honoring Jewish tradition. How, Yad L'Achim asks, can this possibly be?

As a headline on the Israel National News website states, "'Synagogue' and study hall in Jerusalem found to be used as Christian missionary training centers by missionaries posing as Orthodox Jews."

It is at this point, though, that I need to interrupt this story and ask some honest questions. What is the Jewish community asking of Messianic Jews? What are Jewish followers of Jesus supposed to do?

In the first case, you had a Gentile Christian posing as an ultra-Orthodox rabbi while privately holding to Christian beliefs, and together we said, "That is deceptive and wrong, and we reject such practices." (Again, see my article for

quotes and references.)

In the second case, you have a Messianic Jew whose website openly proclaims his belief in Yeshua and whose center in Jerusalem is unashamedly devoted to teaching and training Messianic Jews, yet he gets attacked for being open and forthright.

So, which is it? Is it wrong to be deceptive? As Messianic Jews, we agree. But are you now telling us it's wrong to be open and honest? This makes no sense.

Groups like Yad L'Achim would surely say, "Don't play games with us, Brown. You know exactly what the issue is. These missionaries are claiming to be frum [pious] Jews. Just look at how they live."

But that's the whole point. These Messianic Jews are telling the Jewish world, without any ambiguity whatsoever, that: 1) they believe Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel; 2) they believe that Yeshua fulfills the Torah rather than abolishes it, so, in light of His teachings, they are Torah observant; and 3) they believe that, because of God's covenant with Israel, there is much beauty in Jewish tradition, so where they do not find it contradictory to their faith in Yeshua, they honor those traditions.

What is so evil about that?

After all, when Jews come to faith in Jesus in a church setting, leaving all trace of their Jewishness behind, the anti-missionaries say, "You see! That proves it. Once a Jew believes in Jesus, he is lost to our people, and his children will no longer be raised Jewish."

But then, when a Jewish follower of Jesus feels deeply drawn to his people, makes aliyah, lives as a model citizen, keeps the biblical calendar, observes the dietary laws and raises his children to be Jewish, he is called a dangerous deceiver.

Do you see the hypocrisy of this? Do you see the double standards?

Recently, One for Israel, a sabra-led, Messianic Jewish outreach organization that seeks to bring Israel into the knowledge of Jesus the Messiah, received heavy criticism for a series of articles and videos strongly criticizing the Oral Law. (See here for a debate in Hebrew between a One for Israel leader and an ultra-Orthodox rabbi.) Some even called their material antisemitic.

In contrast, Boaz Michael and his organization, Firstfruits of Zion, honor the Oral Law and show great respect for rabbinic traditions. And the Bram Center in Jerusalem, which is the focal point of the current controversy, carries this mission statement: "Building Torah-based Messianic Judaism in Israel." And their stated goal is "to communicate the message of Yeshua as the Messiah within his proper Jewish context."

And what is the response of the anti-missionaries and other traditional Jews: "They are really Christians, not Jews! This is deceptive!"

One article actually carries this astonishing statement from Yad L'Achim about Firstfruits of Zion's study center in Jerusalem, called Tzemach David and located within the Bram Center: "The Tzemach David facility that trains them looks like a synagogue in every way. Instead of crosses, it has an aron kodesh [Holy Ark], sifrei Torah [Torah scrolls] and sifrei kodesh [holy books]. The literature they put out appears to be Torani [Torah-themed] but is spiked with Christian teachings. The missionaries themselves conduct what would appear to be Jewish lives and wear haredi garb—kippahs, beards and so on."

Exactly! Just as the first followers of Yeshua were Jews who continued to live as Jews, so also these Messianic Jews live today. And just as the meeting places of these first Jewish

disciples were called synagogues (see Jacob [James] 2:2 in Greek), so Tzemach David doesn't look like a church building with crosses. (For the record, it is a study center; it does not house a congregation.)

But they are totally open and honest about their faith in Yeshua. Nothing is hidden. Nothing is meant to mislead or deceive. They are who they are, and if there weren't a single Jew on the planet watching them, they would live the same way.

Now you might differ with their theology or their view on rabbinic traditions (as I do, personally; see [here](#)). But you cannot call them deceptive. And that's really where the rubber meets the road.

When we, as Jewish followers of Jesus, join the church and say, "We are Jewish Christians," we are told, "Just drop the Jewish part. You are Christians, and you are apostates."

When we say, "We believe in meeting in Messianic synagogues and following the biblical calendar," we are called deceptive.

When we reject Jewish tradition, we are told we are committing spiritual suicide, cutting ourselves off from our history and our people.

When we honor Jewish tradition, we are told we are impostors of the worst kind.

To ask again: So, which is it? What do you expect us to do?

To be perfectly clear, as a Jewish follower of Jesus, I fully expect to be rejected by many of my own people, especially in the religious community. While that grieves me because of my love for our people, I accept that rejection as a distinct honor and privilege. I am being rejected as our Messiah was rejected. I wear that as a crown.

So, there are no complaints here, no victim mentality, no martyr complex and no pity parties. I am simply raising these

issues to confront anti-missionary hypocrisy, to expose double standards and to trigger dialogue around this one simple question: What's wrong with Messianic Jews living openly and unashamedly as observant Jews? {eoa}

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