

The Rise of the Second Messianic Movement May 3, 2012

The first Messianic Movement began when the Gospel was preached among the Jewish people who lived throughout the Ancient world. As more and more Gentiles began to accept the Gospel, the early Christian community was divided into Jewish and Gentile contingents (**Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:28**), without there being any significant rift or hostility between the two groups (**Acts 10:34-48**) and when there was a question of whether or not Gentiles had to convert to Judaism as part of their conversion to the L-rd, the answer received a firm no (**Acts 15:28, 29**).

Paul spearheaded the outreach to the Gentiles and one of the biggest growth groups for this early outreach was among the god-fearing Gentiles who had attached themselves to Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire. A false rumor was spread as this process gained momentum, claiming that Paul was teaching Jewish people to abandon Judaism as part of their conversion to the L-rd (**Acts 21:17-26**).

Becoming a Jew and leaving Judaism were never valid choices for believers in the first century (**Gal. 5:6, 6:15; I Cor. 7:17-24; Rom. 8:2-4**) and the same should apply today. When the Jewish people rose repeatedly against the Romans, they lost their position of privilege and experienced all kinds of legal sanctions and this began the long history of the persecution of our people by the Gentile world as they wandered in exile from their homeland.

The gentile church severed its links with the Messianic Jewish contingent of the Gospel and justified this split with what has become known as replacement theology. It is true that we are one new man and that the wall of separation has come down (**Eph. 2:11-22**), but it was never the intention of G-d for the one new man to be composed of Jews who have left Judaism, alongside Gentiles who have left paganism, as if Judaism was something anyone needed to be converted out of.

The first Messianic Movement was finally suppressed in the sixth century and Jews who wanted to acknowledge Yeshua had to leave the Jewish community behind and assimilate among the Gentiles. Things began to change when Napoleon opened up the ghettos at the end of the 1700's and Jews were once again allowed to freely dwell among the Gentile nations where they found themselves. Several groups were formed in the 1800's by Jewish people who had become believers and who wanted to maintain some kind of link with their Judaism. It is true that most of the early groups were formed with the express purpose of facilitating evangelism among the Jewish people, but it was also the first step towards allowing Jew believers to maintain some aspects of their Jewish identity once they became believers.

Various accusations of Judaizing have been leveled against Jewish believers who want to remain within the Jewish community and when Jewish believers first wanted to meet on Saturday and began forming Messianic Synagogues, this old charge was revived and remains with us today. The practice of Judaism is not required for salvation, neither is it necessary to stop practicing Judaism, once a person comes to faith. After the 67 war, the name Jewish Christian or Hebrew Christian was gradually replaced with the term Messianic Jew and while there are still some who feel that Jewish observance is necessary for salvation, most Messianic Jews believe that there are two valid contexts for the practice of faith in the Messiah and that Messianic Judaism is one of these contexts (see also **Rom. 3:1** and **9:1-5**). At last count there are anywhere up to 50,000 Messianic Jews in North America and upwards of 500 Messianic synagogues, not counting the house groups and study groups.