Chapter Six: Messianic Gentiles and the Effect of Communicative Influences

Jew-be-lation

Lewis Rambo (1993) recalled an encounter he had with a man caught in a spiritual transition between what he had been with what he hoped to become. Feeling awkward and ill-at-ease for some years, the man tried to square the seemingly contradictory elements of two faiths, until one key notion was communicated to him that relieved much of his conflict. As Rambo conveyed it:

I once talked to a man who reported that he had been reared Southern Baptist yet he had never been comfortable with that tradition. When he became an adult he discovered that most of his friends were Jewish. For several years he attended various synagogues but was not quite sure how to reconcile his understanding of Jesus with Judaism. One day at temple, the answer came. The rabbi delivered a sermon in which he asked, Where would Jesus be most comfortable if he came to San Francisco tonight? Would Jesus feel at home at Saint Mary’s Cathedral (Roman Catholic), Grace Cathedral (Episcopal), or at other churches in the city? Finally the rabbi asserted that Jesus would surely feel most at home in that very synagogue. This statement confirmed to the discontented Baptist that he too was most at home in the synagogue. Even though this event was not a thunderous revelation or a dramatic turning point for him, it generated an insight that enabled him to begin the formal process of becoming a Jew. (Rambo, 1993, p. 145)

It is important to note that the man’s conflict involved reconciling his understanding of Jesus with Judaism. Despite his displeasure with a Southern Baptist expression of faith, he evidently was not comfortable with a total repudiation of Jesus.
Paradoxically, it was the rabbi that affirmed the cultural connection between Judaism and Jesus, thus allowing the man to conclude that if Jesus would be comfortable in the synagogue, he may be also. To some extent, Judaism provided a degree of identification with Jesus and Jesus with Judaism. Although some may find such a rationale not without fault, it is nevertheless, a common perspective shared by each gentile interviewed for this chapter—a perspective found all the more conducive in the Messianic realm.

**Communicative Influences on Gentiles**

As noted previously in Chapter Five, it is *collective* circumstances, many of them communicative in nature, that typically lead to an individual’s spiritual transformation, for seldom does one event produce a dramatic religious change by itself, although admittedly, it may sometimes superficially appear so (Rambo, 1993, p.46). What is more likely is that a high impacting moment is the dramatic result of a preceding series of seemingly less significant, low impacting occurrences communicated by various means. For example, the seemingly low impacting moment that held sway in Rambo’s (1993) example of the rabbi’s words affecting the Southern Baptist man, “was not a thunderous revelation or a dramatic turning point” (p. 145). still, it proved an important contribution in the man being enabled to *make sense* of his spiritual transformation. The “discontented Baptist” (p. 145) had struggled hitherto with sense-making issues.

In the following interviews, we shall encounter gentiles whose progression to an involvement with Messianic Judaism involved their own sense-making challenges. We will learn that their commitment stemmed, in part, from such diverse matters as personal contacts, the flipping through the pages of a book, an earthquake, a vivid dream, liner notes on a compact disc, a vision, and the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. What is
important to note, is that in each example, where the interviewees experienced uncertainty, they sought order and clarity. Such sense-making became an integral part of their assessing the communicative influences that aided in their changing views of their faith.

**The Array of Gentiles**

Although gentiles that function within Messianic Judaism have been a considered factor for understanding the movement's struggle with identity and expansion (Berger, 2000; Cohn-Sherbook, 2000; Dein, 2009; Feher, 1998; Harris-Shapiro, 1992; Rausch, 1982; Sobel, 1974; Stokes, 1994; Wasserman, 1997) to date, they have not received extensive attention in terms of their individuality, nor in terms of the communicative influences that initially attracted them to Messianic Judaism. With this in mind, I have provided an array of fifteen distinctive gentiles that help to dispense with broad-brushed nonspecific notions of the *generic* gentile.

Of the gentiles interviewed six were male and nine female. They were comprised of twelve Caucasians, two African-Americans and one African-Caribbean. Five of the selected persons were married to Jewish spouses, eight were married to fellow gentile spouses and two were single. Their educational levels ranged from barely functional with a special needs high school diploma to a Ph.D., while the majority of persons had attained regular high school diplomas, baccalaureate or graduate degrees. Their socio-economic standing ranged from one person receiving public assistance to one living a country-club lifestyle permitting multiple trips abroad each year.

As with the preceding chapter addressing Messianic Jews, I have allowed the interviewees to be considered in their own terms of expression. Their words are presented
in succinct segments that permit insight while moving their individual narratives forward. As established in Chapter Five, in keeping with most interviewees' desire for anonymity, I continue the practice of heading each section with an alias instead of a true name.

I remind the reader, that we shall return to the profiled Messianic Gentiles (and Messianic Jews that preceded them in Chapter Five) for further analysis in the next chapter. At such time, the material of necessity, will be categorized and separated into subtopics for the purpose of comparison. In the event that the voices and circumstances of interviewees may appear fragmented, one may refer back to the fuller narrative found in the two preceding chapters, which includes this one.

Elizabeth Cheston

Elizabeth Cheston was born in Anderson, Indiana—the same town associated with the establishing of one of the Church of God denominations. ¹⁸⁴ Her father was a pastor in that denomination, which required them to move frequently. Often feeling dislocated in faith and place, a comfort for her was music. She sings beautifully. In her disrupted life at least music was consistent. Elizabeth recalled that in her childhood she never felt secure with God because she thought him to be, "Loving and caring but also very vindictive—if I wasn’t perfect I wasn’t going to make it to heaven" (personal communication, July 6, 2009).

She often felt despondent as a child and suffered with severe depression during her high school years. Her mother told her that if she was depressed it was because there

¹⁸⁴ There are a variety of denominations in the United States claiming the title Church of God. They have come to be distinguished by the cities of their origin or by the locations of their headquarters, hence there is the Church of God – Huntsville, Alabama; Church of God – Chattanooga, Tennessee, Church of God – Cleveland, Tennessee and the Church of God – Anderson, Indiana. This last entry was Elizabeth's church of rearing. It is not Pentecostal, yet strives to be a first century style church in that it practices the Lord's Supper, foot washing and baptism by immersion (Mead, 1990).
was something wrong in her spiritual walk. She recalled, "The more I got depressed the more I would pray... it would be a vicious cycle" (personal communication, July 6, 2009). She was told that all issues were resolved by obedience to God.

Her father taught her that when she had questions about life she was to look for the answer in the Bible. This she did diligently. However, she discovered that one particular question she had about her Christian life did not jibe with any scriptural mandate—the Sabbath. Her parents became angry at her persistently enquiring why they worshipped on Sunday as opposed to Saturday. At age eighteen, this resulted in her being severely punished. Feeling humiliated, she enrolled in Anderson College, but was not happy for she felt the tyranny of perfectionism. "I had to be perfect, and if I wasn't perfect I wasn't good enough... I wasn't good enough for Daddy if I wasn't perfect" (personal communication, July 6, 2009).

Elizabeth's insecurity with her father found a parallel in her concept of God. With a soft and hesitant voice she said, "When I was doing well and I was perfect He loved me and if I wasn't perfect I needed more prayer or more spiritual maturity, more of this or more of that. I just never really felt like I was good enough" (personal communication, July 6, 2009).

She found a refuge from psychological torment in her studies. However, within a few semesters she was severely injured in a car accident requiring her to quit college. With her face in multiple stitches and her car destroyed—seemingly precluding any immediate independence—she started to plan her suicide. However, she was afraid to kill herself because her church had taught her that suicide was murder and that she would go to hell. With no funds after recovery, she decided to join the Navy, through which she
met her future husband, who was an Episcopalian. Together, the newlyweds attended chapel services and Bible studies on base. Once she was out of the Navy, at thirty years of age, Elizabeth gave birth to their first son, and the couple started attending Church of the Nazarene churches.

After having moved to Virginia, their son developed learning difficulties and it was suggested that the issue might be a matter of diet. If meat was the potential problem, Elizabeth wanted to know about recipes and such. A friend mentioned that Seventh Day Adventists were vegetarians. Elizabeth was interested, but even more excited to learn that the denomination met on Saturdays. However, after visiting an SDA church she felt negative about the experience recalling:

"I barely made it through the first service, their doctrines and their preaching and the man who spoke just scared the liver out of me and I knew I would never go there again—but, by then my appetite had been wetted. I knew if there was one denomination that worshiped on Saturday there had to be more... I fell on my face before the Lord literally [when] I went home—laid on my bed and said, "Lord, I can't worship with those people, but where there's one group [that meets on Saturday] there is more—help me find them" and they found me! (personal communication, July 6, 2009)

Elizabeth was contacted a month later by a representative of Beth Messiah that

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185 The Church of the Nazarene is closely related to the teachings of John Wesley in the holiness and sanctification tradition. They do not permit drinking or smoking, believe in divine healing (although not at the exclusion of regular medical practices) and are quite evangelistic (Mead, 1990).
186 Seventh Day Adventists historically stem from the Millerite movement. Today they are considered evangelical conservatives with some unique aspects including worshipping on Saturdays, dietary restrictions and a belief in soul sleep (Braswell, 1986; Mead, 1990).
187 Elizabeth could not specify what doctrinal elements she found offensive, yet clearly she recoiled at the general atmosphere as she perceived it.
had heard that she gave vocal music lessons. The synagogue had a need for someone to work with some of their home-schooled children to teach them Jewish songs. Elizabeth was hired and was thrilled to discover that there were Jewish people that believed in Yeshua/Jesus and moreover, that met on Saturdays.

Raised by Christian parents that placed emphasis on the biblical history of the Hebrews, Elizabeth had developed a heightened awareness of Jews co-mingled with horrific images from World War II seen on television and in school. She recalled:

My impression was that Jewish people were the Chosen People of God and that they were our brothers and sisters and we were just grafted in. We were adopted. I was actually one of the most well taught people—I feel now. When I hear some of the other doctrines that people grew up with I’m very impressed that my Dad taught me that the Jewish people were the Chosen People of God and they are down trodden . . . and when they are down trodden . . . God is not happy.

(personal communication, July 6, 2009)

It is evident from her words, that Elizabeth developed a view of the Jewish people as suffering from a less-than position, both historically and socially. Moreover, if in her view, God is not happy with the Chosen People being down trodden, then surely God is delighted with those who treat the Jewish people well. This is a common sentiment expressed amongst Messianic Gentiles. It also can be found in instances in tandem with expressions of pity, as indicated by Elizabeth’s further comment:

I just mostly learned to feel sorry for them. I felt sorry for them for two reasons.

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188 This concept is taken from Romans 11:17-24.
189 A favored scripture often quoted in Messianic circles is Genesis 12:3 where God declares to Abraham regarding his offspring, “I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse.”
One was they rejected their messiah and they were never going to have him—I don’t know where I got that idea and I’m sure Daddy would have been flabbergasted if he heard [me say] that. I didn’t think they were interested in him at all . . . or cared about him. I also felt sorry because Hitler did a terrible thing to them. (personal communication, July 6, 2009)

Despite her parents’ respect and sympathy for the Jewish people, they were extremely angry to learn of Elizabeth’s involvement with Messianic Judaism. They asked how she could go back to legalism, worshipping on Saturday and having to earn her salvation. “You know what?” said Elizabeth with tension in her voice, “I never worked harder for my salvation than when I was with my parents growing up” (personal communication, July 6, 2009).

Elizabeth resists the temptation of calling herself a Messianic Jew in favor of the more ambiguous declaration, “I’m Messianic” (personal communication, July 6, 2009).

When asked what it means she stated:

> It means that I believe in Yeshua/Jesus as the Messiah coming to pay for our sins, but that I believe in living the same type of lifestyle that I believe Jesus lived . . . which looks Jewish, is Jewish. He was Jewish and he followed the commandments, he followed the will of God . . . I don’t believe that saying “I’m Messianic” means that I lead a Jewish lifestyle. I like the term “biblical”. I believe that Messianic Judaism is more biblical than any church I’ve visited or been in . . . because what do [Messianics] stress? They stress the Bible and they do what’s in the Bible . . . see, everybody says, “Oh, we want to be like Jesus and Jesus set the example” and yet my Mom says, “Well, he fulfilled all the Law so that we don’t
have to!” I’m like, “How does that make him an example?” You know, I told Mom, “It’s not about being perfect, it’s just about trying to do God’s will and God’s will is written very clearly in his word in the Old Testament” (personal communication, July 6, 2009).

After this impassioned discourse I asked Elizabeth once more how she would describe herself and with a sudden shift in mood she burst forth in laughter saying, “A Messianic Gentile” (personal communication, July 6, 2009). I asked her what was the greatest challenge of being a Messianic Gentile? Without hesitation she said, “Getting your family to understand that you haven’t gone off the deep end and trying to make them understand that you are still okay” (personal communication, July 6, 2009).

Elizabeth enjoys nearly every facet of Beth Messiah’s worship service. In particular she enjoys watching (and on occasion participating in) the Davidic dancing. She said that she had always wondered, “Why didn’t we dance in church? What’s wrong in dancing before the Lord the way David did? Psalm 150 was my favorite thing, and it talks about dancing and yet we were told that dancing was sinful and I didn’t understand the dichotomy of that” (personal communication, July 6, 2009).

With all of her enjoyment at being at Beth Messiah, there is one facet that makes her feel uncomfortable. There is a charismatic element to the synagogue that Elizabeth finds disturbing. “Messianic Judaism” she shares, “is a very tongues oriented thing and I don’t exactly approve” (personal communication, July 6, 2009). Beyond the glossolalia, she is also bothered by prophesies that are sometimes given at services by various members. With concern in her voice, she stated:
I do believe that there are words of prophecy, but I believe that words of prophecy are more about a people in general. Very rarely were there words [of prophecy in the Bible] about individuals . . . they were leaders of people and most prophesies were about the nation. I don’t want to say the prophesies are false . . . but I think prophesy is treated too lightly. (personal communication, July 6, 2009)

Elizabeth has made a deal with herself to ignore such expressions of faith that she finds spurious in favor of other pursuits and activities at the synagogue. She has taught herself Hebrew and how to sing tropes\(^\text{190}\) from the bimah.\(^\text{191}\) She is now literally a significant voice during the services as she is one of the key people routinely called to read from the Torah.

Elizabeth has changed as a pastor’s kid. Today, her life has no place for Christmas or Easter for she feels that she could not return to a church environment without the Sabbath and the recognition of the biblical festivals.

Dewante Wilson

Dewante Wilson likes to wear white shirts, blue jeans and navy blazers in summer. His gleaming smile contrasted with his coffee coloured skin attracts ladies. However, he is quick to inform potential suitors that he is married. This disclosure usually comes as a surprise to those who have only attended Beth Messiah a short while for his wife never attends. Messianic Judaism continues to be a dividing matter for the African-American couple. However, Dewante is not prepared to give up his weekly Torah study and Davidic dancing—not even for his wife. Yeshua must come first.

\(^{190}\) As first referenced in Chapter Five, tropes are the symbols used to indicate the melodic qualities of the Hebrew scriptural passages as they are canted (Portnoy and Wolff, 2000).

\(^{191}\) The bimah is the high table on which the Torah is placed for public reading (Donin, 1991; Telushkin, 2001).
At thirty-six years of age, Dewante has had a varied spiritual life. Raised by his grandmother in a poor neighborhood of East Saint Louis, Illinois, he remembers being taken to Roman Catholic mass and eventually being enrolled in the parish’s school. “I used to wear a crucifix and hold on to it” he recalled of his childhood (personal communication, July 2, 2009). He learned the Hail Mary and had a Rosary. His mother was in the Air Force, but on the rare instances that she came back into his life, she took him to various churches. On one such occasion he heard a protestant pastor say, “Give and it shall be given, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over”192 (personal communication, July 2, 2009). At age seven, he was impressed with this statement and went home that day repeating it in order to commit it to memory.

Growing up, his grandmother remained the principal influence on his life to the extent that once in a while Dewante would accompany her to a charismatic church. However, the allure of the street proved powerful and he began selling crack and other drugs.

One evening, after a day spent dealing and chasing women, he slept at his grandmother’s home. Much to his chagrin, his grandmother frequently watched religious programming on television. Lying on her couch he drifted off to sleep listening with some degree of annoyance to a program on the topic of End Time Prophecy on TBN.193 After some hours of blissful sleep he was awakened by a violent shaking that seemed to emanate from nowhere. When the shaking stopped and he calmed his nerves, he noted that the same program was on again and that he was resuming with it exactly at the point

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192 This verse taken from Luke 6:38, is often cited by pastors during special offerings or fund drives.
193 TBN stands for the Trinity Broadcasting Network which was found by Paul and Jan Crouch in Southern California in the early 1970s. Today the network literally reaches all parts of the world through its satellite programming (Schultz, 1991, Mintle, 2004).
where he had fallen asleep, although many hours had since passed. This time he was receptive to the program's content.

Later, when he couldn't account for the shaking, Dewante watched various newscasts to see if there had been an earthquake tremor, severe storm or explosion in the area, but no reports indicated such. He told his grandmother about the shaking experience and the television program to which she responded, "Well, baby, God must have really wanted you to watch it" (personal communication, July 2, 2009). Dewante decided to stop dealing drugs and a week later, went to a church and told the pastor that he wanted to get saved and was shortly after baptized.

In the following years Dewante attended charismatic churches before moving to Texas to work for Bank of America. While there he met and married his wife, joined a Baptist church and became a deacon before moving to North Carolina for his employer, then to St. Louis again and finally to Virginia.

His wife's sister lived in Virginia, and upon their arrival she announced that she wanted to start a church in the area. Feeling family pressure, Dewante somewhat reluctantly agreed to help, in the hope that his sister-in-law might agree to have her congregation meet on Saturdays—the Lord's Sabbath. This was not received well.

Frustrated, Dewante left his home one day and went to see the motion picture The Passion of the Christ. While sitting in the dark with a soda on his lap, he was thrilled to hear the actors speaking in the original biblical languages. As Dewante stated, "When Mary said his name I was trying to make it [in my mind] form Jesus some how" (personal
communication, July 2, 2009). However, Yeshua was the operative name.\textsuperscript{194} When Dewante suggested to his wife and sister that the Hebrew designation for Jesus be used in the new congregation they weren’t pleased. Dewante felt a growing conviction that believers in Jesus ought to try to be asbiblically faithful as possible in relation to correct terms and to the honoring of God on His day.

While driving one afternoon, he saw Beth Messiah’s building and decided to visit the following Saturday. On that occasion, I was filling in for Rabbi Rosenfarb and delivering the drash. Although I never had the chance to speak with Dewante on that day, he nevertheless spoke with others and kept returning each week. When asked about his first impressions he offered:

I didn’t understand any of it and it was overwhelming. I said “I don’t understand any of this!” but the Spirit kept calling me back. They were reading in Hebrew. I didn’t know what they were saying... so I just prayed. I started questioning whether I should come back or not because I didn’t understand. My impression of it was, “Well you don’t understand because you don’t know anything about this and because you don’t know anything about this, then it is going to seem strange to you. It’s going to be different. You’re going to be uncomfortable.” So I was a little uncomfortable at first, but then I started making connections. (personal communication, July 2, 2009)

Make connections he did—in the form of regular meetings with the rabbi and attending discussions groups and the New Members classes. In addition, he started staying later each Shabbat for the Davidic dancing lessons. Of the latter he said, “It

\textsuperscript{194} Clearly, the film impacted audiences emotionally and educationally (Brown, Keeler and Lindval, 2007). However, as acknowledged in the last chapter by Wendy, the usage of biblical languages proved to be not only educational but also theologically enlightening.
means everything to me . . . it’s my way of being part of Beth Messiah” (personal communication, July 2, 2009). Gradually, Dewante’s self-image began to change.

Considering the matter, Dewante offered:

If you’re at a Messianic synagogue and you enter a Messianic synagogue then people are going to say that you’re a Messianic Jew. I have no problem with that and the reason I have no problem with that is because Paul talks about that in the book of Romans. He says they are not Jews who are ones outwardly but inwardly and circumcision is circumcision of the heart195 . . . I’ve long since not really identified with being a Christian. (personal communication, July 2, 2009)

As a Messianic Gentile the greatest challenge has not been in being confused for a Jewish person or with comprehending all of the Messianic teachings, but rather in the division it has caused with his wife and her sister. As Dewante stated it, “The greatest challenge by far—and it is not with necessarily understanding—but the greatest challenge is [practicing] it without my wife. That’s the greatest challenge . . . being involved with the synagogue, participating in the different things that we do there” (personal communication, July 2, 2009).

Dewante’s stance on the holidays just exacerbates his domestic situation. With tension in his voice he declared, “The Bible doesn’t record anything concerning Easter196 or Christmas197—but it does record Passover, Sukkot [and] Bikkurim” (personal communication, July 2, 2009). Clearly, Dewante’s marriage suffers for the lack of a

195 Romans 2:25-29.
196 Although it commonly refers to the resurrection of the Messiah, the origin of the word Easter is in fact pagan. Moreover, the observance on Sunday, as set by the Council of Nicea rather than by the lunar calendar associated with Passover is an offense to Messianic Jews, as it has also been to various Christian groups throughout history. (Baker, 1959; Johnson, 2005; Stern, 2007).
197 The scriptures do not state December 25th as the day on which the Messiah was born. (Stern, 2007). Subsequently, many view the holiday as Christianisation of pagan traditions associated with the winter solstice.
compromise. To offset his sadness during the week, Dewante listens to his IPod which contains messianic music and downloaded messianic programming from Solace Radio\textsuperscript{108} on the internet.

\textit{Mindy Skivulchen}

As part of Beth Messiah’s worship team, Mindy Skivulchen plays an acoustic guitar that is nearly inaudible amidst the other amplified instruments. Her long hair, parting symmetrically, falls to her shoulders as she closes her eyes with her face lifted to the ceiling as if it were heaven.

At fifty-seven years of age, she is a long-time member of the kehilat. Held in high esteem by all members, she also holds the distinction of being the widow of one of Rabbi Rosenfarb’s closest friends. Additionally, she is also the daughter of a distinguished theological scholar.

Mindy grew up around people of faith as her father was a Presbyterian pastor. At five her family moved from Rockford, Illinois to Austin, Texas where her father became a seminary professor. Despite being a PK\textsuperscript{109} she recalled that until the age of ten “Jesus and the Bible and everything were kind of like Walt Disney fairy tales” in that they were entertaining but not real (personal communication, July 1, 2009). However, while in the fifth grade she visited Israel. She remembered that as she walked the streets of Nazareth, “All of a sudden it was real” (personal communication, July 1, 2009). The Holy Land’s locations impressed her and allowed her mind to connect the biblical and spiritual to the tangible—thus making such matters for the rest of her life relevant.

\textsuperscript{108} Solace Radio is an online internet service emanating from the Rocky Mountains of Colorado—specifically, Monte Visa. Its streaming programming is comprised of Messianic Music, eschatological prophecy and news about Israel. The service declares that it is not a 501C3 corporation, although it nevertheless seeks financial support from listeners.

\textsuperscript{109} A common term used in good humor to mean a preacher’s kid.
Back in the states, her parents started hosting home prayer meetings that became charismatic in nature. It was during one of these meetings that Mindy was “Baptized in the Spirit”\(^{200}\) as she put it, as others laid hands on her (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Increasingly, in years to come, her father became more ecumenical in outlook—comingling with charismatic Roman Catholics and Episcopalians to the dismay of his coworkers. Consequently, as a professor of Systematic Theology at a conservative seminary he was asked to leave. With his doctorate from Columbia and extensive work on a Vatican Council, her father nonetheless was rising in stature and eventually designed the curriculum for an undergraduate and graduate Christian institution in California.

At eighteen, Mindy enrolled at Oral Roberts University and attended an Episcopalian church in Tulsa, before meeting her future husband while visiting her father on the west coast. After returning to Oklahoma, Mindy got a degree in French, married, and then moved with her husband to Virginia Beach to be near her dad who had accepted a position at Regent University. It was at that time that her husband met Rabbi Rosenfarb and became interested in Messianic Judaism.

The young bride was not happy with her husband’s new interest. She recollected her discomfort at her first encounter with the movement. At that time, Beth Messiah was renting a church for its services and she recalled with embarrassment thinking “The Jews killed Christ” and “If I stay with these people I’m going to get persecuted” (personal communication, July 1, 2009). However, twenty-five years later, she also recalled that the music got to her. She liked the e-minor chords, which prompted her to ask God, “Are you here in this place? Is this of you? Are you here?” (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

\(^{200}\) A term used to describe an occurrence whereby persons believe they have been filled with the Holy Spirit in a similar fashion to the events recorded in the second chapter of Acts.
With candor she recounted a vision she experienced in response to her enquiry: "I was near the back looking towards the front and I had a vision of [Yehsua/Jesus] in the middle of the congregation facing me... he said to me, 'I am here' and that was it. I've been at Beth Messiah ever since" (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Although Mindy has spent most of the last few decades at Beth Messiah, perhaps in her enthusiasm, she forgot that she had left Beth Messiah's ministry for two years.

Mindy's husband, a gentle and Vietnam veteran, became the Associate Rabbi at Beth Messiah, before eventually leaving to start an Evangelical Presbyterian church that lasted a couple of years. Thereafter he worked building decks for homes making a good income. Still, during this time the couple lacked a sense of spiritual purpose until Mindy's husband's untimely death. During the crisis, Mindy relied on the synagogue for strength.

Unlike her late husband, as a gentle, Mindy suffered no pretentions of being Jewish. Whenever people enquire regarding her faith she said, "I always tell them I'm at Beth Messiah and that it's non-denominational with a focus for Jewish people" (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Clarity on the issue is important to her as indicated by her asserting, "I'm part of that community but I never say I'm Jewish... I'm a believer in the Lord Jesus and Messiah and I serve Him" (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

Although her late husband once served as the Associate Rabbi, in later years, she consistently emphasized to their daughter, "We're not Jewish and we don't pretend to be Jewish" (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Still, some might argue that sentiment and action in this case don't exactly align, for if one formerly presented themselves as an associate rabbi, can they be assumed to be anything else but Jewish? Nonetheless,
somehow Mindy’s stance was accepted by their daughter as she grew up in a house where both Christian and Jewish festivals were observed. Today, Mindy’s daughter is married and attends Beth Messiah with her gentile husband.

Mindy lamented, “So many in the church don’t understand Messianic Judaism and the Jews are afraid of us ... and reject us” (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Perhaps such suspicion is attributable in no small part to the blended identities often found in the movement. When pushed on her gentile self-designation, Mindy offered, “I don’t like to generalize or call myself anything ... I kind of consider myself like a Ruth” (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

According to the biblical account, Ruth assimilated into Judaism via remarriage—a means, so far, still eluding Mindy. Yet, unquestionably, in a sense, if Mindy has not made the Jewish people her people—like Ruth, she has at least, made them a great concern. With sadness in her voice she stated that there is, “A need for ‘a bridge over troubled water’ between church and synagogue. There should be more outreach to other Jews” (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

Mindy reflects on such matters when at home listening to some of her favorite Messianic singers such as Marty Goetz, Paul Wilbur, Joel Chernoff and Kathy Shooster. When she’s in the mood, Mindy indicated that she may watch a DVD from her collection of Dan Juster and Syd Roth programs or grab a hard copy of the Jerusalem Report to read.

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201 Ruth is a frequently referenced person by gentile women in the Messianic movement - for good reason. The Book of Ruth provides a romantic account of assimilation into the Jewish culture and faith by an alien woman. According to the scriptures, Ruth was not born a Hebrew. She was a widowed Moabite who identified with her Jewish mother-in-law. In the first chapter of the book she declares in the sixteenth verse “Your people will be my people and your God my God” thereafter she eventually marries a prominent Jewish businessman named Boaz and becomes the great-grandmother of King David and subsequently through the name-sake lineage an ancestor of Yeshua/Jesus, as indicated in Ruth 4:21-22 and Matthew 1:1 and 5.
Brian Reagan

Brian Reagan has a Ph.D. and a fondness for anagrams. He told me once that my name (first and last) when rearranged becomes, "calm able plan". I was struck by how the phrase seemed more fitting for Brian than me, for he exudes an air of serene competency. Brian doesn't seem to worry about anything. Content by nature, he is secure in his work and delighted in his Jewish wife of thirty-seven years, Leah.

Raised in Portland, Oregon, his family attended a Methodist church where he was forced to go to (as he put it) "deadly boring" Sunday school classes each week (personal communication, May 26, 2009). Through his early years he learned creeds and occasionally witnessed a rare prayer offered at a meal, but his concept of faith remained rather vague. By the time he went to Amherst College in Massachusetts he started to attend a Unitarian church. I guess I thought that was cool... I was getting more liberated from... traditional ideas" said Brian (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

When he moved to Santa Barbara, California, for graduate school, he got involved with eastern mysticism in the form of the Vedanta Society. "It was weird" Brain recalled, "I was going there but I never really connected with people... but it appealed to me on an intellectual level—you know—'all faiths are one'—I kind of bought it" (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Meanwhile, Brian was developing an affinity for Jewish people. He dated several Jewish girls and found himself naturally developing friendships with Jewish men. "I

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202 Leah Reagan is featured in the previous chapter addressing Messianic Jews.
203 Referenced briefly in Chapter One and with a more extensive footnote in Chapter Five. Unitarians aligned with Universalists in the United States in 1961. They reject creeds and the concept of the Trinity and thereby deny the divinity of Yeshua/Jesus (Mead, 1990).
204 Popularized by the Swami Vivekananda and based on the Hindu writings of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, The Vedanta Society asserts the supposed unity of all religions (Mead, 1990).
think as I look back” he recalled, “there were some things that prepared me [for a future with Jews]... in college... and graduate school... I added them up one time, I had eight Jewish roommates. I didn’t choose [them]—it just happened that way” (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Brian was delighted when others thought he might be Jewish. “Once someone paid me a complement and said, ‘You’re Jewish—are you?’ and I said ‘No’ [and they said], ‘But you think Jewish—right?’ So I took that as a compliment because... some of the brightest kids from anywhere were Jewish and one of them I know—was my classmate—has since become a Nobel laureate in economics, Joe Stiglitz”205 (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Brian hung out with the brightest students and performed well himself. His love life was also flourishing when he moved in with a married woman. One night during this time, he had a “vision-dream” as he called it, of his grandfather in front of him imploring him to look after his grandmother (personal communication, May 26, 2009). The image vanished as he was awakened by a call from his father informing him that his grandfather had died the previous day. This affected Brain in that his grandfather was a strong Methodist. “I had a picture of God then—in a sense—through my grandfather” said Brian, before adding, “...and within a month I was a believer” (personal communication, May 26, 2009). His change in faith was aided by an encounter with a

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beautiful girl that he met on the beach one day. She eventually led him in the “Sinner’s Prayer”\textsuperscript{206} (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Shortly after this encounter, Brian started attending a Foursquare Church\textsuperscript{207} and studying the Bible more than he had before. Later that year, while on Christmas break in Oregon, Brian faced his mother’s agnosticism and his father’s religious indifference. Subsequently, with his parents’ nominal church attendance, he felt spiritually alone. When doubts flooded his mind one night, he prayed half seriously—asking God, that if he knew of his struggle with depleting faith, would he please shake the house. Within seconds, to Brian’s surprise, a temblor hit registering three point four on the Richter scale. Brian was literally and figuratively shook up, but more was yet to come.

When he returned to Santa Barbara he was eating with some friends at a house, when an older, seemingly mentally disabled man, pounded at their door. With stuttering incomplete sentences the man indicated that there was a boy drowning across the street in a neighboring pool. They all ran to help. By the time they saw the boy he was floating motionless. The medics arrived shortly after but there was no response. After the ambulance left the scene, they returned to the house and saw the mentally disabled man praying. Brian remembered his words, “Father, I don’t ask you for much—please give that boy back to his mother” (personal communication, May 26, 2009). Those who witnessed this simple man praying were struck by the child-like earnestness of this prayer offered in vain. They attempted to comfort the man before bidding him goodnight.

\textsuperscript{206} A common term for a prayer where one becomes a Christian, by acknowledging their sins and asking for God’s forgiveness, declaring that they will make Yeshua/Jesus their Lord and Savior by trusting in his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, whereby, he paid their sin debt forever.

\textsuperscript{207} The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel was established by the Canadian born and Los Angeles based evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson. Controversial, yet always effective, by the late 1920s McPherson had built the cathedral sized Angelus Temple, founded a bible college, started a radio station, developed an evangelistic association and was leading the Foursquare denomination. The churches tend to be fundamental with Pentecostal leanings (Epstein, 1993; Mead, 1990).
However, to their astonishment, two days later, they received word that the boy had not only lived and but he had survived with no brain damage. Brian was changed forever.

With his Ph.D. completed, Brian met his future wife, Leah, at a retreat center. They married and moved to Ithaca, New York, where Brian worked at Cornell University. Although raised in a Jewish Orthodox home, Leah had become a believer prior to meeting Brian, so the couple decided to attend an Assemblies God of Church.208 One evening, while driving through a rural area, Brian drove into the back of a hay wagon—ruining their car. However, Brian described it as an “anointed accident” because the man that drove them home connected them with a group of Messianic Jews in the area (personal communication, May 26, 2009). They started a home fellowship and began attending Messianic conferences at Messiah College in Pennsylvania—where they met their future rabbi, Joseph Rosenfarb. They were sufficiently impressed by him and by what they had heard about Beth Messiah Synagogue that they decided to move to Virginia in 1985.

Even though their decade’s long participation at Beth Messiah makes them one of the most senior members in the synagogue, Brian entertains no delusions about being Jewish. As he shared with a smile and a glint in his eyes:

I never say that I’m a Jew—I’m not! I wonder about people who are trying to . . .

they seem almost desperate to find a connection of their ancestry with Judaism.

Now, because my brother has studied our ancestry so much, I can confidently say

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208 The General Council of Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States. It originated in Hot Springs, Arkansas 1914. Although each church is autonomous, they share the commonality of emphasizing that the Gifts of the Spirit (as found in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10) are operational today. (Mead, 1990)
that I don’t have one drop of Jewish blood in me, but I’m fine with that. So I’m a Messianic Gentile. (personal communication, May 26, 2009)

Brian is comfortable in his own skin and with his understanding of God’s grand plan. As he shared, “I feel that in the movement, I’ve become—but only gradually—more so, over time, more the real me I was supposed to be become and I don’t know how this is tied in, but it seems to me, that this is where I belong and it always was” adding further, “It’s where I feel comfortable. You know [when] I go to a church . . . I just don’t feel comfortable” (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Indeed, but it is important to note, that Brian did not always feel comfortable going to Messianic events in his early days. As he recalled:

The main challenge was . . . going to the Messianic conference . . . feeling kind of [like a] fifth wheel—a little bit out there because it seemed clear that to be really on the inside you had to be Jewish—and I wasn’t! It was okay, they could run their organization anyway they wanted to and I understood it—that they needed to be Jewish—that they wanted to be Jewish, but at the same time, I felt a little bit on the outskirts, on the outside. Over time, I just kind of reconciled myself to that and now I’m at Beth Messiah, where it isn’t even that Jewish as far as . . . the number of people you could point to who were born Jewish. (personal communication, May 26, 2009)

Brian still faces challenges of another type at Beth Messiah because he doesn’t read Hebrew. During some of the liturgy his mind can wander causing him to become drowsy. As the majority of the people attending the synagogue don’t read Hebrew, they elect instead to read the transliteration in the siddur. However, this doesn’t work for
Brian, for as he shared, “Sometimes I deliberately do not recite the transliteration, but read the English because at least it has meaning to me” (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Despite the written language barrier, the Messianic Movement does have meaning for him. Consequently, Brian is sometimes frustrated with what he perceives as misconceptions about Messianic Judaism. He is most concerned by the reaction of some of his Christian friends. He told me, “I think there is this lingering idea that people have in quote, ‘Judaizing’. You know, where Messianic Jews are laboring under the law and I just think that is false, but I do see it . . . even with my friends it pops up” (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

Brian acknowledged that he would like to be a better apologist for the movement by confessing, “Really, after all this time I should know more, but I don’t. I have a Jewish understanding of the Messiah. It’s not perfect. You know, I’ve got a lot to learn and so forth. It’s [a matter of] understanding the Messiah in the context of the whole Bible . . . to feel like I’m learning and progressing . . . because I haven’t gone through any program of study. I’ve just been there kind of soaking stuff up—osmosis overtime and sometimes . . .” he added with an impish grin, “falling asleep” (personal communication, May 26, 2009).

*Thelma Rigley*

At sixty-four years of age, Thelma Wrigley wears no makeup. In fact it would somehow seem misplaced if applied. Beneath long curly grey hair, her face is offset with hazel eyes above a downturned mouth that hesitantly divulges details from her difficult life. Abandoned by her mother at birth, she was raised by an emotionally aloof great aunt.
Suffering from low self-confidence she rarely communicated as a child. On the rare occasions that she did speak, she stammered and was ridiculed. Adding injury to insult, she was placed in classes with mentally retarded kids. By the time she left school she could barely read.

A social outcast, she had attended a couple of protestant churches while growing up and believed in God. However, she derived almost as much comfort from being alone, away from tormentors—smoking cigarettes. By the time she was twenty-one Thelma was working in a nursing home for her “boss-lady” but barely surviving on food stamps, adding, “I had to scramble” as she put it, referring to her frantic fear of being homeless (personal communication, July 22, 2009). At this juncture a man came into her life offering to marry her. She accepted only to enter into a life of further abuse. At that time, her only source of transportation was a bicycle as she couldn’t drive because she couldn’t read well enough to pass the examination. Slowly she taught herself to read better and came across a copy of the Good News for Modern Man version of the Bible.209 With great effort she would sound-out the phonetics of each word and get a Bible lesson in the process.

One Sunday morning as a result of her reading the scriptures, Thelma decided to visit the Baptist church that she got married in. She recalled of that event:

I looked around and everybody seemed to be dead just standing up like a statue. Their mouths weren’t even hardly movin’ and I was in with the Lord and I started praising Him and I stepped out into the aisle and the tears were flowing from my eyes and all a sudden my hands just went up in the air. I didn’t even have to put them up, they just went up . . . and later on, after the service, there was this lady

209 This was an extremely popular paraphrased version of the Bible that sold well in the nineteen seventies.
that come to me. She told me that she saw me out in the aisle with my hands up in
the air . . . and she wanted to come to me to tell me how wrong it was for me to do
that. (personal communication, July 22, 2009)

Thelma was deeply hurt by this event, to the point that in her retelling of it, tears
started to stream down her face. She explained that she felt emotionally injured for a long
time, until one day, while clearing a desk at home she found a business card for Beth
Messiah’s Judaica shop. She never knew how it got there, but she decided to investigate
and stopped by one Saturday. Thelma entered the shop directly from a side door by-
passing the synagogue itself. The man minding the shop asked her what she wanted. As
Thelma recalled, “What I wanted I did not have any idea . . . I says, ‘How ‘bout some
music?’” (personal communication, July 22, 2009). The man showed her the CDs.

Thelma stated again with tears in her eyes:

I took my hand reached down and picked up a CD, never having heard it before in
my life. I didn’t know what was on it or nothin’. I paid for it and [the man] invited
me to come to a concert they were having the following next Saturday and my
hands went up in the air and the tears just flowed from my eyes. I didn’t have to
put my hands up, they just automatically went up and I talked to him and I says to
him “You mean to tell me I can come?” He says “Why certainly you can. You
don’t have to cry” and I’ve been coming ever since. (personal communication,
July 22, 2009)

Indeed, Thelma has been coming ever since. Today, she has keys to the building
and is often the first to arrive and the last to leave. She voluntarily straights, organizes, cleans and prepares all manner of things at Beth Messiah. She views her involvement with the synagogue as a divine call on her life. With intensity she shared:

This place is a home for me. It’s a loving home and I am practically here everyday. If I could stay all night I would. Yes, I would because it’s a loving home—it’s a family. It’s a home and I’m here everyday, everyday, all day. This is where God has sent me and this is where I will stay. (personal communication, July 22, 2009)

During worship services Thelma can regularly be seen swaying to the music in the aisle with her hands stretched heavenward with a huge grin on her face. Comparing Beth Messiah with her previous experiences at various churches, she stated with continued passion:

God is here. It’s alive—it’s not dead. He’s all through here. You can feel [God]. It was meant for me to come because God was the one that sent me here . . . and God is using me here . . . God has told me and let me know, that after I started coming here . . . he was gathering his people and that he was going to use me and I was going to bloom and blossom like I never had before. People have told me that I have already started. (personal communication, July 22, 2009)

At least part of this blooming may be measured by Thelma’s willingness to read before the kehilat. At either the Erev Shabbat or Shabbat service, Thelma will bravely walk to the front and read prayers or scripture in English. As she has shared:

I do have difficulty reading because I’m only at a fifth grade reading level, but that’s another way that God is bringin’ me out . . . because he is bringin’ me out
to step out and I've never read out before in my life in front of people until I got
here. I never have and if there was something that I needed to read out I would
know and I would read it and ask other people what the words were before I got
up and practiced it . . . before I got up in front of everybody. (personal
communication, July 22, 2009)

When asked how she viewed herself Thelma declared, "I'm Jewish at Beth
Messiah—I belong to God" (personal communication, July 22, 2009). By this she meant
that in the building her gentile status falls away by the love and acceptance she feels from
the Jewish members. Yet, as with many gentiles in the Messianic Movement, Thelma
revealed a need for a degree of ethnic legitimacy by offering with excitement, "I have
found out that since I have been here at Beth Messiah . . . that I might be Jewish also,
because on my father's side there are a whole, whole lot of Jewish names like Hoffman"
(personal communication, July 22, 2009).

Evidently, Thelma enjoys feeling Jewish inside the synagogue, but would delight
even more in feeling Jewish outside of it. She has taken to wearing tallit during the
Shabbat service and to find music identification with the Chosen People she said, "I
constantly listen to the Jewish music—the CDs all the time" (personal communication.
July 22, 2009). In her desire to identify with the Jewish members, she has bravely tried
to take Hebrew classes at the synagogue that at the moment, have proven too much for
her.

Thelma would not describe herself as Jewish outside of the synagogue. To her
being Jewish is synonymous with being loved—and sadly, her sense of being loved is
limited to Beth Messiah. Perhaps that is part of the reason why she would like to be able
identity herself as a Jew to the world. In the mean time, with a sweet contentment she asserted, "Beth Messiah is a live place. It's a loving place. God couldn't have sent me to any better place than what this is" (personal communication, July 22, 2009).

Georgina Kaplan

As an African-American gentile woman married to a white Jewish husband, Georgina Kaplan, is perhaps the most dramatic example of assimilation at Beth Messiah, for she is one of the synagogue's most prominent leaders. The fifty-four year old retired public school teacher holds great influence over nearly all of the affairs and policies that are decided regarding Beth Messiah. It has become a common understanding amongst the members that she must be consulted before virtually any matter can go into effect. One of her official titles is Events Coordinator, however, her powers extend far beyond mere matters of the calendar. In addition, she has produced and written original shows for the synagogue and has presented drashes on a number of occasions.

Georgina was raised in the African-American Holiness\textsuperscript{210} tradition. Her mother took her to services to sing spirituals. It was understood, Georgina recalled, "She got happy in church" where people fell out in the aisles (personal communication, June 26, 2009). Young Georgina participated in the Singeramas until high school, where various ladies would sing in tongues.

At seventeen she went to college and eventually received a teaching degree at twenty-two. Although she maintained her job, she was partying and married to an alcoholic. After one particularly bad night she struggled to make it to a local church and was too late for the service. Decades later, with deep emotion, she recalled praying on

\textsuperscript{210} Holiness churches tend to be Pentecostal with an emphasis on prophetic revelation (Mead, 1990).
that particular Sunday, “Lord, spare my life—don’t let me die today or I will go to hell!” (personal communication, June 26, 2009).

The next week she started attending the church regularly and went to prophecy seminars. In addition, attracted to the idea of worshiping on the Sabbath, she visited a Seventh Day Adventist church, but found it too formal. Meanwhile, her husband’s behavior went from bad to worse, causing Georgina to have to sleep in her car for three nights at a time, before eventually losing their cars because of her husband’s D.U.I. arrests.\footnote{In the United States a common phrase standing for police arrests made for “driving under the influence of alcohol”.} Innately opposed to the notion of separating, she felt she had little option after her husband refused to stop drinking, but to seek a divorce.

With order and financial stability slowly returning to her life, Georgina visited Beth Messiah a few times because of the curiosity of a girlfriend. During this period, the new divorcee dated a fellow teacher, not recognizing at first that his last name was Jewish. It wasn’t long before Georgina and Danny Kaplan\footnote{Danny Kaplan is featured in the previous chapter addressing Messianic Jews.} were married.

For fourteen years they maintained a steady involvement with Beth Messiah on Saturdays and with Georgina’s Apostolic church\footnote{A large independent Pentecostal congregation mostly attended by African-Americans.} on Sundays. In the meantime, Georgina earned a masters degree and started to lead a non-accredited Bible college in the area. However, there came a point at which Georgina felt called to support her husband and his identity as a Messianic Jew by leaving her church in order to devote her attention to Beth Messiah. As she shared, “I know that there are still a lot of Jews in Christian churches, but I do think there should be a strong Jewish identity. That’s not to say that the Jews that are in the churches should come out of that” (personal...
communication, June 26, 2009). Georgina struggles with frustration over Messianic Judaism not being explained well and with the fact that her own awareness of the movement would have most likely never occurred had it not been for the curiosity of a girlfriend. In other words, Georgina sees the movement as lacking clear definition, articulation, and motivation. With a sigh she offered:

If Messianic Judaism is to be the kind of influence in this would that I believe that the Bible calls it to [be] then we need to spread out our tentacles, because I didn’t know [about it] sitting in a church. No Messianic Jew came to talk to me about Messianic Judaism, about the Jewishness of Jesus, about the high holy days. Nobody ever came to talk to me. So we can sit in our own little cluster and talk about this but unless those tentacles are spreading into the Christian community and sharing with them the jewels that we now have—we’re just marking time. (personal communication, June 26, 2009)

Georgina is not happy with the confusion of identity within Messianic Judaism. She would prefer distinct roles as a justified model. As she shared, “It gets back to are we Jewish? Are we Christian? It gets back to identity” (personal communication, June 26, 2009). After considerable thought she stated, “I’m a believer in Jesus—Yeshua . . . I am a spiritual Jew, but I was not born Jewish . . . I think there should be a strong gentile presence as well as Jewish identity in Messianic Judaism” (personal communication, June 26, 2009).

Bob Wheaton

Bob Wheaton looks like a striking bearded version of William Conrad during the height of the actor’s fame on the 1960s television series Wild, Wild, West. Save for his
wild man's whiskers, the resemblance is uncanny—even to the point of his short, yet muscular physique. He grew up in Michigan, the son of a country veterinarian. A self-confessed rebel as a young man, he joined the Navy and became one of the elite S.E.A.L.s.\textsuperscript{214} He now works in the Washington D. C. area during the week as a private contractor but returns for Shabbat services in Norfolk each weekend to be with his wife, Wendy,\textsuperscript{215} and their three children.

Raised in a Lutheran household, he was surprised to hear Wendy reveal one day that she was Jewish after they had been married twelve years. Indeed, she was Jewish on her father's side but had been raised in part by her Baptist grandmother. Much to Bob's annoyance, Wendy had a history of attending different places of worship for short periods of time. This was extremely frustrating for Bob who desired greater stability. So when Wendy mentioned Beth Messiah he was leery at first. The thirty-eight year old recalled:

I thought it was goin' to be just another couple weeks here—get kind of comfortable and then something would happen where [Wendy would say] "No, they believe something I don't agree with—we're starting over again." So actually, I gave her—I don't know—three or four weeks maybe before I even went [to Beth Messiah], because she was the one driving going to a different place. So I was reluctant to jump up and say, "I want to go too" because I didn't want to go . . . didn't want to go in and get to know people and start to give them a bunch of money every week and then say, "Well, we're not goin' here anymore." (personal communication, October 15, 2006)

\textsuperscript{214} The military acronym SEALs stands for SEa, Air and Land and is an elite part of the United States Navy's Special Operations Forces (Cannon and Cannon, 2003)

\textsuperscript{215} Wendy Wheaton is featured in the previous chapter addressing Messianic Jews.
Despite his reservations, Bob eventually acquiesced and reluctantly agreed to accommodate Wendy’s spiritual needs by visiting Beth Messiah. At first Bob didn’t appreciate the synagogue or its purpose. However, an eventual transformation took place for now the former Lutheran considers himself to be a Messianic. Speaking of his first visit to Beth Messiah Bob remembered:

It was completely different from anything I had ever gone to—not in a good way for me at first. I didn’t like the contemporary services. All the girls dancing around up front made me very uncomfortable . . . and actually the rabbi—who had kind of known Wendy from [her having been] going for a month without me—came up and said “Hey, what do you think?” and I said, “I hated it!”

(personal communication, October 15, 2006)

Still, he agreed to return each week for his wife’s sake. Gradually, he became accustomed to the environment and began to like Rabbi Rosenfarb. As the months passed he found that his attitude was changing. More importantly, he appreciated the teachings that addressed the origin of the Jewish and Christian faiths. With a self-conscious smile Bob stated, “Shortly after we started going there I kind of felt like that was the place . . . because of the teaching and more and more, I think its right above all the other factions. It just makes more sense to me that this is where this came from [and] this is where this came from” (personal communication, October 15, 2006).

Although Bob was gratified by the theological order presented at Beth Messiah, he still struggled with Wendy’s insistence on modifying their family’s life-style at home. Shifting his weight in his seat and leaning forward he recalled his sense of loss associated with ignoring Christmas:
I'm telling you it was hard for me at first, especially the first Christmas, 'cause I grew up having a Christmas. I looked forward to it when I was a kid. I wanted my kids to look forward to it. So, I kind of had my head bashed in that first year because we started going [to Beth Messiah] in the summer time and then it was just a few months later it was Christmas [and Wendy said] "Oh, we're not having Christmas this year" and I thought "What do you mean—whose choice is this?"

... we went cold turkey! (personal communication, October 15, 2006)

Leaning back in his chair again, Bob glanced over at Wendy who had entered the room, as if to gauge her possible response to his next statement before adding, "I used to love that time of year because I grew up in Michigan. We had snow and it was an interesting time of year and I still like that... but now, to be honest with you, it doesn't bother me at all" (personal communication, October 15, 2006). His facial expression seemed to suggest otherwise.

For Bob, abandoning Christmas was keeping himself in compliance with the desires of Wendy and Jesus—yes, Jesus. Unlike most others at Beth Messiah, Bob has not adopted the usage of the name Yeshua, for the name Jesus remains integral to his concept of salvation. Although he was raised Lutheran, he was persuaded to accept Jesus because of the testimony of a man he had never met. I was to learn that in Bob's case media came into play.

As indicated in the first chapter, I had started a music group at the synagogue. Consisting of various alternating men, with a turn on spelling and meaning, I named our group The Guise. I played guitar and keyboard and wrote original music, but Bob strictly played guitar and favored the works of two artists: Neil Young and Kris Kristofferson.

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216 In the prior account of Georgina Kaplan, she referred to Yeshua as Jesus in relation to gentiles.
When I mentioned that in California I had taught film-making\textsuperscript{217} to the latter’s son—also named Kris Kristofferson—Bob was impacted because of the artist’s significance in his spiritual walk. As he shared:

We were talking about Kris Kristofferson . . . and actually on one of his discs or albums—kind of a compilation of his music—he had his testimony printed on the cover. I guess it was in the sixties. He was a helicopter pilot in the army trying to break into Nashville and the country scene—worked at a recording studio where Johnny Cash recorded. They became friends. Johnny had just gone from \textit{The Man in Black} bad-ass to a believer kind of overnight . . . but anyways . . . he and June, invited Kris to go to their church. [Kris] was talking to himself in his head and said “There ain’t no way I’m going up there in front of all these people to proclaim my new found faith”—because he was a tough guy. Well anyways, he couldn’t stop himself. His arms went up [and] he started bawling—went up to the front of the church and was basically saved. I thought [reading the liner notes], “Holy Crap! If he can do that I might be able to do that too.” I think I was meant to read that or get that particular disc. (personal communication, October 15, 2006)

The end result of this is that Bob gave his heart to “Jesus” (personal communication, October 15, 2006). When asked again if he is a Messianic Jew, he squamishly offered, “Well, without having the Jewish Heritage. I might have one [Jewish ancestor] in the woodpile somewhere, but I don’t know. To be honest with you, I

\textsuperscript{217} For nine years (1994-2002) I taught filmmaking production and theory courses in San Francisco at the Academy of Art College—now known as the Academy of Art University.
might have my terminology wrong, but I consider myself [to be] of like thinking, so that’s what I am” (personal communication, October 15, 2006).

After a moment of reflection dusting off his cowboy boots he added, “I don’t understand everything about this. I’m not going to claim to, Wendy’s really pursued it and I get bits and pieces from her, from the rabbi and from other people, so it just gets easier to accept or just kind of let go” (personal communication, October 15, 2006).

I wondered as Bob was speaking how much of his declared identification with Messianic Judaism was simply a matter of his willingness to accommodate Wendy. When asked if there were any particular times when his wife attempted to teach and persuade him about facets of Messianic Judaism he responded with a wry smile, “Whenever I’m awake” (personal communication, October 15, 2006).

Monica Dey

Monica Dey looks a little like the actress Debbie Reynolds in her prime. At fifty-six years of age, she is short, petite, blonde and blue-eyed with smooth skin. Born and raised in Norfolk, she attended a Methodist church sporadically with her cousin from the age of five. On Sundays Monica learned that God lived in heaven and that he was loving and approachable, so she developed the practice of talking to him at night in her bedroom. When she was twelve years old her neighbors took her to a revival\textsuperscript{219} where she “accepted the Lord” as she put it (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

However, this did not preclude her becoming “boy crazy” in her teens. At eighteen she met her future husband Ted, who was seven years her senior. Once married,

\textsuperscript{219} A rather antiquated term usually referring to a program of weeklong night meetings intended to either ignite or revive spiritual fervor in the attendees.
she started watching the 700 Club\textsuperscript{219} on television. “It just represented God to me” she recalled (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Around the same time she attended a Billy Graham crusade and again made a profession of faith. However, her husband was, and would remain, quite uninterested in spiritual matters. This was not new for Monica, she had experienced spiritual loneliness before.

While she was growing up her parents had never expressed any faith or prayed, but that all changed when she was twenty-one, for her Dad had a terrible fall requiring a metal plate to be put in his head. The crisis led to her parents also watching the 700 Club regularly, which resulted in them praying to receive the Lord.

Monica saw her faith developing as she started to attend an independent Charismatic church and slowly developed a prayer language.\textsuperscript{220} Yet, her husband was not pleased. Subsequently, when she became pregnant she stopped going to church. Monica was grieved at not having a place of worship in her life. Nevertheless she prayed regularly in the hope that the circumstance would improve.

One day while shopping in a furniture store, she met the owner who was Jewish. It came up in conversation that he attended Beth Messiah. She was amazed, fascinated and relieved when she learned about the synagogue, for she had always felt concerned about the spiritual plight of Jewish people. As she recalled, “As a young girl in Sunday school I heard that we were Christians and [that] the Jewish people didn’t believe in Jesus . . . I never could reconcile that if they were God’s People why couldn’t they go to heaven too—even though they didn’t believe in Jesus” (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

\textsuperscript{219} Referenced in Chapter Five, The 700 Club, hosted by Pat Robertson, is the flagship television program for the Christian Broadcasting Network (Schultze, 1991; Minle, 2004).

\textsuperscript{220} Prayer language is a commonly used phrase in Pentecostal circles referring to the ability to speak in tongues.
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2009). When she learned of Beth Messiah she concluded that her Lord must be coming soon because Jews were evidently starting to believe in their Messiah.\(^{221}\)

Monica started to attend a group Bible study at the business owner’s home. When on a Friday night she saw a Jewish lady for the first time light Shabbat candles\(^{222}\) and recite the prayer\(^{223}\) she was moved emotionally. Recalling the event years later she shared, “I just felt like I was undone and I felt like the Lord was saying, ‘This is where I want you to be’ and that’s where I wanted to be and I just made that covenant [to stay with it] then” (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Monica had committed herself to the movement. However, her husband was less than thrilled when she started to bring changes to their lifestyle.

Recalling the struggle of her early days in the movement she spoke in the present tense, “Because it’s solo and [my husband’s] not on board with it, I am [at the time] sharing with him a little bit about what I’m learning, but it’s not just the Judaism that I’m learning and how they’re celebrating their Jewish faith but I’m also learning too—as a brand new believer” (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Meanwhile Monica’s husband was complaining that they weren’t Jewish and therefore there was no reason to take on Jewish practices. As she recollected, “I had suggested to [my husband] not having a Christmas tree—well that hit the ceiling! I told him I didn’t want it to be an idol. He

\(^{221}\) Theologically this concept is based on Psalm 118: 26 and Yeshua/Jesus’ affirmation in Matthew 23:39 and Luke 13:35 that he shall not return until the Jewish People say of him, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”. At Beth Messiah the Shabbat service concludes with the kehillat saying the same in Hebrew.

\(^{222}\) Shabbat candles represent the illumination of the divine presence.

\(^{223}\) The honor of welcoming in Shabbat is granted to a woman wearing a prayer veil. After igniting the candles the woman will circle the flames with her hands three times as if to share the light of Shabbat with others present and then placing her hands over her eyes she will recite the following:

אִמְרֵה: אִמְרֶה: אִמְרֵה: אִמְרֶה: אִמְרֶה: אִמְרֶה: אִמְרֶה: אִמְרֶה: אִמְרֶה:

כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר:

כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר:

כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר:

כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר:

כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר, כְּנֶגֶר:
said, "Well you're not bowing down to it and praying to it!" I said 'I know' so it was just a conflict that I had to work through" (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Since that time, Monica has relented on the matter of the tree. Today she limits the items of Judaica around the house to just a shofar and a couple of plaques written in Hebrew.

The greatest challenge for Monica in being a Messianic Gentile is discerning to what extent she should be involved in Jewish traditions, or as she expressed it, "Making sure I know who I am in Messiah without feeling compelled in having to participate in some Jewish traditions—and when I do choose to participate, that [such decisions] are based on faith and not just outward action" (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

Issues of role and degrees of identification can cause the children of Messianic Gentiles to feel confused. As Monica said, "I remember my son. I brought him up in Beth Messiah. He said I had told him that we were Jewish, [but] I can't imagine telling him that. I know we're not Jewish—you know—by birth, but because our faith is in Yeshua, we are of the faith of Abraham and we are spiritually Jewish" (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

Despite her good intentions, such subtleties as declaring oneself to be spiritually Jewish can be lost on thirteen year old boys. Monica’s son adamantly insisted at school one day that he was Jewish—at the cost of ridicule from his classmates. Her son came home embarrassed and angry. Attempting to comfort her son, Monica explained that they were spiritually Jews, but technically Messianic Gentiles. Today, Monica’s grown son does not attend any Messianic synagogues.

Monica is saddened by what she sees as an unnecessary wall between Christian and Messianic congregations. Interestingly, she extends the term “spiritual” Jews even to
Christians. “We have that privilege of being grafted into that wonderful olive tree” she said regarding all believers (personal communication, July 1, 2009). Additionally she shared, “I really believe [God] is serious about us being one new man... I do believe [that] the Messianic Jewish faith [with its] feasts are very important to understand and I think a lot of the church doesn’t fully understand that, but I would love to see more and more of that wall coming down” (personal communication, July 1, 2009).

Besides the 700 Club, Monica couldn’t cite specific television programs that have assisted in her spiritual growth stating, “I haven’t watched too many of them lately. A lot of times, I’ll go on the internet and look in at different ministries. I like to go to Elijah List because they do have prophecies that are shared out there. I don’t take them all—you know—at face value. I just listen to the Spirit and if there’s something that the Lord just really quickens to my spirit and [I’ll] check it out against the Word—then I’ll listen to that” (personal communication, July 1, 2009). A favorite personality she enjoys as a speaker and teacher is Graham Cooke. Monica down loads his teachings to her IPod and listens throughout the day and at night on her headset so as not to bother her husband.

Janet Melville

Janet Melville was born in Miami to a family that didn’t attend church. Despite this she became aware of God at the age of seven when her paternal aunt married a man who unvaryingly said a prayer before each meal. Decades later, the forty-four year old

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224 This reference to engraftment is related to Roman 11:17 to 24 where an analogy is made that compares Israel to a cultivated olive tree and believing gentiles to wild olive branches. The wild branches are permitted to be attached to the tree. However, there is a strong admonishment to the uncultivated branches (gentiles) not to be arrogant, nor to forget that it is the roots of the cultivated tree that support their them.

225 The “one new man” concept stems from Ephesians 2:14 and 15.

226 In 1997, Steve Shultz established a prophetic website called Elijah List. The site addresses eschatological prophecy from a large array of contributors.

227 Based in Vacaville, California, Graham Cooke, is a preacher and prophetic seminar leader with an internet ministry.
recalled her uncle always saying, "God is good, God is great, let us thank you for this food" before eating (personal communication, July 21, 2009). From this limited introduction to theological considerations, Janet developed a concept of God as, "A giant human looking person above the clouds, but we couldn't see him" (personal communication, July 21, 2009). However, Janet's simplistic anthropomorphism had given way to biblical precepts by the time she was fifteen. Baptized at a small Church of the Nazarene congregation, she stayed with the group until leaving to attend one of the denomination's colleges in Nashville.

After graduating with a degree in social work, Janet returned to Florida and started attending an Assemblies of God church. However, after a failed marriage of five years, she returned to Tennessee, this time joining an independent charismatic congregation where she encountered a guest speaker named Gary Huff 228 lecturing on the topic of The Hebrew Roots of Christianity. Janet was fascinated as she recalled, "That's where I started learning and started to be into Jewish belief and Messianic stuff" adding with some annoyance in her voice that she had thought, "Why haven't I heard this all before?" (personal communication, July 21, 2009). No longer was any church sufficient for her. Janet wanted to be immersed in Messianic culture so she went on the internet and discovered Beth Messiah located in Norfolk, Virginia and subsequently moved there.

Her first impressions of the synagogue were that she loved the liturgy in Hebrew and English. However, she thought that the women didn't speak to her much until she had been attending for a few weeks. Eventually she enrolled in Hebrew classes and started to build relationships by becoming a member of the Davidic dance team.

228 Gary Huff founded Man Hu Ministries located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, with the purpose of informing Christians about their Hebraic Roots.
Janet exhibits an ardent attitude toward observing the Jewish holidays. For example, she is frustrated with what she considers a lack of consistency on the part of some gentiles at Beth Messiah for they have been known to participate in outside Christmas activities. Yet, there is a glaring irony in the form of inconsistency in her own life.

Janet does not celebrate Christmas, preferring to take her winter holiday time off from her work at Chanukah. However, she concedes that at least in work related circumstances, “I will attend a Christmas party if I’m invited and I will even take a gift if that’s part of the celebration, but . . . I don’t put up any trees” (personal communication, July 21, 2009). Still, when asked if she misses anything about Christmas she admits to missing, “The lights . . . the colorful lights. I still have lights and things like that—but not on a tree! I might put a string of lights of blue and white [out] but I don’t decorate” (personal communication, July 21, 2009). Still, for all of her minor frustrations, Janet feels great pride in being a Messianic Gentile. She enjoys Davidic dancing, learning Hebrew and celebrating the holidays. She concluded by stating with warmth in her voice that she will be doing these things, “To my dying day!” and then laughed (personal communication, July 21, 2009).

Marcus Dubois

Somehow, Marcus Dubois is able to speak with exaggerated articulation while maintaining a smile. Typically, his fingers curl into near fists before extending to a full breadth at the conclusion of his thoughts. At fifty-three years of age, he gesticulates with the nervous energy of a man thirty years his junior. Born and raised in Haiti and now a naturalized United States citizen serving in the Army, he is married with children.

229 The colors are significant for they are the colors of the Israeli flag.
Although he was raised as a Baptist until the age of ten, once Marcus’ father and older brothers declared that they had been “Baptized in the Holy Spirit”\(^{230}\) the entire family thought of themselves thereafter as “Spirit Filled”. Subsequently, the aforementioned males went for religious education\(^{231}\) and started an independent Pentecostal church. Noted in the community for their clerical involvements, Marcus shared, “We referred to our family as the Levi family. Our last name is not Levi but to compare to the [biblical] priestly family” (personal communication, July 22, 2009). This association with the Jewish priestly line was tied to Marcus’ senses of purpose. As he shared, “There was an attraction as a very young child to Jewish things . . . to me there could be no Christianity without being attached to the Jewish people” (personal communication, July 22, 2009). The family saw their priestly role as propagating their faith through others. One of his cousins furthered his education at Port-au-Prince University and is today a bishop for a charismatic denomination on the island. Marcus on the other hand, immigrated and sought a military career, although he did avail himself of the opportunity to preach on occasion in both his native homeland and in the United States.

While stationed in Virginia, he noted that a lecture was being offered at the Williamsburg Public Library on the topic of Biblical Prophecy. He attended the lecture only to discover that it was conducted by Seventh Day Adventists. When the lecturer claimed that they were the true Israel, Marcus thought it to be an extreme distortion. As he shared:

\(^{230}\) In this case, indicating that they began to speak in tongues.
\(^{231}\) Marcus used the term seminary rather loosely. Upon further inquiry, he explained that his father and brothers went for training at Shiloh Training Institute in Hamilton, Montana, which was an unaccredited three year Bible school.
What I discovered was whenever there was a blessing [in scripture] they
appropriated it to themselves, but if it was a curse it was [appropriated to Israel
for] what Israel did. One thing they convinced me of was the Sabbath. I had no
argument against it . . . so I went on the internet everywhere trying to find out
what Christian organization worships on the Sabbath. A lot of synagogues came
up. (personal communication, July 22, 2009)

While searching, Marcus, encountered Seventh Day Baptists listed in New
England. However, as there were no nearby congregations cited, he kept searching
through listings in the hope of finding something unique. As Marcus stated it, "A
synagogue as a whole that rejected Yeshua was not part of the play for me" (personal
communication, July 22, 2009).

He finally discovered Zion's Sake Messianic Synagogue in Newport News and visited it on Friday nights for awhile with his wife. He liked the rabbi, but wanted
more intellectual stimulation. So he ventured south to Norfolk's Beth Messiah and found it to be a desired place of worship. For nine years since, Marcus and his family have been
driving twice a week to the synagogue from Williamsburg. His involvement has
included (amongst other responsibilities) teaching Hebrew classes and serving with the
Shammashim. Thrilled with Beth Messiah as a congregation he shared, "It is what the
church should have been from the get-go, as it was in the beginning. Before the four

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232 Sometimes called Sabbatarian Baptists, Seventh Day Baptists can trace their roots back to Newport, Rhode Island in 1672. They later established churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey before expanding west. They essentially only differ from most mainline Baptists by their choice of worshipping on Saturdays (Brackney, 1999; McBeth, 1987; Meads, 1990).
233 I have visited Zion's Sake. It is decidedly different in ambiance from Beth Messiah in that it has a
greater number of gentiles and is less liturgical - favoring music and curiosities such as what they call an
Israeli War Dance. In comparison Beth Messiah is considerably more reserved.
234 Newport News is located eighteen miles north of Norfolk
235 A distance of seventy-six miles round trip.
236 The Shammashim is the equivalent of a deaconate in a church in that they serve as lay ministers.
hundreds when a division came between Judaism and the church\footnote{Although Marcus attributed the division to the fifth century there is no clear singular era agreed upon by scholars.} (personal communication, July 22, 2009).

Today, the family does not celebrate Christmas, observes all of the Jewish holidays, no longer eats pork or shellfish and views itself as Haitian-Jewish. Marcus shared, "Keeping kosher [at first] was so easy. I thought it was going to be very, very hard for us. It was no issue" (personal communication, July 22, 2009). However, the Dubois' compromise in that they do not keep meat and dairy separate.\footnote{The basic kashrut dietary restrictions for Jews are found in the eleventh chapter of Leviticus. However, the nineteenth verse of the twenty-third chapter of Exodus states, "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk" which caused rabbis in a later period to prohibit meat and dairy products to be served together. Consequently, Orthodox Jewish families typically have four sets of dishes in their homes – one set for meat, one set for dairy for most days of the week and one set for meat, one set for dairy for the special Shabbat meals. However, the segregation of dishes is frequently neglected or ignored by most non-Orthodox normative Jews.} This point aside, the family clearly lives a Jewish lifestyle to the extent that Marcus and his wife intend for their children to have a Bat Mitzvah and Bar Mitzvah when they come of age. With passion in his voice, Marcus asserted, "I was baptized as a Christian, [but at] the very first baptism service\footnote{This slip of his tongue is somewhat telling for the actual term used for baptism in Messianic circles is mikveh, which refers to Jewish ritual washing in a pool. The practice stemmed from Leviticus 11:36 and extended to broader matters. For the Orthodox a mikveh is required for women after menstruation and for gentile converts. In the days of the Temple, mikveh was used before entering (Donin, 1991, Telushkin, 2001).} that was organized in the synagogue we got baptized intentionally—meaning a complete change from prior religious activities (personal communication, July 22, 2009).

Marcus has not turned his back entirely on his point of spiritual origin. As he said with a distinct French-Caribbean lilt, "The church and Messianic Judaism, I do not see as competing organizations, but I think there is a lot the church could learn, if they were to broaden their way of looking at scripture" (personal communication, July 22, 2009).
As is often the case for Messianic believers, Marcus and his family had initial issues of identity. Gesturing dramatically with his hands he said, "It's like a biracial child. What do you call yourself? Are you white or are you black or both? That is the issue" thoughtfully, he added, "It's a big leap both ways, whether gentile or Jew" (personal communication, July 22, 2009).

When asked whether he considered himself to have converted, he broke ranks with most Messianic gentiles by stating, "To me, regardless of what you say about it—it is a conversion. True, it is not a conversion in the sense that you did not know God before, and now you know Him. It is a conversion though, because your way of life has completely changed" with a grin he added, "at least my and my family's way of life has completely changed" (personal communication, July 22, 2009).

Such dramatic changes did not occur without a pursuit of knowledge. Although Marcus' regular attendance at the synagogue's services and classes were a great aid, a chief source of understanding was derived electronically. As he put it:

The internet is just a trove of information and that has helped me not just in Messianic Judaism, but in church history, which I had studied in college and earlier, as part of our [former] church—our family's church—but I never did go far enough to see the whys of things. For example, why do [Christians] worship on Sunday?240 (personal communication, July 22, 2009)

As for other media used in his development, he regularly reads Messiah magazine.

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240 Messianic believers argue that Sunday is never mentioned in the New Testament by name. However, the first day of the week is referenced in Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1, 2 and 9; Luke 23:54 and 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7, and in I Corinthians 16:1 and 2. In none of these instances is it suggested that the first day of the week should replace the seventh. To the contrary, Messianic believers point to Luke 4:16, Matthew 24:20 and Acts, chapters 13, 16-18 as evidence that Jesus, the disciples and Paul all kept the Sabbath. Messianic believers assert that the reason that Christians started worshipping on Sundays is because of the expanding influence of Rome in the second century onwards.
and the UMJC’s newsletter241 in conjunction with various books on the movement. Additionally he delights in listening to Joel Chernoff and Jonathan Settel CDs.

**Brandy Zuckerman**

With short hair that is dyed strawberry blonde, Brandy Zuckerman’s smiling eyes invite conversation. Raised in Norfolk as a Methodist, at about the age of eight she “accepted Christ” although looking back at the event the sixty-one year old added, “I didn’t feel anything special” (personal communication, June 23, 2009). While attending college she married a devout Roman Catholic man but didn’t care for the mass services. After the birth of their daughter, Diana, the couple eventually divorced in 1980 leaving Brandy a single mother bitter at her plight and just as angry at the death of her mother that had occurred eight years prior.

Angry at God, she met her future husband while working at a hospital as a receptionist. Larry Zuckerman M.D. as his name indicated was Jewish.242 However, Brandy did not recognize Jewish monikers. For Brandy, Larry’s Jewish Orthodox background made little impact on her or their marriage—even after the birth of their son, Reuben.

Living in Bellevue, Washington, where her husband served as an Army surgeon, the family attended protestant churches and celebrated both Christmas and Chanukah. Despite her husband’s accommodating attitude to Brandy’s desire to raise Diana and Reuben with Christian sensibilities, she sensed that Larry was particularly uncomfortable in churches. Nevertheless, he tolerated blessings said before meals for they were offered to a generic deity in the form of, “Dear Lord, accept our thanks for these and all our

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241 As indicated in Chapter Four the UMJC stands for the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations.
242 Larry Zuckerman is featured in the previous chapter addressing Messianic Jews.
blessings—amen" although on exceptional occasions, for a special blessing, Brandy would add, "in Jesus’ name" (personal communication, June 23, 2009). By-in-large, Larry's faith was mostly neglected.

After moving back to Virginia the fact that Larry was Jewish was rarely discussed, save for the few instances when the couple visited Brandy's gentile sister and brother-in-law. John, a fervent evangelical, would engage Larry every time they met in a good-natured debate about Christianity. One day John mentioned something called Messianic Judaism. Neither Brandy nor Larry intended to act on it—they just politely listened. However, a few weeks later, Larry to Brandy's surprise, suggested that they visit Beth Messiah Synagogue.

As soon as she walked through the synagogue’s doors she knew she loved at least one thing, "The music, it was just like, wow! I felt like this is the most wonderful worship" (personal communication, June 23, 2009). By the end of the first service and on their way home they realized that Larry enjoyed hearing the prayers in Hebrew and Brandy enjoyed the music and learning from other members about Judaism. Interestingly, the gentile stated, "I've learned more about my Jewish roots because, you know, the Jews were first" (personal communication, June 23, 2009). Evidently, in Brandy’s mind, Christianity became annexed to Larry’s Judaism at Beth Messiah. Speaking of the benefits of Messianic Judaism to their marriage Brandy added, "We have a common ground" (personal communication, June 23, 2009). For decades she had been concerned about Larry’s destiny in the after life. With near tears in her eyes she stated, “I needed him to believe” (personal communication, June 23, 2009).
Over a number of months Brandy attended Beth Messiah on Saturdays and a Methodist church on Sundays, until the schedule proved too taxing. Today, she and Larry drive from their home in North Carolina to Beth Messiah each week and have omitted church attendance from their lives. However, when asked how she describes herself she hesitated and then said almost as if embarrassed, “I want to say Christian” (personal communication, June 23, 2009).

It is evident that Brandy’s Christianity held dominance in their grown son’s formative years, for Reuben attends a Presbyterian church in Norfolk and has no interest in his father’s religion. As Brandy said regarding Reuben with regret in her voice, “He’s a little mixed up about Judaism” (personal communication, June 23, 2009). In the hope that their son will one day visit Beth Messiah and consider aspects of his father’s beliefs, Brandy stated, “I still think he should learn more” (personal communication, June 23, 2009). While listening to Paul Wilbur CDs at home, this wife and mother prays for a deepening unity in her family’s faith. As her daughter (and Larry’s step-daughter) Diana, understands little of her mother’s interest in Messianic Judaism, Brandy realizes she has become somewhat of a spiritual enigma to her children. Still, she states without apology, “I feel driven to go to the messianic synagogue” (personal communication, June 23, 2009).

Neil Yardley

Neil Yardley is a teacher at a Public School in Norfolk. However, one could easily imagine him as a member of an exclusive yacht club. It’s the way he carries himself, his full head of wavy hair, tan, gleaming smile and the clothes he chooses. At sixty years of age, he watches everything he eats so as not to hinder his tennis playing.
I felt chills up and down my body and I likened it to [being] in Palm Springs when you get out of a swimming pool and the dry air starts to evaporate the water from your body and you feel chills, but this was a chill that went from head to toe and back and forth without stopping . . . all the time they were praying for me! They said, “Now when you go home read the Bible. You are going to find it completely different. It’s going to minister to you” and I will never forgot that night going home and opening up my Bible reading, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. [God] was like answering all of my questions . . . all the doubts . . . everything was being lifted. The past with the Science of Mind—which was like psychology stuff—was nothing! (personal communication, June 22, 2009)

Neil’s born again experience was followed by a felt need to read the second chapter of Acts, which in turn led to the thought that he needed a "prayer language" (personal communication, June 22, 2009). Working a second job as a tennis instructor, he stepped into a utility closet at a tennis camp for privacy in order to pray, when "instantaneously" as he put it, he began to pray in tongues (personal communication, June 22, 2009). Neil recalled, “To me it was likened to a little bit of Spanish, but the more I let it flow freely, the more it came out [sounding] different” (personal communication, June 22, 2009).

Neil and his girlfriend married and moved to a ski resort area in Idaho where Neil got a teaching job and also worked as a tennis instructor. They attended an independent charismatic church for while, as Neil entertained the idea of getting a degree in counseling. His plan came to fruition after moving to Virginia Beach, Virginia to attend

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244 A common phrase used to refer to praying in tongues.
Regent University. There they attended an Assemblies of God Church and a Presbyterian
Church before visiting Beth Messiah Synagogue.

He liked what he saw, but confessed to having initial fears about joining a
Messianic synagogue. When asked why he was fearful of joining Beth Messiah he stated
with some degree of embarrassment, "Well, because of the stigma that goes with being
connected as a Jewish person. I guess fear of persecution, that if persecution arises again,
I'm going to be there. I'm going to be involved. I mean if they're going to be blowing up
things or killing people or putting people in ovens, I'd be there" (personal
communication, June 22, 2009).

Clearly things have changed for Neil. At this writing, he entirely embraces the
movement declaring, "I am a Messianic Jew' as I have assimilated into it. Although I was
raised as a gentile and grew up in my faith as a Christian—I am now a Messianic Jew. I
am assimilated into that lifestyle and I have so much more to grow. I'm excited about it"
(personal communication, June 22, 2009).

Neil has never undergone a ceremony such as a Bar Mitzvah. So the concept of
assimilating into Messianic Judaism, so as to become a Messianic Jew, is extremely
important to him. In other words, one may become a Messianic Jew gradually. Rabbi
Rosenfarb has often taught that the Jewish People have grown partly via assimilation.
Outside persons have married into Judaism or adopted its ways as their own. Applying
this notion to his own circumstance Neil stated, "I suppose it's just in my last nine years
at Beth Messiah, recognizing my love for the worship, teaching . . . and although I don't
know as I have any genetic connection as a Jewish person, I remember the rabbi saying
people assimilated" (personal communication, June 22, 2009). Subsequently, unlike most gentiles in the movement, Neil feels confident in stating he is Jewish.

Such self-declared identification as a Messianic Jew is not always received well, as Neil stated, “My wife’s side of the family thinks that I’m a little bit of a nutcase now, because they’ve seen how I’ve grown in my relationship with Jesus or Yeshua. I’ve somehow not been the same person, but I see myself as growing closer to God and that causes conflict” (personal communication, June 22, 2009). It also causes confusion for those born Jewish who can’t quite understand Neil’s motivations, as he has shared:

In the public school where I’m [working] at right now there are two [normative] Jewish teachers. They’re very well aware of my love for Judaism. I remember using [Jewish] terms. Every holiday now I take off Yom Kippur along with them and they’re aware of it. At different high holy days I’ll mention things to them and just express my love for the land. I think I make it real clear I’m a Zionist. I love Israel. I know for them they’re kind of quizzical about, “Who is this guy anyway? He’s got a love for the land—we don’t even have a love for the land. He loves the Bible and knows about it—we don’t know that much about it.” I remember [that one of them] kind of feigned that she was a believer in Yeshua because I was very open in talking with her about it, but since then I’ve learned that she’s gone with the other teacher to her conservative synagogue. (personal communication, June 22, 2009)

Although rare within Messianic Judaism, gentiles that claim to be Messianic Jews incite a variety of reactions from normative Jews ranging from resentment, bemusement, pity, curiosity, bewilderment to respect. Even Jews who describe themselves as Hebrew-
Christians are puzzled by gentiles claiming to be Messianic Jews as evidenced by Neil sharing, "I have a very close friend of mine—a remarkable man. He’s a worship leader in a Baptist church. He’s miracle man—that’s what I call him, who has survived cancer for eighteen years—nineteen years. He is Jewish and he thinks I’m kind of a nutball being a Messianic Jew" (personal communication, June 22, 2009).

One may wonder, when did Neil first think he had become a Messianic Jew? “It was gradual” he said, “but it was almost as mystical as when I went to Israel the first time . . . flying to Israel, landing there, getting off that airplane . . . there are not words for the feeling that this place is home. Somehow this place—I’d never been there before, but it felt like home more than any other place in my entire life . . . and that’s how I felt in essence about Beth Messiah and the Messianic Movement” with an exuberant grin he added, “I always feel a connection with these people” (personal communication, June 22, 2009). For this gentile, being a Messianic Jew is a matter of feeling at home and connected. Perhaps too, it is also a matter of not feeling at home or connected with other things.

“Christmas to me is a pagan holiday” declared Neil, “for years my wife and I haven’t exchanged gifts or even sent gifts to family members. It’s just a pagan holiday. I don’t follow it at all . . . no Christmas tree” (personal communication, June 22, 2009). Instead, Neil and his wife, celebrate Chanukah by lighting the menorah’s candles. Additionally, each spring, Easter is ignored in favor of Passover.

For all of his change of lifestyle and self-designation as a Messianic Jew, Neil insists that he has not had a conversion. “No” he said adamantly, “Not like I had when I was born again into the Kingdom of God” (personal communication, June 22, 2009).
For Neil the Kingdom of God is extended to all who will receive the Messiah as either Yeshua or Jesus, which leads to the question of how he would present himself to Jews and gentiles for the purpose of explaining the good news. With a significant length of silence he offered, “I suppose if I’m witnessing to somebody I would see myself as a believer . . . I don’t know, I can’t say right now, because I definitely see myself as a Messianic Jew . . . I don’t see myself as a quote ‘Christian’” (personal communication, June 22, 2009).

Over the years Neil has derived spiritual nourishment from television media addressing Messianic issues. Zola Levitt Ministries and Day of Discovery with Mart De Haan245 have been two favorites. Additionally, Neil used to get the Messianic Times in hard copy. Today he prefers to visit the Jerusalem Post online—sometimes to the accompaniment of a Paul Wilbur CD.

Sandy Nebaughm

Sandy Nebaughm seems to have an outfit for every occasion and a hat for every outfit. Frequently struggling with weight gain, she’s a champion at accessorizing with beads, scarves, and broaches. At sixty-five, this gentile has mastered not only Yiddish idioms but the accompanying mannerisms that go with them.

Raised in Chicago by parents claiming no particular faith, she was taken to churches as a child by caring neighbors. She recalled often feeling safe in the Lutheran and Methodist sanctuaries she visited. Although, for reasons she could not explain, she also imagined God shaking his head at her in disappointment.

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245 Day of Discovery is a weekly televised thirty minute production of RBC Ministries that is seen nationally. Often shot in Israel, the show frequently addresses Messianic matters in its high quality documentary styled programs. Most times, the show is hosted by Mart De Haan, who serves as the president of the ministry that also produces the widely read Our Daily Bread devotionals.
As a little girl, Sandy never anticipated one day marrying a Jewish man, but Herman Nebaughm fit the bill and a Justice of the Peace was employed as a concession to their differing faiths. Herman had been raised as an Orthodox Jew, while Sandy had no denominational allegiance and only a vague notion of God. This may explain Sandy’s erratic reaction to her neighbor’s attempts at witnessing about Christianity. Sandy would routinely throw her out of her house and then within five minutes phone to apologize asking her to come back and tell her more about the gospel. This went on for four years until one day Sandy phoned her neighbor and said, “You’re right—I do need to repent” (personal communication, April 21, 2009). Although Sandy still didn’t fully understand the concept of salvation, she was changed in some way and Herman was troubled.

Sandy wanted to attend a church, so Herman begrudgingly agreed to go to one that was the most tolerable for him—a Unitarian. Sandy described it in retrospect as being a “hippy church” of the time (personal communication, April 21, 2009). They grew bored and started attending a Presbyterian church that was motivated toward social activism. During this period they heard of a charismatic tent revival meeting that was going to take place directly opposite their latest church. The Presbyterian pastor told everyone in his congregation not to attend—so Sandy and Herman naturally rebelled and went.

Sandy found the message emanating from the dozens of tiny crackling speakers to be the clearest thing she had ever heard. Beneath the thousand-seat canvass covering, she stood to accept the Lord, as did her husband. A new chapter had begun in both of their

246 Herman Nebaughm is featured in the previous chapter addressing Messianic Jews.
247 Referenced briefly in Chapter One and with a more extensive footnote in Chapter Five, and earlier in this chapter, Unitarians deny the divinity of Yeshua/Jesus, which makes their churches more agreeable to normative Jews (Mead, 1990).
lives. A week later the Christian Broadcasting Network’s 700 Club program started playing on a Chicago television station. Sandy was attracted to the show and watched regularly. A few years later while watching she saw a crawl at the bottom of the screen stating that CBN in Virginia Beach was seeking a person to lead their advertising and promotion. Sandy urged Herman to apply and he got the position.

Once they had moved to Virginia they attended both a church and Beth Messiah. At first it was simply a matter of curiosity. However, eventually Beth Messiah won her allegiance because as Sandy described with her eyes unusually wide open and expressive, “The Strength of Messianic Judaism is truth in its fullness in the biblical sense” (personal communication, April 21, 2009). Resuming her normal expression, she indicated that she is concerned when others do not understand her expression of faith. With some degree of defensiveness she said agitatedly, “We simply want to worship the way Jesus-Yeshua worshiped when he was walking the face of the earth—period” (personal communication, April 21, 2009).

Dodi Mozahn

Dodi Mozahn is proud of her former military experience. Raised in North Dakota, she joined the Navy to escape the confines of her Roman Catholic family and its instability caused by her alcoholic father. A few years later, she met her future husband, Blake—a former Seventh Day Adventist—also in the Navy. After marrying, they gave precedence to Blake’s military career by Dodi returning to civilian life to raise their son, Malcolm.

248 This broadcasting term refers to superimposed writing that moves from right to left across the lower part of a televised image.
249 Blake Mozahn is featured in the next section of this chapter.
Dodi recalled that her earliest concept of God was based on her parent’s Catholicism and the conflict caused by their not having married in the church. Consequently, God seemed disapproving not only of her parents, but also of their offspring. Perhaps to compensate, every room in their home had a crucifix, and the Rosary was recited frequently. Additionally, there were depictions of the Last Supper on various walls throughout their home and the family sought Catholic programming on television such as at each Christmas when they watched the Pope’s broadcast from Rome and the occasional showing of religious epics such as Ben-Hur.\textsuperscript{230}

At the age of nine, Dodi was required to go to catechism in preparation for her first communion. As she recalled:

When I took the communion, I was taking the body and blood of Christ personally into my life\textsuperscript{231} and it was the forgiveness of my sin and back then you actually went to confession. So as a kid, when you go into the confessional booth you’re really afraid of God—you know—they close the door—the sliding thing opens and the red window comes open and you’re like, “Oh, my gosh—can the priest really see me?” type of thing. (personal communication, April 14, 2009)

God remained austere and remote for Dodi until she became involved with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes as a teenager. While traveling to other states to compete in basketball, track and field, she noted that some of the protestant participants she encountered prayed more freely than she did. “I felt a little inadequate” she recalled, “because I really didn’t understand that part of it . . . I believed in God . . . but I really

\textsuperscript{230} Interestingly, the 1959 film based on Lew Wallace’s 1880 novel is about the life of a prominent Hebrew forced into slavery, who encounters Yeshua/Jesus.

\textsuperscript{231} Unlike most protestant doctrine, the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation asserts that the Eucharist—or wine and bread—literally becomes “The Body and Blood of Christ” when offered in a sacerdotal fashion at a mass by a priest. (Erickson, 1998)
wasn’t raised to have that [type of] intimate relationship with God” (personal communication, April 14, 2009).

Dodi became impressed by the passionate prayers of her coach and his practical illustrations from the Bible. With a vaguely sounding Jewish name, he would speak of the Torah and on occasion use phrases such as El Shaddai.\textsuperscript{252} She began to look forward to his teachings at gatherings that grew to an average attendance of eighty people. However, once she joined the Navy at age eighteen, she drifted between Catholic and Protestant base chapels while stationed in Florida and California.

After being assigned to Virginia’s Norfolk Naval Station, she met and married Blake. Not long after, Dodi left the service and her husband was relocated to Bermuda, at which time they both became “born again”.\textsuperscript{253} After the birth of their son they returned to Norfolk and became deeply involved and disillusioned with a Pentecostal church. However, one of the more positive things associated with the church was that it had developed a non-accredited Bible school that Dodi had attended while working on staff.

Meanwhile, Blake, nursing an intense fondness for Jewish history and Israel, became interested in Messianic Judaism. Dodi agreed to visit Beth Messiah, but was afraid of being disappointed as she had been with the Pentecostal church. As she recollected, her first reaction to visiting the synagogue was emotional, “I was touched, because I had studied in Bible school and actually saw the fruition of Jews and gentiles

\textsuperscript{252} A transliteration of יְהֹוָה ὑψιστός, it serves as a title meaning God Almighty.

\textsuperscript{253} The Greek word νήσος found in John 3:3 and 7, which is most often translated born again, as Dodi used it, can also be translated to mean “born from above”, which some Messianic believers use as an alternate expression. Either way, Dodi was alluding to a new spiritual awaking.
coming together as Rabbi Paul taught.\textsuperscript{234} I thought this is really it . . . this is it" (personal communication, April 14, 2009).

Yet Dodi's initial enchantment quickly gave way to apprehension, for once she became accustomed to witnessing Jews and gentiles worshiping together, she worried that any further involvement could lead to a potential bondage to restrictive religious practices. Addressing this matter she offered:

I was anxious and nervous because I didn't want to be under the letter of the law.

There seemed to be a lot of legalism in the churches . . . different aspects of it. I was a little skeptical, very anxious, and nervous thinking, "I don't want to be stuck in another situation." I didn't want to find myself waking up one morning saying, "Oh, my gosh, I'm back where I was five years ago, ten years ago." My greatest anxiety was legalism, but I became free of that, when I began to understand myself through the teaching and the depth of study we did ourselves. It was less and less [anxiety] for me as I went through and became more educated in it. It was a freedom of incorporating those wonderful things, those traditions that became a part of who we are and identifying with who Messiah was as Yeshua. As you begin to understand it by studying it through the new covenant—the parallel of the old covenant—there was more of a freedom than there was an anxiety of it. (personal communication, April 14, 2009)

Although Dodi adjusted and discovered that ultimately she felt no bondage, she

\textsuperscript{234} Dodi was referring to the "one new man" concept found in Ephesians 2: 11-18 promising that God is bringing a new unity between Jews and gentiles where— as indicated in verse fourteen— a wall of division has been removed. Her reference to Rabbi Paul is not uncommon as a substitute for the Apostle Paul in Messianic circles.
nevertheless struggled with a sense of acceptance at Beth Messiah for some time. “I think sometimes gentiles also go through the thing of . . . I’m gentile . . . I’m not really Jewish. Do I really fit in here?” she said recalling her first few months at the synagogue (personal communication, April 14, 2009).

Dodi is a creative and powerful personality who is often inclined to move into new situations with enthusiasm and energy. Sometimes her intensity can seem a little arresting to those unaccustomed to her sincere eagerness. Ironically, her generous spirit can incur resistance from others. She recalled experiencing resentment from some Messianic Jews in her early days in the movement:

When I first came into the movement it was very thick. I didn’t understand it. I didn’t know what it was. I kind of knew, but you could feel that even though it was Messianic and it was Jews and gentiles. The Jews had a very hard time embracing the gentiles coming into the Messianic Movement—a very difficult time. Not all of them, but a good portion of them. So you felt like a square peg in a round hole. So when you would be asked to do something, or to participate in something it would offend some Jewish people, even though they said they were Messianic, it still was difficult for them to embrace a gentile into the movement. (personal communication, April 14, 2009)

Dodi had difficulty reconciling the rejection of some of her ideas with her idealized concept of what the movement was supposed to be.”If I was in charge of a bat mitzvah or a bar mitzvah—and I’m not Jewish—and you’d put this great elaborate presentation on, it was always critiqued and judged excessively by the Jewish people, because you’re not Jewish—[it was a] ‘What do you know?’ type of thing” she said with
near tears in her eyes (personal communication, April 14, 2009). Holding her hand to her
nose she continued:

As I went through these experiences at times I would find myself emotionally
overwhelmed by it. I would cry about it. I didn’t understand it because I just felt
this enormous amount of love for the Jewish people. I felt an enormous amount of
love for the Messianic Movement. I felt complete. I felt home in myself, but I
[also] felt “Maybe this isn’t my home” if they don’t want me to be here. It’s like a
dysfunctional family almost. You’re part of the family but, you know, [it’s a] “We
love you today—but not tomorrow” type of thing. I think that how I got through
was [that] I knew we were all growing together. (personal communication, April
14, 2009)

In order to cope with her feelings of personal rejection, Dodi adopted the
rationale that all the Messianic Jews were also experiencing continual spiritual, mental
and emotional adjustments within the movement. As she expressed it to me, she
concluded that, “It was new to them. They were afraid of it. Just as much as a gentile
would walk in and feel they were uncertain” then referencing a biblical concept she
added, “I think it was anytime you graft something in—it’s not a simple process.”

You’re carving, you’re shaping, you’re molding, you’re making. It was growth”
(personal communication, April 14, 2009).

Today, Dodi is a prominent member of Beth Messiah, functioning in a high
profile capacity leading banquets, arranging receptions, and catering weddings at the
synagogue. Her husband, Blake, is also a prominent member—insuring against any

255 As referenced earlier in this chapter, to be “grafted in” refers to an analogy found in Romans 11:17-24
where Israel compared to a cultivated olive tree and believing gentiles to wild olive branches that are
allowed to draw from the cultivated roots of the tree.
wallflower status. The couple frequently host functions at their home during the high holidays. In their daily lives they not only adhere to the dietary requirements of Judaism, but also to just plain good health, as Dodi is self-educated in natural and organic foods. Speaking of matters of diet and faith Dodi said:

We don’t eat pork.\(^{256}\) I don’t think it’s been written just to the Jewish People. I don’t think you have to be concerned about it either, because [God] said “Whatever I call clean is clean”\(^{257}\) I try not to put myself under the letter of the Law. I don’t eat pork because I know it’s not good for you.\(^{258}\) (personal communication, April 14, 2009)

Regarding the calendar, she added, “I abide by all of the festivals, especially the three festivals that God taught us to observe even as gentiles—Sukkot, Shavuot and Pesach.\(^{259}\) I like the other ones too, because I think it’s a completeness of understanding of who we are together and who we are as a person . . . a complete believer in God himself through Yeshua, Messiah” (personal communication, April 14, 2009).

**Blake Mozahn**

Blake Mozahn’s voice is unique in that it is nasally, yet also gravelly in a low tone. An extremely affable fellow suffering the incongruence of a slightly menacing stare, Blake serves as a Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy. Although he

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\(^{256}\) The kashrut dietary restrictions as found in the eleventh chapter of Leviticus that prohibit the consumption of pork can be an opportunity for gentiles to have a behavioral form of identification with Jewish people.  

\(^{257}\) This scripture reference is found in the tenth chapter of Acts in verse fifteen. Interestingly, the larger section contained in verses nine through sixteen, seem to challenge the dietary restrictions of the eleventh chapter of Leviticus. Nonetheless, Dodi adheres to the more restrictive interpretation.  

\(^{258}\) Dodi has studied natural health diets and in particular the writings of Jordan Rubin. His best-selling books advocate a biblical diet based on the prohibitions found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Rubin, 2005, 2008). Subsequently, Dodi has modified some of this material and lead a workshop at one of Beth Messiah’s women’s retreats.  

\(^{259}\) These feasts that required all men to go on a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem are listed in Deuteronomy 16:16. Today they are more commonly known as the Feast of Booths—or Tabernacles, Pentecost and Passover.
readily acknowledges being fifty years old, it bothers him, as he would like to be further along in his military career.

Born to a father of German and French lineage and to a Panamanian mother of Indian decent, he quietly enjoys it when people try to guess his ethnicity based on his bronze toned skin. Living a character actor’s dream, people routinely mistake him to be Puerto Rican, Native-American, Arab, Brazilian, Italian, Moroccan, Mexican or any one of another dozen nationalities. However, Blake is most flattered, and yet, somewhat embarrassed, when he is mistaken to be an ethnic Jew.

Born in Chicago, his parents decided in his middle childhood to move the family to Wisconsin. Raised as a Seventh Day Adventist, Blake had restrictions placed on him unknown to his friends. As he described it, “It’s a lot like Messianic Judaism in some aspects [and] it’s a lot like normative Judaism in many aspects” (personal communication, July 31, 2007). Dietary restrictions were enforced and Blake was required to shut off the television at dusk each Friday with no hope of watching Saturday morning cartoons before walking to church.

With restricted television viewing, reading became a central pastime. One day, while looking for something to do, he came across a *Time-Life* book about world religions. Only eight at the time, Blake became fascinated with the two pages that addressed Judaism. He realized that the Jewish disciplines were similar to his own and immediately identified. Then turning to the pages regarding Christianity he found himself relating to their content as well. In his young mind he saw himself as a synthesis of both expressions of faith.

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260 As indicated in greater detail previously, Seventh Day Adventists worship on Saturdays, hold to dietary restrictions and a belief in soul sleep for the dead (Braswell, 1986; Mead, 1990).
By the time he was in his late teens he wanted some adventure so he joined the United States Army. However, while stationed in Germany, adventure often became drudgery, so when confined to the base he read Leon Uris’ *Exodus* (Uris, 2000)\(^{261}\) and Herman Wouk’s *War and Remembrance* (Wouk, 1978).\(^{262}\) These works intensified his interest in the Jewish people and in Israeli’s in particular as the books depicted the struggle that Jews faced in leaving Europe to reestablish Israel. Blake recalled, “I could identify with being misunderstood and the injustices they faced” (personal communication, July 31, 2007). All the elements seemed to congeal, romanticism, heroism, militarism and religion.

After leaving the Army, Blake joined the Navy and married Dodi\(^{263}\) with whom he later had a child when stationed in Bermuda. While away for training in South Carolina, Blake visited an Assemblies of God church and became “born again”. Meanwhile, Dodi, a former Roman Catholic, started attending an independent Pentecostal church on the island and had a similar experience. When Blake returned to Bermuda the couple was astonished at each other’s news. Unified in their spiritual walk, Blake’s still had a unique aspect to his faith. Speaking of his life after his born again commitment Blake stated with tears in his eyes:

One would think maybe, that any association I’m sort of having with Judaism would fall away or would jettison off to the side and diminish, because I’m now a born again Christian. Well, the exact opposite thing happened because right after that experience, I picked up another book [this time] by Chaim Potok called *The

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\(^{261}\) Uris wrote about the founding of the State of Israel in this work of historical fiction that was first published in 1958. The book derives its title from the immigration ship of the same name.

\(^{262}\) Although Wouk’s 1978 novel involves many events and locations a major part of the narrative concerns the plight of the Jewish people during the Holocaust.

\(^{263}\) Dodi Mazahin is featured in this chapter in the section immediately prior to this one.
Wanderings (Potok, 1978). It’s more of a panoramic of Jewish history... and I was really moved by that, [but] I didn’t think I’d made a mistake by becoming born again, but I thought, “Your obligation to [Jewish matters] isn’t over yet.” (personal communication, July 31, 2007).

Eventually, Blake was stationed in Norfolk where he and his family became involved with an independent Pentecostal church before visiting Beth Messiah. Upon visiting the synagogue, he was attracted to the combination of a Jewish and charismatic service. At long last, he had found a spiritual home.

A dozen years later, Blake serves as a member of the shammashim and is noted within the kehilat as a strong supporter of Israel and for having made multiple trips to the Jewish homeland both with his wife, their son and by himself. Moreover, he has made two additional trips to Israel as a volunteer for the One Family Fund, an organization that seeks support for victims of terrorism. Back in Norfolk, he has also been a spokesman for Jews and Christians for Israel, a work that has brought Blake into steady contact with Conservative Jews.

I learned that in none of these efforts does he attempt to present his Messianic beliefs to normative Jews—which begged a question that had to be asked. Did he think that Jewish people that don’t believe in Yeshua/Jesus would go to hell? Blake looked uncomfortable and crossed his legs while sitting at his dining room table before responding, “Wow... in all honesty I don’t know anymore, and that could be prejudiced by the personal relationships I develop with these people—I’m certain of that. I think often times, people present that question and think it specifically only applies to Jews”

264 The book was a rare work of nonfiction for the author, as he examined aspects of his disillusionment with Judaism, while considering its People’s historical milestones (Potok, 1978).
265 The equivalent of the position held by a deacon in a church.
(personal communication, July 31, 2007). Disturbed by the enquiry, Blake stared off into space for a moment and then suddenly made an expression indicating that he had a question of his own. Expressed in a tone indicating no small degree of frustration, Blake asked while returning his focus to me, “Where is my father right now, who was raised with this stuff, and from stories I get from my aunts and my uncles, really believed this stuff, and was excited about it and then had a falling away?” he then stared off again and pulled nervously with one hand at his lower lip (personal communication, July 31, 2007).

This uneasy momentary reverie and hanging question did not address the matter of his reluctance to share his Messianic beliefs with normative Jews. Sensing the insufficiency of his response Blake continued:

I’m hoping to lay up enough good works with those guys that somebody says, “Before you go home tonight I want to ask you a question” and then from there hopefully it can take off. There is a great danger in ministering to the Jewish people that you can put the cart before the horse. In this thing it’s going to take right timing. I’m not saying that’s with every Jew. I believe that seeing to their earthly survival here is a witness to what we believe in.” (personal communication, July 31, 2007)

Blake is reluctant to take advantage of what could be construed as advantageous opportunities for witnessing. For example, from time to time, Beth Messiah synagogue has had guests from Israel speak. One such person was David Rubin266 of the Shiloh Israeli Children’s Fund. There is an embarrassing aspect to such visits because often normative Jewish centers and synagogues will not welcome or assist speakers who are

266 I met David Rubin in Israel. He is the former Mayor of Shiloh. Once I was back in the United States, I arranged for him to speak at Beth Messiah and hosted him for two days.
pro-Israel. However, evangelical churches and Messianic synagogues frequently provide housing, transportation and financial support. Blake has had to handle such difficult circumstances many times with guests from Israel, as he recalled:

They notice a tepid response by the Jewish community in supporting Israel and then an overwhelming warm response by evangelicals. I see the pain in their faces about that . . . and I feel misgivings about immediately trying to capitalize on that by saying, "That's why you need to believe in Jesus"—I almost feel that would be a little distasteful too" (personal communication, July 31, 2007).

So how does Blake present himself to Jews and gentiles? Despite their complaints about a lack of identity, I note that some Messianic Jews and some Messianic Gentiles actually use the chameleonesque quality of their identity to their social advantage. For example, when asked if he was a Christian, Blake laughed and offered:

I do admit I have a hard time identifying myself as that, although for someone who is uninitiated in this, I will then define myself as that, to give them a point of reference—a context. By no means does that mean that I have negative feelings. People go through stages like that, when they are a gentile and get into Messianic Judaism, where the church suddenly grew horns and was the devil. I want to make this clear, I think the church overall has been a force for good in the world since it has been around [but] even in the now, on my dog tags, and on my identifying forms in the military, I put down Messianic Judaism. Understanding, (bursting into laughter) that if something was happening they would probably usher a [normative] rabbi to my side and he would be a little shocked too. But, I'll deal with that if it comes. (personal communication, July 31, 2007)
Blake has learned to deal with the confusion caused by his knowledge of Jewish matters extending from religious observance to the correct usage of Yiddish idioms. Indeed, being viewed as Jewish by some can present problems, particularly when it requires continuous explanations, as Blake shared, “Okay, yeah, it’s kind of flattering for a few minutes. Then you realize—I’ve got to clear the picture up on this. That’s were the confusion comes because a lot of times in my life. I’ve been mistaken for being Jewish. Some of them could make comedy reels. Some of them just present themselves awkwardly” (personal communication, July 31, 2007).

At such times, Blake feels burdened to rectify the confusion by giving a fairly detailed overview of Messianic Judaism—often to no avail. As Blake shared about such attempts, “Sometimes you see a light go on in people’s heads of, ‘okay—I get it’ and other times, to other people, you explain it three or four times and they have this response, ‘So you’re Jewish’ and after about the fourth time you just go, ‘Yeah, okay’—I ain’t gonna get this through to you!” he said before laughing (personal communication, July 31, 2007).

Blake, like most Messianic Gentiles, rejects the notion that he has had a conversion, stating, “There were no conversion classes as you would have within conventional Judaism. No, I never went through that, but a slow metamorphosis undertook in my life within me, largely through just picking up publications and reading them and doing my research and from hearing items from the pulpit or Rabbi Rosenfarb” (personal communication, July 31, 2007). After some considerable thought, Blake added, “In me now there is a change, as you [heard] before, I am kind of reluctant to identify
myself as Christian, but I don’t know why. I go back to a Jacob Dylan line in the song
One Headlight... ‘I haven’t changed but I know I’m not the same’” (personal
communication, July 31, 2007).

When asked if his motivations for his involvement in Messianic Judaism were
based more on matters of faith or middle-eastern politics, Blake responded by giving a
politically motivated faith-based answer, “I believe that sometimes one of the best things
the church could probably do to support Israel is to move in mass to try to evangelize the
Palestinians. I’m not saying that that would create a complete overturning of the tables. I
would say... that would present an easier situation for the two to negotiate... if the
Palestinians had a larger Christian base to them” (personal communication, July 31,
2007).

Blake remains the most politically minded member of Beth Messiah—finding it
hard at times to distinguish between biblical precepts and political strategizing. “I’ve
found a home in Judaism” he declared, adding a fervent testimony of devotion:

If suddenly there was a lottery available to everyone who was Jewish and they
said come on down to the bank and pick up your fifty thousand for being
Jewish—I wouldn’t be there! I wouldn’t be in for that. I understand that. I’m not
going to the realm of unreality, but if there’s trouble, as there’s been trouble in the
past—and I certainly hope there’s not trouble so I can prove this—but then I
intend to be there. (personal communication, July 31, 2007)

I concluded by asking Blake if he considered himself deep down to have become

267 Not to be confused with his more prominent father, Bob, Jacob Dylan is the lead singer for the band the
Wallflowers.
a Jew? Staring at me with a long held silence he finally ventured, “Well, I certainly tend to act like one” then erupting into laughter as if amused by the absurdity of his own words, he added emphatically, “but, I’m not!” before laughing again (personal communication, July 31, 2007).

**Conclusion of Chapter Six**

As with the profiles of Messianic Jews that were presented in Chapter Five, in this chapter we have profiled fifteen Messianic Gentiles and considered their distinct and succinct spiritually transformative narratives. In Chapter Seven we shall enter into an analysis of the gathered data by considering the matter of sense-making in relation to the aspect of the interpersonal and mass communication influences on these believers.

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268 Again, the more common academic term would be “conversion narratives”, but in recognition of my interviewees’ deeply held objection to the term, I honor them.
The Non-Converts of Jews and Gentiles to Messianic Judaism:
A Sense-Making Analysis of Interpersonal and Mass Communicative Influence
on Spiritual Transformations

Submitted to Regent University

School of Communication and the Arts

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Alan L. C. Campbell
May 2010
THE NON-CONVERSIONS OF JEWS AND GI JUDAISM: A SENSE-MAKING ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATIVE INFLUENCE ON SPIRITUALITY

Has been approved by his/her committee as satisfactory requirement for the degree of Doctor of

Norman Mintle, Ph.D., Chair
School of Communication and the Arts

J. Dennis Bounds, Ph.D., Committee Member
School of Communication and the Arts

John D. Keeler, Ph.D., Committee Member
School of Communication and the Arts