

I Love Jesus, But Don't Call Me Christian!

Messianic Jews believe in Jesus. Just don't call us Christian.

Charisma places accuracy at the forefront in each story we publish, but sometimes even our most carefully crafted words can send the wrong signal. This was the case in a recent article we published about Messianic Jews and Israel's statehood, which included the subheading, "These brave Christians are sharing the love of Jesus in Israel." With the exception of the word "brave" (Jews in Israel living out their faith in Yeshua are brave indeed), we've learned that the rest of the phrase could be damaging to Messianic Jews' vital task of making Yeshua real to Jewish people. Our friend Eitan Shishkoff, a Jewish believer and director of Tents of Mercy in the Galilee, graciously explains why in the following article.

As believers in God's Son, we stand at a crossroads today of two major developments rooted in our spiritual history. Each emerged from events that took place more than 40 years ago. One is the spiritual renewal that swept the world beginning in 1967. The other is the rebirth of Israel as a nation, highlighted by the recovery of Jerusalem as a Jewish city, also in 1967.

The late Bible teacher Derek Prince used the term "parallel restoration" to refer to this simultaneous restoring of God's full activity in the church and the resurrection of Israel from exile's oblivion. This awakening of both the church of Jesus and the Israel He loves constitutes nothing less than the preconditions for His second coming.

At this intersection is a curious figure: the Messianic Jew. His arrival coincides with the events of 1967. From that year on, the Spirit of God touched many searching young Jews, like

me, and we found Jesus. Then we returned to our Jewish heritage as New Testament disciples of Jesus, or in Hebrew, *Yeshua*.

Thus, the “Messianic Jewish movement” was born, giving rise to congregations founded to provide a spiritual home for Jewish and non-Jewish followers of *Yeshua* who want to celebrate the biblical Jewish roots of their faith.

We are a curiosity because we tear down the wall between Jews and Jesus erected by both church and synagogue. That wall is built on the foundational “rule” that says: “If you’re Jewish, you can’t believe in Jesus. If you do believe in Jesus, you’re no longer Jewish.”

This rule is the primary reason we had not discovered our Messiah in the centuries since His birth—and it was unintentionally affirmed in a recent issue of *Charisma*, for which I was interviewed as one of the Israeli believers. Messianic Jews truly appreciated being featured, but when I read the description of us as brave Christians sharing our faith in Israel, I was shocked.

I know the term “brave Christians” was meant as a serious compliment, but it simply is not our self-understanding. We have not converted to Christianity. We have returned to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through His Messiah, *Yeshua*.

Our life practice, residence in the land of Israel and testimony before our people are a collective reality, which is that Jesus has made us more Jewish than ever, and through Him we have come to deeply value and celebrate our biblical Jewish heritage in a fresh, Spirit-breathed way. This is our evangelism. This is the way we would like to be known.

Concerted campaigns in several Israeli cities have publicly condemned us as nothing more than a mission to convert Jews to Christianity. These accusations threaten relationships we’ve worked years to develop. They severely miscommunicate the

testimony of Yeshua, making Him irrelevant and undesirable to Israelis. This “turning Jews into Christians,” which was even strongly indicated by several references in the article, is patently not our aim.

So, if we are not bringing Israelis into Christianity, then what are we doing?

We are seeking with all our hearts to introduce our people to Yeshua, the Messiah promised by the prophets. We are rejoicing in the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy that God would make a new covenant with us. We are growing new houses of worship—not as missionary churches, but as indigenous, Hebrew-speaking, Yeshua-centered congregations in Israel.

I am grateful that *Charisma* regularly focuses stories on Israel. As Israelis and as Messianic Jews we are aware that not all Christians have acknowledged modern Israel as the dramatic fulfillment of biblical prophecy that it is. Many don’t know that more Jewish people embrace Jesus as the Messiah today than at any time since the first century. *Charisma stands with us.* Thank you!

How then do Israeli Messianic followers of Yeshua want to be known by the global church?

We want to be known as those who have come home. We’ve rejoined the nation of the patriarchs and the apostles.

Like Yeshua’s first disciples, we see ourselves as those who have neither rejected their heritage nor converted to another religion.

We are called by God to identify ourselves as New Covenant Jews, heralding the return of our King with the words, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt. 23:39, NKJV).

At the same time, we delight in the true brotherhood shared by

all His followers, Jew and non-Jew. We are one in the Spirit and sincerely covet your friendship and prayers.

Eitan Shishkoff *is the founder and director of Tents of Mercy, a network of Messianic congregations and humanitarian aid works in the Galilee region of Israel.*