

# Blurring the Boundaries

## American Messianic Jews and Gentiles

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**ABSTRACT:** Messianic Judaism is usually equated with Jews for Jesus, an overtly missionizing form of ethnically Jewish Evangelical Christianity that was born in the American counter-culture revolution of the 1970s. The ensuing and evolving hybrid blend of Judaism and Christianity that it birthed has evoked strong objections from both the American Jewish and mainline Christian communities. What begs an explanation, though, is how a Gentile Protestant missionary project to convert the Jews has become an ethnically Jewish movement to create community, continuity, and perhaps a new form of Judaism. This paper explores the way in which Messianic Jews have progressively exploited the space between two historically competitive socio-religious cultures in order to create an identity of their own in the American religious landscape. It also introduces Messianic Israelites, non-Jewish but sympathetic believers who are struggling with the implications of an ethnically divided church where Jews are the categorically privileged members.

### INTRODUCTION

The words “Messianic Jew” are likely to conjure up images of zealous street missionaries sporting T-shirts emblazoned with the Star of David and the Jews for Jesus logo, brazenly pushing tracts into the hands of passersby. Even today, this 1970s stereotype of the aggressive mission to convert Jews to Christianity is nearly synonymous with the Messianic Jewish movement and what it hopes to accomplish. Jews for Jesus,

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though, is just the most visible expression of a new religious movement whose roots reach back to nineteenth-century British Protestant theology but whose branches now extend into the field of American Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

The Messianic Jewish Movement has grown from a small number of Hebrew Christians and Hebrew Christian pastors in 1903 to, in the year 2002, more than 350 synagogue-styled congregations in the U. S. and Israel led by Jewish and non-Jewish Messianic rabbis.<sup>2</sup> Over the past thirty years, a significant number of Jews within American Protestant Christianity have dramatically shifted from complete acculturation and assimilation to standing outside the direct control of their Protestant mentors, producing their own literature, theology, communities, and educational institutions. This apparently hybrid-blend of Judaism and Christianity has evoked strong responses from religious leaders on both sides, but especially from the American Jewish community. While some of the scholars who have researched and written about the movement have expressed a tempered sympathy for those individuals caught between the borders, Jewish leaders on the ground have charged the Messianics with everything from apostasy to heresy to just bad taste.

Previously published academic studies have concentrated mainly in two areas, history and ethnography.<sup>3</sup> What begs a more nuanced explanation, however, is: (1) how a Gentile Protestant missionary project to convert the Jews to Christianity has become an ethnically Jewish movement that aims, at most, to form a new type of Judaism, or at the least, to reform Protestant theology to accept the presence and expression of a distinctive Jewish identity within its churches, and (2) how the introduction of ethnic distinctives into Messianic Jewish congregations has affected the majority non-Jewish participants. This paper explores the process by which select voices within early twentieth century American Hebrew Christianity and its contemporary offspring, Messianic Judaism, have progressively exploited the space between two historically competitive socio-religious cultures in order to develop a permanent identity as well as a theological and social location for themselves. It also introduces the reader to the way non-Jews drawn to Messianic congregations have reacted to this expression of Jewish ethnic identity within the church—an identity that carries with it a certain authenticity and connection to Jesus and his earliest disciples which non-Jewish believers lack. I contend that the progressive distillation of Messianic Judaism is an ongoing discursive response to the historical and persistent colonizing work of Christianity, which in the past largely denuded Jews of their Jewishness, as a requisite to a full and true Christian identity.<sup>4</sup> By this understanding, Jews, once othered and erased from their own textual and mytho-historical tradition by Christian supersessionist attitudes and doctrines, have found a space of articulation within the dominant religious discourse from which to construct a collective cultural identity that is, in their self-understanding at least, uniquely Jewish.<sup>5</sup>

There are three important phases in the relationship between Jew and Christian that must be traced in order to understand the nature and meaning of contemporary Messianic Judaism. The first is the historical construction of Jews as “others” in the earliest formation of Christian identity, and their banishment from the center of Christian self-definition. The second is the development of Hebrew Christianity—the way in which Jews who were converted under a particular Protestant theological construct in the late nineteenth century were able to win a seat at the table of Christian discourse. The third and ongoing phase is the transformation from a Hebrew Christian identity to that of Messianic Jews, who now constitute a vibrant, ethnically defined community of “Yeshua believers” dedicated to practicing Judaism within a Christian theological framework.<sup>6</sup>

The valorization of a Jewish ethnic identity within the body of Christ has created an undercurrent of estrangement among the non-Jewish members of some Messianic Jewish communities. This in turn has given rise to new discourses that have further defined the movement, yet at the same time threaten to fracture its fragile identity. The most significant non-Jewish counter voice that has surfaced is the Messianic Israel movement, which hopes to rectify the socio-political disparity between Jew and Gentile in this new vision of the church.<sup>7</sup> This paper provides a brief introduction to this new development, which seems to have called forth a large enough following to constitute a permanent challenge to Jewish hegemony of the Messianic movement as a whole.

## **CONSTRUCTING THE JEWS IN CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE**

### **Gentile Christianity from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century: Exiling the Jews**

To understand the dynamics at work in the current contestation between Gentiles and Jews within the Messianic movement, it is important to establish how it was that Jews, or Jewish ethnicity, came to be the quintessential Christian “other.” In the formation of early Christian discourse, two significant events came to define the difference between Jews/Judaism and Christians/Christianity. The first event chronologically, and the most enduring historically, is reducible to a single binary statement of belief: Jews rejected Jesus, while Christians believed in Jesus.<sup>8</sup> Jews in early Christian literature are rhetorically defined by their stubborn refusal to believe in the resurrection story, a lack of faith that rendered them blind to divine activity in their midst and adrift with respect to Israel’s impending salvation. Beginning with Paul’s observation that “we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23 NASB)” the stage was set for interpreting the Judeans’ wholesale rejection of Paul’s particular gospel as an ethnic problem of spiritual

proportions. By the time Paul penned his letter to the Romans (ca. 57–58 C.E.), he was forced to resolve a paradox. On the one hand, his gospel proclaimed the crucified and resurrected Jesus as Israel’s promised redeemer; on the other, his contemporaries (*Ioudaioi*) had rejected both his message and his Christ. Could a divine plan to save Israel be thwarted by Israel’s refusal to believe? For Paul this seems unthinkable. The solution he arrived at is to limit the makeup of Israel to a believing remnant of *Ioudaioi*, whom he calls the children of promise. Paul wrote in Romans, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel . . . That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.” (Rom. 9:6–8). He continued, “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, . . . God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew . . . [rather] there has come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.” (Rom. 11:1–5).

Complicating matters further, not only were most Judeans, or ethnic Jews, of Paul’s day excluded definitionally from his concept of an eschatological Israel, it was, on the whole, outsiders who accepted his gospel of a resurrected Jewish messiah, and who were turning their faith to Israel’s God.<sup>9</sup> Paul, for his part, interpreted Judean rejection of Christ as part of the divine plan that would temporarily allow Gentiles a chance to participate in Israel’s salvation. However, by the second century C.E. the church would come to be composed almost entirely of ethnically non-Judean believers in Christ (Christians) who considered themselves the successors to Israel’s promises. Early apologist author St. Justin Martyr wrote, “And we [the Gentile proselytes of Christ] shall inherit the Holy Land together with Abraham, receiving our inheritance for all eternity, because . . . we have become children of Abraham. . . . God promised Abraham a religious and righteous nation of like faith . . . but it is not you [the Jews], in whom there is no faith” (*Dialogue* 119:5-6).<sup>10</sup>

There is a decisive change in attitude toward Judeans from Paul’s empathetic admission that the majority of his people would not follow his Christ to a hardening polemic against “the Jews” who supposedly opposed the Judean Jesus, and ultimately caused his death. This shift in perspective and new narrative focus on Judeans as religiously anti-Jesus, is rhetorically visible in the synoptic Gospel of Matthew (ca. 80 C.E.) when, at the crucifixion of Jesus, the author imputes collective guilt for his death to the Jews and their descendants.<sup>11</sup> Late first and early second century Christian preachers and apologists also engaged in this developing denunciation of Jews and Judaism as related realities, but realities that are ultimately opposed to true Christian faith and practice. Throughout history this categorization of Jews as those who did not believe in Jesus and Christians as those who did has reverberated,

transforming an ancient, internecine argument over the messianic character and mission of a particular Jewish figure into the lopsided construction of a religion whose boundaries were idealistically articulated in terms of ethnicity on one side (Jews are excluded) and belief on the other (Christians are included).

The second significant factor that transformed the Jews in relationship to followers of Jesus was the attempt to create a new kind of identity that could be likened to the existing *Ioudaismos*, that is founded on the Torah and prophets, but that would remain distinct from it. *Christianismos* would transcend the physical requirements of Jewish law, such as circumcision, and be based on voluntary association rather than unilineal descent. Ignatius of Antioch is credited with inventing the language for this new identity in the second century C.E. in his letter to the church at Magnesia, "Be not led astray by strange doctrines or by old fables which are profitless. For if we are living until now according to Judaism, we confess that we have not received grace" (Mag. 8:1).<sup>12</sup> "It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism (*kai ioudaizen*). For Christianity (*Christianismos*) did not base its faith on Judaism, but Judaism (*Ioudaismos*) on Christianity . . ." (Mag. 10:3).<sup>13</sup> This construction served the fledgling Christians in two important ways: it simultaneously erased ethnic Jews as authentic interpreters of the Jesus tradition, and it neutralized the stigma of Gentile otherness in a socio-religious world marked by the privileged position of the Jew in the Jew/Gentile dichotomy. Christians replaced Jews at the center of Israel's symbolic universe, while Christian rhetoric exiled the Jews beyond even the periphery of Israel's boundaries. The effect of this transposition was to render those Jews who did believe no longer Jews but Christians, members of a "new race"<sup>14</sup> who were no longer to reckon their descent from Jacob, or to practice *Ioudaismos* with its antiquated rituals (Sabbaths and circumcision), but to pursue a newly articulated way of life free from the constraints of an identity dependent on Jewish law.<sup>15</sup>

Although ethnic distinctions within Christianity were ostensibly erased in Paul's famous adage, "neither Jew [Judean] nor Greek (Gal. 3:28)," in fact ethnicity was inscribed into the fledgling identity by virtue of its characterization of the primary outsiders as ethnicities: Judeans and Gentiles (Gk. *ethnoi*, Heb. *goyim*). After the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. and the expulsion of Judeans from the land, Israel could make the transition from a nation (*ethnos*) with limited sovereignty in the Roman Empire to a Christian eschatological construct inhabited by flesh-and-blood believers in the new Messiah, believers, who for the most part, had no physical or historical connection to the ancient Israelites or their physical descendants, the Judeans. In this way, Judean (Jew) and Christian were conceptualized and actualized as mutually exclusive identities and ways of life.<sup>16</sup>

From its earliest incarnation as an imperially sanctioned *religio*, Christianity sought to distance its adherents from their Jewish proclivities. The tortured history of Jewish-Christian relations in the West was marked by Christian supersessionist attitudes, punctuated by the Crusades, the Inquisition, expulsions, persecutions, and a continuous theological derogation of Judaism and Jews as inferior and estranged from their own God; strangers in their own biblical tradition. During these centuries of Christian domination in Europe, Jews were often forced or coerced into converting. Jews also co-opted conversion as a strategy for survival, a form of resistance that is still being measured today by scholars interested in the descendents of the *conversos* (*anusim*) and the hybrid religious practice dubbed crypto-Judaism.<sup>17</sup>

Despite these anomalous survivals, the assertion that Judaism and Christianity are mutually exclusive religious systems, and that Jews are the inferior and unfortunate partners in this binary pair, was carefully and successfully transmitted through Western culture for centuries, traveling across the Catholic/Orthodox divide, through the early Protestant Reformation, and then violently transecting the Christian/Jewish world into pre- and post-Holocaust eras. From the earliest Christian rejection of Jewish identity and its religious practices, anti-Judaism had grown to include formal doctrinal charges of deicide leveled at the Jews collectively. By the early twentieth century, these religious indictments, coupled with racial theory, enabled the transformation of what had begun in antiquity as a dislike or distrust of *Ioudaismos* (Judaism), a particular ethnic way of life, into a virulent racial hatred of Jews, whether they practiced their religious traditions or not.

### **Recall from the Periphery—Seventeenth Century to Present: Philo-semitism, Dispensationalism, and Gentile Missions to the Jews**

But, alongside the development of this pernicious strand of anti-Semitism was its perplexing and paradoxical double, a periodically recurring thread of Christian philo-Semitism.<sup>18</sup> By the nineteenth century in Britain, fascination with the Hebrew language and the romanticized biblical Jews of Old Testament and New Testament texts helped give birth to a new Protestant theology known as Dispensationalism, a systematic exposition of salvation history that affords Jews, as the physical remnant of biblical Israel, a decisive role in the unfolding of the Messianic kingdom.<sup>19</sup> Jewish Israel was not forsaken but rather it had been set-aside during the age of the church. When the time was right, Christians would be “raptured”<sup>20</sup> and Israel would pick up the divine mandate to evangelize the world, ushering in the Messianic Kingdom. In classic Dispensationalism, the church was a mysterious interlude in prophetic time, but it was not and did not replace Israel.

A combination of historical events and an exhaustive, albeit imaginative, research into biblical prophecy fueled the flames of this philo-Semitism, leading eventually to a renewed emphasis on the conversion and restoration of the Jews to the land of Israel. Dispensationalists interpreted the rise of Zionism and the beginning of Jewish resettlements in Palestine as signs that an eschatological drama was beginning to unfold.<sup>21</sup> Although for Dispensationalists of the early twentieth century, Israel had not yet been reborn as a nation-state, it did exist as both a mythic construct and an incipient reality, fused in the religious imagination by the imminence of the End. The notion that ethnic Jews should be physically restored to the Holy Land, together with the prophetic tradition about a coming Messiah, successfully merged Protestant Christian theology with Jewish Messianic and Zionist discourses. In this new Dispensationalist scheme, Jews moved from utterly rejected by God to the structural center of his plan of salvation.<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, this both “improved Christian attitudes toward Jews and stimulated missionary efforts to convert them.”<sup>23</sup> The new view of saved Jews as a first fruits of the prophesied remnant of Israel would give Jewish converts within the church a voice of their own as well as a space between cultures from which to speak. From here, Jews who confessed their faith in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah could identify themselves as part of the Jewish people with a pride of place in the Christian story.

### **HEBREW CHRISTIANS: TAKING A SEAT AT THE TABLE**

By the late 1800s, Dispensationalist teachings made their way to America, reenergizing a core of Protestant Christians who engaged themselves in the benevolent work of establishing missions to evangelize the Jews. Literature aimed at Jewish conversion poured out; missions with names like Hope of Israel, Chicago Hebrew Mission, and Williamsburg Mission to the Jews appeared, and missionaries reached out to tell the Wandering Jews that they were on the way home.<sup>24</sup> Those Jews who converted to a Protestant confession of Jesus as Savior through these Christian missionary efforts in Britain and America were called Hebrew Christians. At the first meeting of the newly formed Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA) in 1903, the Rev. A. R. Kuldell, elaborated on what Jews who converted under this Dispensation had and had not given up in the process:

We cannot afford to forget the rock from which we are hewn. We have indeed given up our people’s [Jewish people’s] unbelief [in Jesus Christ], but we cannot give up on our people. We have joined the Church of the First Born composed of all individuals called out of all nations to be a people unto His name, but we have not and dare not give up our nationality. Our nation [the Jewish people] stands unique in God’s plan of the ages. . . . They were the seed sowers at the beginning and they shall be the sheaf gatherers at the end of this dispensation”<sup>25</sup>

These early declarations of national unity with all Jews and spiritual unity with the Christian church reveal how these Hebrew Christians conceived of their theological location within the Protestant schema and their political or ethnic connections to each other. Here belief and nationality, Christian doctrine and Jewish peoplehood, are integral elements in a new prophetically determined Hebrew Christian identity.

Early Protestant missionaries to the Jews had high-minded and lofty ideas about the Jewish people and how they could be reached with a religious message that reminded them that they were still the Chosen People. The reality that confronted them, however, as they took their message to the streets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the shock of secular and Reform Jews, whose liberal thinking and way of life contrasted sharply with the idealized biblical Jew they had imagined. In order to reach these educated but unspiritual targets, missionaries understood they needed knowledge, and so they enlisted “native guides” to lead them through the wilderness of Judaism and Jewish life in the contemporary world. Bible Institutes set about training a new generation of missionaries in the “demographic, social, and cultural aspects of Jewish life, Jewish religious practice, and national aspirations.”<sup>26</sup>

The eminent Dr. Jacob Gartenhaus was one of these guides. A Jew who had converted in his native Austria and immigrated to America prior to World War I, Gartenhaus dedicated his life to Jewish evangelism. Yet, even as a committed Hebrew Christian, Gartenhaus displayed a rather surprising ambivalence toward his Gentile co-religionists. In the short essay that served as a preface to his booklet, *Winning the Jews to Christ*, Gartenhaus takes the opportunity to defend both the project of evangelizing the Jewish people and the transference of responsibility for evangelism itself to the saved Jew. Although on the surface he appears to support the Christian project, Gartenhaus delivers a stinging critique of the Gentile church’s 1,900 years of preaching by non-Jews to non-Jews. The disappointing result of all this effort, he argued, is that “while paganism has become ‘civilized,’ ‘Christian civilization’ has become paganized. This is what the Gentile church has achieved during 19 centuries.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Jews Within: Critiquing the Gentile Church**

Whether Gentiles had come to agree with this criticism of their missionary efforts and the state of Christian civilization on their own or not, what is striking is that Gartenhaus, a converted Jew, a Hebrew Christian, could openly criticize Gentiles from within their own paradigm, and do so with ringing endorsements from his evangelical sponsors.<sup>28</sup> There was, however, a price to pay for enlisting articulate and educated natives in the discovery of the “other.” Hebrew Christians now had a measure

of authenticity and authority, increased agency, access to the Christian classroom, and the means for self-expression through the production of educational literature. Although Dr. Gartenhaus, like most of the earliest Hebrew Christians, was entrenched and complicit in the Protestant project of converting Jews, his narrative shows the way conflicting loyalties to ethnic identity and religious belief complicate a theology that attempted to overcome Christian supersessionism by radically separating Israel from the church. Hebrew Christians, that is Jews *qua* Jews, brought an ethnically defined Israel *inside* the church, creating the potential for in-group divisions based on ethnicity rather than equality based on belief.

While converted Jews were expected to remain a distinct subgroup within the body of Christ, they were continually scrutinized by the conservative element to be certain that any Judaizing tendencies were warded off before they could take root. As Rev. Elias Newman reflected on the early years of the movement, "We had to watch our steps. If we wanted to eat a Jewish corned beef sandwich we were Judaisers. If we wanted to get married we were told we must marry a Gentile; there were a few Hebrew Christian girls and they had to marry Gentiles and if we were impudent or imprudent to cast an eye upon one of these maidens, flesh of our flesh, we were considered in danger of apostasy, etc."<sup>29</sup> These restrictions extended not only to Jewish cultural practices like *kashrut*, and social markers like marriage, but were especially vigilant in respect to precluding the introduction of Jewish religious ritual into the church. Evangelicalism accepted Hebrew Christians but had no intention of promoting or allowing the practice of Judaism alongside a Christian confession of faith.<sup>30</sup> Despite their desire to resist complete acculturation and assimilation, these early twentieth-century Hebrew Christians overwhelmingly held closely to traditional Protestant claims that rabbinic religion was dead and useless, and so they shunned any inkling of religious hybridity. What they specifically feared were the so-called Messianic Jews who advocated the observance of Jewish ceremonies and customs as part of a renewed Jewish national identity. However, the fact that converts were plagued by these issues, and that the notion one should or at least could meaningfully mix the two reveals the extent to which this double identity, ethnically Jewish and confessionally Christian, could not be resolved on the ground by a lofty systematized theology alone.

The Hebrew Christian movement changed dramatically during the late 1960s and 1970s, propelled by several factors: (1) upheavals in American culture, including the proliferation of individualistic, non-institutional, movement-oriented religious groups and the infusion of disaffected youths seeking spiritual renewal; (2) the liberalization of mainline Protestant denominations that had once fueled American missions to the Jews, but which now preferred interfaith dialogue with

institutional Judaism; and (3) Israeli victories in the War of Independence (1948) and the Six-Day War (1967) that at once boosted pride in Jewish ethnic identity and gave prophecy pundits new hope that the Messianic kingdom was around the corner.<sup>31</sup>

## **MESSIANIC JEWS: A VOICE OF THEIR OWN**

### **Creating Social Space**

The birth of Jews for Jesus in 1970 exemplifies the paradigm shift that was just on the horizon, a shift that would transition Hebrew Christianity into a Messianic Jewish movement. Moishe Rosen, a second-generation, American-born Jew serving with the Jewish Missions of America (JMA) in the late 1960s became increasingly critical of traditional Protestant missions. According to Juliene Lipson, Rosen complained that the JMA failed to address the ethnic needs of its Jewish members, and on a personal level, he came to resent his own Gentilization. In 1970, Rosen launched his new model for one-to-one missionary outreach—Jews for Jesus—based on the enthusiasm and assertiveness of the Jesus movement, the hard-work ethic of Protestantism, Dispensationalist doctrine, and above all, ethnic pride in being Jewish.<sup>32</sup> Rosen deliberately staffed his organization to give it a visible Jewish look and began aggressively confronting the Jewish community with a campaign of impassioned face-to-face street evangelism. He was rewarded for his efforts by being fired from his missionary post with the JMA, and as his band of brash believers began confronting their target, the Jewish community responded in outrage and denunciation, stating their conviction that Jews cannot believe in Jesus and remain Jews. The lines were drawn and for the most part, Rosen's ethnicization of Hebrew Christianity pleased no one but his followers and his donors.

Undaunted, he continued his project of ethnic rehabilitation by Jewish-izing<sup>33</sup> the church, aiming to teach Gentiles through drama, song, and testimonials about what it meant to be Jewish. A typical example of this updated native guide to the Jewish world is the "Christ in the Passover" booklet, which lays out an ostensibly "sermonic presentation showing the accoutrements and items used in the Passover Seder."<sup>34</sup> Jews for Jesus sponsored and performed these ritual demonstrations for sympathetic Christian congregations. Rosen's self-styled Jewish-izing of the Christian church along with his unabashed, aggressive evangelism of Jews may not have pleased everyone, but Jews for Jesus did mark a new possibility socially and politically for converted Jews within Hebrew Christianity; it was possible to largely leave the colonial fold behind and forge a new path. Those Jews who wanted to could now express their ethnic identity freely in the American public space while maintaining and preaching traditional evangelical Christian doctrines.

Those who came into Hebrew Christianity through the 1970s counterculture revolution as well as those from the older generation who felt the pull toward a more overtly Jewish religious and cultural lifestyle eventually forced a name change in the single Hebrew Christian organization that represented them. In 1975 the HCAA was renamed the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA). The new name represented an “evolution in the thought processes and religious and philosophical outlook toward a more fervent expression of Jewish identity.”<sup>35</sup> The new Messianic Jewish leaders successfully created networks of synagogue-styled congregations largely independent of Protestant control where they could read from the Torah, wear ritual clothing, sing in Hebrew, and combine those elements with evangelical doctrine and charismatic worship.<sup>36</sup>

By the 1980s a significant number of Jews within American Protestantism seemed to have moved from assimilation, acculturation, and mimicry to true hybridity. As David Stern, self-appointed theologian for the then budding Messianic Jewish movement, proclaimed, “I am 100% Messianic and 100% Jewish.”<sup>37</sup> By Messianic Stern meant “born again” spiritually and by Jewish he meant born to at least one Jewish parent. This claim to a dual identity, confessionally Christian but Jewish by birth, together with the proliferation of independent Messianic congregations consisting of ethnic Jews and non-Jews, seems to have spurred the flurry of academic studies of Messianic Judaism during the 1990s.

### **Creating Theological Space**

As the movement grew, leaders began to consider the theological implications of their hybridity and what that meant for their relationship to non-Jewish churches. If in the third century C.E. Gentiles had erased Jews culturally and ethnically from Christianity, Messianics were now reminding Christians that in the original first century encounter it was Gentiles whose status was contested and Jews who had the leadership roles. Christianity, they claimed, had become a Gentile religion that had usurped authority from the rightful owners, corrupting the Gospel message with Gentile anti-Jewishness. David Stern is the single voice most responsible for framing the internal discourse for and about Messianic Jews. He is also credited with the first attempt at producing a distinctive theology of Messianic Judaism in which Yeshua-believing Jews hold center stage. Stern’s seminal work, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, outlines his hopes and strategy for restoring what he calls the Jewishness of the Gospel. In it he encourages Messianic Jews to develop Messianic Judaism and then to teach non-Jewish Christians the neglected aspects of the faith, which this ostensibly restored Judaism will make known.<sup>38</sup> Stern envisions Messianic Judaism as the vehicle responsible for

providing the communal, theological, and ideological framework within which Judaism, the real religious reality, can become what it ought to be. For Stern, Judaism is not a survival, but the logical and authentic framework for articulating faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.<sup>39</sup>

In 1989 Stern published *The Jewish New Testament: A Translation of the New Testament that Expresses its Jewishness*, a feat accomplished primarily by Yiddishizing or Hebraicizing the English translation: Jesus becomes Yeshua, Solomon becomes Shlomo, the Holy Spirit is rendered as *ruach-ha kodesh*, and so on.<sup>40</sup> What Stern attempts here is to move the New Testament's center of gravity from a Gentile Christian scripture to a Jewish book that he says is, "by Jews, mostly about Jews, and for Jews as well as Gentiles."<sup>41</sup> By shifting the interpretive linguistic framework of the New Testament from Greek to Hebrew, and the interpretive community from Gentile to Jew, he also normalizes Jewish belief in a Jewish Messiah while marginalizing non-Jews as "others," whose access to Israel's salvation without conversion to Judaism was originally a matter for Jewish debate!

Even more than a restoration of the gospel's Jewishness, Stern and other Messianic Jews denounced the Gentilization of what they see as the original Jewishness of ancient Christian faith. This project of recovering an allegedly lost form of indigenous Judaism has been encouraged by a Western Christian fascination with a re-Judaized Jesus. As David Van Biema wrote in his 2008 article for *Time* newsmagazine,

The shift [in the perception of Jesus' Jewishness] came in stages: first a brute acceptance that Jesus was born a Jew and did Jewish things; then, admission that he and his interpreter Paul saw themselves as Jews even while founding what became another faith; and today, recognition of what the Rev. Bruce Chilton, author of *Rabbi Jesus*, calls Jesus' passionate dedication 'to the Jewish ideas of his day' on everything from ritual purity to the ideal of the kingdom of God—ideas he reweave but did not abandon.<sup>42</sup>

Read from the Messianic Jewish perspective, this is simply the Gentile church's recognition of what Messianics have been happy to proclaim all along: the gospel is indigenous to Jews and rightfully constitutes a form of Judaism rather than a new religion to which Jews must convert. Within this framework, Jews have moved from marginalized, oppressed, delegitimized, and even dehumanized "others" in the Christian salvation narrative to the rightful spokespersons for and interpreters of the New Testament message and writings. Gentiles should respectfully take a back seat to their Jewish counterparts and acknowledge their rightful place as wild shoots grafted on to the vine of Israel. If in the 1970s Jews who believed in Jesus were the anomalous "other" in Protestantism, by

the 1990s it was the Gentile members of Messianic Jewish congregations who were beginning to feel displaced and othered.

## **MESSIANIC JEWS AND GENTILES: BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES**

### **Gentiles in a Jewish Movement**

How did Gentiles attracted to the movement respond to this new vision of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ? They came in such overwhelming numbers that their presence threatened to upset the delicate balance that kept the minimum quota of Jews in Messianic congregations.<sup>43</sup> As part of their Christian experience, Gentiles now felt free to participate in traditional Jewish religious holidays, prayers, ceremonies, wear Jewish ritual garments, and learn Hebrew, confident that they were learning to do what Jesus (as a Torah-observant Jew of his day) would have them do to honor their commitment to him and to honor their commitment to the Torah (something they feel the Church wrongly abandoned early on). However, these blurred cultural boundaries have contributed to the confusion about what or who is a Messianic Jew, complicated the interaction between Messianics and their two contributing religious communities, and served as a constant reminder to members that they occupy a liminal space between two institutional religions.<sup>44</sup>

This blurring also complicates the relationship between Jew and non-Jew, given the Christian understanding that the body of Christ should be ethnically neutral. Radicalized notions of Jewish ethnicity create a hierarchy of members within congregations, categorically privileging Jews who have already been theologically constructed as the authentic remnant of biblical Israel with all the benefits and obligations assigned to it in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament scriptures. Jews are also then linked to the Jewish Jesus and his original disciples in a way that Gentile Messianics never can be. Thus the desirability of Jewish status in the movement reintroduces the dynamic of dislocation, although inverted, where Gentiles rather than Jews are at risk of being displaced in their own religious world.

Openly accepting the large number of [Righteous] Gentiles that flocked to their congregations as equals was an uncomfortable issue, and largely one that had gone without formal discussion. Because defining who is a Jew in the Messianic movement has implicitly been either by virtue of genealogy, formal conversion to Judaism, or marriage to an ethnic Jew, and because Jews envisioned Messianic Judaism as their own ethnic branch of the church largely precluding Gentiles from holding leadership positions in their synagogues, the status of believing Gentiles in the movement could fairly be described as that of second-class

citizens.<sup>45</sup> This tension between a Jewish minority that feels its autonomy threatened by the numerical superiority of its non-Jewish co-religionists, and the Gentile majority who senses it is something less than authentic before Jewish claims to authority by ethnicity, has generated a series of actions and reactions within the Messianic Jewish movement that threatens to fracture the fragile union between the two parties.

### **Postmissionary Messianic Judaism**

The hope for unity has been challenged on several fronts, but two particular theological positions with social implications deserve extended treatment because of their persuasiveness and ability to attract a serious following. Within the UMJC, Mark Kinzer, President and Theology Department Chair of the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute, hopes to justify the existence of a non-missionary driven, ecumenically minded, halakhically observant Messianic Judaism to his evangelical peers. In 2005, Kinzer published an apologia for what he provocatively calls “Postmissionary Messianic Judaism.” In it he employs the term “postmissionary” to capture the essence of his vision for a mature Messianic Jewish movement that: (1) includes living a Torah-observant lifestyle out of commitment to the covenant rather than as a proselytizing strategy, (2) that embraces the Jewish people and Judaism the religion, and (3) that serves the Gentile Christian church by linking it to Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thereby “confirming its [the Gentile church’s] identity as a multinational extension of the people of Israel.”<sup>46</sup>

What Kinzer envisions is a single “body” with two distinctive expressions: a Jewish church that stands in continuity with historic Israel and its divine covenants, and a Gentile church that has been grafted into Israel by grace through a living Jewish Messiah.<sup>47</sup> This proposition would reconfigure the body of Christ, or eschatological Israel, back to what Kinzer believes was the original intent and form of Christian faith in the first century C.E., Dispensationalism notwithstanding. Ideally, Jewish believers would constitute a form of Judaism (defined by practice) and Gentiles would continue within a renewed form of Christianity that no longer rejects Torah-observant Jews within its theological self-understanding. Still, despite this desire to separate out believing Jews from the believing Gentile church, there remain the so-called Messianic Gentiles who want to participate fully in this Jewish expression of faith in Yeshua rather than remove themselves to the traditional evangelical way of life. This has prompted some leaders in the Kinzer camp to form the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council in order to effect conversions to their particular form of self-styled Judaism, under certain compelling conditions.<sup>48</sup> This is a reversal of the UMJC’s prior position that banned such an identity change.<sup>49</sup> If Kinzer and those who follow his agenda are successful, they will have crafted a new place for themselves in the

American religious landscape. Whether they can overcome the externally imposed separation from the broader Jewish community occasioned by their unorthodox beliefs remains to be seen, but they are working hard to create positive connections to both Jewish historical memory and to the unifying discourse of rabbinic tradition that also distanced them from Jews in other forms of Judaism.<sup>50</sup>

Reactions from Christian leaders remain mixed. Some evangelicals are openly receptive and encouraging, while others, including Jews for Jesus, denounce the notion as almost, if not certainly, heretical.<sup>51</sup> A recent Catholic response by theologian Matthew Levering unqualifiedly rejects Kinzer's specific proposal for a bilateral church in which the relation between the church and believing Jews should be understood in terms of an "eschatological renewal of an already existing reality"—that is the "Jews within" represent an ancient covenantal people whose covenant has not been abrogated but renewed—and in which believing Jews are therefore obligated, by virtue of this covenant, to continue in their observance of the Torah, despite participation in a Christian communion. According to Levering, this would reduce the place of Jesus in Jewish self-understanding to a "prophet like Moses," and put Gentiles in the impossible position of never having a full membership in the people of Israel or in the body of Messiah,

If Jesus simply adjusts (renews and expands) Israel, then there is no way for gentiles to relate to him as full members of his body on par with Jews. . . . I have difficulty envisioning how this gentile church . . . would be the equal of the Jewish church. Given Kinzer's arguments, would not the Jewish church be more Christ's body, at least more profoundly related to Christ's body than would the gentile church? Could the gentile church then be apostolic in a real sense? . . . could the Jewish church be catholic?<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, Levering argues that the acceptance of Jews who would continue to observe Torah within a Catholic confession of Christ would be tantamount to saying that the Torah cannot be fulfilled through the mystery of the eucharist alone, the ritual consummation of salvation history that is the lifeblood of Catholic identity. Such an admission understandably places Gentiles who look to fulfill the Torah's obligations through the church's ministrations outside of Israel's leadership in jeopardy of non-compliance. "Were this the case," Matthew Levering writes, "gentiles should simply become Torah-observant Jews rather than Christians."<sup>53</sup>

### **Messianic Israel**

Not all Messianics think that conversion is the solution to equality within the Messianic movement. For some Messianic Gentiles, the notion that non-Jews need to change their fundamental identity in order

to claim their place at the table smacks of ethnocentrism as well as social and psychological discrimination. Beginning in the 1980s, a murmur of discontent began to swell among some of the rank and file non-Jews who were in large part responsible for filling the pews if not the bank accounts of those early Messianic ventures. Discomfort with this social distinction within the church, together with her assumption that this was contrary to the spirit of the New Testament, provoked Batya Ruth Wootten, founder of Messianic Israel Alliance, to puzzle out a solution that would rectify the situation and heal the widening rift between non-Jewish Messianics and those who claimed Jewish heritage. The end result of Wootten's intensive foray into the scriptures and numerous evangelical study aids was a new theological solution to what was, in effect, an unpalatable socio-cultural phenomenon. While all Jews, she concluded, were indeed biblical Israelites, not all descendants of biblical Israel were Jews.<sup>54</sup> On the one hand, Jews within the church, as purported descendents of two ancient tribes, Judah and Benjamin, represent one segment of redeemed Israel, while Torah-seeking, Messianic Gentiles, on the other hand, represent descendants of the proverbial lost ten tribes, and should properly be called Israelites. These two "houses" of Israel, Jewish and Israelite, as equals, Wootten argues, will make up the one future Israel of Christian eschatology.

Since they consider themselves natural heirs of Biblical Israel, these Gentile Messianics outwardly appear to practice a form of Judaism, incorporating traditional Jewish symbols, rituals, liturgical forms, dietary laws, Shabbat observance, and the festal calendar. If Messianic Jews and some Gentiles are intent on returning to their *Jewish* roots, Messianic Israelites see themselves as doing *teshuva*, repenting for the sins of their forefathers and returning to their *Israelite* roots.<sup>55</sup> Needless to say, this new understanding of the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the movement has rankled Messianic Jews as well as missionary-minded evangelical theologians, who disparage what they see as Wootten's iconoclastic and unsophisticated, non-critical exegesis of the scriptures. The International Messianic Jewish Alliance issued a position paper denouncing, what they called, the Two House Movement, as unscriptural and anti-Semitic.<sup>56</sup> Wootten and the supporters of her now decade-long movement countered by warning the opposition to disagree respectfully, and to consider the possibility that at the Second Coming they might just find themselves on the wrong end of the argument.

## CONCLUSION

It is too early to say whether the Messianic movement as a whole will ultimately cohere as a singular new religious movement, whether it will fracture along liberal/conservative lines, or whether it will fail and send its next generation back to the traditional churches and synagogues

from which it emerged. It is also not clear what will happen with the growing contingent of non-Jewish Messianics who have now embraced an outward form of Judaism without conversion or integration into the Jewish community, and whose claims to ethnic equality with Jews in the Messianic Jewish movement have met with little to no acceptance, and even ridicule. The fact that Messianics have appropriated or even expropriated traditional Jewish symbols and ritual practices for their own purposes calls into question how Christianity, which has been defined by its doctrines and beliefs and an explicit rejection of rabbinic tradition, and Judaism, constructed as an ethnic community expressed visibly by its heretofore unique religious and cultural practices, propose to maintain their impermeable institutional boundaries in the face of such blatant crossings.

While much is unclear and evolving, what is clear is that earlier perceptions of Messianic Judaism as a singular if variegated movement of Protestant Christians who mimicked and borrowed from Jewish culture and religion as an evangelistic strategy is overly simplistic. It ignores the dissension that such strategies have evinced. It obscures the significant and growing rift between its evangelical and Judaizing factions, as well as the problematic division between Jew and Gentile that continues to be a creative force in the development of Messianic and now Israelite Two House theology. Whatever its fate, exploring the process by which Jews and non-Jews have negotiated the in-between spaces helps to integrate the Messianic movement into the history of Jewish-Christian relations in America, and allows us to see how the interplay of practice, belief, and ethnicity can be used to construct and deconstruct religious identity and set social boundaries. It also challenges the logic and propriety of collapsing the complex category of Messianic Judaism into a singular, if convenient, thirty-year old stereotype.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Although the American Messianic Jewish movement's history is closely connected to Dispensationalism, its European antecedents have a much broader base in eighteenth century German Pietism and non-Dispensationalist nineteenth century British Protestant Christian theology, whose attitudes toward Jewish culture and literature remained positive even while advocating the conversion of Jews to Christianity. I am grateful to Yaakov Ariel for his input in this regard.

<sup>2</sup>David A. Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity* (New York: Mellen Press, 1982), 29; Louis Goldberg and John Fischer, *How Jewish Is Christianity?: Two Views on the Messianic Movement*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 25.

<sup>3</sup>B. Z. Sobel, *Hebrew Christianity: The Thirteenth Tribe* (New York: Wiley, 1974), and Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, provide detailed

historical accounts of Hebrew Christianity from its European beginnings to its split with an emergent Messianic Jewish Movement in the 1970s. An important early ethnography, Juliene G. Lipson, *Jews for Jesus: An Anthropological Study* (New York: AMS Press, 1990), was framed in the counterculture revolution of the 1970s and 1980s. Two subsequent and similar studies examine the complex issues that accompany professing and maintaining a dual Jewish-Christian identity in specific Messianic congregations. Both Carol Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism: A Rabbi's Journey through Religious Change in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), and Shoshanah Feher, *Passing over Easter: Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1998), engage the Messianic movement with an eye toward understanding their subjects and the implications their claims to Jewish identity pose for the Jewish community. Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok in *Messianic Judaism* (London; New York: Cassell, 2000) contributes a Jewish pluralist perspective on Messianic Judaism, arguing that it should be regarded as one among many interpretations of the Jewish faith.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Steven Jacobs, "The Imperial Construction of the Jew in the Early Christian Holy Land" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2001); Yvonne Sherwood, "Colonizing the 'Old Testament' or 'Representing Christian Interests Abroad': Jewish-Christian Relations across Old Testament Territory," in *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Brook W. R. Pearson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 255–83.

<sup>5</sup> William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 204. Hutchison argues that imperialism can be broadly construed to include the imposition of one's own cultural forms (including religion) on the "other" through the tools of persuasion as well as through military power. This concept seems especially applicable when the hegemonic discourse is fueled by a triumphalist ideology like Protestant Evangelical Christianity.

<sup>6</sup> Many Messianics are uncomfortable with what they perceive as Christianity's defection from its Hebrew roots and so they tend to avoid terms and labels they feel are associated with the Gentilization or corruption of a pristine Jewish faith. They have therefore deliberately substituted the Semitic name Yeshua for the Anglicized Jesus whenever possible, and are moving toward a wholesale defection from self-identifying as Christians, preferring instead one or another more Hebrew-sounding descriptors.

<sup>7</sup> For such an example see Batya Ruth Wootten, *In Search of Israel* (Shippensburg, Penn.: Destiny Image Publishers, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Not that Christians in antiquity were always in a position to enforce their pronouncements, but rather the literary output of these early dissidents should be read as a hegemonic discourse "from a position of disempowerment," analogous to the early rabbinic construction of the troublesome *minim* (sectarians). See, Christina Hayes, "The 'Other' in Rabbinic Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 243–269.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Mason, "Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38, no. 5/4 (November 2007), 457–512. Ethnicity at this time included a description of a people's tie to a particular land, language, and ancestral tradition. Jews are properly understood

here as “Judeans” whose ancestors were exiled and restored in the 5th century B.C.E. Imperial policy granted colonized and conquered nations, including the Jews, the right to limited self-governance and religious worship in accordance with their own set of laws. For the Jews this meant the Torah, in one form or another.

<sup>10</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls, ed. Michael Slusser (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p. 179. See also Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in early Christian Controversy* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) for a general discussion on this issue.

<sup>11</sup> In this gospel narrative, Judeans are retroactively cast as anti-Jesus, and not only anti-resurrected Christ. Before the crucifixion, Jesus’ followers are admittedly Judeans. Historically, however, it seems most fell away after his death or perhaps continued on with Jesus’ and John the Baptist’s ministry focused on a continuing prophetic call for Israel’s repentance. Only a few of the original Judean disciples appear to have responded favorably to the resurrection witness of a living Christ and even fewer agreed with Paul that Gentiles should have access to Israel’s covenant without maintaining the ancestral traditions. When the gospel writer here accuses Judeans of complicity in murder under Jewish law—the unlawful shedding of innocent blood—he moves the nexus of his polemic from political complicity in the Roman execution of Jesus to a religious crime, a violation of the terms of Israel’s divine covenant for which the punishment is expulsion from the ancestral land. Judeans are beginning to be transformed into the more familiar “Jews” of Church history, who were constructed in opposition to a post-resurrection Christian church rather than a pre-crucifixion messianic prophet.

<sup>12</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, “Ignatius to the Magnesians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers: Volume II*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1985), 205.

<sup>13</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, “Ignatius to the Magnesians,” 207.

<sup>14</sup> See Jeffrey S. Siker, “Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries,” in *The Early Christian World*, Volume I-II, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 2002), 231–257. Siker finds antecedents for Christian claims to be a “new race” in I Pet. 2:9, 2 Cor. 3:6, 5:17; and Gal. 6:15. It is the second century Aristides of Athens, however, who traces the religious origin of the Christian race or genus to Christ. In this ancient context race is more rightly conceived of as a category based on ethnicity or national origin rather than biology and phenotype: Barbarians and Greeks, Jews and Christians—each has putative physical ancestors from whom they trace their origins, inherit their religious identities and legitimate their customs—the Jews have Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the Christians have Christ.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Boyarin argues that Christianity ultimately defined itself by defining Jews and Judaism in theological terms. Jews made heretics out of Christians who identified the risen Christ as the logos of God, while Christian apologists lambasted Jews for refusing to believe that Jesus was this Logos, a second divine person in the godhead. The institutionalization of these differences eventually permitted Christians to create an independent religion, Christianity, that could legitimate its existence and confer identity through philosophy/theology rather

than by appealing to ancestral origins and customs. See Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 4, 37–73. The separation that begins to be visible in Ignatius, matures in Justin Martyr and Aristides, and eventually comes to fruition in the fusion of imperial power and religious ideology under Theodosius.

<sup>16</sup> The Greek word *Christianismos* was recoded through Latin as *Christianitas*, and then to English as Christianity, an abstract noun that enhances even further the privileged difference of this identity over all its competitors, which remain marked as “isms,” related to practice or ideology rather than being.

<sup>17</sup> Stanelly M. Hordes, *To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Seth D. Kunin, *Juggling Identities: Identity and Authenticity Among the Crypto-Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> For works on philo-Semitism see David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of Jews to England 1603–55* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1996); Alan Levenson, “Missionary Protestants as Defenders and Detractors of Judaism: Delitzsch and Hermann Strack,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 92, no. 3/4 (Jan.-Apr. 2002), 383–420.

<sup>19</sup> Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 19–21.

<sup>20</sup> In Premillennial and Dispensational Christian eschatology, the Church is expected to be raptured, or caught up to meet the Savior at the time of his return. The foundational New Testament text for this doctrine is 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17.

<sup>21</sup> Yaakov S. Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 12–13.

<sup>22</sup> Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 13–14.

<sup>23</sup> Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2005), 268–69.

<sup>24</sup> Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 9–21.

<sup>25</sup> Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 83.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Gartenhaus, *Winning Jews to Christ: A Handbook to Aid Christians in Their Approach to the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 18–19.

<sup>28</sup> One of many ironic twists to this ongoing story of reinforcement and resistance is the admission by contemporary Messianic Jews that they have been no more successful than their Gentile predecessors in converting the world, let alone their Jewish brethren. In fact, the theology of a self-described and recent “Mature Messianic Judaism” renounces open evangelistic efforts at converting Jews, preferring instead to remain living witnesses to God’s abiding presence within the larger Jewish community. In this postmissionary Messianic thought, the remnant of Jesus-believing Jews remains centrally located within the Jewish people and stands as a testimony to both the ongoing identity of ethnic Jews as the chosen people and to the enduring legitimacy of their ancestral religion, Judaism. This contrasts markedly with the nineteenth century Protestant understanding of this remnant as converted Jews whose location was unquestionably within the Christian Church.

- <sup>29</sup> Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 32.
- <sup>30</sup> Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 33–34.
- <sup>31</sup> Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 24–25.
- <sup>32</sup> Lipson, *Jews for Jesus*, 56–59.
- <sup>33</sup> Jewish-izing rather than Judaizing seems appropriate in a modern context since the objective was to teach Gentile Christians to appreciate Jewish culture (Yiddish, music, dance, etc.), as a means to normalizing Jewishness for Jews within the Church, rather than to turn Christianity towards the acceptance or practice of rabbinic Judaism.
- <sup>34</sup> Ceil Rosen and Moishe Rosen, *Christ in the Passover: Why Is This Night Different?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 103.
- <sup>35</sup> Rausch, *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity*, 76–77.
- <sup>36</sup> Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism*, 27–29.
- <sup>37</sup> David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, 1st ed. (Jerusalem; Gaithersburg, Md.: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988), 4.
- <sup>38</sup> Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, 250–52.
- <sup>39</sup> Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, 3–4.
- <sup>40</sup> Lit. “the spirit of holiness.” This expression does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, which prefers “*ruach kodshékha*” (your holy spirit, referring to the Israelite deity) or *ruach kodsho* (his holy spirit), conceptualizing the spirit as a possession or attribute of the Holy One. In the earliest rabbinic writing, the phrase *ruach ha kodesh* appears only three times in two verses of tractate Sota (9:6, 15), where it is has been translated into English by Jacob Neusner as “the Holy Spirit.” Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 463, 466.
- <sup>41</sup> David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament: A Translation of the New Testament That Expresses Its Jewishness*, trans. David H. Stern (Jerusalem; Clarksville, Md.: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1989), ix–x.
- <sup>42</sup> David Van Biema, “What’s Next 2008: #10. Re-Judaizing Jesus,” *TIME*, 12 March 2008, <[http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1720049\\_1720050\\_1721663,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1720049_1720050_1721663,00.html)> (accessed 18 August 2009).
- <sup>43</sup> The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) founded in 1979 “to establish, strengthen, and multiply congregations for Yeshua within the House of Israel” requires that a congregation have a minimum of ten Messianic Jewish members in order to apply for membership in the Union. A Messianic Jew is defined as “a Jewish person who has repented and received Messiah Yeshua as his or her personal atonement.” The role of the UMJC is to “embody the message of life and redemption through Messiah in the context of the larger Jewish community.” Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, “What are the Standards of the UMJC?,” <<http://www.umjc.net/home-mainmenu-1/faqs-mainmenu-58/14-umjc-faq/19-what-are-the-standards-of-the-umjc>> (accessed 10 July 2009).
- <sup>44</sup> Feher, *Passing over Easter*, 93–94.
- <sup>45</sup> Patrice Fischer, “Equal Participants in the Community,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 2001), 123–131.
- <sup>46</sup> Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> In light of Kinzer's proposition for a bilateral ecclesiology, many have asked whether he advocates a two covenant theology as well. The more liberal two covenant position basically holds that there are two separate covenants, an older one for Israel and the Jews, and a new one for Christians (Gentile and Jew alike), both of which remain effective with their own terms and conditions. The difficulty for Kinzer and more liberal Messianic Jews in general is that a two covenant theology can be interpreted to mean that Jews need not be evangelized to be saved, a position that Kinzer's postmissionary Messianic Judaism seems to endorse. Because Messianic Judaism has its roots in evangelical Protestantism with its single covenant theology and missions-to-the-Jews mindset, I sense a reluctance on Kinzer's part to stray too far into dual-covenant possibilities for fear of widening the rift between his contingent and the more conservative voices in the movement. Still, Kinzer is equally reluctant to be quoted as teaching that observant, faith-filled non-Messianic Jews have no legitimate standing in the divine economy, or any hope for salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus. One solution is to read Jesus' mission as renewing Israel's covenant rather than replacing it with an entirely new one. The Mosaic covenant remains a covenant of fidelity between God and the Jewish people, while Israel's ultimate salvation depends on the atoning work of Yeshua. As Kinzer explains it, Jesus' work extends to all Israel, whether the nation as a whole recognizes its Messiah or not. The believing remnant—Messianic Jews—are the holy piece of dough that sanctifies the entire loaf (see Rom. 11:16, Num. 15:20-21), so that within Israel proper there is a Torah-observant witness to God's faithfulness and salvific work. Gentiles who are immersed in the Messiah are then grafted into Israel and its divine covenants so long as they do not revert to pagan ways. See Mark S. Kinzer, "Final Destines: Qualifications for Receiving an Eschatological Inheritance," *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 22 (Spring/Summer 2008), 87-119; and Walter Brueggemann, "Covenant," in *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes*, (Louisville: Westminster Knox, 2002), 37-40.

<sup>48</sup> See Richard Nichol, "The Case for Conversion: Welcoming Non-Jews into Messianic Jewish Space," <[http://ourrabbis.org/main/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=18&Itemid=32](http://ourrabbis.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18&Itemid=32)> (accessed 8 July 2009). This page is part of the web site sponsored by the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council. In this essay, Nichols details "why I and a growing number of Messianic Jewish leaders have come to believe that offering a formal conversion is essential for the future health and vitality of our movement, the spiritual and emotional well-being of the people in our care, and the good of the Jewish people."

<sup>49</sup> Acculturation can be defined as the minority group's adoption of the cultural patterns of the host society, a phenomenon that typically comes before assimilation is effected. For American Jews, social interaction with the majority Protestant Christian group has always been perceived as a slippery slope that would lead to complete assimilation and loss of ethnic distinctiveness. However, in this Jewish-Christian movement, the majority/minority positions are defined by the power of the perceived authenticity and imputed authority of the Jew as a member of biblical Israel rather than by the numerical ratio of Gentile to Jew. Gentiles are by far the demographic majority but they act the part of a typical minority population in their quest to acculturate to Jewishness [Judaize]. The fact that some acculturated Gentile Christians are seeking conversion to Messianic Judaism offers a novel twist on this sociological axiom. It remains to

be seen whether this group-centered acculturation will inevitably lead to some type of structural assimilation either en masse (a legitimated Messianic Judaism that shares institutional social space with non-Messianic Judaism) or individually through conversion to traditional forms of Judaism. See Richard Alba, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” *International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997), 826–874.

<sup>50</sup> Michael L. Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 15. According to Satlow, Messianic Jews “have every right to call themselves ‘Israel,’ but through their rejection of the post biblical Jewish literature they have largely ceased to engage in the same conversation as other Jewish Communities.”

<sup>51</sup> Michael L. Brown, “Is a Postmissionary, Truly Messianic Judaism Possible?” Paper presented at the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE), San Antonio, Tex., 18 April 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Mark S. Kinzer and Matthew Levering, “Messianic Gentiles & Messianic Jews,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life*, no. 189 (January, 2009), 43–49.

<sup>53</sup> Kinzer and Levering, “Messianic Gentiles & Messianic Jews,” 49. Matthew Levering is associate professor of theology at Ave Maria University. Nevertheless, there is communion, or at least ongoing dialogue between Messianics and Catholics mediated through the shared experience of the Charismatic renewal. From the Messianic side, the Toward Jerusalem Council II (TJCII), whose vision is to work for a formal reconciliation between the church and the Messianic Jewish community, held its first meeting in North America in 2003. From the Catholic side, the ministry of reconciliation has collaborated with TJCII as well as with other non-Catholic Christian organizations. See Toward Jerusalem Council II—Repentance and Reconciliation between Jews & Gentiles, <<http://www.tjcii.org/what-is-toward-jerusalem-council-ii.htm>> as well as the seven articles of affirmation offered up by TJCII to the Christian church available as a PDF file at: <<http://www.tjcii.org/toward-jerusalem-council-ii-articles.htm>> (accessed 10 July 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Wootten, *In Search of Israel*, 110–112; Batya Ruth Wootten, “Angus and Batya—a Saga,” *Messianic Israel Herald* 1, no. 1 (2000), 4–7, 30–32.

<sup>55</sup> Batya Ruth Wootten, *Israel’s Feasts and Their Fullness*, expanded ed. (St. Cloud, Fla.: Key of David Publishing, 2008), 19–20.

<sup>56</sup> Kay Silberling, “The Ephraimite Error: A Position Paper Submitted to the International Messianic Jewish Alliance,” Personal Collection of the Author (received as a handout during a congregational meeting of Torah Study Chavurah, Scottsdale, Arizona, early 2000). The Paper was completed in November, 1999, and subsequently published on the web by the IMJA in 2006 <[http://www.imja.com/article\\_pages/Entries/2011/2/21\\_The\\_Ephraimite\\_Error.html](http://www.imja.com/article_pages/Entries/2011/2/21_The_Ephraimite_Error.html)> (accessed 16 March 2011). Sandy Bloomfield, “The Errors of ‘the Ephraimite Error’: Seeking Unity through the Promotion of Truth,” <[http://www.ephraimiteerror.com/Downloads/Ephraimite\\_Error\\_Address.pdf](http://www.ephraimiteerror.com/Downloads/Ephraimite_Error_Address.pdf)> (accessed 10 July 2009). Although Wootten’s movement acquired the moniker of Two House (Ephraimites from the House of Israel and Jews from the House of Judah), she adamantly insists that her teachings advocate a single House—Israel—into which the divided kingdoms will ultimately be collected at the Second Coming of Jesus.