

## What is Messianic Judaism??

Messianic Judaism is a Biblically based movement of people who, as committed Jews, believe in Yeshua (Jesus) as the Jewish Messiah of Israel of whom the Jewish Law and Prophets spoke. To many this seems a glaring contradiction. Christians are Christians, Jews are decidedly not Christian. So goes the understanding that has prevailed through nearly two thousand years of history. Messianic Jews call this a mistaken - and even anti-Scriptural - understanding. Historical and Biblical evidence demonstrates that following Yeshua was initially an entirely Jewish concept. Decades upon decades of persecution, division, and confused theology all contributed to the dichotomy between Jews and believers in Yeshua that many take for granted today.

### FIRST CENTURY BELIEVERS IN YESHUA

Two thousand years ago Yeshua was a Jew living among Jewish people. "Yeshua," by which Jesus was called during his time on earth, is itself a Hebrew word for "Salvation." Yeshua kept Torah, or the Law of Moses. He studied the Jewish Scriptures that many now know as the "Old Testament," and read them aloud at the local synagogue on Shabbat (Luke 4:16). He was called rabbi (Teacher/Master) by his followers.

"Think not that I came to abolish the law and the prophets: I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them." - Yeshua, Matthew 5:17

After His death and resurrection, His following increased. From the book of Acts and other historical evidence, many believe that in the first century A.D. hundreds of thousands of Jews followed His teachings (Acts 2:41, 2:47, 4:4, 6:7, 9:31, 21:20), and established Messianic Synagogues throughout the Roman Empire and beyond (James 1:1, 2:2).

One of the first debates these early disciples faced seems ironic to us now: Could non-Jews participate in the community of Yeshua's followers without becoming Jews? At the very birth of Judaism, God had told Abraham that He would bless all nations of the earth through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 12:3). Accordingly, the apostolic council in Acts 15 decided that non-Jews could follow Yeshua without converting to Judaism.

Many factors intervened in the following years. Believers in Yeshua suffered increased opposition from both Roman authorities and Jewish synagogue leaders. As more and more Gentiles came to accept this faith and as the original Jewish apostles passed away, the Jewishness of that first-century faith was gradually lost.

### MODERN MESSIANIC JUDAISM

Though Messianic Judaism itself dates back to Yeshua's twelve apostles, its "resurrection" is a relatively new phenomenon.

In the late 1800s, after several large-scale "revivals" among protestant believers in the United States and Europe, many Christians sought to tell Jewish people about Yeshua, or Jesus. Even as some Jewish people in Europe began to desire to return to the land of Israel and establish a permanent Jewish homeland there, the Lord stirred many Jews to look at the so-called "Christian Bible," or New Testament Scriptures, for themselves.

Centuries of continuing anti-Semitism in the name of Jesus had left the Jewish community skeptical. But some Jewish men and women did become followers of Yeshua during this time. In the following decades whole congregations of Jewish believers in Jesus were born. This movement was dubbed "Hebrew Christianity."

"They are the Israelites, and to them belong the Son-ship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Messiah!" - Rabbi Sha'ul (Apostle Paul), Romans 9:4-5).

"Hebrew Christianity" has since become known as "Messianic Judaism." There are now tens of thousands of Messianic Jews in the United States alone; some estimate as many as 1.2 million. Messianic synagogues are springing up in almost every major city across the U.S., and Messianic Judaism is quickly growing in other nations throughout North and South America, Europe, Oceania, and the former Soviet republics.

Christianity later became the state religion of the Roman Empire. Eventually an anti-Semitic view of the Messiah's life and death became accepted theology in Christian Europe for hundreds of years. Messianic Jews recognize that their existence is entirely due to God's intervention on behalf of His Jewish people. Messianic Judaism is part of the fulfillment of God's many Scriptural promises of eternal love and faithfulness to Israel.

### THE MESSIANIC JEWISH IDENTITY

The "Messianic Jewish identity" is wholly dependent on the person of Yeshua: God Himself comes to earth to reconcile the Jewish people and all nations to Himself. (See our Statement of Faith to find out more.)

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." - Isaiah 53:6

The foundation of Messianic Judaism, therefore, is each individual's personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through Messiah Yeshua. In the Hebrew Law God clearly demands a blood sacrifice for the remittance of sins. Each Messianic Jew recognizes his or her own sinfulness and has accepted that Yeshua Himself provided this sacrifice.

Another important aspect of the Messianic Jewish movement is Jewish congregational worship. If Yeshua really is the Jewish Messiah of whom all the Jewish Law and Prophets spoke, then it is the most Jewish thing in the world to follow Him! **Should Jews really attempt to assimilate into churches and forego their Jewish identity when they choose to put their faith in the Jewish Messiah? Messianic Judaism answers, "No!"**

As Yeshua Himself embraced His Jewishness, Messianic Jews seek to embrace theirs, by meeting in congregational communities with other Jewish believers and by maintaining a Biblically Jewish expression of their faith. Every congregation is different, but this expression often means worshiping in Hebrew, following Mosaic Law, dancing as King David did before the Lord, and keeping Biblical holidays such as Pesach, Sukkot, or Shavuot.

Also important is Messianic Judaism's ministry to both the Jewish community and the Christian body of believers. Messianic Jews are part of the larger Body of Messiah throughout the world, and Messianic Jews hope to help all believers in Yeshua to better understand the Jewish roots of their faith. Finally, Yeshua declared that no-one can come to the Father - the God of Israel - except through Him (John 14:6). Messianic Jews seek to share this way, this truth, and this life with their Jewish brothers and sisters.