

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE POPULAR JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE EXISTENCE
OF MESSIANIC JUDAISM**

by

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SUMMARY

This study is an investigation of the most popular justifications for the existence of the modern Messianic movement.

The movement's distinctive beliefs and practices are outlined.

The matter of establishing a distinctive Christian-Jewish identity using the Messianic approach is then examined next to biblical and practical evidence.

The use of the Messianic approach for Jewish evangelism and discipleship is then tested against actual results.

The facts of ancient Judaism and early Jewish Christian are examined next to the claim that Messianic movement is the resurrection of ancient Jewish Christianity.

Finally, seven recommendations are given for leaders in local churches.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.



David Jack de Bruyn

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem

1.1.1 Background to the problem

The so-called Messianic movement, or 'Messianic Judaism', as its proponents prefer, has mushroomed in the last 30 years to become a distinctive and conspicuous entity within professing Christianity.

This movement's continued existence is largely owing to the claim of its proponents that non-Messianic Christianity does not contain the theological and practical distinctives necessary to fulfill its mandate to the Jew.

Certain Messianic advocates go further to attack evangelical hermeneutics and church polity as belonging to Greek humanism or even paganism.

Thus, the movement claims to be the most effective means of reaching and disciplining Jewish people, while, in some cases, ostensibly claiming it is the purest and most original form of Christianity. There appears to be a growing sense amongst some South African Christians that such groups have 'authentic' or 'original' Christianity, and non-Messianic congregations fall short.

Further, Messianic Judaism provides yet another 'specialised' approach to an altogether over-specialised ministry-scene. In an era where marketing techniques have enamoured church leaders into unwittingly fostering a fragmentation of the church through 'target-marketing' its evangelism and discipleship, Messianic Judaism only perpetuates this problem. Some churches may even abdicate their responsibility to evangelise the Jew, reasoning that the Messianic groups 'specialise' in Jewish evangelism.

These claims present theological, methodological and practical challenges to common evangelical theology and practice.

1.1.2 Problem statement

The problem statement can be summarised as follows: Is Messianic Judaism a

biblically and practically justifiable or necessary approach to church polity, evangelism and discipleship?

1.2 The Study to be Conducted

1.2.1 The value of this study

Messianic Judaism's claims throw down the gauntlet at professing evangelical Christianity's polity, theology, and hermeneutics. If its claims are correct, most of professing Christianity is guilty of any number of several errors: seeking to 'assimilate' Jews instead of preserving their unique identity; failing to uphold the Biblical teaching on the Law of Moses; incorporating pagan rituals in its worship; failing to interpret Scripture in its Hebraic context, and using Greek and Latin classical categories of thought instead; failing to be a "Jew to the Jew"; overlooking the Jews when it comes to evangelism; and teaching Replacement Theology. Certainly, these are serious charges. The examination of such claims is therefore highly relevant.

As a pastor of a church in a Jewish neighbourhood, the Messianic movement's claims are particularly relevant to my ministry. The church I pastor was begun by the International Board of Jewish Missions, with a strong leaning towards local church ministry following a conservative Baptist model of church polity, hermeneutics and corporate worship. The implications of Messianic Judaism's claims have significant ramifications for our evangelism, discipleship and church life.

1.2.2 The aim of this study

1.2.2.1 Polemic

This study will seek to examine if the claims and distinctive practices of Messianic Judaism are biblically defensible, historically accurate and practically necessary or demonstrable.

1.2.2.2 Didactic

This study will seek to expound the New Testament's teaching for the problems

Messianic Judaism claims to solve.

1.2.3 The objectives of the study

Since it represents an innovative approach to ministry, Messianic Judaism's literature is replete with justifications for its existence. Therefore, this study will examine those justifications founded upon its theological and practical distinctives. For the purposes of the study, these claims can be grouped into three categories.

Firstly, Messianic Judaism champions the need to form and maintain a unique Christian-Jewish identity for believing Jews. It claims that its distinctive approaches to church order and general ministry are the best way of doing so.

Secondly, Messianic Judaism presents itself as the most viable (if not the only acceptable) ministry approach toward Jewish evangelism and discipleship.

Thirdly, and more ominously, restorationist elements in Messianic Judaism claim that modern Western Christianity is paganised, a humanised version of what was a Judaistic movement at its inception. Their insistence upon a return to Judaistic customs, worship and even hermeneutics challenge the polity and preaching of most of the evangelical church.

On theological fronts, Messianic Judaism also raises the issue of the validity of the Mosaic Law for believers, raising the specter of Galatianism again – and often stipulating it as necessary for Jewish believers. These theological matters and their practical ramifications for church life must be dealt with.

This research will examine the validity of the three most popular justifications for the distinctive theology and practice that defines Messianic Judaism. The justifications will be examined in light of biblical and historical evidence and practical necessity and compared with the literature for and against Messianic Judaism.

An alternative to the Messianic model will be suggested, based upon New Testament evidence and corroborated by historical evidence and personal ministry

experience.

1.3 The Research Question

The research question is essentially as follows: Is Messianic Judaism justified as a distinctive approach to ministry?

1.4 The Subsidiary Questions

- 1) What are the beliefs and practices of Messianic Judaism?
- 2) How do its proponents justify its existence?
- 3) Are these justifications biblically valid and demonstrably necessary?
- 4) What is the New Testament model for dealing with the problems Messianic Judaism claims to solve?

1.5 The Current State of Scholarship

By far the majority literature on the topic defends Messianic Judaism as a viable or even necessary approach. Very few authors have written mainstream works criticising the movement. Other studies have revolved around the psychological aspects of Jewish-Christ identity. What is lacking is a systematic evaluation of the justifications for Messianic Judaism, by grouping such justifications into recognisable categories.

1.6 Research Methodology and Overview

This research will generally follow the LIM Model of theological research.

1.6.1 Overview

a) Chapter 2: To discover *the situation as it is*, a literature survey will be done to examine how the modern Messianic movement came into being and developed into what it is today. The aim of this research will be to concisely answer the question, "What is Messianic Judaism?"

The next three chapters will form a 'bridge' between *the world as it is* vs. *the world as it should be*. These chapters will include literature surveys of existing practices, with biblical and practical critiques. They will seek to answer the second

and third key questions: *how do Messianic advocates justify their movement's existence* and *what is a biblical response to these justifications?* The chapter following these three will present *the world as it should be*.

b) Chapter 3. The third chapter will survey and summarise the literature of Messianic Judaism with its view that a distinctive Christian-Jewish identity is a) necessary and b) attained or reinforced through Messianic practices. The question of Christian-Jewish identity will be touched on, with an emphasis on Paul's treatment of the matter in Romans, Galatians and Ephesians. The theological matter of the Mosaic Law and its relationship to the believer (Jew and Gentile) will be examined, with special reference to the matter of identity. The distinctive practices of Messianic Judaism will be examined for their validity in the church and their effects on Scriptural and practical grounds.

c) Chapter 4. The research for the fourth chapter will survey and summarise the Messianic view with its supporting justifications that its distinctive approach and theology is the most successful in evangelising and discipling Jews. The views of its proponents will be studied. Studies in Jewish evangelism will be referenced. This will be examined next to Scripture's assessment of Jewish evangelism. Special attention will be given to I Corinthians 9, with Paul's "Jew to the Jews" statement.

d) Chapter 5. The situation analysis will continue with the survey and summary of the relevant literature of Messianic Judaism with its view that its practices reflect ancient and possibly authentic Christianity. Scholarly resources on ancient Christianity and Judaism will be referenced to respond to the claims of Messianic Judaism.

e) Chapter 6. The biblical and traditional insights of the previous chapters will be combined to present the theological model for the *preferred scenario*. This chapter will answer the final key question: "What is the New Testament model for dealing with the problems [the Messianic movement] seeks to answer?" Analysis of the findings

will lead into a number of measurable steps for existing churches to implement in terms of Jewish identity, evangelism and discipleship within a New Testament local church setting.

f) Chapter 7. The findings will be summarised, recommendations given and hypotheses confirmed or rejected.

The version of the Bible used as the default translation in this study is the New King James Version.

1.7 Hypothesis

Messianic Judaism arises out of evangelistic pragmatism, revisionist historical views and an *a priori* favouring of Judaistic worship and customs over Christian ones.

Chapter Two: History and Practices of Messianic Judaism

2.1 Introduction

To adequately deal with the topic of Messianic Judaism, it is necessary to account for its origins, and attempt to describe its distinctive beliefs and practices. This chapter will seek to describe the development of Hebrew Christianity into Messianic Judaism, with the theology, polity and practices that distinguish it from evangelical Christianity. These distinctive beliefs and practices will be outlined.

2.2. History of the Messianic Movement

2.2.1 *Historical caveat: Modern vs. ancient*

Messianic writers write the history of their movement as the history of Jewish Christianity itself, implying that the modern Messianic movement is the direct descendant of the faith of the earliest Jewish believers (Fruchtenbaum 1992:35). Indeed, the retitling of David Stern's book from *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* to *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement With An Ancient Past* (2007) is certainly reflective of the view of Messianics regarding the history of their own movement.

However, it is manifestly clear that Messianic Judaism in its current manifestation was unknown until the 1960s (Maoz 2003:325). Messianic Judaism's claim to be the modern restoration of the ancient Jewish faith in Jesus will be specifically dealt with in chapter five of this paper. Regardless of the validity of these claims, what is not contended is that Messianic Judaism is essentially a modern movement. Even Stern (1935:21) places the 'restoration' of Messianic Judaism in A.D. 1988. It is the history of this modern movement that this paper is concerned with for the present moment.

2.2.2. *History of the Messianic movement*

2.2.2.1 *Background*

The 19th century saw a large-scale growth of interest in Jewish evangelism and

missions. Partly due to a revival of premillennialism, which sees a restored Israel as part of future prophecy, various groups and mission agencies towards the Jews sprang up. Much of the interest was sparked by such men as Robert Murray McCheyne, Andrew Bonar and John Duncan, whose Jewish evangelism in the mid-19th century brought such men as Alfred Edersheim to faith. The journal of Bonar and McCheyne, *Mission of Discovery: The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Evangelism* provoked more interest. Many prominent Jews were converted during this time, such as Benjamin Disraeli, Felix Mendelssohn, Franz Delitzsch and several rabbis (Fruchtenbaum 1992:49).

2.2.2.2 Early associations

In 1813 an association known as *Bnei Abraham* ("Sons of Abraham") was formed. This was an alliance of Jewish Christians that served to encourage them in their mutual faith, assist them in evangelism and in their relations to the churches to which they belonged (Maoz 1995:319).

The years 1866-7 saw the formation of the Hebrew Christian Alliance in Great Britain by Dr C. Schwartz (Maoz 1995:319). It had essentially the same goals as Bnei Abraham, and went on to establish similar Alliances in other parts of the world (Telchin 2004:57). Messianics, however, claim that its goal was to maintain a distinctively Jewish identity (Juster 1995:148).

2.2.2.3 Pre-1960 Jewish Christian congregations

In 1885, Joseph Rabinowitz formed a congregation in Kishenev (modern Ukraine) called *Israelites of the New Covenant*, hoping to reach orthodox Jews. He went on to establish others, but it seemed the movement had died by 1914 (Goldberg & Gundry 2003:24).

In 1934, David Bronstein established a Jewish Christian congregation in Chicago, which later became a Messianic congregation in the 1970s, when its name was changed to Adat Ha Tikva (Maoz 2003:324). Prior to that, it used Christian

hymnody, Sunday worship, and a regular 'church atmosphere' (Juster 1995:151).

According to Juster (1995:149), Mark Levy, the General Secretary of the America Alliance in the early 20th century argued that Jewish Christians should maintain their heritage of feasts, festivals and Hebraic worship. However, the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America rejected his position, and with regards to Messianic Judaism declared in its 1917 journal that it was 'free from it, now and forever" (Rausch 1982:43).

Messianic writers, when writing on the history of their movement, tend to regard almost every pre-1960 congregation led by or largely made up of Jewish believers as examples of early Messianic congregations. While there were certainly individuals who leaned that way (Levy and Rabinowitz), by and large the congregations were often simply churches with a love for Jewish evangelism and a respect for the non-rabbinic Jewish traditions. Maoz (2003:320) says that these congregations, for the most part, laboured for a distinctly Christian identity within Jewish communities, in contrast to modern Messianic congregations, which seek to have a distinctly Jewish identity within the body of Christ.

2.2.2.4 Mission agencies

Many mission societies formed in the 19th century, with the express task of reaching Jews for Christ. Some of these mission agencies played a role in forming the modern Messianic movement. Amongst the agencies that developed in the 19th and early 20th century were The British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to the Jews (1842), The Mildmay Mission to the Jews (1898), The International Society for the Evangelisation of the Jewish people (1915), the Hebrew Christian Alliance in America (1915), the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (1925), and the International Board of Jewish Missions (1948).

What is of interest is that many of these agencies pondered the matter of establishing separate Hebrew Christian congregations. As early as 1913, the idea

was firmly rejected in the meeting of the men who founded the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (Maoz 2003:322). While the members of these groups were conscious of their Jewishness, opposed to anti-Semitism, supportive of Zionism, they were typically opposed to what is now the Messianic movement (Maoz 2003:321) Jacob Gartenhaus (1976:26), the founder of the International Board of Jewish Missions put his view explicitly: "I therefore saw no solution to this problem [of reaching the masses of unsaved Jews] than to place the responsibility for evangelizing the Jews primarily at the door of the local church by challenging each church to minister to the Jews of its vicinity."

2.2.2.5 Winds of change

The 1960s brought the anti-Establishmentarian views of the time into the Hebrew Christian Alliance, with a lack of allegiance to the church and a desire to be distinguished from it. By 1966, the Young Hebrew Christian Youth Organisation was formed, which became the Young Hebrew Christian Alliance (Maoz 2003:324). The fomenting Messianic views found within these groups would soon find their way into the larger bodies as these young leaders took positions in them.

Martin Chernoff became the president of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America in 1971, and spearheaded the move towards the adoption of rabbinic traditions and a more aggressive assertion of Jewish identity. With his sons Joel and David following him, in the years leading up to 1987, a whole new nomenclature was adopted. Jews were no longer *converted*, they were *completed*. The church was now *a congregation* or even a *synagogue*. Jesus was to be called *Yeshua*, the Law was to be called the *Torah*, and names in the Bible were to be pronounced in the original Hebrew form (Telchin 2004:60). The year 1973 saw the beginnings of Jews for Jesus, under Baptist pastor Martin Rosen, who later changed his name to Moshe. Significantly, in 1975 the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America changed its name to the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (Stern 2007:30).

2.2.2.6 New directions

These pushes toward aggressively demarcating Jewish identity in Jesus and restoring rabbinic practices gathered steam in the 1970s. Manny Brotman was called to lead Beth Messiah of Washington D.C, one of the first truly modern Messianic congregations (Juster 1995:152). Joe and Debbie Finkelstein maintained a traditional Jewish lifestyle and attracted Jewish and Gentile adherents, who worshiped in Finkelstein's home in the late 1960s (Maoz 2003:327). Ed Brotsky started the first Messianic congregation in Philadelphia, while Martin Chernoff began one in Cincinnati (Juster 1995:152). These efforts effectively formed the bridge, or perhaps the turning point, from the Jewish Christianity practised earlier, to a fully-fledged Messianic theology and practice.

2.2.2.7 Growth and current state

Messianic associations began to proliferate. Today, groups such as the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues, the Fellowship of Messianic Jewish Congregations, the Canadian Fellowship of Messianic Congregations and Ministries, the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship, and The International Messianic Jewish Alliance are some of the many groups representing a growing movement (Maoz 2003:325). Some estimates suggest that there are over 300 Messianic congregations worldwide (Maoz 2003:351), but that number is very conservative, given how many Messianic congregations begin as cell-groups or house churches.

Furthermore, the Messianic movement is much larger than merely the number of existing Messianic synagogues. A perusal of a prominent Messianic website which keeps a running list of Messianic groups and congregations lists multitudes of para-church ministries, missions boards, and evangelistic groups that have adopted the Messianic model (*Messianic Jewish Top 100 Sites* 2008:1). A number of 350 000 Messianic adherents worldwide has been postulated (*Messianic Jews* 2008:1).

2.3 Theology and Practices of the Messianic Movement

2.3.1. Theology and beliefs

2.3.1.1 Evangelical beliefs

a) Doctrine

Daniel Juster's *Jewish Roots* (1995) is as close to a systematic theology of Messianic Judaism as there is. According to Juster (1995:149), the theological roots of Messianic Judaism are in American fundamentalism - that is, the evangelicalism that responded to 19th century Higher Criticism with the publication of *The Fundamentals* in 1910 - 1915. Thus, most Messianics would affirm the following fundamental doctrines of Christianity: the inspiration and authority of the Old and New Testaments, salvation by grace alone through faith alone leading to good works, the Tri-unity of God, the deity and Messiahship of Jesus Christ, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ by His bodily death and resurrection, the personal return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

Juster (1995:172) seems to speak for mainstream Messianic Judaism when he does not accept the two-covenant view of John Hagee, which teaches that Jews are saved through God's covenant with Abraham, not through Christ. However, he leaves the door open for Jews to be saved by 'responding to God's revelation in the Tenach' (Juster 1995:172).

b) Hermeneutics

Juster (1995:158) affirms a grammatical historic hermeneutic, though he cannot speak for all. Certainly, as far as theological systems of interpretation go, Messianic theology also has much in common with Dispensationalism (Juster 1995:43).

Dispensationalism sees a distinction between the church and Israel, and believes in the restoration of national Israel to be the geographical centre of Christ's millennial kingdom in the future. Thus, the crucial hinge on which Messianic Judaism swings – that God has a future for believing Israel – emerges from premillennialism,

and probably Dispensationalism in particular. However, many Messianics feel that Dispensationalism is too rigid in its distinctions between Israel and the church, and furthermore reject Dispensationalism's trademark pre-tribulationism for post-tribulationism (Juster 1995:44).

This view of God's plan for future Israel tends to make Messianics staunchly Zionist and supportive of the political state of Israel. In fact, Stern (2007:117) goes so far as to say that every Messianic Jew should consider *aliyah* (emigration to Israel) to make it the centre of Messianic Judaism.

2.3.1.2 Distinguishing beliefs

a) The maintenance of Jewish identity as a God-given obligation

Probably the single biggest distinguishing factor between Messianic Judaism and evangelicalism is the belief that Jews who believe in Jesus ought to retain their Jewish identity with conspicuously Jewish practices. Messianics believe that the doctrine of God's future plans for Israel, combined with the doctrine of Jesus' Messiahship mean that Jewish identity and life is a continued call of God for the Jew who believes in Jesus (Juster 1995:153). This call is considered to be 'irrevocable'. Yangarber-Hicks (2005:127) describes it as a two-pronged commitment: simultaneous commitment to the Jewish people and the larger Body of Messiah (Christ) as communities of reference.

Nichol (2008:2) makes it clear that Messianic Judaism does not believe that regular church life is capable of imparting Jewish identity to a Jew who embraces Jesus, hence their distinctive approach. Messianic theology and practice therefore rests on the assumption that the maintenance of Jewish identity for the believing Jew is a divine command. In fact, Juster (1995:110) maintains that Christian Jews who do not live as Jews, "have not heard the Spirit".

Much of this theology rests on a concern for Jewish survival in light of their Dispensational eschatology (Nichol 2008:2). Messianic Jews believe that a Jewish

converts to Christ loses their Jewish identity within a non-Messianic congregation, effectively 'assimilating' them into the Gentile world, and partly defeating the end-time goals of the full salvation of all the Jews through a believing remnant. Particularly of concern to Messianic writers is the children of Messianic believers, who, they maintain, will have no connection to Jewish heritage or identity if they grow up in a non-practising Jewish home and attend a regular church (Fischer 2008:2).

The loss of a distinctive Jewish identity becomes to many Messianics the fulfilment of the anti-missionary's claim that Jewish evangelism is simply a deceptive attempt to destroy the Jews through assimilation into Christianity.

Further, if Jews play an important role in end-time prophecy, Messianic advocates believe they must be active, not passive, in this process (Nichol 2008:3). Their understanding of how to do this is to simultaneously profess Christ and actively identify with the present culture of the Jewish community at large.

b) The place and function of the Law

Most Messianic apologists give extensive space to their view on Torah, or the Law. While views on the Law are not unanimous within evangelicalism, Messianics do adopt a distinctive approach.

They hold that the Law remains for the believing Jew a form of national culture and heritage – and therefore the keeping of which maintains the identity they believe is part of God's calling. Thus, Juster (1995) maintains that believing Jews are obliged to circumcise their male children, keep Sabbath, keep the biblical feasts, keep the food laws, and keep all the laws that are part of God's eternal moral standard.

c) The past and future of Messianic Judaism

Most Messianic writers defend their movement as a modern revival of the practices of the early Jewish church, referencing events in Acts 15 and 21. Nichol

(2008:2) calls it “a recapitulation of the First Century reality.” Juster (1995:148) calls it “the resurrection of a very old movement”.

Messianic writers do not only look back and regard their movement as original Christianity, but they look forward and regard their movement as final Christianity. Stern (2007:59) maintains that Messianic Judaism will be the instrument that brings the church to understand its debt to Israel, and brings Israel to embrace Messiah, fulfilling the Romans 11:26 prophecy that 'all Israel will be saved'.

2.3.1.3 Heretical beliefs

Though Messianic Judaism, for the most part, identifies with evangelical doctrine, it is by no means a monolithic movement. There have been, and there continue to be elements within its ranks, that are guilty of serious error.

a) Denial of fundamentals

Probably the doctrine most likely to be in danger is the deity of Christ, and its corollary, the Trinity. William Varner (2003:12) warns of the tendency in Messianic Judaism to re-articulate the doctrines of the Trinity and the deity of Christ, ostensibly to rid them of 'Greek thought', which may inadvertently lead to embracing heretical positions, like the Ebionism of the early centuries. Certainly there are Messianics who deny the deity of Christ (*Was Jesus “God” or “the son of God”?* 2008:1).

Juster (1995:25) also mentions the heresy of denying the substitutionary atonement of Christ as being a danger to Messianic Judaism.

b) Questionable hermeneutics

While many Messianics utilise a grammatical-historical approach to biblical interpretation, there are some who insist that Jewish writings can only be understood through Jewish hermeneutics. Stern (2007:106) mentions the four kinds or levels of interpretation the rabbis used: *p'shat* (simple, plain sense); *remez* (peculiar features that hint at a deeper meaning); *midrash* (creativity which finds allegorical applications

of the text); and *sod* (secret meaning is revealed through the numerical value of the Hebrew letters). In this regard, one notices some Messianic teachers capitalising on the ignorance of Gentile believers and promoting their midrashic interpretations as the lost key of interpretation. Gentiles, enamoured by a whole new 'take' on theology, crave these midrashic, allegorical lessons, as well as supposed hidden Hebrew meanings. This sets up a semi-Gnostic situation, where the uninitiated wait with baited breath for the Messianic teacher to unlock the true meanings of passages for them (*Midrash: The Camel's Nose* 2008:1).

2.3.2 Practices

As a result of these beliefs, Messianic Judaism adopts a number of distinctive practices. These practices affect both the private and public life of Messianic believers.

2.3.2.1 Corporate practices

a) Corporate worship

The primary means of maintaining the dual Christian-Jewish identity that Messianics seek is through the formation and actions of Messianic synagogues. "Messianic Judaism is primarily a congregational movement", says Nichol (2008:3). This, he maintains, is an "imperfect yet meaningful answer" to the question of how modern Jewish believers in Jesus can survive as Jews.

Messianic synagogues are patterned after synagogues and churches. Most meetings are held on Friday night or Saturday morning. In most cases, the corporate worship involves the singing of Hebrew songs. Some Messianic synagogues use the liturgies developed by the various branches of Judaism, which include rabbinic prayers and citations (Stern 2007:173). Certain congregations participate in 'Davidic dancing', a kind of Israelite folk dance (*Messianic Dance* 2008:1). Some Messianic synagogues mimic the regular synagogues by owning a *sefer-Torah*, a Torah scroll for public reading. Certain Messianic synagogues call their elders 'rabbis', while others caution against a flippant use of this title (Juster 1995:225). The Lord's Supper

and baptism are celebrated, though often called by different titles. Some Messianic males will attend wearing a *kippah* (yarmulke) (Juster 1995:216). Many use the *Talit* or prayer-shawl during prayers at the synagogue, while some sew tassels on their garments, as per the Orthodox practice.

b) Feasts

The various biblical feasts are celebrated corporately or individually. These include Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost), Rosh Hashanah (Feast of Trumpets), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Succot (Feast of Tabernacles).

Passover meals and demonstrations, services marking these days and other individual practices are done to commemorate these feasts. Messianics will draw attention to the Christological and prophetic significance of these feasts. Purim and Chanukkah (Festival of Lights) are not biblically commanded feasts, but are also celebrated. Some Messianics will observe Simchat Torah, Yom HaShoah (Holocaust memorial), Yom HaAtzmaot (Israel Independence) and Tisha B'Av (Destruction of the Temple) (Juster 1995:210).

2.3.2.2 Individual and family practices

a) Shabbat (Sabbath)

Sabbath was a central sign of the Covenant between Israel and God, so Messianic Jews regard Sabbath observance as crucial to upholding their Jewish identity. Sabbath, for Jews, is from sunset on Friday till sunset on Saturday. Observances may vary, but some recommend freedom from work, a special Friday evening meal, corporate worship and family time (Juster 1995:199)

b) Circumcision

Circumcision is seen as an eternal sign between God and Abraham, and to forgo it is to be cut off from Israel (Juster 1995:5). Thus, the circumcision of the male children of Messianics is enjoined.

c) Other practices

Halakhah refers to the material written to explain tradition, practice and law-keeping. It is a kind of 'case law' used to help Jews apply the Torah in everyday life. Messianics, while acknowledging Jewish Halakhah, essentially seek their own, since they all agree that some of the Torah is to be kept, while the New Testament truth has rendered some of those laws inapplicable today. Such matters as the food laws, the cleanliness laws, the matters of birth, Bar-Mitzvahs (coming of age), marriage, death, Sabbath observance, and relationships with Gentiles are included in these discussion (Stern 2007:158). There is no unanimity on these matters amongst Messianics, and the interpretation and application of New Testament Scriptures on these matters continue to be debated.

2.4 Conclusion

Messianic Judaism grew out of the anti-Establishment views of the 60s and 70s, turning a Hebrew Christian movement into one that sought a distinctively Jewish identity within the body of Christ. This attitude is largely based on eschatological reasons – the need to preserve a Jewish remnant that is not assimilated into a Gentile church. This belief is manifested mainly in the congregational life of Messianic Jews, though it touches the individual practices of observant Messianics as well.

Chapter Three: Jewish-Christian Identity [Crisis]

3.1 Introduction

At the heart of the modern Messianic movement is an introspective, and some might say, obsessive, approach to Jewish identity. Its advocates proclaim that a Jewish believer in Jesus cannot, without great difficulty, maintain a Jewish identity in the mainstream church. Further, the maintenance of this identity is seen as a mandate from God.

This chapter will examine the identity dilemma faced by Jewish believers, examine its nature, and critique the practices undertaken by Messianic Judaism to affirm the identity they seek.

3.2. Jewish Identity

Certainly the question of “Who is a Jew?” has been contested amongst Jews themselves for some time. Orthodox Jews have sought to make Jewish identity synonymous with some form of adherence to Judaism. However, this notion fails to account for the majority of Jews, who are secular, atheistic or subscribe to a religion other than Judaism. Many such Jews keep certain Jewish customs (such as circumcision and Bar-Mitzahs), eat Jewish foods, enjoy Jewish humour, have an interest in Israel, are self-consciously Jewish, but have little or no interest in Judaism itself.

Fruchtenbaum (1992:8) states that a Jew is one descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Contrary to rabbinic tradition, this can be through the father or the mother (Juster 1992:192). Messianics believe a Jew must also have some form of deliberate identification with Jews, through circumcision if male, and in the fullest sense by preserving Jewish heritage (Juster 1992:194).

3.3 Jewish Christian Identity

3.3.1 Four views

There are generally four views of a Jewish person's identity once they profess faith in Jesus Christ:

1) *The Jewish View: Jewish Christians are no longer Jews.* Rabbinic authorities have sought to make Judaism and Jewishness synonymous. Therefore, since one cannot be an adherent of Judaism and Christianity simultaneously, according to this view one cannot be a Jew and a Christian simultaneously (Fruchtenbaum 1992:2).

2) *The Replacement View: All believers in Christ are spiritual Jews.* Held particularly by Christians who have embraced covenant theology, amillennialism, postmillennialism, or Replacement Theology itself, it interprets passages like Galatians 3:28 and Romans 2:28-29 to teach that the Jewish-Gentile distinction no longer exists post-salvation, and believers in Jesus are the New Testament Israel (Fruchtenbaum 1992:19).

3) *The extreme Messianic View: Jewish believers in Jesus are not Christians (a term that refers to Gentile believers in Jesus).* Rather, Jews that believe in Jesus are Messianic Jews. Gentiles who believe in Jesus are Christians (Stern 2007:32).

4) *The Hebrew-Christian View: Jewish and Gentile Christians exist simultaneously in the body of Christ.* Jewish believers in Jesus retain their Jewish ethnicity, but are born-again Christians. Gentile Christians are not spiritual Jews, but they are part of the one new man in Christ (Fruchtenbaum 1992:13)

3.3.2 Analysis of the views

3.3.2.1 Analysis of the Jewish view

The early Pharisees did not question the Jewishness of those who believed on Christ, they questioned the identity of Christ. The modern attitude is a result of the rabbis' hijacking of Jewishness that seeks to make adherence to Judaism the

cornerstone of Jewish identity (Maoz 2003:70). While no one can hold to two opposing religions simultaneously, the notion of Jewishness being primarily a religious matter is a rabbinic innovation, and if held consistently, would invalidate the Jewishness of the large majority of Jews worldwide.

3.3.2.2 Analysis of the Replacement view

Passages such as Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:10 and I Corinthians 12:13 do not teach that Jews and Gentiles lose their respective cultural identities in Christ, otherwise we would be forced to conclude that males and females lose their gender differences, and slaves and freemen lose their social identities. The point of these passages is *equality*, not *uniformity*. The many passages detailing gender roles and slave responsibilities prove that Paul did not believe these things disappear in Christ, only that they are no longer points of division.

Romans 2:28-29 and 9:1-4 are often enlisted to support the idea that all believers are Jews. But as Fruchtenbaum (1992:22) points out, the structure of Romans makes it very clear that in those respective chapters, Paul is dealing with national Israel, and his point is that unsaved Jews are merely Jews according to the flesh, while Jewish believers are true Jews – inwardly and outwardly.

Replacement advocates strengthen their case by referring to Galatians 3:7-9, 14, 39 and Romans 4:12-14. Here Gentiles are clearly regarded as becoming descendants of Abraham through faith in Christ. One could argue that Gentile believers become spiritual descendants of Abraham, without becoming Jewish – since Jewishness is ethnic, while a relationship to Abraham by faith is spiritual. In other words, Gentiles become fellow-heirs with the Jews (Ephesians 3:6, Gal 3:29), even if they do not become 'spiritual Jews' themselves.

3.3.2.3 Analysis of the extreme Messianic view

The notion that the title *Christian* was only applied to Gentile believers is certainly a novel view, and a weakly supported one at that. First Peter includes the

word *Christian* (4:16), and is written to 'the pilgrims of the Dispersion' (1:1) – Jewish believers outside of Israel. The church at Antioch, where Christians are first called (Acts 11:26), was clearly a church of Jews and Gentiles (Acts 13:1). To argue that King Agrippa was asking Paul, “In such a short time are you persuading me to become a *Gentile believer*?” (Acts 26:28) is quite ridiculous. Paul's response in verse 27 shows that he identified himself as a Christian, and desired others to be the same.

3.3.2.4 Analysis of the Hebrew-Christian view

The Bible recognises the simultaneous existence of unbelieving Jews (Romans 10:1-3, 2 Cor 3:13-15, 1 Cor 10:18) and believing Jews. Paul identifies himself as belonging to Israel post-conversion (Romans 11:1).

Fruchtenbaum (1992:28) lists four proofs for the Hebrew Christian view:

i) The Israel within Israel (Rom 9:1-5), the doctrine of the remnant in Israel (Rom 11:1-7) the doctrine of the Olive Tree (Rom 11:16-21) and the Abrahamic Covenant.

3.4. The Issue of Assimilation

Given that a Jew does not lose his or her Jewishness once born again, we may ask – is his or her Jewishness threatened, undermined or compromised by a new life in Christ and in His Church?

3.4.1 The perceived threat to Jewish-Christian identity

David Stern (2007:79) defines assimilation as Jews becoming less Jewish and more like the so-called “Christian culture” around them. Messianic advocates are united on this much: the church is far too 'Gentilised' to support any Jewish identity within it. As Jewish believers abandon Jewish customs, intermarry with Gentiles, and raise children without Jewish customs, they effectively lose all ties to the Jewish community and are no longer Jewish in any real sense. The intensity with which Messianics regard this matter is seen in the banner on a popular Messianic website: “Certified 100% Assimilation-proof” (*Messianic Bureau International* 2008:1).

There is no doubt that the church has suffered greatly through its own sinful anti-Semitism over 1800 years. It certainly taught and practiced assimilation in the Middle Ages, and some churches holding to Replacement Theology effectively continue to do so. The present writer doubts whether there is the same attitude in most evangelical churches today; rather there is a poverty of understanding of the Jewish culture, and little of a true Hebraic culture left in the church.

Equally, Judaism has hardened over the last 1800 years, taking a stance that creates a 'make-or-break' identity crisis for the Jewish Christian. The historical actions of both Christendom and Judaism have thus created a painful disjunction for the Jew who trusts Christ.

3.4.2 *The importance of Jewish identity within the church*

The question to be answered is this: What weight does the Bible place upon Jewish Christians maintaining a distinctive Jewish identity?

Messianics answer by saying the Bible makes it an obligation. Hebrew Christians answer by saying it is important, but not commanded.

Messianics buttress their case with three lines of argument:

Firstly, they claim that the Jewish apostles lived as Jews, supposedly giving modern Jewish believers an example to follow. Scriptures referenced are Acts 15, 20:16, 22:3, 23:1-5, 25:8, 26:5-8, 28:17 (Juster 1994:86).

Secondly, they insist that God's prophecy of the remnant of Israel requires active participation on the part of Jewish believers to prevent Gentile assimilation (Nichol 2008:2).

Thirdly, they claim that to live a distinctively Jewish life is in fact a calling from God (Juster 1994:125).

In response, one notes that with the exception of the third reason, the reasons are based on extrapolating narratives and prophecies into commands – never a sound hermeneutical principle. Paul's example is beyond the full scope of this paper, but suffice it to say that Paul chose to move in and out of Jewish living to better evangelise his audience, as Peter did as well, apparently (I Cor 9:20-21, Gal 2:14) (Maoz 2003:85). He exercised liberty – liberty to keep traditions, and liberty not to.

While Messianics like Nichol (2008) believe their approach is an act of obedience to make sure the Jewish people are not assimilated, the approach is begging the question. Messianics assume a conclusion they have not proved – that Jews necessarily lose their identity within the church, and that the Messianic approach preserves a true and biblical Jewish heritage.

There is no doubt that Jewish believers are called to be believers; what is less emphasised in the New Testament is that God commands them to be self-consciously Jewish. To claim this is to collapse a distinction to force a point.

The very point of passages like Galatians 3:28 is not to suggest that the differences don't *exist* in the body of Christ, but that they don't *matter*. Our cultural and social differences are to be submerged to a commonality that overwhelms – being in Christ.

On the Hebrew Christian side, advocates such as Maoz (2003:73) believe that Jewish assimilation would be a loss to the church, but not a sin. No Scriptures clearly lay the obligation upon Jewish believers to remain distinctively Jewish. On the other hand, Scripture does portray it as a privilege -to be amongst the Israel of God, the remnant, the Israel within Israel (Galatians 6:16, Romans 11:1-6, 9:1-6). With that privilege in mind, Jewish-Christian identity is something Jewish believers should seriously consider upholding, for the sake of a continued witness to other Jews, for the sake of the wholeness of the church, and to silence the critics of those who maintain Jews cannot be Christians, or to raise children who confess Christ and

understand their Jewish heritage.

3.4.3 The test of Jewish identity

Both Messianics and Hebrew-Christians will agree on this much: maintaining a Jewish-Christian identity is important. The point of departure becomes how that identity is understood and practised in the modern religious environment.

Unquestionably, Messianics are using the standard of Jewishness established by the current Jewish community, particularly the religious Jewish community. Jewishness as defined by unbelieving Jews becomes something of the benchmark for a Jewish Christian to the Messianic movement. Along these lines, we move to examine the approach of the Messianic movement in defining their identity.

3.5 The Messianic Approach

3.5.1 Messianic synagogues

Messianic Judaism defends the right to set up separate Messianic synagogues at which Gentiles are permitted, but which targets Jews, creating a Jewish atmosphere conducive to the Jewish identity they seek.

3.5.1.1 Response

As most critics of Messianic Judaism have frequently pointed out, this seems to be an obvious rebuilding of the middle wall of partition that Christ died to tear down (Ephesians 2:14). Messianics respond by saying that this Scripture refers to Christ restoring full table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles, not negating a distinctive Jewish life for Jews (Juster 1994:112). But this misses the force of the passage, which speaks not only of relationships between Jews and Gentiles, but of their inclusion in one body (v16). The oneness goes beyond social contact to being fellow-citizens in local churches (v19). To say that Gentiles are welcome in a congregation that emphasises Jewish culture to an extreme is disingenuous. Which Gentile will feel at home in a Messianic synagogue without first 'assimilating' into Jewishness? It is simply reversing the alienation that Jews have felt in a church hostile to Hebraic culture.

Indeed, the fact that Messianics must devote chapters of their books and research papers to “Gentiles in the Messianic movement” (Stern 2007:175; Stokes 1997) is conspicuously symptomatic of a movement veering off the pattern of Ephesians 2:11-17 towards one fraught with issues of elitism, racial separation and confusion. Telchin (2004) speaks anecdotally of Jewish-Gentile engaged couples who were refused marriage by a Messianic rabbi, of Gentiles made to feel “less-than”, of Messianic rabbis who asked Gentiles to visit but not stay, lest they dilute the congregation. These examples might be isolated and not representative, but where there is smoke, there is often fire.

Further, Varner (2003:61) points out that Messianic synagogues will only contribute to the problem they complain of: a “Gentilised church”. Removing Jewish believers removes much of the potential for re-growing a Jewish culture within local churches.

God's pattern remains the local New Testament church, patterned according to New Testament Scripture. Pragmatic concerns cannot overcome Scriptural obligations.

3.5.2 Torah

Messianics differ on the degree to which they emphasise the Law of Moses, but all agree that some of it must be kept for the sake of preserving Jewish identity. Messianics agree that an equivalent *Halakhah* (dictum) must be sought to apply the Torah to the lives of Messianic Jews. Identification with Torah becomes the means of being regarded as a branch of Judaism, not Christianity (Yangarber-Hicks 2005:128) This admission is significant, for it reveals that some Messianics perhaps want an identity more *Judaistic* than Messianic.

3.5.2.1 Response

The place of the Mosaic law provokes lively discussion amongst Christians.

Views range from the Reformed to the Theonomic Reformed to the Dispensational to the Lutheran to the evangelical view (Gundry 1999). A in-depth treatment of the matter is beyond the scope of this paper. What is relevant to the matter at hand is whether or not the Law of Moses continues as a standing covenant between God and Israel. Is the Law of Moses still essentially a contract between God and the Jewish people? Is it still the means by which God identifies His people, and similarly, by which the people of God are identified as such? If so, then Messianics are essentially correct in calling for continued allegiance to its code by Jewish believers.

It seems to this writer that the Law continues to function in many ways: as a means of conviction (I Tim 1:8-10), as a revealer of sin and impetus to grace (Rom 7:12-13, Gal 3:24), as a shadowy portrayal of Christ's completed work (Col 2:17, Heb 10:1), and as a display of God's righteousness (Rom 3:31).

However, Christ fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5:17-18). This might be better paraphrased as *Christ completed the terms of the contract*, by both fulfilling its righteousness and paying its penalties. Therefore, the one in Christ is freed from the Law as the binding agreement between him or her and God, because the Law reached its ultimate fulfillment in our substitute – Christ (Rom, 3:31, 6:14, 7:1-4, 8:3-4, 10:4). This is particularly so for the Jew, since Gentiles were not under the Mosaic Covenant, though their consciences proved they understood God's moral law (Rom 2:14-15). The existence and continuance of the Mosaic code did not allow Gentiles to be considered God's people, for the covenant is God's agreement with His people. Ephesians 2:15 suggests that by removing this Law as the standing agreement between God and His people, it allowed Gentiles to be ushered in to God's plan. The regulatory authority for God's people – Jew and Gentile – is now the New Covenant. Insofar as parts of the Mosaic law represent God's eternal moral requirements, they continue on in the Law of Christ (Fruchtenbaum 1992:86). These are usually reiterated in the New Testament, or *Covenant*. Beyond that, the keeping or not keeping of various days or food laws becomes a matter of individual conscience (Romans 14), not of national obligation.

To call for the keeping of the Mosaic Covenant as an obligation is quite simply the Judaizing that Paul wrote against in Galatians (Maoz 2003:50). Paul was clearly writing against not only the Law as a means of justification, but also as a means of sanctification (Gal 3:1-2). Torah as a means of righteousness stands in opposition to Christ's free grace. Further, it rebuilds what excluded the Gentiles, and reverts back to shadows instead of rejoicing in the Messiah (Heb 9:9, 8:5, 10:1) (Maoz 2003:105). Christian Jews have the liberty to take what they please from the Mosaic Law as a means of Jewish identity, without insisting upon it as an obligation for anyone else – Jew or Gentile.

3.5.3 Adoption of Rabbinic Judaism

Modern rabbinic Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform) is essentially an innovation of the sect of the Pharisees. Nehemiah Gordon (2006:11), a Karaite Jew, characterises it as a movement built on five things: an Oral Torah, the interpretation and authority of the rabbis, irrational interpretations, traditions of men and man-made laws. Nevertheless, this is the form of Judaism that triumphed over the others, and has set itself up as the arbiter of all things Jewish. As such, Jewishness is associated with many rabbinic innovations: the wearing of kippahs, the Sabbath laws, the meat and dairy food laws, the liturgies of the synagogues and the presiding power of the rabbinate and the synagogue.

Messianics have hurried to adopt the outward trappings of 'current' Judaism, rather than the Jewishness found in Scripture. This includes synagogues patterned after Orthodox synagogues; the use of Orthodox liturgies; the observance of rabbinic kashrut, the adoption of rabbinic practices for births, weddings, funerals and Bar-Mitzvahs (coming of age); the observance of the feasts using rabbinic prayers and liturgies, and even the adoption of rabbinic hermeneutics for preaching.

3.5.3.1 Response

It is hard to miss the fact that while Jesus upheld the Law (Matthew 5:17-18), He

deliberately confronted and repudiated the Judaism that the Pharisees were developing (Matthew 15:1-8, 12:1-15, 23:1-39, Mark 10:2-9). Equally, Paul, a former Pharisee, spoke of his attachment to Pharisaism as “my former life in Judaism” (Gal 1:13). Certainly, this should give one pause before drawing from a religion that came to be dominated by the Pharisees. Indeed, much of the admiration of current Judaism's piety, liturgy and devotion betrays an ignorance of history. As a later chapter will detail, Judaism travelled on a trajectory away from Scripture and the faith of Abraham after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Regardless of the fact that modern Jewry identifies the Judaism that is current now as the incarnation of the Jewish faith, it is actually an incarnation of the Talmudic religion created by the sect that was hostile to the preaching of Christ and the apostles.

Nichols (2008:2) is unapologetic:

History has marched on. This means that Messianic Judaism must be defined in terms of what Jewish life has come to look like since the days of Yeshua. Messianic Judaism correctly reflects the collective experience of the entire Jewish people as our culture has developed over the centuries.

But to draw uncritically from this pool is to rebuild what has been destroyed (Gal 2:18). It is the importation of a false religion into the church, for the sake of identifying with a Jewry that rejects God and His Word (Telchin 2004:63). Indeed, there are other kinds of Jews, such as Karaite Jews, who reject the Talmudic religion of the rabbis and insist on the Tanakh (Old Testament) alone. Why rabbinic Judaism should be the model of choice for the Messianics makes one wonder if the goal is authentic Jewishness or *popular* Jewishness.

An interesting, and instructive, phenomenon is that congregations in Israel are seldom rabbinic (Maoz 2003:39). The feasts are celebrated in a moderately traditional manner, but other than that, rabbinic lore plays very little part. Perhaps when Jewishness is taken for granted, there is no self-consciousness that protests too much that it is in fact Jewish. What is needed is the perspective that Jewishness

can exist outside of rabbinic Judaism.

Stan Telchin (2003:72), as a Jewish believer, mentions sharing Jewish history, culture and concerns apart from rabbinic Judaism as part of Jewish identity. Baruch Maoz (2003:81), as a Jewish pastor, points out that Jewishness is found in practising cultural norms, adhering to the national consensus, while challenging any part that conflicts with the Gospel. This writer contends that much in rabbinic Judaism does just that.

3.6 Conclusion

A Jewish believer has the right to celebrate and perpetuate his or her Jewish identity, but is not obligated to do so. The church has failed to address the identity crisis of Jewish Christians because of a history of anti-Semitism and apathy towards Jewish evangelism. However, the solutions advocated by Messianic Judaism, instead of affirming the identity of a Jewish Christian, end up giving credence to the very religion that has created part of the identity crisis. Ironically, it probably accentuates the crisis by creating an allegiance to a religion now hostile to Christianity, instead of affirming a biblical Hebrew identity. Further, it divides the church, robbing it of its Jewishness, creating an identity crisis for Gentiles, and re-introducing the Mosaic law as the covenant between God and His people – effectively alienating non-Jews.

Chapter Four: Jewish Evangelism and Discipleship

4.1 Introduction

Messianic Judaism claims that the mandate to evangelise and disciple Jewish people is better achieved through its distinctive approach. This chapter will seek to examine that claim.

4.2 The Mandate

Romans 1:16 makes it clear that the church is obliged to take the Gospel to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Gentile). Acts 1:8 had the Gospel witness begin in Jerusalem and Judea, before spreading outwards. The Gospel is to all nations (Matthew 28:19), which certainly includes the Jewish people.

4.3 Messianic Justifications

Messianics support their claim to better effectiveness in Jewish evangelism and discipleship with at least three reasons: cultural relevance, potentially higher success in evangelism than regular churches and a less hostile reception from the Jewish community.

4.3.1 Cultural relevance

By far, the most repeated justification for Messianic Judaism as a form of evangelistic testimony to the Jewish people is that the cultural similarity of Messianic practice to the Jewish people will contextualise the Gospel for the culture of Jews. Paul's statement that he 'became a Jew to the Jews' (I Cor 9:20-21) is frequently cited as justification for the adoption of recognisably Jewish ways to win Jewish people (Stern 1990:6). Some advocates believe that the Gospel's inherent Jewishness must be restored, so that Jews must understand it is for them as well (Stern 1990).

4.3.1.1 Response

Bauder (2006) points out that I Corinthians 9 is in the middle of a three-chapter discussion about the eating of foods offered to idols. Chapter 9 is Paul's use of personal illustration about the exercise of his rights and liberties in the cause of the Gospel, he was willing to surrender them as he preached, so as to offend none, and Acts 15 and 21 are illustrations of this. His autobiographical allusions are meant to support the notion of "Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God" (I Cor 10:32). Paul then again uses himself as a personal illustration of the principle being taught: "just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved." (I Cor 10:33). The chapter is not supportive of the notion that Paul adopted the mores, customs and habits of those he ministered to.

As in all evangelism, a certain amount of cultural adaptation is advantageous. Congregations in particular cultures reflect something of the customs of those people. However, Maoz (2003:46) points out that adaptation is never to be at the expense of the Gospel. If an aspect of Jewishness is hostile to the Gospel, it is something due for change, not something to be enlisted in the service of the Gospel.

However, the irony is that only 7% of Jews actually attend a synagogue as often as 24 times a year (Telchin 2004:54). In other words, most Jews do not identify the trappings of rabbinic Judaism as essential to their sense of Jewishness. To make the distinctive cultural issue (adoption of rabbinic practices) something which is largely irrelevant to most Jewish people seems to miss the point by a mile. If it weren't bad enough that rabbinic Judaism is hostile to Christianity and represents the streams of Judaism that Jesus actively opposed, it is actually a characteristic that is relevant in under ten percent of the population. Pragmatism is one thing; pragmatism that misses 93% of the target population seems to fail on every point.

At the same time, we readily acknowledge the failure of the church to

emphasise its own biblical Jewish roots, making cultural accommodation for a Jew minimal. There are many legitimate aspects of true Hebraic culture that can be emphasised without sacrificing the integrity of the Gospel, and these have been largely forgotten or overlooked by professing Christianity. Such things as consistent exposition of the Old Testament, referencing the biblical feasts, emphasising Jewish evangelism, the use of the Psalms in worship emphasise a biblical Hebraic culture.

4.3.2 Potentially higher success

Messianics do not claim to have higher success rates at winning Jews to Christ than regular churches – for that would be untrue. They claim that they have greater *potential* for doing so (Sedaca 2003:2).

4.3.2.1 Response

Whatever the unrealised potential of Messianic Judaism's evangelism and discipleship of Jews may be, the results are consistently disappointing. Telchin (2004:70) reports that between 85 and 90 percent of the attendees of Messianic synagogues are Gentiles. In fact, a large proportion of the leadership of Messianic congregations is often Gentile. One cannot help picturing the fisherman who keeps hooking all kinds of things except the fish he wants.

Further, most Jews are not won through Messianic synagogues. A survey conducted by Jews for Jesus that surveyed over 4500 Jewish believers showed that most Jews are saved through the testimony and witness of a Christian friend or the personal study of the Bible (Telchin 2004:105). Maoz (2003:239) cites research which claims that less than four percent are converted through the direct work of a Messianic congregation.

Sadly, Messianic leader David Sedaca (2003:1) frankly admits that Messianic congregations are typically not very evangelistic, mostly due to a strong emphasis on courting Jewish approval instead of bold witness that may alienate, offend or paint them as 'missionaries'. Messianic congregations often become introverted, focused

on the cultivation of Jewish identity, rather than the evangelisation of Jewish unbelievers.

4.3.3 Better reception

Messianics believe that the environment of a Messianic synagogue is 'less threatening' to an unsaved Jewish person than a church (Sedaca 2003:2). Further, they believe it provides a spiritual haven for Jewish believers in Jesus.

4.3.3.1 Response

It is probably true that the Messianic movement has provided a 'bridge' to Christ for some Jews. But as Telchin (2004:155) points out, you don't build a home on a bridge.

On the other hand, many Jewish people, especially religious Jews, are highly offended by Messianic Judaism. Often the offence goes beyond the regular offence of the cross, to offence at the methodology of Messianic Judaism. Samuelson (2001:171) cites orthodox rabbis, who variously describe Messianic Judaism as 'deceptive proselytizing', 'false pretences' and a 'Christian Missionary Cult'. The director (at the time of interview) of an anti-missionary organisation, Jews for Judaism, Jerry Siegel, characterises Messianics as ignorant people who practice both a fraudulent Christianity and a fraudulent Judaism (Samuelson 2001:171). On the surface, this approach actually seems counter-productive. In other words, the adoption of Jewish customs as a form of cultural identification is ironically alienating Jews, and attracting Gentiles. In the effort to couch the Christian message in Jewish terms, Messianics are actually couching it in Judaistic terms, which offends adherents of Judaism. One can imagine the ire of Christians if Muslims were to begin 'churches for Allah' in which traditional Christian hymns were sung, the Bible was read, a 'pastor' led the congregation, but ultimately Islam was preached.

Maoz (2003:237) points out that in straddling two identities, instead of being more winsome, Messianics antagonise the very people they hope to reach. The fact is that Judaism is defined by its rejection of Jesus' Messiahship. Judaism will never

concede a millimetre on the matter of Jesus, no matter how many concessions are made to rabbinic culture. Jesus remains the cornerstone over which the builders stumble (I Pet 4:7-8).

Telchin (2004:83) asks why so few of the more than 100 000 Christian Jews in the United States do not attend Messianic synagogues. The notion of feeling at home in Messianic synagogues seems to be untrue for the very large majority.

If the discipleship of Jewish believers was best done in Messianic congregations, one would expect a higher response. It seems that the complaints of shallow teaching, Jewishness emphasised over Jesus, phoniness, ethnocentrism, and elitism keep most Jewish people attending regular local churches, or none at all.

4.4 The Church and Jewish Evangelism

4.4.1 *The church's obligation*

Jacob Gartenhaus, the founder of the International Board of Jewish Missions, put it simply: the responsibility for evangelising Jewish people is laid at the door of the local church (1976:24). The New Testament local church is still the means God calls to complete the Great Commission (Mat 28:19-20).

One of the effects of the Messianic movement's presence is to further foster the 'specialisation' mindset in the church today, where groups of people are segmented by age, marital status, interest group and accordingly 'targeted' with evangelism or a 'tailor-made' ministry. With this kind of specialisation mindset, many in the church may grow complacent with the task of Jewish evangelism, believing it is the task of those in the Messianic movement, who are perceived to have the knowledge and specialised training to deal with Jews. Thus the church 'defers and refers': it defers to Messianics, and refers Jewish people to them (Varner 2003:61).

4.4.2 *The church's equivocation*

The church has believed at least three myths regarding Jewish evangelism,

which Telchin (2004:138) exposes: that Jewish people know the Old Testament better than Christians, that Jewish people must be reached in the context of Judaism, and that Jewish people must be reached through other Jews.

Instead, the church is to provoke Israel to jealousy (Romans 11:11), with the godliness, purity and power found in Christ. A clear Gospel is to be preached, not obfuscating the identity of Jesus, or hiding behind rabbinic forms, but proclaiming Him openly. Equivocation will convince no one: the Messiahship of Jesus must be boldly stated (Maoz 2003:64). While effective tools are available to defend Christianity in the eyes of Jewish criticism (Brown 2000), it is time for the church to proclaim a clear message of Jesus' saving power with lips and lives.

4.5 Conclusion

As a tool for evangelism and discipleship of Jewish people, Messianic Judaism is not winning more Jews than local churches, nor are the majority of believing Jews being disciplined in Messianic synagogues. Most Jews are being won through the faithful witness of Jewish or Gentile friends or relatives, while Messianic Judaism actually alienates many Jews. Messianic Judaism's contextualisation does not seem to be relevant to most Jews, and is often seen as phoney. The whole approach is based on what appears to be a misguided pragmatism, that actually misses, and sometimes further offends, the target. It remains the task of the local church to evangelise and disciple Jewish people with boldness, tenderness and clarity and trust God for the results.

Chapter Five: Ancient Jewish Christianity and Messianic Restorationism

5.1 Introduction

The Messianic movement seeks support for its movement in the pages of church history. This chapter will seek to examine the claims of the Messianic movement with regards to ancient Jewish Christianity.

5.2 Messianic Interpretation of Ancient Jewish Christianity

Messianics portray their movement as the resurrection of an ancient movement, not a novel one (Stern 2003). Generally, the Messianic interpretation of early Jewish Christianity appears along the following lines:

Jesus, Paul and the apostles remained within Judaism, simply beginning another movement within Judaism, a Messianic Judaism. This was a Torah-keeping, synagogue-attending, festival-keeping Jewish church, which ultimately wrestled with how Gentile believers were to live once included in the Jewish-dominated church. Jewish believers were never 'Christians', they were adherents of Judaism who believed that Jesus was the Messiah (Mosely 1996:12).

However, after A.D. 70, and more particularly, after the Bar-Kochba revolt, Jewish influence in the church began to be overwhelmed by the Gentile influence. The separate Jewish church continued in groups such as the Nazarenes, but these died out by the sixth century. Jewishness in the church was squeezed out, until eventually it was forbidden altogether by the Gentile triumph within the church (Yangarber-Hicks 2005 :129).

Messianics draw a direct parallel between their actions and the earliest Jewish Christians. This leads to a form of restorationism: the effort to restore a pristine version of Jewish Christianity supposedly originally practised.

5.3 Historical Synopsis

To gain an accurate picture of ancient Jewish Christianity, four factors must be understood: the acts of the apostles and those of the early church, records of post-apostolic Jewish Christians and their beliefs and activities, the changing face of Judaism, and the growing anti-Semitism in the church.

5.3.1 The actions of the apostles and early church

Hill (2007:46) suggests the Jewish Christians, particularly those in Jerusalem, had three distinguishing beliefs: a belief in the election and hope for the restoration of Israel, obedience to the Law of Moses and reverence for the Temple.

Messianics frequently point to Acts 21 as a sample of ancient Jewish Christianity. This chapter has James calling on Paul to prove to the Jewish believers 'zealous for the Law' that he is also a Law-keeping Jew. Paul's submissive response is seen as proof that he kept the Law, along with (supposedly) most Jewish Christians at the time.

It is likely that the early Jewish church synthesised their newfound faith in Christ with older Judaic customs. However, the book of Acts is widely recognised as the record of a church in transition. At this time the church did not recognise the full implications of Jesus' teaching. One proof of this is that it took persecution for the Jewish church to begin to fulfill the Great Commission given so many years earlier (Acts 8, Matthew 28:19). The church was still 'Judeo-centric'; it is no surprise that it retained 'childish things' to be put away as maturity came (I Cor 13:10-11). Hort (1904:180) maintains that the church at Jerusalem was likely Judaistic only in certain practices, but not in principle.

Paul, who received greater revelation than most, surely understood the synthesis of the old and new covenants better than most, particularly as a Jewish

believer. Paul's example is one who selectively observed the feasts, sometimes trying to get to Jerusalem for a feast (Acts 18:31), while on other missionary journeys, he made no such effort. He clearly lived 'as a Gentile' in contrast to the Judaizers, as did the apostle Peter (Gal 2:14). Whether he observed, or did not observe, he did so 'as to the Lord' (Romans 14:6). In this sense, Paul represented the mature Jewish believer in contrast to Jewish believers still wrestling with shadows, times and seasons of the past.

5.3.2 Post-Apostolic Jewish Christianity

Early Jewish Christianity is often seen in two groups: the Ebionites and the Nazarenes.

The Nazarenes were the earlier group, from which the Ebionites probably sprang. The Nazarenes held to an orthodox Christology, they did not reject Paul's writings, and they were Trinitarian. They were probably Syriac ethnic Jews, who continued to keep aspects of the Jewish law, while rejecting the *halakah* (traditions) of the rabbinic authorities of the time. It does not seem that they sought to remain separate from Gentiles, as much as they were simply geographically located in Syria, as ethnic Jews amongst ethnic Jews. They seemed to experience rejection from both camps: Jews, for their Christology, and Gentile Christians for their selective Law-keeping. They had probably disappeared by the fifth century (Pritz 1992:109).

The Ebionites seem to have been most clearly characterised by the following beliefs: a rejection of the virgin birth and deity of Jesus Christ; an adherence to much of the Mosaic Law, a reverence of the Gospel of Matthew and an general anti-Pauline bias (Hill 2007:86). Ebionism was rightly condemned as a heresy by the early church fathers, such as Irenaeus.

5.3.3 The hardening of Judaism

Moseley (1996:1) points out that first century Judaism had as many as twenty-six denominations within it. The book of Acts reveals that the opponents of the

apostles never questioned their Jewishness, only their correctness in ascribing Messiahship to Jesus. Early Judaism was inclusive and ecumenical, allowing for quite divergent views to co-exist under the banner of Jewishness.

Varner (2003:58) lists three landmark events, which changed the face of Judaism against Jewish believers in Jesus: the destruction of the Temple, the curse on heretics, and the Bar-Kochba revolt.

a) The Destruction of the Temple

History records that before the fall of Jerusalem took place, Jewish Christians seem to have fled to the mountains of Pella, apparently heeding the warnings of Christ recorded in Luke 21:20-21. This action did not endear Jewish believers to the nationalistic Jews of the time (Wilson 1989:76). Further, the destruction of the Temple meant that Judaism was forever changed. Judaism had now lost the entire sacrificial element of the Law, effectively rendering redundant the priestly Sadducees, and setting the stage for a reformulation of Judaism along synagogal rather than Temple lines. This was done so at the Council of Yavneh in A.D. 90 under Yohannan ben Zakkai. The Pharisaic oral traditions began to be codified, which would become the written Talmud, centuries later (Wilson 1989:78).

b) The curse on Jewish Christians

One of the means of ensuring Pharisaic dominance over all other competing sects in Judaism was to add to the Amidah prayer a benediction against heretics (*minim*), who, in some texts, are explicitly named as *notzrim*: the *Nazarenes*, or Jewish Christians. This essentially made it impossible for Jewish believers to continue worshipping in the synagogue in any shape or form. It was a public and direct ejection of Jewish believers from the Judaism that was coming to be (Varner 2003:59).

c) The Bar Kochba revolt

Simon Bar Kochba led a revolt against Rome from A.D. 132-135, while claiming

to be the Messiah, a claim upheld by Rabbi Akiva. The revolt was crushed, resulting in the loss of a national state for Jews and increasing their worldwide dispersion. Jewish Christians rejected Bar Kochba's messianic claims, and refused to follow him. The Jewish community regarded their pacifism and rejection of Bar-Kochba as traitorous, while making their rejection of Jesus' Messiahship even more plain. The separation of Jewish believers from the rest of the Jewish community was now complete (Wilson 1989:82).

5.3.4 Growing Church-sponsored anti-Semitism

As Judaism hardened, so did Christianity. By the time of Justin Martyr (A.D. 160), a sense of supercessionism was growing. Increasingly, the church viewed itself as the replacement of Israel, and Judaism as an illegitimate and defunct religion. Church fathers like Cyprian, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Irenaeus and especially Chrysostom incited ridicule and even contempt for the Jews in their writings. The church adopted an increasingly allegorical approach to the Old Testament, ridding the Jewish people of validity, legitimacy and historicity, as seen in the works of Marcion and Augustine. The Reformers, often following Augustine, continued supercessionist amillennialism. Martin Luther, in his later writings, poured out invective on the Jews. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms and the Holocaust are testimony to the power of these ideas on professing Christendom (Wilson 1989:101).

5.4 Analysis

Apostolic example and the fact that the Nazarenes rejected rabbinic Judaism shows that ancient Jewish Christianity was often a self-confident Jewishness that saw no need to impress the Jewry of the day with the authenticity of their Jewishness by mimicking Pharisaic custom. On the other hand, this co-existed with an immaturity that did not yet understand all the implications of the sufficiency of Christ. Paul and the later Nazarenes are an example of Jewish believers who choose to freely keep certain of the feasts, circumcise their children, and keep certain Jewish traditions, while remaining within the church as self-identified Jewish Christians.

It seems the problem of Jewish identity became compounded in the Diaspora, especially post A.D. 135. Since Jewishness could no longer be tied to a land, it became tied to the rabbinic traditions of Judaism, making Jewishness and Judaism nearly synonymous for most Jews, until 1948, with the creation of modern Israel. Once again, we note with interest the lack of rabbinic lore in churches in modern Israel, where Jewishness is once again taken for granted.

History makes one thing very clear: Judaism and Christianity travelled on divergent trajectories, becoming reactive and hostile to one another. Nearly two thousand years later, the Judaism that Paul moved in and out of, the Judaism that the Nazarenes selectively chose from, the Judaism that allowed Jewish believers in Jesus to attend the synagogue at will is forever gone.

The *non-sequitur* of Messianic Judaism is this: If based upon apostolic or Nazarene example the case could be made for a Jewish-Christian church within Judaism, then we can simply do the same thing in the 21st century. As Varner (2003:58) states, this is what Messianics seem to refuse to admit: that such a situation is unrecoverable. Historical developments have forever changed the landscape of Judaism, changing altogether the proposition of believing in Jesus from 'within Judaism'. Judaism is not simply a way of culturally identifying with the Jewish community. Today, it is fundamentally a rejection of Jesus as Messiah. To argue for a sect that accepts Jesus within a religion that rejects Jesus is as absurd as it sounds.

Not only is the *former* Judaism gone, the Christianity that *is* presents difficulty for the modern Jew. One must acknowledge the regrettable anti-Semitism of the church both in theology and practice. The Hebraic element was all but eliminated from Christian worship and liturgy as Replacement theology dominated Christian thinking until a revival of premillennialism in the nineteenth century. Until this time, the concept of a Jew retaining his or her Jewishness within the church was hardly

countenanced.

Thus, the modern Jew who contemplates the validity of Jesus as Messiah is assaulted by numerous views shaped by the history of Judaism and Christianity: To be a Jew is to adhere more or less to Judaism; Judaism at heart fundamentally rejects Jesus as Messiah; Christianity is the enemy of Jews; to become a Christian is to cease to be a Jew.

Messianic Judaism is correct in seeking to redress some of these historical blemishes that have contributed to the apparent crisis of identity that presents itself to a Jew contemplating faith in Jesus. However, its solution is untenable: promote the idea that Jewish believers in the twenty-first century can act towards Judaism as believers in the first century could. It is dismissive of the historical development of Christianity and Judaism and idealistic. Modern Judaism is Yavneh-inspired Pharisaism. It is quite pluralistic when it comes to the competing views of rabbis. But it retains one unifying, non-negotiable principle: Jesus is not the Messiah. On this point, it will never budge, or it will cease to be Judaism. Thus, *Messianic*, or to use the Greek term, *Christian Judaism*, is today a contradiction in terms.

Our response to enabling a true Jewish-Christian identity, which may open the door to greater numbers of Jews being saved and discipled does not lie in rejoining Judaism or starting Messianic synagogues. It lies in what Paul himself was a part of: the church. It is up to the New Testament church to recognise its historical errors, and seek to rebuild what has been lost in terms of Jewish identity.

5.5 Conclusion

The claims of Messianic Judaism regarding ancient Jewish Christianity are partially correct. Some early Jewish believers did maintain their Jewish identity through law-keeping. However, this practice reflected a church in transition, trying to understand God's plan for national Israel as opposed to a multi-ethnic church. Clearly, they did not remain separate from Gentiles with separate synagogues.

Jewish believers, in the then-tolerant atmosphere of first-century Judaism moved freely in and out of Judaism's traditions while belonging to the church, while rejecting Pharisaical innovations. Judaism since then has changed, making such a lifestyle impossible. The anti-Christian views of Judaism, and the anti-Semitism of so many Christians makes Jewish identity a challenging problem for the New Testament church, whose job it is to address it.

Chapter Six: Supporting a Biblical Jewish Identity in a New Testament Church

6.1 Introduction

The imperfections of both Christianity and Judaism have made identity confusing for the Jewish believer in Jesus. This is an obstacle to hearing and receiving the Gospel. Messianic Judaism does not offer real solutions, and in fact further muddies the water.

This chapter will lay out recommendations for local churches to restore what has gone missing through the errors of Replacement theology and anti-Semitism: elements of a biblical Hebraic culture within the larger culture of Jew and Gentile in a local church.

6.2 Recommendations

While the ethnic identity of Jewish Christians is always subordinate to their new-found identity in Christ, reintroducing Hebraic elements can be beneficial for the church to pursue, for the good of Jew and Gentile. When such an identity is present, there will be no need to tinker with and borrow from rabbinic Judaism, nor to have separate meetings for Jews. Evangelism will not earn the scorn of rabbis as a cheap trick to mask Christianity as Judaism. Discipleship will not be assimilation into 'Gentilisation', but growth into Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

Solutions begin with admissions of failure. Church leaders must begin by acknowledging the impoverishment of Christianity through its anti-Semitic actions and theology. We have often forgotten the root that holds us (Rom 11:18), and created church cultures with little of biblical Hebraism in them.

What follows is a modest attempt to offer seven actions by which local churches can work towards restoring something of the lost Hebraic culture.

6.2.1 Jewish evangelism

Too often, the clear mandate to witness 'to the Jew first' (Romans 1:16) is forgotten. Even in a completely Gentile church, the call to Jewish evangelism revives interest and understanding of the history, culture and identity of the Jews. Any evangelism that seeks to be effective will seek some understanding of the culture it targets. When Jewish evangelism is made the responsibility of every member in local church, it is inevitable that a certain Hebraic tone revives itself. If the church is geographically removed from Jewish people, then it can fulfill this goal in missions. Further, Jewish evangelism that emerges from a true desire for their salvation cannot help producing a genuine love for the Jewish people. Of all the things that will both attract Jewish unbelievers, as well as encourage Jewish disciples of Christ, it will be a local church that displays genuine love for Jewish people. In such an environment, the Jewish and Gentile heritages are respected, but subordinated to a common love for Christ and one another.

6.2.2 The presence of Jewish converts

While conversion is not something churches can orchestrate, the presence of Jewish converts certainly fosters the Hebraic culture and identity in a church. Whether such Jews come from secular, Reform, Conservative or Orthodox backgrounds, Jewish people bring with them a unique zeal, forthrightness, humour, and perspective. In most cases, the rejection they have faced in professing Christ makes them fervent for Christ, and bears testimony to the Gentile Christians of the faithfulness of God to continue saving a remnant. While this cannot be controlled, its absence contributes to the 'Gentilisation' of the church (Varner 2003:61). Churches should pray for the conversion of Jewish souls and the addition of true Jewish believers to their local church.

6.2.3 Pastors learning Hebrew

At first, the knowledge of Hebrew might seem like a peripheral concern, one related only to a pastor's effectiveness as an expositor. The reasons for learning

Hebrew go beyond accurate exegesis, though. The language of any people is at the core of their identity. To read the Tanakh in the language in which it was written is to imbibe the Hebraic culture at the source. I would suggest familiarity with Hebrew, thereby becoming familiar with the thought-patterns, poetry, word-puns, manners of expression and imagination of the Hebrews found in the Tanakh, connects one with true Hebraism in a far deeper way than the superficialities of wearing kippahs and dancing to recently made 'Davidic' songs. It is when the pastor-teacher is drinking at the source of Hebraism that such a culture will filter down to the church. Of all the members in the congregation, the pastor has the opportunity to pursue a Biblical language study. There is really no reason for a full-time pastor not to pursue a deeper knowledge of Hebrew.

6.2.4 Old Testament preaching

In line with Hebrew studies, it goes without saying that a pastor should preach from the Old Testament. Yet, with the exception of aberrant allegorical messages, Old Testament preaching is often neglected, even in churches committed to expository preaching. The extended narratives, the Law, the Semitic poetry and the prophetic books are simply not as homiletically friendly to exegete as the Pauline epistles. Yet it is in preaching through the Old Testament that a congregation of Jews and Gentiles experiences the Hebraic heritage that is theirs in Messiah Jesus. Certainly we continue to foster a 'Gentiles-only' mentality if the Old Testament is regarded as defunct and irrelevant to Christians.

6.2.5 Referencing the biblical feasts

While no obligation is laid on believers to celebrate the 'shadows' of Christ, there is great value in referencing and marking them as a church. Christ's true fulfillment is striking and faith-building, the prophetic significance is certainly a strengthening of biblical hope. Such things as Passover demonstrations, messages related to the feasts, the use of such days for repentance, consecration and thanksgiving achieve both New Testament aims, while underlining the true Hebraic culture. Pastors will have to be vigilant to weed out rabbinic customs attached to

such feasts that give credence to rabbinic Judaism.

6.2.6 Singing the Psalms

The psalms are more than sweet devotional tools. They are the battle cries, aspirations, confessions, praises and prayers of ancient Israel. Certainly the early church sang them as well (Col 3:16, Eph 5:19). While we do not need to sing them in Hebrew, allowing our worship to include the Songs of Israel introduces a significant element of true Hebraic culture into our churches. At any rate, it is a step away from the trite and sentimentalised songs that dominate the church today. Some hymnals still include the psalms, while there are websites devoted to providing the entire book of Psalms in metrical form for corporate singing.

On that note, we should draw attention to the fact that Judaism, like any religion that respects tradition, is quite liturgical in its worship. While this paper is not about the merits of free worship as opposed to liturgical, it is worthwhile noting that some of the 'spontaneity' in evangelical churches is simply poor planning and laziness. The 'freedom' does not smack of the Spirit's orderly arrangement (I Cor 14:40), it speaks of a last minute thought to what songs will be sung. To a Jew accustomed to rabbinic liturgies, this can often be quite off-putting. As A.W. Tozer (1996:5) put it,

But I have observed that our familiar impromptu service, planned by the leader twenty minutes before, often tends to follow a ragged and tired order almost as standardized as the Mass. The liturgical service is at least beautiful; ours is often ugly. Theirs has been carefully worked out through the centuries to capture as much of beauty as possible and to preserve a spirit of reverence among the worshipers. Ours is often an off-the-cuff makeshift with nothing to recommend it. Its so-called liberty is often not liberty at all but sheer slovenliness."

This is not to commend the vain repetitions of rabbinic prayers, or dead formalism. However, when thought, planning and work are put into corporate worship, it shows. Sloppiness in worship does not adorn the Gospel, particularly to a Jew who is used to structure in worship.

6.2.7 A more rigorous approach to aesthetics and tradition

One considers that the Jewish culture has given the world such musicians as Fritz Kreisler, Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, Mark Peskanov, Michael Rabin, Emil Hauser, Jascha Heifetz, to mention just a few of the over sixty greatest violinists of all time – all Jewish. A similar list of pianists, composers and conductors could be produced. Norm Weiss (2006:2) comments:

The reason for the disparity between Jew and Gentile is owed to many things... but it should be obvious to everyone that this preponderance of genius will *never* appear in an ethnic sub-culture obsessed with sport or pop entertainments or video games. Or with a contempt for tradition.

In other words, a dominance of such lists only emerges when the large majority of amateurs in such a culture are involved in aesthetic pursuits, and pursuits of aesthetic excellence, at that.

Sadly, the (largely Gentile) church has hungered after the banal offerings of pop culture, impoverishing the aesthetic sensibilities and capabilities of the large mass of professing evangelicalism.

To leave a culture with a rigorous approach to musical and artistic excellence and enter one where part-time guitar players strum a few impromptu pop choruses in Sunday worship in a rather ugly building is cognitively dissonant. Indeed, as is often the case, unbelievers may rise up in judgement of believers.

Any pastor studying the aesthetics of the Tabernacle, the organisation of Israelite worship, or the beauty of the Temple will realise the pop entertainment that passes for modern 'praise and worship' is a far cry from the artistry of biblical worship, that modern evangelical architecture is functional and insipid, that evangelical piety is almost a contradiction in terms.

In that vein, pastors must become familiar with and reflect on the Christian culture and heritage largely abandoned since the pragmatism of Charles Finney. The Christian culture of pre-1850 reflected something of the aesthetics of a tradition concerned with the true, the good and the beautiful. This is seen in the hymnody, poetry, music, architecture, plastic arts, and belletristic literature of Christendom. Particularly the devotional classics of the church reflect a piety that would resonate with zealous orthodox Jews.

When tradition preserves what is wrong, it is a lie that won't die. When tradition preserves what is good, it is a reliable witness of what is true, good and beautiful from believers now gone. Lacking any connection to tradition, Christian churches continually innovate, and find themselves further from a Christian culture that had more to attract the unbelieving Jew than the present one does.

Pastors must immerse themselves in the church of the past, and seek to develop their own aesthetic sensibilities, if they are to begin to recover something of a similar culture within their churches. It is sad to say, but the 'culture' of modern evangelicalism will do little to 'provoke them to jealousy' (Romans 11:11).

Lastly, it is worth noting that this is no short-term solution. As T.S. Eliot (1949:126) remarked, "...you cannot put on a new culture ready made. You must wait for the grass to grow to feed the sheep to give the wool out of which your new coat will be made."

Restoring something long lost suffers the misguided defensiveness of those opposed to all things Jewish, as well as the misguided zeal of those Judaistic zealots who cannot discern Jewish from rabbinic. By God's grace, what may emerge in the churches of the future, is something more balanced, and more in harmony with Ephesians 2:11-17.

6.3 Conclusion

The New Testament church remains the preferable model for reaching and discipling Jewish people. The church's deficiency is in the area of a lack of sustaining elements of the biblical Hebraic culture, for historical reasons. This chapter has suggested seven ways to begin to restore and maintain that identity.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, an attempt will be made to combine and summarise the findings as well as the recommendations of the entire study. The hypothesis will be confirmed or refuted.

7.2 Summary of findings

The goal of this study was to test the major justifications for the existence of the Messianic movement. The justifications were found to revolve around three areas: the notion of a Jewish-Christian identity that must be preserved through Messianic practices, the need to evangelise and disciple Jewish people through the Messianic approach, and the notion that Messianic Judaism is the restoration of the situation of the original Jewish church.

In the first place, it was found that while the ethnic identity of Jewish believers is important, it is not an obligation for it to be kept. The Messianic approach was found to be problematic. Messianic synagogues rebuild the wall of partition and introduce issues of elitism and exclusion. The reinstatement of the Mosaic Law reinstates a national, ethnic covenant that excludes Gentile believers and Judaizes the church. The adoption of rabbinic practices gives credence to a form of Judaism hostile to Christ and apostles, which actually accentuates the identity crisis of the believing Jew.

Secondly, it was found that while Jewish evangelism is a mandate, the Messianic approach is not preferable to the one-on-one evangelism of local churches. Messianic synagogues are not more culturally relevant, since a minority of Jews are religious. The Messianic approach, instead of currying favour, creates hostility, suspicion and cynicism in the eyes of many Jews. Further, it was found that Messianic congregations are often less evangelistic than they might wish. It was also

found that most Jews are not won through a Messianic synagogue, but through the faithful witness of Gentile believers.

Thirdly, it was found that Messianic Judaism does not represent a modern recapitulation of the early Jewish church. There were significant differences in the Judaism of the time from ours, which has further transmogrified since then. Messianic Judaism was found to be combining two religions now very distant from one another: Christ-denying Pharisaism and Christianity.

7.3 Deductions

The original hypothesis was found to be accurate: Messianic Judaism cannot be satisfactorily justified on the grounds of preserving Jewish identity, evangelistic success or for historical reasons. The research suggests it arises out of pragmatism, a misinterpretation of history, and a misguided favouring of Judaism as the means to accentuating Jewish identity. The local church remains the best model for Jewish identity, evangelism and discipleship (Ephesians 2:11-17).

7.4 Recommendations

The recommendations revolved around local church leaders recognising the identity crisis faced by Jewish believers due to the history of both Christianity and Judaism. While churches cannot control the choices of Jewish believers as to how they wish to accentuate their own identity, the church ought to relearn the Hebraic culture on which it is built. Seven recommendations were given for pastors to reintroduce an authentically biblical Jewish culture in a local church.

7.5 Conclusion

This study has contributed to Practical Theology by outlining concerns with Messianic Judaism's theology and practice. These have been countered and local church leaders may have a better idea of how to approach Messianics, and how better to disciple Jewish people within their own local churches.

Appendix: Definitions

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| Aliyah | emigration to Israel |
| Brit Chadasha | Hebrew for 'new covenant', or New Testament |
| Conservative | one of Judaism's denominations, more conservative than Reform Judaism, less observant than Orthodox. |
| Diaspora | The scattering of Jews across the globe. Also used to refer to Jews outside of Israel. |
| Dispensationalism | theological system that divides God's work with mankind into various economies, and sees separate plans for ethnic Israel and the church |
| Ebionites | Early Jewish sect that denied the virgin birth or deity of Jesus, while affirming Him as Messiah. |
| Gentile | Someone not ethnically Jewish |
| Halakah | Rabbinic Jewish traditions used to explain the Law and Jewish practice. |
| Hebrew Christian | A Jewish believer in Jesus, regardless of their position on the Messianic movement. Also used by Jewish believers who wish to distinguish themselves from Messianics |
| Karaites | A sect within Judaism that rejects the Talmud, and |

accepts only the Tanakh as authoritative.

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| Kashrut | dietary law of Judaism where certain foods may not be touched; milk and meat must be kept entirely separate. |
| Kippah | head-covering for men, also called a <i>yarmulke</i> |
| Kosher | English transliterated term for <i>kashrut</i> . |
| Messianic believer | one who embraces the beliefs or practices of Messianic Judaism, regardless of their ethnicity |
| Messianic synagogue | a congregation of Messianic believers |
| Messianic rabbi | one who leads a congregation of Messianic believers, functioning essentially as an elder of a regular congregation would. |
| Messianic Jew | An ethnic Jew who embraces Messianic Judaism |
| Midrash | A tractate of the Mishnah |
| Minim | Hebrew for 'heretics' |
| Mishnah | The post-biblical codification of the Jewish oral Law |
| Nazarenes | a group of Jewish believers in Jesus in the early centuries, probably Syriac Jews |
| Orthodox | a strongly observant Jew |

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| Pharisees | An anti-Hellenising, scripturalist sect within ancient Judaism, that grew to become the dominant form of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple. |
| Premillennialism | The theological view that believes Christ will return before the inauguration of a literal 1000-year kingdom. |
| Reform Judaism | a denomination of modern Judaism known for its liberal approach to interpretation and observance. |
| Replacement Theology | theology that teaches the people of Israel in the Bible are now the church universal, and all the promises of the Bible belong to the church. |
| Tanach | The Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, arranged in different order than in English Bibles. |
| Talit | prayer-shawl worn by some men on Shabbat |
| Talmud | The Mishnah, combined with the Gemara (the later commentaries on the Mishnah) make up the multi-volumed work which rabbis hold to be the Oral Law that was given to Moses. |
| Torah | the first five books of the Bible |
| Torah-observant | one who seeks to keep the Law found in the first five books of the Bible. |

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|--------------------|---|
| Yavneh | The town where Pharisaism reestablished itself and reformulated Judaism past A.D. 70. Also known as Jamnia. |
| Yeshua | The Hebrew name for Jesus, or Joshua. |
| Yiddishkeit | Yiddish for 'Jewishness', a term referring to Jewish culture |
| Zionism | modern secular movement focused on the establishment and protection of a Jewish state. |

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