

MESSIANIC JEWS

The Book of Acts describes a time of transition from Judaism to biblical Christianity. This transition is shown in many encouraging events and examples in the Acts, while the doctrinal impact of these things is taught in other parts of the New Testament. Sadly, in the history of the Church, many of these new biblical principles were soon neglected and even rejected. Towards the end of the Christian era, the days in which we live, a time of transition seems again to be taking place, but now in a different sense. The Lord is setting the stage for prophetic events with respect to Israel and the whole world, to occur at almost any time. The Church according to the Bible is composed of Jews and Gentiles taken out of this world, to be a testimony for God. After the Church's rapture (1 Th. 4:16-18) – those who merely profess to be Christians will be left behind – the Jewish remnant will have an important role to play in the coming prophetic events. They will help to prepare this world to be ruled by the Messiah (although a false Messiah will be on the scene first).

Opening Comments on the Messianic Movement

At this time it may be good to examine some of the things gleaned from newspaper articles, brochures, documents, magazines and websites from all kinds of Messianic groups¹ along with many books and tapes from, about, for and even against the Messianic movement. The subject is controversial, for various reasons, among Jewish as well as Christian communities. This phenomenon of a rapidly growing *Messianic testimony* is, at the same time, exciting and sometimes intriguing, as well as challenging for Bible-believing Christians. Why? Because we can possibly see in our day, God's hand at work in the fact that at the present, perhaps more Jewish people are being born again than ever before and many want to be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ (of *Yeshua Hamashiach*, as they often call Him). We are confronted with a variety of groups calling themselves Messianic Jews, *Jews for Jesus*, Jews confessing (Jesus as) the Messiah, Messianic Judaism and the like. Some consider themselves to be "born-again" Christians, although they are reluctant to use such terms. Others even refuse to be called Christians. Some see themselves as "completed Jews," whereas others have no objection to being called Hebrew Christians or Christian Jews. Some refuse to use the term *conversion* for the change of life and belief they have experienced. Others avoid the name Jesus but use the name *Yeshua* (*Yahweh is salvation*), often combined with the name *Hammashiach* (the Messiah).

An Interesting Phenomenon

A growing number meet and worship in Messianic synagogues – with a worship leader, a Messianic rabbi, including Messianic liturgy – or in Messianic congregations, as well as other forms of gathering, with various rules. Although they may use church buildings, they often prefer not to link themselves with a church or a denomination, apart from their own congregation of Messianic Jews (these will be called MJs in this chapter). Other MJs definitely identify with evangelical Christians. Theological training is sometimes given in a *Yeshiva* with Messianic Teachers and with special emphasis on Jewish roots and the Jewishness of the New Testament. Other MJs have been, or are being, trained in evangelical colleges, seminaries and universities. MJs can be found all over the world and are rapidly growing in numbers, especially over the last few decades. We may wonder then, why these MJs are considered and treated as outcasts by their

¹ For source materials and bibliography, see at the end of this study. We must distinguish these Messianic believers, who believe in Jesus the Messiah, from orthodox Jews, who sometimes call themselves Messianic, but who do not believe that the Messiah has ever come.

fellow-Jews and not well accepted by several “mainline” churches either. Some evangelical groups are very enthusiastic about this development of a growing Messianic community, whereas other Bible-believing Christians reject their basic belief-system. At any rate, a fascinating movement presents itself for our study and consideration. It is impossible in this brief overview to discuss the many theological implications of the points that have been mentioned and so only few observations and comments will be made.

What are Messianic Jews?

The issue “Who is a Jew?” divides the Jewish community in the land of Israel² as well as in the Diaspora (i.e. outside the land). Therefore, a definition of Hebrew Christians, or of Messianic Jews for that matter, is even more difficult. At this point, the reader is referred to chapter 7 of “Jesus was a Jew” and also to “Hebrew Christianity” written by Arnold Fruchtenbaum.³ He summarizes his thoughts on page 13: “By faith Hebrew Christians align themselves with other believers in Christ whether Jews or Gentiles, but nationally they identify themselves with the Jewish people.” In “How to be like the Messiah,” John Bell gives the following definition, “When a Jewish person accepts the promised Messiah according to the Jewish Scriptures, he becomes a Messianic Jew, in continuity with Moses and the prophets and the first-century believers in Jesus.”⁴ While we do not have much difficulty with these definitions (and notice, by the way, that there is no difference *in principle* between Hebrew or Jewish Christians and MJs)⁵ we certainly would have problems with those who say, “We haven’t (been) converted. We haven’t left Judaism. We’ve simply accepted our Messiah.”⁶ This is confusing, not only for Jews in general but also for Christians with a Gentile background and even for the MJs themselves because there is so much disagreement on many issues even within their own ranks.⁷ Some estimate that in the course of the 19th century between 200,000 and 300,000 Jews⁸ have been saved, accepting the Lord Jesus as their Messiah *and* Saviour. This number has increased during the 20th century. In past centuries, many of the Jewish believers gave up all links with their Jewish roots. As the custom was in the past, and sometimes still is today, the Jewish relatives of a “convert” who had been baptised would organize a funeral service and from then on consider their relative as dead: even when they might meet him or her on the street or in a public place. Today, the pendulum swings to another extreme. More and more Messianic Jews deny any link with biblical

² “According to a (1988) Dahaf poll, 78 percent of a random survey of 1,189 Jewish Israelis said that children of a Jewish mother who believe in Jesus but do not formally convert, and who claim to be Zionists, should be accepted as “olim.” This statement is quoted from *Salvation*, published by International Ministries to Israel, Chicago. It should be noted that Jews confessing Yeshua or Jesus are not longer considered to be Jews by the authorities or the general population.

³ Both titles are publications of *Ariel Ministries*, <http://www.ariel.org/>

⁴ From *Chosen People Publications* (1987) in Charlotte, NC.

⁵ Although in actual practice, there are many differences! The more “fanatic” MJ reproach their Jewish-Christian brethren that they have left their fold and should come back into the fold of Judaism, to be an effective testimony to the Jewish nation. They misinterpret passages like Luke 5:39 to support this view and say, “the old is better.” This implies that (biblical) Judaism would be better than (biblical) Christianity! We should, therefore, understand that differences exist between MJs trying to follow God’s Word and those MJs in man-made systems, who are opposing some of the clear teachings of the New Testament.

⁶ Rabbi Larry Freiberg in an interview with Ann Ledesma, “The Princeton Packet,” July 22, 1988.

⁷ As some Jews say, “When you have two Jews together you have three religions.”

⁸ In 1989, approximately 110,000 were called *MJs* and 140,000 *Hebrew Christians*. There is a clear trend to call them all *MJ*. These numbers do not give the total for the 20th century, but only the total estimated in 1989.

Christianity. Yet, as far as the Scriptures are concerned, they do belong to the “one Body” and also to “the great house” of the Christian profession (2 Tim. 2:19-22), but some refuse to see it that way. Others understand the principles in relation to the unity of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-6) and see themselves as part of it, whereas many genuinely born-again Jews refuse to be called Christians, even in the biblical sense of the word.⁹

A Brief Look at the History of Messianic Jews

1. MJs correctly trace their history back to Moses and Abraham. They understand that because of Christ’s coming and His accomplished work, many of the Old Testament promises have been fulfilled and that the foundation has been laid for the fulfilment of the other promises. Yet, many of them fail to understand that – based on the first coming of Christ, His sacrificial death, burial, resurrection and exaltation – God has introduced *a completely new order of things*, which ultimately resulted in a separation from Rabbinical and even biblical Judaism.¹⁰

2. Many MJs associate themselves with the “Nazarenes,” Messiah-believing Christians, as found in the books of Acts, James, Hebrews and Peter’s Epistles. Initially, they were considered by the Roman authorities to be just another Jewish sect, and were, more or less, tolerated as such.¹¹ The leadership among the Jewish believers encouraged them to accept Paul’s apostleship and ministry (cf. Acts 15; 2 Pet. 3:15-16). Nevertheless, the Jewish believers were divided as to Paul’s teachings and they still are today.

3. The overall picture which comes to us from the New Testament, as well as from history, is that the Jewish believers had a difficult time as they identified with the Messiah rejected by the Jewish leadership and crucified under Roman law. The Nazarenes remained a *sect* among the Jews, or at least they were considered as such and, in general, were usually rejected by their fellow Jews, although often respected. Especially after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and more so after the revolt of Bar Kochba in 132-135, it became even more difficult for Jewish believers to stay among their fellow-Jews. The question remains as to how far the Nazarenes represented biblical Christianity. Some clearly did not, like the Ebionites, the Essenes, and other groups.¹² On the other hand, the Gentile Christians exerted pressure on the Nazarenes as the influence of the Roman Emperor on them increased – even more so since the time of Constantine – not willing to identify with a people known to have always been “rebellious.” Thus, the public expressions of their Jewishness gradually diminished and ultimately almost disappeared. Yet, during the course of the centuries many Jews – a remnant according to God’s sovereign grace (Rom. 11:1-5), who for the time being are “the true Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) – have accepted the Lord Jesus as their Messiah and Saviour. The emphasis of the MJs on their Jewishness reappeared in the 19th and gradually increased during the 20th century and into our day, sometimes within biblical limits, sometimes going beyond them.

4. A movement among the MJs not only stresses their Jewish roots and identity, but with increased emphasis, also Jewish traditional forms and customs. The historical roots of this

⁹ However, see for example Hebrews 13:13-15; Acts 13:38-50; 19:9; 28:23-29 and the publications mentioned towards the end of this study and under General Reading, for a better understanding of their position.

¹⁰ For this position, see the “radical” teachings of the former Rabbi Saul of Tarsus. MJ overemphasize the fact that they were tolerated. Many details in the New Testament show that these “Nazarenes” were often persecuted by their fellow-Jews inside and outside the land.

¹¹ For more information, see Arnold Fruchtenbaum’s writings and also “Nazarene Jewish Christianity” by Ray A. Pritz, 1988 Leiden, E.J. Brill/ The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

¹² For more details, see “Modern Messianic Jewish History” (1987), Robert Winer (Mess-Jew. Alliance).

development can be traced to the end of the 19th and into the beginning of the 20th century, when the (International) Hebrew Christian Alliance started and Messianic Judaism was emphasized (the Holocaust decimated the Jewish population and after the war only a small percentage of MJs was left). In the 1970's there was a kind of revival, particularly in North America, with an emphasis on establishing Messianic Jewish Congregations. Today this movement is represented in many countries. In the USA and Canada, more than one-hundred Messianic synagogues or congregations already exist, besides groups which may be either more extreme or more moderate. Other more moderate MJs are associated with evangelical churches. Generally speaking, the emphasis on their Jewishness is increasing even while active in gospel work and teaching, using press, radio, TV, and the Internet. They publish a variety of magazines and books on all kinds of subjects. They have home Bible studies, organize conferences, musical performances, and so on. They are now also represented in many European countries, as well as in Israel, Argentina, Mexico, and South Africa. In 1990, the number of Messianic believers and Hebrew Christians was estimated at 350,000 (this figure probably includes Jewish Christians who identify with "Gentile" churches).

Some Points to Consider — Evaluation and Some Criticisms

Many true Messianic Jews, who are our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, fail to understand that Ephesians 2 does *not* teach – even though this is a view also held by many theologians – that Gentile believers have become partakers in the blessings of the Jewish covenants. (Although this is true *to a certain degree* as taught in Rom. 11, this is *not* the issue in Eph. 2). They do not see that Ephesians 2 teaches that believers from among the Jews and Gentiles, together, have been brought into blessings of a different character than biblical Judaism (Eph. 2:11-22). In other words, from Acts 2 and until the Rapture occurs, believers are introduced into a new order of things, which can be called "new things," planned by God from before the foundation of the world (2 Tim. 1:1, 9; cf. Acts 26:16-19; Gal. 3:14b). God has held these things in reserve from before the world's foundation, according to the promise of eternal life (Tit. 1:2; 3:7). This goes far beyond the Old Testament revelations, though not contradicting them, and is communicated through New Testament prophetic writings (Rom. 16:26, Eph. 3:3-12). At the same time, believers from among the Jews and Gentiles have *also* been introduced into the blessings of Abraham ("the old things") and it is in that sense that Gentile believers participate in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant (Gal. 3 and 4).

According to Romans 11 and 14, a certain room exists for Hebrew Christians, within the functioning of the Body of Christ, to express their Jewishness.¹³ According to the flesh they belong to Israel, as a remnant (Rom. 11:5) while, *at the same time*, being part of a new order of things "in Christ," in relation to the Church of the living God, united with Christ as a glorified Man in heaven. However, placing the ministry of the apostle Paul on the same level with those who stayed in Jerusalem, *as if Paul had not received further light from the glorified Messiah* is part of the problem. Paul shared what he had learned about the glorified Messiah and what He had shown him (Eph. 3:1-12) with the other apostles (and they accepted his ministry) and with the Hebrew Christians.

Their Good Points – Yet, Confusion between Things Earthly and Heavenly

There are many things for which MJ may be commended: their zeal, their enthusiasm, their commitment, and their creativity. On the other hand, many of them display a mixture of biblical teachings with human traditions, even rabbinical teachings – which is usually wrong, though not always – and there is sometimes a mixture of the things of the Spirit of God with the things of the

¹³ Paul often practiced this using his Christian liberty to identify himself with his nation... but not with the Judaistic rabbinical system that rejected Christ (e.g. Heb. 1:1; 2:1-3; Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:5-8; 28:20).

flesh, especially in the Pentecostal / Charismatic sections of the MJs. Confusion exists as to important New Testament principles, like church organization, appointed elders, “worship leaders,” the role of women in public ministry and teaching.

For true solutions and remedies, it is recommended that John’s Gospel should be studied, as well as the Epistle to the Hebrews. Both books present a special theme, which we could call, “Christ is greater than” John’s Gospel provides a presentation of Christ’s greatness which surpasses the great things expressed in Judaism, including Moses (1:17) and John the Baptist (1:26-27). The Son of man (His universal title) is even greater than the Messiah of Israel (1:49-51). He is greater than the temple (2:20-20). *Heavenly* things introduced by Christ, are greater than the earthly things, although He presents and maintains these as well (3:12-13). He is greater than Jacob (4:11-14) and greater than God’s gracious dealings shown at the pool of Bethesda (ch. 5). Christ is greater than the manna (ch. 6) and even greater than the highest feast in Judaism (ch. 7). John’s presentation of the Messiah draws people to Jesus (or Yeshua), who gives eternal life and who is God blessed over all (Jn. 20:31; Rom. 9:5). He delivers believers from Christ rejecting Judaism and from any man-made religious system, as Hebrews definitely confirms.¹⁴

Many MJs are sound as to a number of basic New Testament doctrines. On the other hand, some of their theological principles are not sound at all because of this zeal to emphasize their Jewishness. For example, some MJ say that *the Shema* (Dt. 6:4) is the completed revelation of God¹⁵ which, in the way it is written, implies that there could be no further revelation. This implicitly denies that, with the coming of Christ, God inaugurated a new order of things (Jn. 1:17). The statement of faith of the Messianic Jewish Alliance says, “The complement to this revelation was given to us in the New Covenant.” This statement is in direct conflict with the teachings of the New Testament (Eph. 2-4; Col. 3; Hebrews), which were given after the rejection of the Messiah, introducing something that *surpasses* the promises to Abraham regarding a new covenant, promises that are still to be fulfilled. It also places the new covenant on the same level as the old by saying that the new is only a complement. Furthermore, the new covenant will be established *in the future* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (Jer. 31:31), not with the *present-day* believers taken from among the Jews and Gentiles.¹⁶ Moreover, MJs consider themselves as being formally under the new covenant and thus under the future blessings which God will give them when He inaugurates the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, many think that speaking in tongues and healings are an essential part of their movement.¹⁷ It is true that Christians are participants of the New Covenant’s spiritual blessings (cf. 2 Cor. 3-4).

¹⁴ In the parables of the old and the new garment, the wineskins and the new wine, the Lord warned against a mixture of the two systems. Judaism, once given by God, had rejected the Christ of the Scriptures and was now rejected by Him. This should not be mixed with biblical Christianity, as God intended this for believers from among both the Jews and Gentiles. After *the nation* had rejected the heavenly Christ also (Acts 7), the Lord dealt with Jewish persons on an individual basis and led them outside their community. This was *illustrated* in the Gospel by the healing of the blind man in two phases (Mk. 8:22-26). Many MJs, as well as many non-Jewish believers, are greatly affected by Phariseean and Herodian leaven (religious and political influence). They see men walking as trees (first phase of the healing) instead of seeing clearly, i.e. seeing all things in relation to God and Christ. Instead of allowing room for the greatness of the natural man, the Lord Jesus gave the blind man an understanding of Who He was, as the healed man looked up to see Him, and then when he saw everything in relation to Him (second phase of the healing).

¹⁵ See *Statement of faith*, Messianic Jewish Alliance.

¹⁶ Under Messiah’s public reign, Gentiles will have an important role (e.g. Isa. 66:18; Zech. 14:16), but Israel, with their Messiah, will be the head of the nations (Dt. 28:13).

¹⁷ It is important to distinguish this from a correct application of these sign gifts according to New Testament principles.

Misunderstandings, Conflicts and Inconsistencies

Misunderstandings easily arise, not only between Gentile Christians and MJs, but also between them and representatives of Judaism in its different mainline groups, as well as with leaders of nominal professing Christianity. MJs face many misunderstandings, contradictions and conflicts within their own ranks as well. Therefore, we must be very careful in our statements, declarations and studies, and we should double-check many things before giving an evaluation of the MJs and their theology in the light of God's revealed Word. Following are just a few examples:

Conversion – This term is often used for formal conversion to Christianity. We understand that MJs don't like this term because of the thoughts associated with it, like forced "conversions" in the days of the Inquisition. Or because of other forms of pressure to "convert" and the shame that this brings, even today, when Jewish relatives understand that one of them has left their "fold." On the other hand, it is not correct to stay inside the fold of Judaism (Jn. 10:3-5, 16; Heb. 13:10-15), in the sense of exclusively belonging to it. This does not set aside the principle of a remnant in Israel today, as we have seen earlier. However, the biblical concept of repentance and conversion, in its inward and outward aspects, including water-baptism, should never be given up.

Circumcision – This practice should be rejected when it is imposed as a means of salvation (Christ + circumcision) for both Jews and Gentiles. We could accept it when practised by Jewish believers who want to continue in the line of *God's promises to Abraham*, provided their motives are right, although they have to realize that the spiritual meaning of these things counts more before God than the literal, outward application. To some there seems to be a problem when these outward things are practised for tradition's sake or only to emphasize Jewishness (professing Christians are guilty of similar things, as for instance, literal feet washing, Christian traditions and holidays). Today, any Christian man has the option of being circumcised, for example for health reasons, but if it is done to demonstrate one's Judaism or for religious reasons, this is questionable (see Paul's teachings in Rom. 2:25-29; 4:9-12; 1 Cor. 7:18-19; Col. 2:11-13; Phil. 3:3).

Inconsistency – MJs rightly reject "covenant-theology" as this theological system spiritualizes God's promises to Israel and claims them for the Church (replacement theology). However, MJs see themselves as those with whom God has already made the New Covenant, and this is not correct either (for more details, see my study on the New Covenant). Another example of confusion is the statement "Zionism is the sister-movement to Messianic Judaism" (MJAA folder).¹⁸ Although we may sympathize with the Zionist movement from a human perspective, it represents the return to the Promised Land in unbelief. We must understand that their self-realization or self-actualization programs are deeply humanistic. Such views and efforts will ultimately lead to the acceptance of the "man of sin," replacing the true God. All the great things which have been realised, in independence of God, are still going to be destroyed in the Great Tribulation.¹⁹ Let us therefore, not be overly enthusiastic about the things which have been achieved, although we may recognize God's hand in them *in His providence*. Only after the Rapture *God will identify Himself publicly* with the prophetic remnant: with those Jews who will be born again and who will cast themselves entirely on God (Mt. 23:39; Zeph. 3:12).

¹⁸ See also *Statement of faith*, Messianic Jewish Alliance.

¹⁹ The magnificent temple complex, renovated and enlarged under Herod and his successors, was destroyed in 70 AD only a few years after its completion. Similarly, the third temple will be built and then quickly destroyed (Dan. 9:27) after idolatry is set up in it (2 Th. 2:4, 8; Rev. 13:11-18). Idolatry caused the destruction of the first temple under Nebuchadnezzar.

A Sound and Biblical Response is needed

In view of the above issues, questions and positions, it is suggested that our response should be marked by several elements.

Compassion – As in the attitude of compassion demonstrated in the prodigal son’s father, even towards the older brother (Lk. 15:20-32).

Understanding – In the process of spiritual growth, many things must be experienced before spiritual maturity is reached. Understanding this, we can be patient (cf. Eph. 4:2).

Sympathy – Realising the debt the world owes the Jews because of all the misdeeds and crimes committed against them, Christians should show sympathy towards the Jews in general, conscious also of the fact that God used them to give us the Bible, the Messiah, and salvation (Jn. 4:22b). We also have a debt to our Jewish fellow-believers, for through them, God gave us the New Testament scriptures and many marvellous blessings (Rom. 15:27). Yet many of them have suffered much at the hands of the “Christian” profession, both under the Inquisition as well as under Protestantism. Non-believing Jews were persecuted as well as born-again Jewish believers.

Firmness – We must be uncompromising as to true doctrine. No “deal” can be allowed when it comes to fundamental issues, but meanwhile, we need to understand the difference between essentials and non-essentials (cf. Rom. 14:1-15:7). Over-emphasizing Jewishness will lead to divisive actions. The enemy can use anything to divide believers.

Appreciation – A work of the Holy Spirit is evident in many MJs, despite various failures and shortcomings. Thus, thankfulness towards God with respect to these souls is appropriate.²⁰

The Danger of “Mixing” Things

Many Christians have little or no understanding of the biblically sound, dispensational approach to these matters. They risk mixing or blending the Old and New Testament together. A careful study of Paul’s epistles and Hebrews should keep us from falling into the errors that are often found among Messianic believers and groups. Romans 9-11 explains that there are basic and continuing differences between Israel and the Church. In Galatians, Paul solemnly warns against mixing the Mosaic Law with the grace of God as revealed in the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his allegory (Gal. 4:21-31), Paul contrasted the two systems in seven sets of opposites. In Hebrews, the Jewish believers were repeatedly warned, not to go back to Judaism. Instead of doing so, or of mixing Judaism with biblical Christianity, they were encouraged (and so are we today) to appreciate the new position “in Christ” and the blessings that God has given through and in the Messiah, the One rejected by man but exalted and glorified by God (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:1-6; 6:1-12; 7:11-22; 8:1-6; 9:11-15; 10:1-10; 10:26-29; 11:18-24; 12:18-29; 13:10-14). God’s grace, displayed in the Church (distinct from Judaism and the Gentile world, 1 Cor. 10:32), represents something entirely new in God’s ways and implies that there is “no difference” between the true Christian from either a Jewish background or a Gentile one (Rom. 3:22; 10:12) because grace is shown to all, whether under law or without law.

Evaluation and Questions about the Messianic Movement

Considering the whole MJ movement, it may be suggested that we are living in a transitional period, a movement “in reverse.” The history of the Church started with a Judaistic form of the New Testament Church, where worship in the temple (although the veil had been rent) went on together with the breaking of bread in the homes of the believers. This Judaic form of worship, practised by Jewish Christians, stopped shortly before the destruction of the temple when they left Jerusalem, as instructed by Hebrews. Even after these terrible events, the Nazarenes stayed

²⁰ See “Jesus for Jews, A Messianic Jewish Perspective” (1987) and “Jewish Doctors Meet the Great Physician” (1998), both by Ruth Rosen (Editor), *Jews for Jesus*, San Francisco, CA.

among their fellow-Jews until they gradually were forced to leave. Today, the Nazarenes “appear” again, under the form of (certain types of) Messianic Jews and some are ushering in a similar situation as at the beginning.

Sometimes the question is asked, are these MJs the forerunners of the future Jewish remnant which will exist after the Rapture? First, we must realize that all Jewish people who are saved and have come to the knowledge of the truth – from Pentecost to the Rapture – belong to the Church of the living God, which is composed of believers from among the Jews and from among the Gentiles (Acts 10-11; Eph. 2:12-22; Rev. 5:9). MJs who are truly born-again during that period, therefore, belong to the same universal Church/Assembly/Ecclesia, according to the teaching of the New Testament. They also form a special identity within Israel, as a “remnant” (Rom. 11:5), called “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16; in the Millennium of peace, this term refers to Israel as a nation). All these believers will be “raptured” or snatched away (1 Th. 4:14-18) and so they do not belong to the future Jewish remnant that God will have in the period between the Rapture and His Reign. Yet, a secret work of the Spirit of God *may* have started *to prepare* the prophetic remnant already, as it will come into existence some time soon after the rapture of the Church, and they will be publicly identified as such.²¹ But the Scriptures are silent about the issue raised at the beginning of this paragraph. There is only one thing we do know: somehow and somewhere, those Jewish believers will be there, sometime after the Rapture. Once God starts a work to form this prophetic remnant, He will continue and complete it, as He did with Cornelius and others (cf. Phil. 1:6). However, one thing is certain: those who have heard the present truth of the gospel of grace and rejected it, will not have a second chance (1 Th. 2:14-16; 2 Th. 2:10-12).

Should we accept Messianic Judaism? Many studies have been written about this, both for and against this movement.²² God, in His sovereign grace, can and does use many ways and methods to save people. However, when Judaism is mixed with biblical Christianity we have to take a firm stand as fundamental issues are at stake. For example, the teachings of the Epistle to the Galatians (the way of salvation) or of Hebrews (outside the camp) need to be strictly kept. MJs, in general, accept Paul’s apostleship and ministry, but there is an increasing tendency towards “Judaizing.” Furthermore, many MJs are not clear as to the biblical meaning of the “mystery” of the true Church, called from among the Jews and Gentiles. Sadly, this is the case with many Gentile Christians as well.

Notes and Bibliography on Messianic Jews

Against the Messianic movement: “Messianic Judaism, or Judaizing Christianity,” by David Baron, a Jewish Christian, at the beginning of the 20th century. In this paper he discussed several fundamental issues. It was republished by International Ministries to Israel (formerly A.A.J.E.) in their magazine “Salvation.”

A moderate, often biblical, Messianic position is represented by Arnold Fruchtenbaum. Besides the books mentioned above, see especially his Ph.D. thesis “Israelology: The Missing Link in

²¹ We hear of cases in the very centre of the strictest and most orthodox Jewish circles that an isolated person really believes that our Lord Jesus is his/her Messiah. We leave with God the question whether faithful Jewish people who believe in God may be born again. Personally, I would say not, because all believers today (from the day of Pentecost till the Rapture) belong to the Church of the living God. However, we do not know whether God will include a period of *transition* before the Rapture takes place; in that case, there might one day be Jewish believers in God, forming the nucleus of the prophetic future remnant.

²² Not only by non-Jewish, but also by Jewish Christians, some of whom are mentioned in the following paragraphs. After writing this overview, I saw, “How Jewish is Christianity?” (Two views on the Messianic movement, Zondervan, 2003), which substantiates my concerns about divisions and contrasting views.

Systematic Theology”; “Messianic Christology” and “Footsteps of the Messiah.” These studies provide many interesting points, generally acceptable and well balanced, although there are things which are debatable and sometimes questionable, as is the case with some of his other publications and tapes, through *Ariel Ministries*. The emphasis is on teaching and discipleship, generally sound, and the proclamation of the gospel, to the Jews first and also to the Gentiles. Located in San Antonio, TX, they have recently redesigned their website: <http://www.ariel.org/>

A *more extreme* (often unbiblical) position is represented by Daniel C. Juster, president of the Union of Messianic Congregations; John Fischer (Menorah Ministries), and many others. Together with MJAA, a fast-growing “denomination” within MJ.

Even more extreme: “Foundations of Messianic Judaism” by Robert W. Benbow (T’Shuvah Ministries).

Slightly Messianic, but with a growing emphasis on Messianism or a Messianic identity:

1. *The Chosen People Ministries* (formerly A.B.M.J.), headquarters in Charlotte, NC. The oldest organization of its kind in modern American history. Emphasis on the Gospel and Hebrew/Jewish/Messianic/Christian witness.
2. *International Board of Jewish Missions*; founder Jacob Gartenhaus; conservative Baptist.
3. *Jews for Jesus*, with Moishe Rosen, president. This organisation works with Moody Bible Institute and Fuller Seminary and is a fast growing organization. It is less “conservative,” more open to contacts in different directions, i.e. either “Church-type” or “Messianic Congregation,” but tending to the latter. They organize gospel presentations through concerts. These three organisations emphasize the proclamation of the gospel, to the Jews first and also to the Gentiles, for which they can be commended.

Evangelical Christians, not publicly identifying with the Messianic movement as such, are represented in:

1. *The Christian Friends of Israel*, publishing “Israel My Glory,” with tracts and brochures. Besides effective gospel ministry, their special emphasis on sound biblical teaching, with the Institute for Biblical studies; they cooperate with Moody Bible Institute.
2. *International Ministries to Israel*, well-known among evangelical Christians (H.A. Ironside was its president for many years, under the name A.A.J.E.), publishing a magazine called “Salvation,” as well as tracts and books.

General Reading – Besides Books Already Referred To

1. “Exploring the World of the Jew” by John Phillips (Moody).
2. “Israel, At the Centre of History & Revelation” by Ch. Feinberg (Multnomah).
3. “The Messiah-ship of Jesus” by Arthur W. Kac (Moody).
4. “Christianity is Jewish” by Edith Schaeffer (Tyndale).
5. “The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah” Alfred Edersheim (Eerdmans).
6. “Introducing the Jewish People to Their Messiah” (1977) ABMJ.
7. “Y’shua, The Jewish Way to Say Jesus” by Moishe Rosen, 1982 (Moody).
8. “Famous Hebrew Christians” by Jacob Gartenhaus (Baker, 1979).

Books of general importance in relation to the discussed matters:

9. “The True Worship” by J.S. Blackburn. Central Bible Hammond Trust, UK.
10. “Synopsis of the Books of the Bible” by J.N. Darby. BBS, USA or Canada.
11. Four volumes on the New Testament by F.B. Hole, CBHT, UK.

(Many more titles, articles, brochures, tapes, could be mentioned).²³

Epilogue

There is a lot of confusion about the relationship, according to Biblical standards, between Christians and the Jewish people, and also with respect to Israel as a nation or a state. The following statements from Newell's commentary on Revelation are worthy of consideration. Believers today need to be faithfully warned regarding their attitude as to the Jews. Some thoughts are reproduced for our encouragement as follows:

1. "They should not join at all in that Gentile envy and hate lying at the root of 'anti-Semitism.'"
2. They should not give special place to Jews, even Jewish believers, as such.
3. They should glorify God for the 'remnant according to the election of grace,' among them, now being saved.
4. They should remember that the most of the nation is to be cut off as apostate before the Millennium sets in.
5. They should believe that God's words in Romans 3:22-23, and 10:12 are true today: 'there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,' and, 'there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.' Jewish sinners, Irish sinners, American sinners, Hottentot sinners. Hindu sinners, English sinners, Scotch sinners; no difference at all! Just sinners, all!
6. They should understand that the nation Israel has not changed. It remains in spiritual death and blindness and enmity toward God. When the opportunity offers, the majority of the Jews will go over openly to Antichrist, as we well know from Daniel 9:27, Isaiah 28:14-15, and many other plain prophecies.
7. We do well to have 'great sorrow' for them as did Paul in Romans 9; to remember that nationally they are 'beloved for the fathers' sake'; and to labour to reach them. But it is folly to close our eyes to their blinded, deadly state! The nation that crucified Christ, stoned Stephen, and most bitterly hated and opposed the gospel of grace preached by Paul, remains unchanged. The fountain for sin and for uncleanness is not yet open for them nationally, nor will it be until 'that day' of Zechariah 12:10 to 13:1, when, beleaguered by all the hostile nations of earth, and in despair, they at last 'look upon him whom they pierced,' and fall into such mourning as has never been known! They will not believe until they see." (William R. Newell, Revelation Chapter-by-Chapter).

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²³ For more information, please contact the organisations mentioned, their publishing houses, or their authors. See also my *Outline on Galatians*, at: <http://www.theholyscriptures.org/alfredbouter/>