

What is The Messianic Movement?

In the early seventies, Jewish people who came to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah, wanted to be able to express their faith, without leaving their Jewishness behind. They began to form Jewish **Messianic Congregations** (sometimes also called **Messianic Synagogues**), where they could express their faith in a Hebrew context. Instead of meeting on Sunday, they meet on Saturday (the Sabbath), and call the Savior by His Hebrew name: "**Yeshua HaMashiach**".

They also follow the Hebrew calendar of Biblical Feasts and Fasts, and celebrate the Messiah as the fulfillment of the **Torah** (the five books of the Law). Jewish people consider the Torah to be "**Ayts Chayim**" (a tree of life). Messianic believers proclaim that the Torah became a Man, and died on a tree so that all who believe on Him, would have eternal life (**John 1:12-14**).

The Gospel is to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile (**Rom. 1:16**). Israel was always intended to be a light to the nations (**Is. 49:6**), and the Jews were entrusted with the Oracles of God (**Rom. 3:1, 2**). Saul of Tarsus prayed earnestly for his people, and his burden for the House of Jacob was powerful (**Rom. 9:3 & Rom. 10:1**).

Israel is the **natural olive branch** whose numbers first filled the congregations in the early years of the church. Jews were the first to respond to the Gospel, and to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah (see **Acts 21:20-25**). When many Gentiles began coming into the faith, the Messianic Congregation at Jerusalem decided that it was not necessary for Gentiles to convert to Judaism, in order to have a vital, personal faith in the King of the Jews. Even the apostle Peter acknowledged that Saul of Tarsus was called to

go to the Gentiles, while he continued to reach out within the extended Jewish communities of the Roman world. (**Gal. 2:7**- see also **Peter's Nightmare**).

There is no place in the Holy Scriptures where Jews were required to cease being Jews, in order to become true believers in Jesus of Nazareth (**I Cor. 7:18**). The Messiah became a curse for us, so that the **blessings of Abraham** (**Gen. 12:2, 3**) could extend beyond the Jews, and become available to all mankind (**Gal. 3:13, 14**). He broke down the wall of separation, and made one new body, composed of both Jews and Gentiles (**Eph. 2:11-21**).

He never intended for the Jewish race to disappear, nor for the Jews to abandon the practices of their biblical faith. Neither did God intend for the Gentile nations to be absorbed into Israel, and be required to practice all the requirements of what it means to be Jewish.

These two groups were intended to exist side by side, as a testimony to the world, sharing in a common faith, from a common root, waiting for the King of Kings to return and establish His Eternal Kingdom over all the nations of the Earth. It is at this point that all distinctions and differences shall disappear (**Gal. 3:28**).

When the Jewish nationalists rose against the Romans from 67-70 AD, their Messianic brethren joined with them. When **Bar Kokhba** declared himself to be the Messiah, Jewish believers in Jesus of Nazareth, refused to join his forces, but wept when the Jewish nation was destroyed in 135 A.D.

The Romans feared that the remaining Jewish communities throughout the empire would continue to pose a threat to their government, and began a systematic purge of all Jews from positions of leadership throughout their administration. The

Romans required that the church do the same. They were even obliged to remove the last Jewish patriarch of Jerusalem.

It was at this time, believers in Jesus of Nazareth began to separate into **Messianic Synagogues**, and **Gentile Churches**. Many elements of traditional Judaism were abandoned, and such things as the rise of Sunday as the Lord's Day, caused much friction between the two groups. More and more, the official position of church leaders became **anti-Semitic**, until by the time of Chrysostom, Jews who believed in Jesus of Nazareth were forbidden to have any contact with non-believing Jews, and were not allowed to practice Judaism or celebrate any traditional Jewish festivals.

Eventually **supercessionism (replacement theology)** taught that the Church **replaced** Israel as G-d's chosen people and as the recipient of G-d's promises. However, Messianic Synagogues survived in the Middle East until they were destroyed by the Moslem invaders, but Jews in the West, were forced to make a choice between their Jewish Heritage and their faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

No such choice was ever required by the early church, or by the Scriptures. At various times throughout the next 2,000 years, Jews who acknowledged their faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the true Messiah, crossed over into Gentile Christianity. The remnants of Judaism were consigned to ghettos until emancipation was granted in the time of Napoleon.

This new freedom began an era of **conversion** to Christianity and of **assimilation** into Gentile society which continues today. However, in the late 1800's in an attempt to maintain some Jewish identity, Jewish believers formed the **Universal Hebrew Christian Alliance**, with headquarters in England.

With the rebirth of the nation of Israel, Jewish believers were no longer content to be absorbed into Gentile Christianity, as if their Jewishness were something **unacceptable** and **unbiblical**. They rightly understand the Scriptures to teach that Jewishness is a perfectly acceptable context in which to express authentic, biblical faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

Just as Gentile Christianity developed **unbiblical** elements, which movements like the Reformation sought to purge from the practice of their faith, Jewish people who become believers have to contend with centuries of **tradition** and **superstition**, as they seek to remove all unbiblical elements from the authentic Jewish expression of their faith. These are two different **contexts** for the same **challenge**, which is to **contextualize** the expression of our faith without allowing syncretism to move our faith from the rock to the sinking sand (Matt. 7:24-27 and 5:17-20).

You do not have to **become** Jewish to practice an authentic faith in Jesus of Nazareth, neither do you have to **stop** being Jewish, in order to practice this same authentic faith in Yeshua HaMashiach. **Both settings, Jewish and Gentile are equally valid contexts for the expression of a biblical faith in the Messiah, who is the true King of Kings, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.**

All around the world, wherever there are Jews, Messianic Congregations are springing up as a place where Jewish believers in Jesus of Nazareth can express their faith, without losing their **spiritual** and **cultural** heritage. The natural children of Abraham were always intended to be a light to the nations (see Gen. 18:18, 19), so that the **principles of righteousness**, expressed in the **Ten Commandments** and applied in the **laws and ordinances** of the Torah, would be a guide to show believers of all nations how to **contextualize**

their faith and avoid the **criminal syncretism** which the generations of Israel struggled with and sometimes succumbed to (I Cor. 10:1-12).

All of the covenants of Israel and all that she was taught and that she experienced, are a **rich spiritual heritage** for two groups of people: **Firstly**, for **Jewish believers**, who seek to maintain the unbroken generational link with Abraham and to express their Judaism as a celebration of Messiah Yeshua in the New Covenant and **Secondly**, for **Gentile believers**, who are called to the same **level** and **kind** of **equivalent spirituality**, in a Gentile cultural and linguistic/spiritual context.

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*We are a Messianic Jewish congregation of Jews and
Gentiles that acknowledges that Yeshua is the promised
Messiah and celebrates this fulfillment of Torah in a Jewish
lifestyle*

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A Summary of the Jewish Situation in the First Century

According to many estimates, before the destruction of the temple, the Jewish population of the Roman world accounted for some **10%** of the Empire's total population. With the few million who lived in the Fertile Crescent outside of the Roman Empire, the Jewish population of the First Century was between **15-17 million**, or about as many Jews as there are alive today. Many of these were **converts** to Judaism, since Jewish people had become very successful in winning new adherents all over the ancient Middle East (which **Acts 15:21** and **Matt. 23:15** indicate).

As well, since their return from Babylon, Jewish teachers began to set up schools to teach the Torah. These were called **Yeshivas** and there were as many as **4,000** of them scattered across the ancient Middle East. In the world of the New Testament, the price of a book (scroll) was perhaps equal to or greater than the wages a man could earn for a whole year, so **Jewish people would memorize the Torah**. Teachers would verify that their students had learned the Scriptures without error, and would also require students to memorize whatever **traditions** and **commentaries** the particular teachers wanted to pass on along with the Scriptures.

Once the students had memorized everything the teacher said, some would seek out students of their own, and these in turn memorize everything they had learned (**Scriptures** plus **oral commentaries**), along with any further instructions of the subsequent teachers. This Bible Study movement made the surprising claim that their **oral traditions** were first taught by Moses and then whispered into the ears of the seventy elders, whose successors have been handing them down

orally to their successors ever since. They are considered to be of equal authority with the written Torah.

Thus, they incorrectly taught that the Word of G-d no longer dwells in Heaven, but is among men. Not surprisingly, they eventually taught that even G-d Himself must now abide by the decisions of the **rabbis** and **sages**. For them, the canon of Scripture is only part of a greater **generational revelation** which not only comes through them alone, but which they are both the sole **guardians** and **interpreters** of.

When it was first suggested that this growing body of oral traditions should be committed to writing, the teachers or sages, resisted such a move, for fear that errors would creep into the written text. However, so many Jews were killed during the two rebellions against Rome (70 AD and 132 AD), that these teachings were written down to prevent them from being lost.

The period of **organizing, writing** and **commenting** on these traditions occurred over several hundred years and culminated in a final edition of the **Talmud** in the fourteenth century. During this process, the sages began to take control of Judaism and created **one unified expression of the Jewish faith**.

The **Talmud** mentions that there were either **24** or **72** competing forms of Judaism before the destruction of the second temple. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, once the Sanhedrin was reconstituted at **Yahvne**, near Jerusalem, the surviving rabbis began a **systematic purge** of any form of Judaism which did not accept the authority of their evolving **Talmudic** traditions, which they claimed possessed equal authority alongside the **Torah**.

They deprived the **Sadducees**, or the priestly class, of any real power in Judaism, along with Jews who believed in Jesus of Nazareth. They began to formalize the **prayers** and **rituals** which now form the basis of **modern rabbinic Judaism**. Beginning with **Rabbi Akiva**, they also began to adopt a specialized system of interpreting the Torah, along **mystical lines**. One dissenting rabbi, **Elisha Ben Ishmael** said the Torah was written in the ordinary language of men, but Rabbi Akiva disagreed with this idea, and modern rabbinic Judaism follows the opinion of Rabbi Akiva, and accepts a traditional, mystical (cabbalistic) or hidden **Talmudic** interpretation of the **Torah**.

Modern rabbinic Judaism is a very **intricate religion of formal traditions and complicated interpretations of the Bible**, similar to the abuses which Jesus spoke about in Matthew (chapters 5 and 23). Jesus taught that the Scriptures were the only spiritual authority for Jewish believers (Matt. 23:2, 3 – the chair of Moses) and all believers, Jew and Gentile would do well to heed His stipulations. First century Judaism was a dynamic, growing religion, with as much doctrinal diversity as existed in Reformation Christianity with its conflict between **biblical** and **traditional** authority. Messianic Judaism seeks to re-establish the primacy of biblical authority in the practice of Judaism.