the musical idiom of former Eastern European communities. This style is perpetuated through Klezmer, traditional Yiddish songs, etcetera. But one rarely hears Messianic worship songs in the traditional styles of Sephardim. That would sound more Oriental, more 'Arab', and instruments would be quite different from those which Messianic worship bands usually have at their disposal nowadays.

Many Jews are no longer part of a community where traditional music is an integral part of social life. They are largely Western in their cultural expressions. No wonder, then, that large numbers of JBJ easily adopt the musical and liturgical styles of Western churches in general, and the Angle-Saxon 'soft rock' worship music in particular.

**Culturally Jewish worship and celebration**

We can now bring together the two angles from which we have looked at the Messianic practice of holidays. They look like mutually exclusive approaches. One is saying that Messianic holidays are boundary markers that keep a congregation distinct from its surroundings, creating a sense of exclusivity. The other is saying that Messianic holidays are forms of cross-cultural worship and celebration, meant to communicate the Gospel to interested (Jewish) outsiders. When we look at our subject from one angle only, we are bound to miss a point. Socially, Messianic worship and celebration function as boundary markers, but they cannot be reduced to that. They are more than that. They are forms of indigenous celebration.

From our discussion it has become clear that we should not speak in terms of 'either...or'; but in terms of 'not so much...as'. Messianic worship and celebration is a marker of 'identity'. There is a social side to that, as it enhances the special character of the group, amidst the wider Christian community. In this sense one can use the term boundary marker, but we should immediately add that Messianics do not put up a fence to the Jewish world. Rather, they want to see the message spread to others. When looking at the liturgical practice of Messianic congregations, one easily gets the impression that they are preoccupied with 'Jewishness'. And indeed they are, but this is not their only preoccupation. More important still is making the Gospel culturally relevant for Jewish people.

In the preceding section 10.3 we concluded that Messianic holiday practice is not so much restoration as inculturation of the Gospel. Here we add that in some cases, it serves as a boundary marker of Messianic congregations with respect to the Church at large, but in all cases it is a way of placing the worship and the celebration of sacred times in a Jewish cultural context. In a particular form of Jewish cultural expression, we should say.

11. **Gentile Christian Interest in Biblical and Jewish holidays**

The Messianic Jewish practice of celebrating Biblical and Jewish holidays arouses considerable interest among Evangelical Christians, as can be seen from the growing number of publications devoted to the meaning and the observance of the feasts of Israel. New titles are constantly being added to the list. Moreover, a certain number of Gentile believers join their Jewish brethren in keeping 'biblical' holidays, and in some cases they celebrate them in their own churches and organisations.

In general, this interest is closely linked to another phenomenon that is even more widespread among Gentile Christians, i.e. the growing awareness of the Jewish roots to their faith. Scholars bring to light the New Testament's indebtedness to first century Judaism, not least in the area of liturgy and calendar. They elucidate original practices that have been lost from sight – such as the practice of circumcision, and the observance of Sabbath and Jewish Festivals, by Judeo-Christians until the fourth century.

A reappraisal of Jewish roots can be observed in Roman Catholic and Ecumenical Protestant churches as well as in Evangelical and Charismatic circles. But the practical consequences vary, depending on the theological outlook on the Jewish people in general. Summarising the different forms of interest, one could say that Evangelicals are primarily focussed on Messianic believers and the state of Israel. They connect Jewish roots with an interest in the unfulfilled prophecies regarding the Jewish nation, and in the way of life of Jesus and the first Jewish believers, which included celebrating Sabbath and Biblical festivals. For Roman Catholic and Ecumenical Protestant churches, awareness of the Jewish roots of Christianity leads to developing a dialogue relation with Judaism.

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543 The study of Rudolf Boon, *De joodse wortels van de christelijke eed dienst*, was groundbreaking. The publications of Jean Daniellou in this field are still frequently quoted (*Bible et liturgie* and *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*). See for recent examples e.g. Peter Wick, *Die urchristlichen Gottesdienste*; Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*; and the more general research by Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadows of the Temple*.

544 See e.g. Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*. 
as a living religious tradition alongside the Christian tradition. In Orthodox churches, this awareness seems to be less widespread, at least until now.

11.1 Various kinds of interest

Coming to the interest in Biblical and Jewish holidays in particular, we observe that this takes different forms. Looking at the wide spectrum of the Church at large, four approaches can be distinguished.

Typological approach

The first approach is typological. In Chapter 1 we noticed that Hebrew Christians were keen to study the Biblical and Jewish holidays from this angle. They were seen as symbolic antitypes of the finished work of Christ during his first coming, and of coming events related to his second advent. Only a few Hebrew Christian authors addressed the issue of keeping these holidays. Generally speaking they were very reluctant in this matter. For instance, in the 1950s, Victor Buksbazen raised the question ‘Sabbath or Sunday’ and concluded that Sabbath observance made only sense in the state of Israel, i.e. in a predominantly Jewish society.

Several Gentile Christian authors belonging to Evangelical and mainline Protestant constituencies shared the same approach. One example that comes to mind is Willem ten Boom, a Dutch Reformed mission-pastor involved in Jewish evangelism. Just before the Second World War he published a book on the three main festivals of the Old Testament and their symbolism. He informs his readers extensively about the Jewish practice of Passover, Pentecost and the feast of Tabernacles. He also enters in discussion with rabbinic interpretations, so as to bring out the New Testament significance of these three holidays. However, there is in his writing no trace of Jewish believers celebrating Jewish Festivals.

In the current Evangelical movement, the Feasts of Israel are still a favourite subject of typological teaching. Why? ‘They tell us the story of God’s salvation plan,’ as Hans Obrist summarises. We mention three examples. The first is André Boulagnot, a French Pentecostal pastor. In 1985 he published a book explaining the ‘spiritual significance’ of the Jewish festivals. Not only the Biblical festivals as such but also various Judaic customs of a later origin are related to Jesus Christ in a typological way. The aim is evangelistic:

When Jewish people discover the deep spiritual meaning of the traditions they have always kept so faithfully, a meaning hitherto unknown to them, they will learn that they refer to Jesus and that this Jesus is their Saviour. A second example is Willem Ouweene who published a book on what he called ‘the High Seasons for Him’. His aim is twofold:

I wish to expose the New Testament meaning of the feasts, viz. their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. Secondly, I wish to succinctly expose what form the Biblical high seasons have received in Jewish tradition. Too often I have read Christian treatises on the feasts in which only the Biblical data were dealt with. As a result, one misses the meaning of all kinds of New Testament details.

According to this Dutch author the real ‘meaning’ is typological (or ‘spiritual’, to use his terminology). The feasts of Israel contain images of everyday Christian living, as well as images of salvation history.

The last line of interpretation is particularly important in a growing number of publications, including websites and blogs on the Internet, in which Gentile Christians present the Biblical festal calendar as a reflection of God’s program of salvation as it unfolds in the course of history. Authors following this approach invariably speak of the ‘prophetic meaning’ of the holidays and the structure. Concentrating on the seven festivals mentioned in the Torah, they prefer to speak of ‘Biblical’ instead of ‘Jewish’ high seasons. The result is a highly schematised presentation of their meaning, in which numbers, dates and time-periods play an important role.

In short, the three spring festivals Pesach, Matzos and First Fruits are related to the first coming of the Messiah, i.e. the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost is related to the period of the Church, while the autumn holidays are seen as prefigurations of future events: the national and spiritual restoration of Israel, the return of the Messiah and the Millennial Kingdom.

Of the many examples that could be cited, we mention a recent Dutch-Belgian coproduction by Arnold Lamm and Emilie-André Vanbekevoort. Their aim is


546 Willem ten Boom, *De drie hoofdfeesten van het Oude Testament*.

547 Hans Peter Obrist, *Feste Israels mit messianischer Hagadda: die Feste erzählen Gottes Heilsgedanken*.

548 André Boulagnot, *La signification spirituelle des fêtes juives*.

550 Willem Ouweene, *Hoogtijden voor Hem*.
to ‘wake up’ the Church at large to what they call ‘God’s prophetic calendar in Biblical timetables and feasts’. And they explain:

Understanding the prophetic meaning of the feasts is tremendously important, because they open the eyes of Christians today for mature discipleship and for the imminent return of the Messiah. All the holidays as a whole show their pattern of God’s total salvation plan... and they clarify in a detailed manner the order of events in God’s plan.

Such ‘prophetic’ interpretations are usually combined with practical application. The objectives and the details of each holiday, mentioned in the Bible, are explained as object lessons for daily living. They bring to light the principles of Christian discipleship. They also make the believer aware of the need to be alert, as they wait the return of their Saviour. As Lamm and Vanbekevoort write: ‘the wakeful Bride of Christ will integrate the holidays in all aspects of her discipleship walk.’

Historical approach

Another approach to Biblical and Jewish holidays is historical. It is bound up with the endeavour to bring to light the Jewish roots of Christianity. From a historical point of view, holiday observance in first century Judaism is interesting because it was an important aspect of the religious and cultural context of Jesus and the apostles, and because it is the essential background of Christian liturgy.

Examples of this historical interest in the feasts of Israel abound. At the Catholic Church side, we only mention Hedwig Hahle and Frédéric Manns. The study of holiday practice at that time is essential, writes Manns, ‘because the teaching of Jesus is embedded in the Jewish liturgy.’

In Ecuemical Protestant circles we mention the ground breaking study of the Jewish roots of Christian worship by Rudolf Boon. At the outset he affirmed:

All Christian worship has its roots in Israel’s liturgical heritage. Without that heritage, the foundations and the character of this worship remain inexplicable and inconceivable. Anchoring our liturgy and its experience in the Jewish relation of the time when the Church emerged is not a marginal affair for the Church of-tomorrow. The Jewish roots of Christian worship-of-tomorrow must be considered as something that is of essential and fundamental importance for that worship.

Other Protestant authors have followed the lead, investigating the historical background of holidays and worship practices, and pleading for a redefinition of Christian worship in the light of its Jewish roots.

In the Evangelical world, the historical interest is often combined with the typological approach. Thus, Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal co-authored a book on what they call ‘God’s prophetic calendar from Calvary to the Kingdom’. They explain the background and the customs of both Biblical and later Jewish holidays. Moreover, they offer typological and futurist interpretations, not only of the Biblical data but also of later Judaic customs.

British theologian Ron Moseley has written a ‘Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church’, in which he sets out to explain the worship practices of the early church in the light of worship in contemporary Judaism. Another example is Marvin Wilson’s book Our Father Abraham. He defines the Jewish roots as ‘the Hebrew thought world, the Hebrew culture, the Hebrew relation, the Hebrew traditions and the Hebrew concepts that have developed in the history of the people of Israel’. Underlying the New Testament is a Jewish spirituality, which Marvin Wilson calls ‘the Jewish core’. Unlike most Evangelical authors, Marvin Wilson argues that one cannot understand this Biblical heritage without ‘extending our sources and our scope to the whole complex of Judaism’ at the time of Jesus, including apocalyptic and rabbinic literature. He argues that Judaism is an ongoing living tradition and that it would be incorrect to oppose the Old Testament religion of Israel to the post-exilic religion of Judaism. ‘The essence of the religious teaching of Judaism has remained remarkably constant, firmly rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament).’

Norwegian Lutheran scholar Oskar Skarsaune, an associate of the Caspari Centre of Jewish studies, has written extensively on the roots of early Christian worship in Jewish worship. There was a ‘basic similarity in style of worship; he

551 Arnold Lamm & Emile-André Vanbekevoort, Wake up!, the quote is the subtitle of the book.
552 Idem., p. 167.
553 Idem., p. 386.
555 Frédéric Manns, Les racines juives..., p. 34.
556 Rudolf Boon, op. cit. p. 4.
559 Marvin Wilson, Our Father Abraham, p. 29ff.
560 Idem., p. 32.
notices, *because in both camps there was a combination of freedom in wording and stability in themes and patterns*.562

Other Evangelical Protestant authors likewise show an historical interest in the Jewish roots of Christian worship and holiday observance, such as Cees den Boer in his book on the historical development of Jewish Passover into Christian Easter.563

**Dialogical approach**

A third approach to Biblical and Jewish holidays is dialogical. Its aim is to inform Christians about the religious world of Judaism, in order to take away prejudices, to foster mutual respect, and to promote dialogue. One of the best ways to learn about Judaism is to study the meaning and practice of Jewish holidays. Viewed from this angle, the Sabbath and the festivals need to be described in an informative, matter-of-fact way, so as to provide Christians with a right understanding and take away preconceived ideas. Authors adopting this approach present the Jewish festivals as they have developed throughout the ages and as they are observed today. While they point out the various lessons they contain for Christians, they refrain from placing Jewish festivals in a Christian interpretative framework.

This dialogical approach is widespread in Roman Catholic and Ecumenical circles. Those who want to become more acquainted with the subject, are referred to Jewish publications, encouraged to visit a synagogue, assist to informative lectures organised by the local Jewish community, and so on.

In order to reach a larger public, churches organise study-groups, lectures and discussions, preferably with the participation of Jewish speakers. The idea is to learn about and to learn from Judaism - especially in the area of Sabbath liturgy and festival celebrations.

Usually, this approach does not encourage Christians to celebrate these holidays in a Christian setting. The line of argument is as follows: the Church and the Synagogue have a common historical background, so it is important for Christians to know their Jewish roots. Yet, Judaism and Christianity are two different religious traditions, so it is equally important to be aware of the specific character of Judaism. When Christians learn about Jewish holidays, they become conscious of that these celebrations mean for Jews today. By the same token it is clear that Christians should not celebrate them, because they are part of the Jewish tradition, not of the Christian tradition.

We mention two examples of this approach. In his book on Jewish Festivals, Dutch theologian Simon Schoon is keen to highlight their value and the lessons they contain for Christians. But they should not idealise this aspect of Judaism, writes Simon Schoon. Moreover, they should resist the temptation to adopt and imitate these festivals:

Sometimes, efforts in this direction are undertaken. But a mingling of traditions leads to confusion and haziness on both the Jewish and the Christian side. It is better to listen to each other and to try and learn from each other. Jewish festivals can lead Christians to reflect on their own forms and their own identity. They can ponder over Biblical passages that describe the Jewish festivals or have been a source of inspiration for their practice.564

Evangelical author Marvin Wilson follows the same dialogical approach. In his already mentioned publication on the Jewish roots of Christianity, he goes at length to relate the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples to the Seder celebration in those days, but he does not offer a Christian version of the Seder for believers today. He advocates interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews, because this provides the context whereby Christians and Jews can achieve a new rapprochement as they explore ancient sources and forge new links together.565

His readers are encouraged to visit nearby synagogue, in order to learn of such areas as Jewish worship, prayer, symbolism, education, holidays and synagogue architecture.566 They should take advantage of any possibility to participate in a community Passover Seder. (Marvin Wilson does not indicate whether in a synagogue or in a Messianic assemblies, although he seems to think of the former.)

This will further enlighten them on the background of redemption... and remind the Church of some of the more unfamiliar aspects of its Biblical heritage such as singing the Hallel and expounding the Song of Songs during Passover. Finally, this will lead contemporary Christians to reconsidering the importance of joyful celebration in connection with the Hebraic background of the Last Supper.567

Evangelicals are reluctant to adopt the dialogueual approach, because in the actual practice of dialogue between Christian theologians and representatives

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562 Oskar Skarsaune, Jewish Influences, p. 127.
563 C. den Boer, Pasen, Feest van bevrijding.
564 Simon Schoon, De joodse feesten, p. 7.
565 Marvin Wilson, op. cit. p. 325–6.
566 *Idem*, p. 331.
of Judaism, the Messianic movement and its Jewish expression of faith in Jesus are usually not taken into account. This is not to say that Evangelicals are not in favour of learning more about Judaism, fostering personal contacts and working together for common causes. They are.\textsuperscript{568} Evangelical publications on Biblical and Jewish holidays usually provide ample information about the rites and customs connected with Sabbath and festivals in rabbinic Judaism. But contrary to Roman Catholic and Ecumenical authors, they do not hesitate to place both the Biblical data and the Judaic traditions in a Christian interpretative framework. From an Evangelical point of view, Judaism's holiday tradition is full of New Covenant meaning.

We already noticed this in the publications of André Boulignon and Willem Ouweleen. Another example is the book of Alfred Burchartz on the Feasts of Israel. His aim is to 'foster an understanding of the Jewish faith and of the bond between the Church and Israel'.\textsuperscript{569}

\textbf{Practical approach}

The fourth approach to Biblical and Jewish holidays is practical. It provides information in order to encourage Gentile believers to actually celebrate them. The idea that Gentiles may, or should, celebrate these festivals is a major shift in comparison with the older view, widespread among Hebrew Christians and Gentile Evangelicals, that the feasts of Israel shall again be celebrated in the Millennium. This is part of the restorationist view of the future of the Jewish people: Israel shall be restored in its land and the Messiah shall set up his reign in Jerusalem. In that day, the appointed times of the Lord shall be celebrated again. The two Biblical passages usually quoted to substantiate this expectation are Jesus' statement during the Last Supper that he would abstain from eating 'this Passover' until its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God (Luke 22:18) and Zechariah's prediction that at some stage in the future 'the survivors of all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16).

Adherents of the restorationist view take this as evidence that not only Pesach and Sukkot but all the appointed times of the Lord shall be observed again during the future reign of Messiah on earth. Willem ten Boom, whose book we already mentioned, held to this view. He was not at all in favour of celebrating the feasts of Israel already in the present dispensation, but he argued:

When the Son of God returns and inaugurates the Kingdom of God on earth, all the Jewish holidays shall be restored. (...) Attempts to reintroduce these Old Testament ceremonies are bound to fail, because...the old has (once and for all) passed away and the new has come. Only in the Millennium will their practice be restored.\textsuperscript{570}

Since Willem ten Boom wrote these lines, opinions have developed. The idea that the feasts of Israel shall be restored in the future still holds sway. But it is no longer limited to a future observance. In the Messianic movement, the practice of these holidays is already restored. Various Gentile authors emphasise that this is indeed God's plan for JBY (Jesus believing Jews) in the present age, and that Gentile believers may also celebrate them. Some go so far as saying that the feasting calendar of the Torah should be restored in the Church.

From the 1980s onwards, this change of perspective becomes visible, as Gentile Christians began to take a lively interest in the Biblical holidays, not only as a study object but also as occasions for celebration. For some, this is a way to 'reconnect' with the Jewish roots of Christianity. For others, it is an anticipation of the future celebration of these festivals in the Messianic Kingdom. Thus, the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ) took the initiative, in 1980, to organise a 'Christian celebration during Sukkot' in Jerusalem. It has been repeated every year, and many thousands of visitors from abroad have come to participate. The motivation was not only to anticipate the fulfilment of the prophecy in Zachariah 14, but also to show Christian solidarity with the Jewish people in general and the state of Israel in particular.

Curiously, the organisers were not very keen to invite Messianic Jews to play an important role. The reasoning was one of expediency mainly: if these believers would catch public attention, this would hamper good relations with Israeli authorities. For a long time, relations between the ICEJ and the Israeli kehillot have been rather tense, to say the least.\textsuperscript{571} While freely adopting Judaic symbolism with Messianic interpretation, and for all the Messianic songs that are sung, the ICEJ version of Sukkot is more like an Evangelical convention conveying the message of Christian solidarity with Israel. Be this at it may, the Tabernacles celebrations of the ICEJ became well known in the Evangelical world, especially

\textsuperscript{568} See e.g. the reflection of a whole series of dialogue in the United States: Marc Tanenbaum, Marvin Wilson and James Rudin, Evangelicals and Jews in conversation.

\textsuperscript{569} Alfred Burchartz, Israels Feste: Was Christen davon wissen sollen, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{570} Willem ten Boom, De drie hoofdfeesten van het Oude Testament, p. 84 and 92.

\textsuperscript{571} See for a reflection of the debate, caused by the ICEJ among Messianic believers in Israel, the articles by Baruch Maoz, John Ross, David Friedman and the responses of the ICEJ in Mishkan, Issue 12, 1990.
in Charismatic circles. As such, they certainly fostered awareness of this and other 'Biblical' festivals.

Having said this, the major factor contributing to the growing Evangelical interest in Biblical holidays is the emergence of the Messianic movement. When Evangelicals took a closer look at this movement, they had the impression to 'discover' feasts and festivals that were far more in keeping with the Biblical liturgical calendar than the Christian Church Year to which they were accustomed. Here they saw Jewish roots in action, so to speak. It was only predictable that this would lead to a desire to celebrate with their Jewish brethren. It is not an exaggeration to state that the practice of Biblical holidays in Messianic assemblies was one of the main reasons for Gentile believers to become members.

11.2 Practical interest, a closer look

Let us take a closer look at the practical interest in Biblical and Jewish holidays. How many Gentiles are actually celebrating them? It is difficult to assess the size of this phenomenon. Quantitative research is completely lacking in this area. Having said this, the phenomenon is there and can be described and analysed as such when we look at the actors in the field. Who are they? Three categories can be distinguished:

Gentile members of Messianic assemblies

To begin with, there are the Gentile believers who practice Biblical holidays in the context of a Messianic assembly, so what we know about the practice in these assemblies can be applied to these believers as well. In Chapter 2 we noticed that Messianic congregations attract Gentile believers who either wish to identify with the Jewish people, or connect with the Jewish roots of their faith, or both. By definition they will keep Sabbath and Festival, in fellowship with the rest of the congregation (page 47ff and page 73ff).

In Diaspora congregations, 50% or more members are Gentile believers, in some cases even more. In the Hebrew-speaking Israeli kehilot, they make up about 20%. These figures give us some idea of the number of Gentile Christians that systematically observe Jewish holidays in a Messianic congregational setting.

Churches keeping Biblical holidays

A second category consists of Gentile churches celebrating the feasts of Israel – or at least some of them. Sabbath keeping churches are the first who come to mind. Sabbath observance has a history of almost four centuries. Nowadays it is spread to churches in many countries around the world, the Seventh Day Adventists being the most well known example. In their view, the Sabbath is the 'Biblical' day of worship and rest. Therefore, Jews as well as Christians should sanctify this seventy day.

However, the celebration of annual Biblical festivals by Christians is a recent phenomenon. The most frequently kept holidays are Passover and Tabernacles. In the United States it has become quite usual for churches to stage a Passover Seder, conducted by an invited Messianic congregational leader or by the pastor of the church himself. Such a Seder is always a copy of the Seder in Messianic congregations, or a reduced version of it. Messianic scholar Michael Brown notices:

They [Christians] have not only begun to understand and appreciate their Jewish spiritual roots, they done so with enthusiasm, recognizing the importance of Messianic Jewish congregations and doing things such as hosting Passover Seders in their churches and celebrating the feast of Tabernacles.

The same occurs in other countries. Some Evangelical and charismatic churches have integrated annual Biblical festivals in their program. When Christians celebrate one or more feasts of Israel, they almost always follow the example of Messianic assemblies and instructions in Messianic publications.

Sabbath keeping churches are another interesting example. Some of them seem to be open to keeping the annual OT festivals as well. Samuele Bacchiocchi, a Seventh-day Adventist scholar, has made a strong case for this, and some Adventist churches are following his lead. He argues that it is only a matter of consistency for churches that consider the seventh day to be obligatory, to keep the rest of the Scriptural calendar as well. Challenged by a colleague to study the subject more seriously, he was in for some surprises, as he writes in the foreword to his two-volume volume study on 'God's Festivals':

572 In 2000, Jeffrey Wasserman published his survey which showed 60% Gentile members (Messianic Jewish Congregations, p. 100, note 25).
573 See: Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil F. Skjott, Fact and Figures, p. 70.
575 Michael Brown, Answering Jewish Objections, Volume 1, p. 205.
576 Samuele Bacchiocchi, God's Festivals in Scripture and History, introduction to the first volume.
A first surprise was to find considerable interest in the relevance of Israel's Feasts for Christians, not only among Messianic Jews who wish to retain their Jewish religious heritage, but also among those Christians who wish to rediscover their Jewish roots. The second surprise was to find a significant interest in the feasts of Israel among Adventist members and scholars. A third surprise was to find supportive statements for the feasts in the writings of Ellen White, custom-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A fourth surprise was to discover that I was wrong that the annual Feasts came to an end with the sacrifice of Christ.  

Having changed his mind, he developed a case for celebrating these Feasts in the Church, in addition to the weekly Sabbath.

My purpose is not to resurrect a legalistic observance of the annual Feasts... but to enrich church worship by proposing a church calendar that focuses on the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first and second Advents.  

Churches and groups on the fringe of Evangelical Protestantism that consider the OT commandments to be binding for all believers, are now also keeping the annual feasts of Israel. One example is the Worldwide Church of God, whose roots go back to nineteenth century Adventism.

**Gentiles celebrating Biblical holidays occasionally, as special events**

The third category comprises Gentiles who occasionally celebrate Biblical holidays, either in a Messianic congregation or in a non-Messianic setting. It is impossible to give a quantitative indication of this category. However, there are several indications that a considerable number of non-Jewish believers celebrate Biblical holidays, occasionally or regularly, either in a Messianic or in a Christian Church setting. First of all, Messianic assemblies report that special festival services always attract visitors from elsewhere. Furthermore, several Evangelical organisations organise Erev Shabbat meetings, Seder evenings and other holiday celebrations. And last but not least, there are the Gentile pilgrims going up each year to participate in the Christian celebration of Tabernacles, staged by the ICEJ (International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem).

One indication that Gentile celebration of Biblical holidays was spreading from the late 1980s onwards, is the publication on this subject of the Lausanne Consultation of Jewish Evangelism (LCJE, part of the Lausanne 'movement'). The LCJE is a platform for mission agencies involved in Jewish evangelism, Messianic Jewish organisations and representatives of Messianic assemblies. As such, this body is well placed to see what is happening on the field. Apparently, the LCJE saw the need to discuss the matter in depth. During its International Convention in 1991, Lutheran pastor Bruce Lieske presented a paper on 'Jewish Feasts in Gentile Congregations'. He describes some initiatives taken by his own denomination to help churches organise a Passover Seder in the Lenten period, Bible studies and worship services during the other festivals and a ritual opening of the Sabbath on Friday night.  

It remains to be seen how many people are actually involved, but this is at least an indication that occasional celebrations of Biblical holidays are taking place in the Evangelical world.

**Publications on the practice of Biblical and Jewish holidays**

There is a fourth category to be included in the survey: books and manuals about Biblical and Jewish holidays. Some provide only historical background information and theological interpretations, others also deal with the way in which believers could (or should) celebrate them today. Many of these publications are practical guides and liturgical manuals.

The number of titles as well as the number of sold copies has been steadily on the increase over the last twenty years. Can this be taken as a sign that the practice of Biblical holidays is actually spreading in the Evangelical movement? It is difficult to verify the exact causal relationship between the number of publications and what actually takes place in Churches. No quantitative research has yet been conducted in this particular area. But the fact that these titles are published certainly has some practical implications. Christians are buying these books. One can suppose that at least some of them are putting into practice what they read – either in Messianic assemblies or in the context of a Christian church or organisation.

We just mention a few publications of Gentile authors who explicitly encourage the observance of biblical holidays. (This is not to say that other works that 'only' explain the meaning and history of these holidays have no bearing on the way in which Gentile Christians observance them. One can safely assume that they have.) In the United States, Martha Zimmerman wrote a book on how to celebrate the feasts of the Old Testament in your own home or church. She was to publish a practical manual on the subject, aimed at a general Christian public (nowhere she singles out the Messianic movement). That was in 1981. At that time there was very little material of Messianic origin. The fact that it keeps being  

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579 See Bruce J. Lieske, 'Jewish Feasts in Gentile Congregations.'
reprinted attests to its popularity, not only Christian but also in Messianic circles. Recently, she has published a new title on the same subject.580

A number of organisations advocate the Christian celebration of biblical holidays. One example is Laubern Ministries, an organisation led by Richard Leonard who has written on the significance of Israel’s festivals for the renewal of church worship.581 Another one is linked to Restore Magazine – as the name suggests, its aim is to restore Jewish roots, primarily in the area of worship and calendar.582 Gradually a whole network of websites, magazines and publishers is developing. There are close links with the home-schooling movement in the United States. In fact, a number of manuals on biblical holidays are offered as teaching material for home schooling and also contain suggestions for celebrations in the homely setting.583

Moving to Western Europe, we mention the (Anglican) CMJ that has developed a special ministry, called Shoresh. As its Hebrew name already indicates, the aim is to help Christians become aware of their Jewish roots, through articles and seminars. This is also the objective of the Messianic (Christian) Education Trust that publishes the magazine Eda. It regularly carries articles on the biblical holidays.

In 2000, Margot Hodson published a book on the same subject. She does not so much concentrate on theological meaning as on historical background, Jewish customs and practical applications.584 In the introduction to her book, she explains how she got involved with groups of Jewish believers and how, as a result of that, she discovered the Bible’s festivals.585

Crossing the North Sea, we come to the Netherlands. Willem Ouweelen’s publication on the biblical holidays has already been mentioned. Even though he admits that ‘it cannot be said that God intends them in a literal sense for Gentile believers as well’, he adds that ‘there is nothing against Gentiles joining in with Messianic celebrations’. However, he does not develop the practical aspects in detail.586 The same can be said of the Belgian and Dutch authors Emile-André Vanbeekvoort and Arno Lamm. In their recent book on the prophetic meaning of the holidays, they strongly encourage the Church to leave the traditional Christian calendar and return to the Biblical one. Celebrating the holidays in their Biblical meaning not only pertains to the people of Israel, including the Jewish believers in Jesus, but also to Christians today, as they discover the Jewish roots of their faith and the New Covenant meaning of these festivals.587

In Germany, the ‘Evangelical’ Renewal movement in the Lutheran Church produced a concise manual, with a view to helping local churches or home groups in celebrating biblical feasts. This was in 2003. It deals with the Sabbath, Yom Kippur and Sukkot only. One of its contributors is Messianic pastor Jakob Damkani; the other three authors are Gentile believers.588 Three years later, Hanspeter Obrist published a book on the complete festal calendar of the Torah, encouraging his Christian readers to study and celebrate them. He added a Messianic Haggadah.589

11.3 Motives

Why do Gentile believers celebrate Biblical and Jewish rather than traditional Christian holidays? Bruce Stokes has analysed their motives for keeping lifestyle commandments of the Torah and preferring a Jewish style of worship. He is particularly well placed to scrutinise their motives, because he is a Gentile pastor, participant in a Messianic congregation, and vice president of the Association of Messianic Believers. In a paper presented at the International Messianic Jewish Alliance meeting in 1997, he distinguishes several types of Gentile involvement in Messianic congregations.590 His summary is a good indication of the various motives behind this involvement. Mutatis mutandis, these motives also apply to the observance of Biblical and Jewish holidays. We will use the analysis offered by

581 Richard C. Leonard, ‘Festivals of Israel and the Christian calendar.’
582 See for the motivations: John D. Garr, ‘Should Christians Celebrate Jewish (Biblical) Festivals?’
584 Margot R. Hodson, A Feast of Seasons – Celebrate the Bible’s festivals.
585 Margaret Hodson, op. cit. p. 28.
586 Willem Ouweelen, Hoogtijden voor Hem.
587 Arno Lamm & Emile-André Vanbeekvoort, Wake up! p. 196.
588 Peter and Dorothee Gleiss, Jakob Damkani, Waltraud Rennebaum, Christen feiern biblische Feste.
589 Hanspeter Obrist, Feste Israels mit messianischer Haggada.
590 H. Bruce Stokes, ‘Gentiles in the Messianic movement,’ paper presented at the meeting of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance (IMJA) in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, 1997. The (American) Association of Messianic Believers is member of the IMJA.
Bruce Stokes, and add comments of other authors, pertaining to Gentile believers within or outside Messianic assemblies.

As we shall observe, we come across the same motives as in the Messianic movement (see Chapter 7, page 171). One additional motive comes into play, mentioned at the end as number (9).

(1) Discipleship motive – serve Christ and express belonging to his Body

First of all, Gentile believers keep holidays for the same reason as Jewish believers, namely to serve and glorify their Lord. This is the general motivation. Celebrating Biblical holidays is a means to serve Christ and to express their belonging to the Body of Christ. Messianic Jews are no exception to this rule. Keeping Biblical holidays is often seen as a means to deepen one’s Biblical knowledge, and to come into a closer relationship with the Lord.

For example, Willem Ouweeneel mentions what he considers to be ‘pure motives’. One of them is the desire ‘to experience in a visible way the deeper spiritual truths behind the Jewish festivals’. 591

When Margaret Hodson explains why Christians should regularly practice the ‘Hebraic festivals’, she uses an argument we have already come across at several occasions; this is a way deepening our understanding of Jesus, the Gospel and the unity of the Bible message. Having grown up in the Anglican Church, Hodson joined the staff of the CMJ. 592 As a result, she had what she calls ‘the immense privilege to live and breathe the Jewish festival year’ as her own traditional Christian one. And this in turn has become a way of knowing Jesus better.

Through understanding Jesus in his Jewish family context, I have come to a fuller understanding of the Christian faith. A key part of this for me has been the festivals. (…) If you are a Christian but have never experienced the Jewish festivals, I would strongly encourage you to do so at least once for the Biblical understanding they will bring. 593

(2) Personal motive – express Jewish identity

Bruce Stoke distinguishes ‘wanna-be Jews’, who ‘have come to the conclusion that God has called them to be Jews’. They therefore wear yarmulkes and prayer shawls and do typically Jewish things, sometimes with more ardour than born Jews. In this category come those who suspect having a hiddur Jewish ancestry, which leads them to try and discover their ethnic Jewish roots. Even when this link cannot be established, they are sometimes unwilling to be totally honest about their Gentile identity. Others ‘copy Jewish ethnicity’ for more honest reasons:

They find Jewish ethnicity attractive and find meaning and fulfilment in Messianic styles of worship. By copying Jewish ethnicity, these Gentiles seek to demonstrate their love of the Jewish people and the Jewish roots of Christianity. 594

People in these two categories keep Biblical/Jewish holidays in order to express Jewish identity, even though this identity is absent or at most spurious, ethnically speaking.

(3) Socio-cultural motive – identify with the Jewish community

This is another personal motive. Here we should especially mention are Gentile believers married to Jewish spouses. They engage in some forms of Torah observance and Jewish practices, writes Bruce Stokes, ‘in an attempt to bring their children up in a home that reflects the children’s Jewish heritage’. 595 Here we recognise the cultural and the educational motivations of Messianic believers for observing holidays: the identification with Jewish heritage and its transmission to the next generation.

When a mixed couple joins a Messianic assembly, one can safely assume that the Gentile spouse finds it important that his wife / her husband does not lose his / her sense of Jewishness, and that the heritage of his / her people be fostered in the family. Mixed couples in Gentile churches who have the same concerns, are in a much more difficult situation. Because of the constant pressure of assimilation, they need to do certain things together in order not to ‘loose touch’ and to counteract assimilation. Participating in Jewish or Messianic Jewish holiday celebrations is an important means to identify with the culture of the Jewish spouse.

Other Gentile believers can also be motivated by a desire to identify with the Jewish heritage. While conducting her field research in a local Messianic assembly, Shoshanna Feher has noticed that most Gentile women like to compare themselves to the Biblical Ruth, who crossed the cultural border between Israel and her native neighbouring country. Likewise, these Gentiles incorporate much of Jewish culture in their lifestyle. When interviewed, one of them said:

591 Willem Ouweeneel, op. cit. p. 21.
592 The (Anglican) Church’s Ministry among Jewish People.
593 Margaret Hodson, op. cit. p. 202 and 205.
595 Idem. p. 3.
People think I'm Jewish now because I do these things. And I tell them: 'No, I'm not, I'm a Gentile, but I keep the Jewish traditions.' In my heart, I'm really feeling called toward the Jewish people, and... I think an outward sign of that is maybe keeping kosher.\textsuperscript{596}

Jewish culture is not uniform, it comes in different expressions, and the most important distinction is between Ashkenazi and Sephardic subcultures. Gentiles will of course identify with the particular subculture of the people with whom they link up. So they will be divided as Jews themselves when it comes to the delicate question what it means in practice to live as a Jew. But this changes nothing in the overall motivation as such.

Having analysed the various motives of Gentile involvement in the Messianic movement, Bruce Stokes arrives at the conclusion of that their primary role is to identify with Israel. However, he cautions that this should not go as far as adopting the other's identity:

As Gentiles, our struggle must be to show that we have been brought into a relationship with the God of Abraham without being a replacement of Israel. But there is a danger here. If Gentiles lose their own identity and become copy-cat Jews, or if the differences become hidden, the purpose for the body to be both Jew and Gentile in one new man will be lost.\textsuperscript{597}

His closing remark refers to Ephesians 2:14, a passage that is also frequently quoted by Messianics to emphasise that the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the Body of Christ does not annul but rather presupposes distinguishable ethnicity and expression.\textsuperscript{598} In other words, identification is not the same as changing identity. Here we have the essential point of the cultural motivation: it does the first while refraining from the latter.

Of course, one should not be blind to the fact that a fascination with anything Jewish often flows forth from a disillusionment with church life and Evangelicalism as it is. While depreciating their own heritage such Christians take hold of the heritage of the other 'camp', and not everyone succeeds in keeping at bay the danger of idealisation.

Willem Ouweneel concurs. Having argued that 'non Jewish people are perfectly free to celebrate the high seasons with Messianic Jews,' he cautions that this should not be done out of sensationalism, nor out of a melodramatic love for all that is Jewish, nor on the basis of the mistaken legalistic idea that this will gain a better standing before God! When they want to join the celebration of Jewish festivals, the motive must be 'a pure love for and solidarity with Israel (after all the persecutions of Jews by Christians!).'\textsuperscript{599}

(4) Educational motive – learn and transmit essential values

This motive is closely related to the socio-cultural one. We would call it educational. It has a double sense. Believers keep sacred times to learn and be reminded of essential values; at the same time they keep them to transmit these values to others, especially to the succeeding generation.

This motivation does not exactly amount to the same for Jewish and Gentile believers, the former want to transmit their own heritage; the latter receive and pass on a heritage that is not their own by nature. Part of this heritage is the religious and cultural tradition of post-Biblical Judaism; this part does not become theirs in the same way as it belongs to ethnic Jews. Another, equally in particular part is the Hebrew Bible, the Messiah, the New Covenant, and this part has become theirs as a consequence of their faith in Jesus.

So there is every reason to foster and transmit the Jewish heritage as it pertains to both the Old and the New Testament. Many Gentiles celebrate Biblical holidays precisely for this reason.

For Martha Zimmerman, author of a widely read book on this subject, this seems to be the major motivation. In fact, it is the only one she mentions. She explains that the festivals were instituted in order to remember; and she adds that these are still excellent educational tools to do just that.

The word 'remembrance' is repeated over 300 times in the Old and New Testament. The challenge is: how to relate the past to the present? How do we actively 'consider' and 'remembrance'? (...) \textit{Reading} the great stories in the Bible, the accounts of God's amazing love, provision and protection, is a good, steady first step. But \textit{practising} the Hebrew traditions recorded in the Bible provides visual reminders and encourages awareness of the Lord's presence and His blessings. Biblical festivals are living experiences.\textsuperscript{600}

(5) Evangelistic motive – communicate the Gospel in a Jewish context

Some Gentiles have a particular desire to reach out to Jewish people who do not know Christ. For that reason, they identify with their Messianic brethren, express their faith in a Jewish way and keep Biblical holidays. Bruce Stoke talks

\textsuperscript{596} Shoshanna Feher, \textit{Passing over Easter}, p. 68f.
\textsuperscript{597} \textit{Idem}, p. 68f.
\textsuperscript{598} See e.g. Menachem Benhayim, 'One New Man.'
\textsuperscript{599} Willem Ouweneel, \textit{op. cit.} p. 21.
\textsuperscript{600} Martha Zimmerman, \textit{op. cit.} p. 18.
about those who 'have a desire to minister faith in Yeshua as contextually relevant to Jews.'

We already noted the view of Bruce Stokes that the Biblical role for Gentiles in the Messianic movement is to identify with the people of Israel. The second one, he says, referring to Romans 11:11, is to provoke unbelieving Israel to envy. In order to assume this role, they should give evidence of authenticity — if not, Israel will only be provoked to apathy — and attractiveness in their obedience to God's commandments. 'I believe that we can best fulfil this role by Torah observance that is consistent with the Torah commands but is distinctive with regards to Jews and Gentiles.' He illustrates this by the following example:

In our home, we celebrate the Sabbath in a manner similar, but not identical, to the traditions of Judaism. All of the Torah's commands and elements of Judaism are present. But the form is distinct. Our Jewish neighbours... see an authenticity in what we do that reminds them of childhood Sabbaths at home. We are often asked why we observe the Sabbath. We respond with the text from Isaiah 56:6–8 which tells of the Gentiles who keep the Sabbath.

Some Gentile believers outside Messianic congregations who participate in celebrations of Biblical and Jewish holidays do so for the same missional motive. They invited Jewish friends to come along. And by their simple participation they intend to enhance the communication of the Gospel to Jewish people.

(6) Restoration motive — connect with Jewish roots and with the Jewish nation

A second missional motive for celebrating Biblical and Jewish holidays is mainly aimed at Gentile Christians. In her field research, Shoshanna Feher includes the testimony of a certain Nicholas who has joined the congregation in order to connect with Jewish roots. As he looks back on his previous church experience he talks about the dryness of Scripture. Understanding Jewish culture and its role in the New Testament has brought the Bible 'to life', he says. As a result, he feels closer to God and his life has become enriched. Shoshanna Feher calls such Gentile believers 'root seekers'. Here we have the restorative motive to celebrate Biblical and Jewish holidays; this is a practical means to connect the Church again to its Jewish roots.

Often, there is the feeling of having a special mission to fulfill with regards to the Church at large. Bruce Stokes argues that this is particularly important for Gentiles in the Messianic movement:

Their role is to... make the movement understandable to Christians who have no idea of the Jewish roots of their faith... and assist the remnant of Israel in being a light unto the Gentiles.

For most Gentiles who celebrate the festivals, this is a very concrete way to live out the Jewish roots of their faith and the bond between the Church and Israel. Arno Lamm and Emile-André Vanbeekvoort have written a passionate plea to the Church at large to 'un-Greek' her thinking and her practice. 'Believers have inherited Greek thinking that has taken away from them deep truths about God's kingdom,' they argue. To recapture them, there should be a shift to a Biblical-Hebrew way of thinking. One of the ways to bring about this kind of paradigm shift is to return to the festal calendar of the Bible. And the authors see signs that this momentous change is indeed beginning to take place.

Nowadays, the Spirit of God wakes up Christians all over the world to open their eyes to his Plan, through the feasts and also through other parts of the Bible that were misinterpreted. These [prophetic] passages are often related to the feasts. By placing them in their right context, they come to live again.

(7) Eschatological motive — connect the end-time Church with the Jewish nation

Closely related to the former motive is the eschatological motive. Celebrating the festivals is a way to anticipate the promised future of Israel, the Church and the world at large. In so doing, the Church becomes aware of the time in which we live, the time in which the restoration of Jewish nation has begun, in fulfillment of prophetic predictions, the time in which Christians should prepare for the final stages in God's plan of salvation. These prophetic overtones are particularly present in the prayers and songs used during the celebration of Sukkoth.

This motivation is the same as the parallel eschatological motive that we came across among Messianic believers. It is not necessary, therefore, to describe it in detail here. We refer to the particular paragraph; Chapter 4.3, page 181–182.

602 Idem, p. 3.
603 Shoshanna Feher, op. cit. p. 71.
604 H. Bruce Stokes, op. cit. p. 4.
605 Arno Lamm & Emile-André Vanbeekvoort, Wake up!, p. 195.
(8) Vocational motive – obeying a Biblical mandate

Then there is the vocational motive. It amounts to saying that all believers should keep Biblical holidays. In other words, this is a matter of obedience to Biblical mandate. We noticed that some Messianic Jews call themselves Torah observant. This means that they are persuaded of the lasting validity of the Torah in the area of holidays and lifestyle. This vocational motive comes in three forms. They are persuaded that all the mitzvot that are not explicitly abrogated in the New Covenant are still in force, and/or that Jews should maintain a distinctive identity, and/or that they should follow the example of Jesus who lived as a Torah observant Jew. Some Gentiles, Bruce Stoke notices, share this motivation:

They have come to the theological position that the Torah is equally binding on Jews and Gentiles. The result is a loss of Jewish-Gentile identity.606

Outside Messianic assemblies, Torah observance is rare, but other vocational motives do come into play. When this is the case, believers usually appeal to the example of Jesus. He celebrated each Jewish feast, and regarded all of the festivals as ordained by God to be remembered, observed, and celebrated; writes Martha Zimmerman. She combines this with Jesus’ famous statement on the abiding value of the Torah in Matthew 5:17–19, which she quotes from The Living Bible and comments as follows:

‘Don’t misunderstand why I have come – it isn’t to cancel the laws of Moses and the warnings of the prophets.’ (Don’t throw away half of the puzzle pieces and expect a finished picture when you are through.) ‘I came to fulfil them, and to make them all come true’ (fit together). ‘Those who teach God’s laws and obey them shall be great in the Kingdom of heaven.’ (...) I believe that the Hebrew festivals also are key puzzle pieces.607

According to Timm Hegg, the appointed times are related, not only to the Mosaic Covenant but also to the creation order, from which he concludes that they have universal value.

If Israel is commanded to do and keep the Moedim of the Lord throughout her generations, then all who have attached themselves to Israel through faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and his Messiah Yeshua are equally privileged to keep the Lord’s appointed times.608

(9) Renewal motive – return to Biblical practice

The abovementioned motivations of Gentile Christians run parallel with those of Jesus-believing Jews. However, there is yet another reason for which some Christians advocate the (re)introduction of Biblical festivals in the life of the Church. We would call it the renewal motive. At first sight, it looks very much like the restoration motive, since there is the same focus on the Church, and the same concern of bringing back something that has been lost.

Yet there is a difference. The restoration motive focuses on Jewish roots and the relation between the Church and the Jewish people; the renewal motive is mainly concerned with Christian worship and Church life. Generally speaking, the first is combined with the second, but the second is not necessarily an outcome of the first. In other words, one can consider the Biblical festivals as excellent means to enhance meaningful worship, to bring renewal to the Church, or to foster a broader vision of God’s saving works throughout history, without emphasizing the special place of Jewish nation in God’s salvation plan and the Jewish roots of Christianity, without defending the cause of Israel, and without introducing specifically Jewish customs and ideas concerning these festivals.

An example of practicing Biblical festivals with a view to the renewal of the Church is Samuel Bacchiocchi. Concerned by the way in which congregations seek worship renewal by introducing contemporary music, theatrical preaching, drama and the like, he is persuaded that a church calendar...

...that focuses on the great truths of salvation challenges us to foster worship renewal by seeking for a deeper understanding and experience of what Christ has done, is doing, and will do for us. The celebration of the great saving acts of God commemorated by the annual Feasts can bring about worship renewal by making our worship experience God-centred rather than self-centred.609

It should be added that the motivation for renewal with Biblical festivals but without linking up with the Jewish people is quite rare. But it is part of the overall motivation picture. Its concern is a return to Biblical practice, over and against the Christian traditions that have developed in later ages.

11.4 Restoration or Reorientation?

All along this chapter we have seen that the Gentile Christian interest in Biblical and Jewish holidays is closely related to their interest in the Jewish roots of their faith. Of the various motivations to practice these sacred times, the restoration

607 Martha Zimmerman, op. cit. p. 15–16.
motive stands out as the overriding one: the desire to restore the original Jewish character of the early Church. This raises the question whether this is actually happening or not. Are we witnessing a restoration of New Testament Church life?

At the end of the forgoing chapter, we asked the same question with respect to the religious practice of the Messianic movement: is this a restoration of the original Jewishness of the Gospel, as some of its spokesmen claim? We concluded that what we are witnessing is in fact a contextualisation rather than a restoration. Surely, certain characteristics of the early Jewish Church are taken up. In that sense, one can speak of restoring elements that have been lost when there was a parting of the ways of Church and Synagogue. But one cannot say that the way in which these elements are put in practice today, is the same as nineteen, twenty centuries ago. For one, we have insufficient knowledge of the religious practice of early Jewish Christianity to be able to re-enact it today – let alone the question whether this is desirable or necessary. Moreover, the celebration of holidays in the current Messianic movement incorporates many elements of post-Biblical Judaic tradition as they are still present in Orthodox Judaism today, as well as elements from today’s Evangelical and Charismatic streams. In so doing, they relate to the context of the Jewish people at present.

The same can be said of Gentile Christians wishing to restore Jewish roots through festival celebrations and various liturgical practices. Certainly, they reintroduce elements of Church life that have been lost since the first centuries. Certainly, the fact that they keep Biblical holidays recalls the original Jewish context of the Gospel. But the way in which they celebrate is not a return to the good old days when Jerusalem was still the dynamic centre of the apostolic Church, for the same reasons that the Messianic religious practice is not a restoration either. What is it, then?

As for the Messianic movement, contextualisation is the more appropriate term. As for Gentile Christians celebrating Biblical and Jewish holidays, the proper qualification is not restoration but reorientation. It is part of a change of perspective that occurs when Christians become aware of the separation between Church and Synagogue. They turn their eyes again to Jerusalem and all that the name of this city stands for: God’s alliance with the people of Israel, the revelation of the Scriptures, the Temple as the dwelling place of God’s Name, the prophetic promise of the restoration of Jewish nation...

This phenomenon occurs most notably in Western Christianity. Over and against the Latin, Roman, Protestant, Evangelical and Anglo-saxon Occident stands the cradle of the Christian faith in the Jewish Orient. There was a shift from Jerusalem to Constantinople and Rome, and then to other centres of the Christian world, and this shift brought all kinds of theological and practical changes. The Church disconnected from its Jewish origins, and even turned into an agent of discrimination and persecution of the Jews. Those who regret this history, call for a re-orientation, a change of perspective, a reconnection with Jerusalem – both the physical city and all that it stands for (Israel, the Jewish people, the return to the Land) and the prophetic promise concerning the future of this city. Celebrating Biblical holidays is a way of giving expression to the bond between the Church and the Jewish people, a bond that originally existed in NT times but got lost in the course of Early Church history.

Most Christians interested in Biblical and Jewish holidays are Evangelicals. As Evangelicals, they are not only interested in the Jewish roots of Christianity and peaceful relations with the Jewish communities today, but also in the testimony of the Gospel of Jesus the Saviour in Israel. So they are inclined to relate directly with the Messianic Movement, which they consider to be the forerunner of what will happen in the future, i.e. when ‘all Israel’ will come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. For Evangelical Christians, celebrating the feasts of Israel is a way of relating not only to the Jewish people in general but also to the Messianic believers in particular. That is why their celebrations follow the example of the Messianic Jewish community. There is a close resemblance of motives, calendars, interpretations and formats. The identification with Messianic Jewish holiday practice seems to be deliberate. Even when they develop a more ‘Christian’ or ‘Evangelical’ way of celebration, the underlying ideal still is to celebrate these sacred days in communion with the their Jewish brethren in the faith.

This is of course a departure from the view that the bond between the Church and Israel should first of all be expressed through dialogue, through respect for Judaism as a living religion. Such views also exist within Evangelical Protestantism today.

In the Jewish Christian dialogue, the views and testimonies of Messianic believers are usually not taken into account, sometimes they are deliberately bypassed. Attempts to communicate the Gospel to Jews are generally disavowed. As we noticed in the paragraph about the dialogue approach to Jewish holidays, there is a reluctance to celebrate them, because this might offend the Jewish religious sensitivity. The general policy of dialogue is to foster friendly relationships between Christianity and Judaism as they are. Christians should learn from Judaism but not imitate Judaism. From this perspective, Biblical festivals are Jewish festivals, and Gentile should rather not celebrate them.
Jesus believing Jews and Gentile Christians who are supportive of the Messianic movement, consider this to be the wrong kind of reorientation. In their view, connecting with Jerusalem – the Orient – include the awareness that Jesus is the Jewish Saviour of Israel of all the nations of the world, including his own people. This conviction clearly comes to the fore as they celebrate the sacred times of Israel.

12. General Conclusions

As we bring our study to a close, we present a summary of our findings by means of twelve general conclusions.

(1) These Holidays serve to express the identity of Jewish believers as belonging to the Chosen People

Our historical survey (Chapters 1 and 2) has brought to light the social-cultural situation in which JBJ (Jesus-believing Jews) began to celebrate Biblical and Jewish holidays. Caught in the middle, between Church and Synagogue, they were up against the pressure of assimilation on the one hand, and rejection on the other. Accordingly they had to find ways of ‘surviving’ as a special category of believers within the Church at large. At the same time, there was the need to affirm ethnic identity, in words and deeds.

At first community development seemed to be the answer. Eventually the need was felt for a more ‘Jewish’ form of worship and celebration. This led to the practice of Jewish holidays, especially those that were already part of the Biblical festal calendar. For JBJ these sacred times have a direct link, not only with the Bible but also with the place of this particular people in the economy of salvation. Celebrating these holidays is a means by which Jewish believers express their identity as belonging to the Chosen People.

(2) Messianic Jews are developing a novel holiday tradition

In our analysis (Chapter 3) we have brought to light the fact that JBJ have developed a novel holiday tradition. As they keep the sacred times of the Old Covenant, as well as a number of Jewish holidays of later origin, they reinterpret and reformat them, blending elements from both Jewish and Christian traditions, and relating them to original Biblical data. In so doing, they are creating a new holiday tradition. Notwithstanding the variety of calendars, meanings and customs, there are some common denominators that can be summarised as follows: this is ‘worship between Church and Synagogue’.

While the development of Messianic holiday practice is still ongoing, one thing stands out: this is a very visible and meaningful way for believers to express
Messianic Jews and their Holiday Practice
History, Analysis and Gentile Christian Interest