

Voices *of*
Messianic
Judaism

קולות היהדות המשיחית

**Confronting Critical Issues
Facing a Maturing Movement**

Dan Cohn-Sherbok
General Editor



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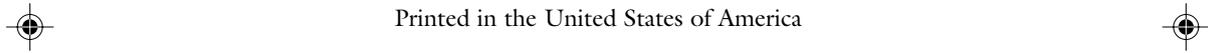


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The following versions of the Bible were used where noted by the authors.

CJB Complete Jewish Bible
KJV King James Version
LB Living Bible
NASB New American Standard Bible
NIV New International Version
NKJV New King James Version



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FOREWORD

“I am your friend!”

Thus began Dr. Dan Cohn-Sherbok’s speech to the annual conference of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations in the summer of 2000. With a skeptic’s ear, I sat back and listened to this gentle, Reform rabbi explain why he was a friend of Messianic Jews.

In case you don’t know this, as a rule, Jewish people who believe in Yeshua the Messiah are usually considered to be outside the Jewish world. Messianic Jews, as they are called, have been labeled as ignoramuses, traitors, self-hating, etc. But, here was a rabbi who claimed to be a friend of the movement.

Actually, I already knew something about Dan Cohn-Sherbok, having read his excellent book, *Messianic Judaism*. In it, he included an illustration of a *menorah*, which represented the seven branches of Judaism. One branch was labeled “Messianic Judaism.” He wrote that in a pluralistic model, there is no reason to exclude Messianic Jews. Although for centuries that’s exactly what Messianic Jews have been saying, this is the first time a rabbi has been willing to take the position that it might be true.

Being seen as M.O.T.s, (“Members of the Tribe”—Jews) by a respected spiritual leader of our people was a new experience for the thousand attendees and for me. He even predicted that we would be considered an accepted part of the Jewish people in this century—reminding us that every branch of Judaism was at first rejected by the “establishment.”

I had been looking forward to talking with this author of over thirty books. We were to meet to discuss the book you’re holding in your hands. As he explains in his introduction, he was intrigued by this growing movement and wanted to understand it better. Unlike most “professional” Jews, Rabbi Cohn-Sherbok was willing to give Messianic Judaism a fair hearing. After all, as he quipped, he lives in the rolling hills of Wales, far away from the religious controversy in the U.S. and Israel. He had nothing to lose by telling the truth.

He dedicated many months to researching and writing about what is surely the most misunderstood movement of Judaism. During this time, especially at conferences (Dan and his wife, Lavinia, also attended Messiah ’99, the annual conference of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, another other major Messianic group), he discovered something.

He saw that the Messianic Jewish brand of Judaism had something other brands lacked. Setting aside the issue of whether Yeshua was the Messiah, he saw joy and celebration, dedication to the Bible and to the traditions of the Jewish people. He saw the fruit of the lives of people who had been transformed. He recognized, as he says in his introduction, “that the



Messianic movement has become a significant force on the Jewish scene.” It was fun to watch Dan and his wife, Lavinia, get up and do the *hora* (with only a little coaxing from my wife). They really enjoyed themselves.

When Dr. Cohn-Sherbok and I finally talked, he continued to develop the idea he had for this book. As a friend of Messianic Judaism, he believed that it was important for the movement to grapple with some of its more thorny issues. Compiling a collection of articles by some of its best scholars and thinkers would contribute to the process.

I invited my friend, Dr. John Fischer (also a member of my Board of Advisors) to join us. Before lunch was over, we came up with a list of topics and prospective authors for each issue. When I got back to my office, I asked my editor, Janet Chaiet, to contact each of these writers to see if they’d be willing to write on the subjects “assigned” to them.

Soon, amid her other duties, she got a group of disparate people with different perspectives and backgrounds, to contribute to this book. They conformed to *our* style-guide (pretty much), limited the amount they wrote (even though many wanted to write books on their topics), met deadlines (most of the time), and generated this book.

As you read *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, keep in mind the old saying, “When three Jews get together to discuss a matter, there are at least four opinions.” In this book, you will encounter strong opinions on different sides of an issue. You may find yourself agreeing with one side, then find yourself agreeing with the other side after you read it. That’s good. It means that each author, expressing his or her own thoughts and opinions, has argued effectively for their position. This kind of discussion and dialogue is a distinctive of Jewish theology called *pilpul*, a way to resolve apparent contradictions.

We selected topics we think are most germane to Messianic Jews at this time, and the authors we believed could do them justice. There are other matters we could have addressed, and other writers who could have contributed to this book. However, we had to make some difficult choices. Perhaps there will be a sequel with a whole new set of discussions and authors. If there’s interest, there will be.

We deliberately chose *only* thirteen different topics. Discussion questions are included for twenty-seven chapters. Many congregations prefer materials that can be used over one quarter of a year. It is our hope that you and your group—whether a Messianic congregation or a gathering of Christians who care about the Jewish people and Messianic Judaism—will have your own discussion and dialogue, using these well thought-out articles as a starting point. Doing so will contribute to the maturing of Messianic Judaism.

—Barry Rubin
President, Messianic Jewish Communications

P.S. We’ve included a glossary in the back of the book to help you with some unfamiliar terms and abbreviations.



INTRODUCTION

Growing up in the leafy suburbs of Denver, Colorado, it was my intention ever since I was a little boy to become a Reform rabbi. This desire amazed everyone. My father was a successful surgeon. Why, my parent's friends asked, did their son not want to follow in his footsteps? Being a rabbi, they said, was not a job for a nice Jewish boy. Undeterred, I went to Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and later studied for five years at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. During this time, I served as a student rabbi in congregations in Jasper, Alabama; Galesburg, Illinois; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and Boulder, Colorado. After ordination, I was a Reform rabbi in Melbourne, Australia before beginning studies at Cambridge University for a doctorate. During my time at Cambridge, I served as a rabbi at the West London Synagogue, and later in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Although I had anticipated that congregants would listen in hushed silence to my sermons and attend study courses, it did not turn out that way. To my astonishment, I discovered that being a rabbi was not at all what I had expected. Services were sparsely attended; hardly anyone came to the courses I offered. In one of my congregations, the parking lot was packed on bingo night at the Temple, but only a few came to synagogue to pray. In another congregation, I was expected to dress up for a fashion show, or play tennis with women members at the Jewish country club. Eventually I decided I could take no more, and I became an academic, first at the University of Kent in Canterbury, England, and now at the University of Wales where I am a Professor of Judaism. During these years, I have written books on a wide variety of Jewish topics, many which deal with modern Jewish life.

Several years ago, my wife and I were writing a book, *The American Jew*, a study of the nature of American Judaism based on a single Jewish community. In the process of our research, we heard about the Messianic movement. One of those who spoke to us was an opponent of Messianic Judaism. At length, he recounted what he perceived as the iniquities of the movement. "Messianic Jews," he declared, "are deceptive and deliberately attempt to hide their true intentions. Although they claim to be Jewish in their approach, in fact they are nothing more than Christians in disguise."

Intrigued, my wife and I contacted a local Messianic Jewish rabbi. His congregation was located in an industrial warehouse on the outskirts of the city. The sanctuary had an Ark, which contained a *Torah* scroll, and there was a purple curtain with an embroidered Star of David hanging in front of the Ark. The bookcases in the rabbi's office were full of Hebrew Texts, and a large photograph of the Walling Wall hung over his desk. The rabbi wore a skullcap, and was anxious to explain about the history and nature of Messianic Judaism.

“In the 19th century,” he said, “a small group of Jews proclaimed their faith in Jesus.” Referred to as Hebrew Christians, they saw themselves as fulfilling their Jewish heritage by embracing the Messiah in their lives. Throughout the 20th century, Hebrew Christianity grew in strength, but it was only in the 1960s that notice was taken of these Jewish Christians. In recent decades, a new form of messianic faith has emerged out of these earlier subgroups within the Jewish community.

“Messianic Judaism,” he went on, “is a movement of Jews who, like the Hebrew Christians, believe that Jesus, whom we call Yeshua, is the promised Messiah.” In the view of Messianic Jews, Messianic Judaism differs from all other branches of Judaism in relying solely on the Hebrew Scriptures. Their faith is biblical Judaism; centered around the Messiah and the worldwide salvation he brings. Messianic Jews are convinced that they have access to God because of the atoning work of Messiah Yeshua, who has fulfilled them as Jews.

Showing us around his synagogue, he explained that Messianic Jews are one in spirit with Gentile followers of Jesus. Yet, Messianic Jews have their own expression of faith in the Messiah. Messianic Judaism asserts that it is Jewish to believe in Yeshua—this, they contend, is a return to the Jewish roots of the faith. As a result, Messianic Jews observe the biblical feasts and holidays while maintaining that the only route to salvation is through the atoning work of Yeshua.

Adherents of this new movement insist they are not Christians. “In our view,” he continued, “the term Christian originally meant ‘follower of Christ.’” Yet, over time, the connotations of the term have changed. Unlike Gentile believers in Christ, Messianic Jews do not wish to separate themselves from their Jewish roots. They believe that they have found the Jewish Messiah and are now completed Jews in that Yeshua is the fulfillment of biblical Judaism. Yeshua never intended to start a new religion. Rather, he came to correctly explain the law and the prophets.

After introducing us to several members of the congregation who were wearing skullcaps as well as *tzitziyot*, he continued his description of the movement. “From an institutional perspective,” he stated, “Messianic synagogues constitute the heart of the movement: they serve as the place where those who believe in Yeshua as the Messiah can live a Jewish life, raise their children as Jews and worship the God of Israel in a Jewish fashion.” Like other Jews, Messianic believers celebrate all the biblical festivals—*Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Hanukkah*, *Purim*, and Passover—in a Messianic fashion believing that Yeshua is the fulfillment of all these holy days. The pattern frequently followed involves Davidic worship and praise using musical instruments, singing, Hebraic music, psalms, lifting up of hands, chanting, clapping, and processions. In addition, Messianic Jews incorporate dance into the worship.

Although Messianic Jews are guided in their practice by Scripture, he noted, there is a degree of ambivalence about *Torah*. As Messianic Jews, they believe that it is not possible to be “saved” through religious observance. Yet, while the law does not provide salvation, it is not dead. The moral precepts of the Ten Commandments, for example, are part of the New Covenant. The festivals are for all time. Hence, in varying degrees Messianic Jews seek to uphold the precepts found in Scripture, and often the details of observing the *Torah*.

Because of the centrality of Israel in God’s plan for all nations, he pointed out, Messianic Jews are ardent Zionists. They support Israel because the Jewish State is viewed as a direct fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Although Israel is far from perfect, Messianic Jews believe that God is active in the history of the nation and that the Jews will never be driven out of their land again. While God loves the Arabs, he gave the Holy Land to his chosen people.

Concerning the distinction between Messianic Jews and Gentile believers, Messianic Jews maintain that the rabbinic definition of who is a Jew is not correct. According to Scripture, they point out, Jews are pre-eminently a nation and a people. To be considered Jewish, one must be a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Further, biblical lineage is patriarchal, not matriarchal. Moreover, the Scriptures indicate that if either parent is Jewish, or if a grandparent is Jewish, one can identify himself or herself as Jewish. Therefore, some Messianic Jews have rejected the traditional doctrine that one is Jewish only if born of a Jewish mother. Instead, some maintain that a person is Jewish if he or she has at least one Jewish grandparent.

Returning to his office after a tour of the synagogue, we listened as he discussed his congregation. According to Messianic Judaism, he related, Jewish and Gentile believers are all one in Messiah Yeshua. Spiritually there are no barriers between Jews and Gentiles; they are all one in him. Gentile believers have entered the Jewish faith and have become spiritually circumcised and spiritually Jewish as they have accepted Yeshua into their lives. While Gentile believers cannot become physically Jewish, they are one with their Jewish brothers and sisters because the Spirit of God is within both Jewish and Gentile believers.

In this light, Gentile believers are permitted to be members of Messianic synagogues. It is often the case, he indicated, that there are more Gentile members than Jews. Intermarriage is permitted, and parents are encouraged to live a Jewish lifestyle and raise their children as Jews. Having accepted Yeshua into their lives, Messianic Jews are to grow spiritually. The primary way whereby Jewish believers can continue to live their lives as Jews is by guarding against assimilation. They should become members of Messianic synagogues. Through participating in the life of the community they

can continue to worship the Lord in a Jewish way, celebrate the Jewish festivals, raise children as Jews, and be a testimony to faith in Yeshua.

This new movement fascinated both my wife and me, and on return to the United Kingdom, we attended the national conference of Messianic Jews. On our arrival, we were greeted by smiling, friendly people who directed us to the bookshop and market stalls. Hebrew folk music played in the background as we looked at stalls loaded with various ritual objects including *shofars*, *siddurs*, prayer shawls, pictures of the Wailing Wall, *mezuzahs*, and *menorahs*. On other tables, there were stacks of books dealing with Messianic Judaism, as well as various aspects of Jewish belief and practice. Milling around were attendees to the conference—many women wore Jewish stars around their necks and some of the men wore skullcaps and fringes.

After lunch, we attended a series of lectures dealing with various aspects of Messianic Judaism including Jewish music, theology, and liturgy. Later in the day, my wife and I attended the afternoon service. In the evening all the attendees gathered in a large hall. In the front, a band played loud music as members of the audience flooded to the stage. Joining hands, they sang and danced, praising the Lord. Others stood lifting their hands in thanksgiving. At the end of the service, members of the congregation lined up at the front to receive a blessing from the rabbis. Praying fervently, the rabbis prayed over the faithful, many of whom were overcome with emotion.

Anxious to learn more about the movement, my wife and I traveled to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania for the annual conference of the MJAA, which takes place at Messiah College every year. On the first day of the conference, we went to a session dealing with Messianic identity. The speaker was a bespectacled Messianic rabbi wearing a skullcap who told us that although he believes in Yeshua, he is emphatically not a Christian. Instead, he declared, he is a fulfilled Jew. At another session, one of the Messianic rabbis discussed the enemies of the movement. His message was filled with quotations from Scripture. The audience responded “Amen” and “Praise the Lord.”

In the evening, we attended a large service for the entire conference. In the front, there was a splendid band; behind them was a replica of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. When the music began, the entire congregation stood; raising their hands in praise, they sang uproariously. Then a mass of people came forward to dance. This was interspersed with a variety of speakers whose words were constantly interrupted with shouts of “Praise the Lord” and “Barukh *HaShem*.” Again, at the end of the service, the Messianic rabbis lined up in front as people stood in line to receive a blessing.

When we returned after this conference, I was convinced of the need for an objective account of this important development in modern Judaism. Despite the criticisms made of Messianic Judaism by its opponents, I could see that this new movement had captured the hearts and minds of thousands of pious individuals from the Jewish community, as well as Gentiles

who have accepted Yeshua as Lord and Savior. The Messianic movement has become a significant force on the Jewish scene.

In the years that followed, I completed a major study of the movement entitled *Messianic Judaism*, which was published by Cassell in 2000. Beginning with a discussion of the development of Messianic Judaism from ancient times to its transformation after World War II, I focus on the nature of Messianic Judaism, today. The volume then continues with a detailed examination of Messianic practices, including the celebration of the Sabbath, Passover, *Shavu'ot* and *Sukkot*, festivals of joy, and life-cycle events. The book then goes on to consider the place of Messianic Judaism within the contemporary Jewish community. Messianic Jews, I point out, contend that they are fulfilled as Jews and that Messianic Judaism is a legitimate interpretation of the Jewish faith. Its critics, however, argue that Messianic Jews are dangerous and deceptive.

In the final section of the book—which is the most controversial—I confront this contentious issue and outline three alternative models for understanding the relationship between Messianic Judaism and the modern Jewish world. The first model—Orthodox exclusivism—contends that there is only one legitimate form of Judaism: Orthodoxy. Thus, according to Orthodoxy, Messianic Judaism is viewed as totally unacceptable. Despite the claims of Jewish believers that by accepting Yeshua they have become fulfilled as Jews, Orthodox Judaism categorically rejects any form of Jewish Christianity as part of the Jewish tradition. From a theological point of view, Messianic Judaism is viewed as fundamentally distinct from traditional Judaism because of the centrality of Jesus. Furthermore, Orthodox Jews regard Messianic Judaism's conviction that the New Testament is part of God's revelation as a fundamental deviation from the Jewish faith.

The second model—non-Orthodox Judaism—categorically denies legitimacy to Messianic Judaism. Yet, the non-Orthodox rejection of Messianic Jews is more difficult to comprehend given the multidimensional character of contemporary Jewish life. Concerning belief and practice, there are fundamental divisions between the various non-Orthodox movements: modern non-Orthodox movements embrace a wide range of theological and ideological perspectives. There is simply no consensus among non-Orthodox Jews concerning the central tenets of the faith, nor is there any agreement about Jewish observance. Instead, the various branches of non-Orthodox Judaism embrace a totally heterogeneous range of viewpoints. Nonetheless, these disparate branches of modern Judaism are united in their rejection of Messianic Judaism as an authentic expression of the Jewish tradition. Even though the adherents of these branches of the tradition differ over the most fundamental features of the Jewish religion, they have joined together in excluding Messianic Judaism from the range of legitimate interpretations of the faith.

The final model—Pluralism—is a very different approach. According to Jewish pluralists, the non-Orthodox exclusion of Messianic Judaism from the

circle of legitimate interpretations of the Jewish faith is baffling. Given the multi-dimensional character of modern Jewish life, pluralists contend that Messianic Judaism should be viewed as simply one among many interpretations of the Jewish heritage. The central difficulty with the non-Orthodox exclusion of Messianic Jews, they point out, is that the various non-Orthodox movements are themselves deeply divided over the central tenets of the faith. Belief and practice no longer unite Jewry; instead, the various branches of the modern Jewish establishment have radically separated themselves from the past. In the light of such an abandonment of the tradition, pluralists maintain that the exclusion of Messianic Judaism from the circle of legitimate expressions of the Jewish heritage is totally inconsistent.

Jewish pluralists understand why there is a visceral rejection of Messianic Judaism within the community. Despite modern ecumenical efforts, Christianity in its various manifestations is still seen to symbolize centuries of oppression, persecution, and murder. Nonetheless, Jewish pluralists insist that given the multi-dimensional character of contemporary Jewish life, the rejection of Messianic Judaism from *K'lal Yisra'el* makes little sense. If non-theistic and non-halakhically observant forms of Judaism are acceptable, why, they ask, should Messianic Jews, who are observant believers, be denied recognition within the Jewish community?

After my book was published, I was invited to be the guest speaker at the annual conference of the UMJC. After discussing the contents of my book, I stressed that in my view Messianic Judaism constitutes an innovative, exciting, and extremely interesting development on the Jewish scene. Messianic Judaism was a new movement, wrestling with the big issues of modern Jewish life. In the articles I had read in the theological journal *Kesher*, Messianic leaders were struggling with fundamental questions: Who is a Jew? What is the authority of *halakha*? Should conversion be permitted? This quest to make sense of the tradition is fascinating and important. Today many Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Humanistic Jews are preoccupied with other issues. But from reading about the movement and meeting its members, I could see that Messianic Jews were constantly engaged with central religious issues.

During the UMJC conference, I met with Barry Rubin, the president of Lederer/Messianic Jewish Publishers to discuss a book project exploring the issues now facing Messianic Judaism. After having studied Messianic Judaism for several years, I came to the view that there is a pressing need for Messianic thinkers to address the nature of the movement for the future. This volume, which includes twenty-seven chapters written by leading figures within the movement, seeks to examine a wide range of key topics.

Beginning with a discussion of liturgy, Stuart Dauermann, rabbi of Ahavat Zion Messianic Synagogue, maintains that Messianic Judaism must embrace traditional Jewish music if it is to remain authentically Jewish. Such an infusion of tradition should infuse congregational life, as well as the

home. Increased contextualization of Messianic services, he observes, is directly proportional to the increased use of the Hebrew liturgy. Hence, Messianic Judaism must institute ongoing programs designed to nurture liturgical literacy. The greatest obstacles to liturgical renewal are ignorance, fear, and prejudice.

Adopting a different stance, Joel Chernoff, president of the IMJA, argues that the Messianic movement was vitally revived in the 1970s by the inclusion of Jewish liturgical music, including new instrumentation for Messianic Jews. This music was a fresh expression, a hybrid of modern pop and traditional minor key Jewish music. The objective was to express the joy that believers had found in knowing the Messiah. Although appreciative of traditional Jewish liturgy, he argues that Messianic Jewish music must be spiritually moving.

Regarding Scripture, Dan Juster, the director of Tikkun International, contends that the Hebrew Bible and the New Covenant are the primary authorities within the Messianic community. This view of Scripture is rooted in the biblical material, but theologians have developed it for centuries. For Juster, the Bible is infallible, a view enshrined in the statements of both the UMJC and the IAMCS. Infallibility, he argues, means that the Bible is true in all that the writer claims to teach as true. Because it is the highest and final authority, subsequent teaching cannot supersede Scripture. Yet, it is crucial that Messianic Jews recognize that hermeneutics are of vital importance in understanding the meaning of the biblical text.

Mark Kinzer, Executive Director of Messianic Jewish Theological Institute, argues that the Bible requires interpretation. It is not possible, he writes, to adopt a purely biblical perspective. One never reads the biblical text apart from one's own preconceptions. The historical setting in which one finds oneself shapes the questions addressed to the text, as well as the concepts and terms used to respond. The interpretative tradition, he argues, consists of the accumulated insights of a community transmitted from one generation to the next. In a Messianic context, tradition represents the understanding of Scripture preserved through generations among the Jewish and Christian communities. Hence, interpretive tradition is always necessary in seeking to understand the meaning of the biblical text.

In the view of Russell Resnik, General Secretary of the UMJC and leader of Adat Yeshua Messianic Synagogue, rabbinic *halakhah* is vital for the Messianic movement. *Halakhah*, he contends, serves as the bridge over which the *Torah* moves from the written word into living deed. Without the rabbinic tradition, he argues, Messianic Judaism lacks integrity as an authentic form of Judaism in the modern world. Even though the *halakhic* system cannot simply be imported into the Messianic community, it is vital that Messianic Judaism is informed by the tradition.

As to congregational life, Bruce Cohen, rabbi of New York's Congregation Beth El of Manhattan, argues that Messianic Jews should orient

themselves toward synagogues rather than churches. In his view, adherence to Jewish cultural norms and customs is of primary significance. As a result, Messianic Jews must establish their spiritual home within the context of Jewish life. Rather than disengage themselves from Jewish identification, Jewish believers must embrace *Torah* Judaism as well as Jewish national identity.

Presenting an alternate point of view, Jim Sibley, Coordinator of Jewish Ministry for the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board, maintains that Jewish believers should not be reluctant to join Bible-believing churches. In answer to the question, “Can a Jew go to church and still be Jewish?” he asserts that those who feel comfortable in such a setting should have no hesitations. Jewish believers, he notes, should not deny their unity with Gentile believers. Rather, both groups desperately need one another.

Turning to organizational structure, Barney Kasdan, rabbi of Kehilat Ariel Messianic Synagogue in San Diego, California, argues that Messianic congregations should be run on democratic lines. The movement, he maintains, must listen to the collective voice of its members. As the current president of the UMJC, he stresses the ways in which this body seeks to provide all congregational members with a voice in the affairs of the movement. Such a system, he alleges, provides a vital system of checks and balances. In addition, such a structure can serve as a means for issuing directive policies and insuring interdependent participation in Messianic activities.

According to Robert Cohen, rabbi of Beth Jacob Messianic Congregation in Jacksonville, Florida, it is desirable that the Messianic movement be run by a central governing body. In his view, the democratic model can lead to factionalism. A centrally run organization, however, can provide a basis for the outpouring of God’s Spirit, as well as a framework for the provision of rabbinic training, worship, and congregational life.

Turning to Jewish education, Michael Rydelnik, Professor of Jewish Studies at the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, argues that Jewish studies must be integrated with traditional evangelical theological education. In the Messianic movement, he writes, theological education has often been undervalued; what is now required is for Messianic leaders to be trained in traditional Jewish sources including biblical theology, biblical exegesis, Jewish studies, homiletics, leadership, teaching, and pastoral care. In his view, Messianic Jewish leaders should train in academically accredited evangelical schools whose facilities would encourage and support the Messianic movement.

For Paul Saal, spiritual leader of Congregation Shuvah Yisrael, there is now a need for an indigenous and integrative Messianic Jewish education. As he explains, the UMJC has developed a *yeshiva* program consisting of intensive college level courses leading to ordination. In his view, the movement must develop its own educational institutions along these lines to set

high standards for credentialing, education, information dissemination, and platforms for theological and halakhic disputation.

Concerning children's education, Eva Rydelnik, an adjunct professor at the Moody Bible Institute, believes it is vital that children should be taught about the Messiah. In her view, the wealth of educational material available to Messianic congregations provided by Christian publishing houses serves as a vital resource. As she notes, these publishers have been producing children's educational material for decades, and Messianic congregations should not overlook these publications.

According to Jeffrey Feinberg, chairman of education at the UMJC and leader of Etz Chaim Congregation, the nature of Messianic Jewish education must be Messiah-centered, and yet distinctly Jewish. It is the task of Messianic Jewish education, he notes, to transmit a Jewish heritage that integrates an understanding of the Hebrew Bible and the New Covenant into the context of a Jewish community. In this context, Messianic Jews should never lose sight of their calling to transmit the Jewish heritage of membership in a priestly community.

In the next chapter dealing with intermarriage, David Rudolph, editor of *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism*, contends that intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews can make a positive contribution to Messianic Judaism as long as the non-Jewish spouse is a believer in Yeshua. Noting that the vast majority of Messianic Jews in the United States are intermarried, he stresses that often the most committed, hardest-working members of Messianic congregations are non-Jews. These non-Jewish spouses are vital for the growth and development of the movement.

Michael Schiffman, on the other hand, argues that Jewish life is precious, delicate, and fragile; as such, it is vital that marriage between Jews is encouraged. Fearing the dangers of assimilation, he believes that intermarriage threatens future generations. Although he notes that Messianic Judaism should be reaching out to intermarried couples, the movement should recognize the dangers inherent in such a situation. If the rate of intermarriage continues, he writes, Messianic Judaism will become a movement of people with remote or imagined Jewish ancestry.

Regarding Gentiles, Tony Eaton, congregational leader of Simchat Yisrael Messianic Jewish Synagogue, argues that the leaders of Messianic congregations should be Jewish. He stresses that this is of vital concern if Messianic Judaism is to constitute a Jewish movement for Jews. In this context, he argues that there should be a well-defined, rigorous rite of passage for converts. In this way Gentiles could become part of the Jewish people through a process of conversion, and thereby assume positions of leadership within the Messianic community.

According to Patrice Fischer, Gentiles should be treated as equal participants in the Messianic Jewish community. Fears, misconceptions, and

unwritten rules have affected the level of acceptance that Gentiles find within the Messianic movement. She advocates the need for an open discussion of the place of “Righteous Gentiles” who are dedicated to a Jewish way of life and worship. The New Covenant provides a pattern to guide the Messianic Jewish movement in establishing the rights and responsibilities of these modern-day Godfearers.

In his chapter on conversion, Michael Wolf, leader of Beth Messiah Messianic Jewish Synagogue, strongly opposes conversion of Gentiles to Messianic Judaism. There is no basis in Scripture for Messianic Jewish institutions to entertain such a notion, he contends. Further, the practice would bring great confusion to the movement as well as accusation from those the movement seeks to reach. He claims that no one in the mainstream Jewish community would regard Messianic Jewish conversions as legitimate. Messianic Jewish converts would never be considered Jewish by any branch of Judaism.

Opposing this position, John Fischer, rabbi of Congregation Ohr Chadash, points out that there is a basis in the *Torah* for conversion. In his view, Gentiles should be offered the option of converting. The issue should not be whether the Messianic movement should promote conversions—rather, it is whether they should allow individuals to make the choice to convert. Some members of the movement, he notes, have been deeply drawn to Jewish traditions and observances. In many cases, they have evidenced a higher level of Jewish commitment and observance than many of the Jewish people in Messianic synagogues. For such individuals who have demonstrated their commitment—there should be a way for them to identify as Jews.

Concerning the question of whether women should occupy senior roles within Messianic Judaism, Ruth Fleischer, rabbi of the London Messianic Congregation and Executive Director of Yeshua Ministries and Conferences, contends that no sex should be elevated over another; rather both men and women should serve together in a program that utilizes the gifts and calling of each to advance the Kingdom of God. Although the Messianic movement has not officially ordained women rabbis, she argues that the movement should embrace those women who feel called to lead their communities.

Sam Nadler, president of Word of Messiah Ministries and leader of Hope and Israel Congregation, emphasizes that women have served with Yeshua and his apostles; they have judged, prophesized, preached, and prayed as effectively as men. Nonetheless, there are a number of reasons why women should not serve as leaders of the Messianic movement: there were no biblical models of women as senior congregational leaders; there is no biblical authorization given to women to be senior congregational leaders; all instruction assumes men as overseers; in the home the husband was always the leader.

Advocating traditional missions, Mitch Glaser, president of Chosen People Ministries, argues that the Messianic movement needs an organizational structure to communicate with the Jewish people. Traditional Jewish missions, he notes, are a continuation of the apostolic tradition. Today this process should continue and be attuned to contemporary Jewish culture. More than any other organizational structures, missions to the Jews are well equipped to bring the message of Yeshua to the Jewish people.

According to Kay Silberling, who has taught at West Coast colleges and universities, the Messianic movement suffers from its negative image in the Jewish world. Traditional Judaism, she writes, characterizes Messianic Jews as Christians. Hence, the Jewish community is unwilling to grant legitimacy to Jewish believers. Given this position, it is incumbent for Messianic believers to employ new methods of communication and outreach. What is now required is a form of dialogue that opens avenues of communication between Messianic Jews and others.

Concerning Israel, Murray Silberling, Southwest Regional Director for the IAMCS, maintains that for Messianic Jews, Israel is crucial. He stresses the fact that although Messianic Jews tend to view the Diaspora as secondary in the struggle for Jewish survival, it is an essential and effective weapon in the fight against anti-Semitism and assimilation. The Diaspora, he urges, can be a place of innovation regarding Jewish identity and practice.

Adopting a different approach, David Stern, translator of the *Jewish New Testament* and the *Complete Jewish Bible* and author of the *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, argues that Messianic Jews should actively seek to make *aliyah*. Not only would such an act be in accordance with God's will, the land of Israel provides a place where Messianic Jews would be able to live a truly Jewish life. Currently, Messianic Jews frequently excuse themselves from making *aliyah* for various reasons, but they do not actually provide a sufficient basis for refusing to immigrate to the Holy Land.

Discussing the end times, Richard Nichol, rabbi of Congregation Ruach Israel, stresses that it is difficult to predict the coming of the kingdom. Further, he notes that an over-preoccupation with the end times tends to dull our awareness of the importance of creation and the human role in bringing about a better world. Yet, Messianic Jews must continue to anticipate the coming of Yeshua, and the fulfillment of God's plan for the world.

In the opinion of Arnold Fruchtenbaum, founder and director of Ariel Ministries, the promises made in the Jewish covenants apply to Messianic Jews. Jewish believers, he continues, will be caught up and taken to heaven at the Rapture; there, they—along with Gentile believers—will be evaluated on how they served the Lord.

The book concludes with two chapters from outsiders. The first, by Shoshanah Feher, the author of *Passing Over Easter*, outlines three challenges to Messianic Judaism. In her view, Messianic Jews will need to deter-



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mine the status of Messianic Gentiles, an issue dealt with in other sections within this volume. The movement will also need to consider why some Messianic Jews eventually discarded Messianic Judaism and became members of non-Messianic synagogues. Finally, she notes, Messianic Judaism will need to determine how faith in Yeshua can be passed on from one generation to the next.

Arthur Glasser, former Faculty Coordinator of Judaic Studies and Dean Emeritus of Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, traces the development of Jewish awareness of Yeshua within the Messianic movement. Highlighting the need for the creation of authentically Jewish Messianic congregations, he points out that Messianic synagogues need to reflect the traditional role of serving as faithful custodians of Jewish communal and religious tradition. As the movement developed, he notes, various types of congregations emerged with their own distinctive features—such diversity is an indication of strength as congregations seek to express their faith in Yeshua.

This volume thus focuses on a wide range of issues currently facing the Messianic Jewish community. The various voices within the movement reflect a wide range of attitudes and opinions. This is not a weakness, but rather a reflection of the vitality of Messianic Jewish conviction. The Jewish religious establishment would do well to reflect on the seriousness of this quest to revitalize Jewish life in a post-Holocaust age.

