

The Title 'Messianic Rabbi' Carries Heavy Expectations

The other day, I was reading comments online by a man who used the title "Messianic Rabbi," yet the point of view of his whole website and the opinions he expressed were anti-Rabbinic Judaism and anti-Torah observance for Messianic Jews. He is also opposed to the future direction of Messianic Judaism to being a Judaism for Yeshua.

Basically, he is just an evangelical Christian minister of Jewish descent.

It seems ironic and sad that we have many "Messianic rabbis" who are this way—using a title from the larger Jewish world, although they boldly speak out against the larger Jewish world and declare "the rabbis" spiritually bankrupt.

This is wrong on many levels.

Messianic Judaism is not evangelical Christianity practiced by Jews or the local Baptist church with some Hebrew songs.

Messianic Judaism is and should continue to develop as Judaism, within the Jewish world, for the Jewish world, following the example of Yeshua—our righteous Messiah—and responding to Torah daily.

If you are an evangelical Christian minister of Jewish heritage, call yourself pastor, congregational leader, minister or spiritual leader. Don't use the title "rabbi"—a title you don't live up to, for which you do not have the educational training and that is representative of a leader of a Judaism community.

Another important issue of "Messianic rabbis" is the majority of "Messianic rabbis" in our movement who are using this title

without having taken a rigorous course of study in Torah, Rabbinics, Hebrew and Jewish studies.

In the larger Jewish world, the training for the rabbinate involves many years of study—either a graduate level of study in Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism or in Orthodox Judaism—and a lifetime of study capped by intense Talmudic studies in yeshiva. With this rigor comes the title of “rabbi.” The need to make our congregational leaders of the future knowledgeable in the Bible, in Hebrew and in Jewish studies is not an option but a mandate.

I know that the founding of Messianic yeshivot and graduate schools take time, effort and money, but sadly, the issue that we need these educational institutions is not even considered by many in our movement. This is the great opportunity we have in building up the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute for the training of the next generation of Messianic rabbis and scholars. For our leaders to stand under the title “rabbi,” they must be knowledgeable in the Torah, Rabbinics, Hebrew and Jewish studies.

One of the requirements given to Timothy by Rav Shaul in 1 Timothy 3 was that the elders of the congregations, rabbis and other leaders needed to be respected by those outside the congregation:

“And he [elder/rabbi] is to have a good name among those outside the messianic community, so that nothing may be said against him and he may not be taken by the designs of the Evil One” (1 Tim. 3:7, JNT).

If our “rabbis” are merely those individuals who self-apply the title or those who receive ordination without a solid background in Hebrew, Rabbinics, Torah and Jewish studies, then we are misusing a title with great meaning in the Jewish world and we are also allowing for the Messianic community to be open to disrespect before the larger Jewish world, because

our ignorance of Judaism and the norms of Jewish life without our faith claims relative to Yeshua being the Jewish Messiah become an issue.

By developing a strong Messianic Jewish educational system, we will allow for a future where we can have a mature Messianic Judaism that honors G-d and is infused by the power given us by Yeshua to live Torah.

***Sean Emslie** is a Messianic Jewish theologian. For the original article, visit .*