

How Many Jewish Believers in Yeshua are there in the World Today?

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How Many Jewish People Believe in Jesus Today?

Introduction

Rabbi Shaul tell us that in every day and period of Israel's history there is remnant of Jewish people who are faithful to Hashem. He writes,

In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. (Romans 11:5)

We understand that there is a remnant today who are followers of Yeshua the Messiah – the One who fulfills all the Law and the Prophets. But, how many of us are there? This is a complex question that we will try and answer to the best of our ability. For starters, simply look around and smile at one another. This is a sight I did not see when I first became a believer and I will never tire of meeting fellow Jewish people who love the Lord, nor hearing testimonies of how my brothers and sisters came to faith. It is always thrilling!

But, how many of us are there?

Past Centuries

Let's look back before we look to the present and even forward. It will help us appreciate what God is doing today when we put our modern movement in its historical context. I wish I had time to speak about the very early years of the Messianic movement or even some of what God did when we thought He was silent and there was no Messianic movement. I do not believe the Lord forgot about us in any period or age throughout history. There was a remnant in the years after the destruction of Jerusalem, the difficult Medieval years, and during the pre and post Reformation periods. We stand on the shoulders of Jewish believers who were faithful and suffered greatly for their belief in Yeshua.

Since we do not have time to cover it all, let's take quick peek at the last couple of centuries and especially try to determine the number of Jewish believers who lived in the 19th century and perhaps even during the time of the Holocaust. This has always been an interest of mine as I suppose I wanted to know if my grandparents and their fathers and mothers and cousins, aunts and uncles who perished in the Holocaust ever had an opportunity to hear about the Messiah Yeshua.

The Levison Numbers

Just prior to the Holocaust, in the article “Jews become Christians,” by Rev. John Stewart Conning, the leader of the Jewish Mission sponsored by the mainline Presbyterian church, quotes Sir Leon Levison (1881-1936), then president of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (now the International Messianic Jewish Alliance)¹, regarding the numbers of Jewish people who came to faith in Yeshua during the first third of the 20th century:

*According to Levison’s research, 97,000 Jews in Hungary alone accepted the Christian faith; in Vienna 17,000; in Poland 35,000; and in Bolshevik Russia 60,000 Jews became Christians. We also found Jews turning to Christ in Germany, Sweden and Denmark. Not a few have done likewise in Britain. In America, careful estimate places the number of Christians of the Jewish race at no less than 20,000.*²

Though the figures are a mix of anecdotal assumptions and some degree of researching baptismal records, the number of Jewish believers in Continental and Eastern Europe prior to the Holocaust was more than 200,000 as critical populations such as Germany, Romania and France are not even listed. The number of Jewish believers may have been somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000. The authenticity of these believers has been discussed by those trying to decide if the believers were spiritually motivated or chose to become “Christians” to escape persecution. I assume that most of the believers noted were sincere for a variety of reasons, including the demanding catechism classes they needed to take prior to baptism which were required, especially by the Jewish people who joined Evangelical churches.

I was raised to believe that all Jews who believed in Jesus did so for some type of benefit. But, perhaps our historians and leaders talked about those of other centuries in the same way the current Jewish community generally speaks about us today. I have many reasons why I believe this but no time to tell you the details. But, please keep an open mind to this possibility.

Additionally, it is also important to recognize that the number of believers mentioned probably may not have included those Jewish people who became part of Catholic or Orthodox churches. And I personally believe that this number was significant and maybe as large as the number of those who came faith through Jewish missions and Protestant churches.

Therefore, the number of Jews who became followers of Yeshua during the first third of the 20th century may have been upwards of 300,000, which is far more than the 224,000 Jews during the 19th century mentioned by Rev. Johannes F. de le Roi a missionary to the Jewish people who worked with the Institutum Judaicum in Berlin and Leipzig. His research has not been translated into English but can be found in the book written by Christian and Missionary Alliance missionary to Israel, Alfred Thompson.³

Thomson reflects on the numbers detailed by de le Roi,

¹ elected as the International Alliance’s first president at Islington, London, in September 1925

² Sir Leon Levison, quoted by Conning, “Jews Become Christians,” *Missionary Review of the World* (1931):905.

³ Thompson, Alfred E. *A Century of Jewish Missions*. New York: Revell, 1902.

It is foolish to attempt to number Israel, as David found to his sorrow; nor can the number of conversions be tabulated except in the Lambs Book of Life. It is difficult to ascertain even the number of professed conversions. A more careful calculation has been made Johannes de le Roi in his book, Judentaufen in 19 Yahrundert (literally Baptized Jews) – published in 1899, in which he shows that 72,740 Jews had been baptized into the evangelical churches during the last century and that these, with their offspring make over 120,000 members of Protestant churches. He also states that 57,300 have been received into the Roman Catholic Church, and 74,500 into the Greek church during that period, making a total of 204,540 baptisms during the century.⁴

Thompson compares the number of Jewish believers with Muslim believers,

The fruitful character of the Jewish mission field where properly cultivated. Much fruit has been gathered in the last hundred years, though not all as a direct result of the mission. According to the Jewish Year Book the number of Jews throughout the world is 11,245,000. In the 19th century 72,000 Jews accepted Protestant baptism, not to mention the 132,000 baptized into the Greek and Roman Catholic churches. This is one protestant convert to every 156 of the present Jewish population. The number of baptized converts among the Heathen and Muslims in the same period was 2,000,000, one in every 525 of the present Heathen and Muslim population. The same degree of success among Heathen Muslims as among Jews would've shown 7,000,000 converts instead of 2,000,000 - three times as many Jewish converts enter the gospel ministry as of converts from among the Heathen. A careful comparison of fact shows that no mission field of modern times been so fruitful as the Jewish.⁵

Even Hugh Schoenfeld, a prominent British Jewish author who wrote the Passover Plot, which was dismissive of the resurrection of Yehsua and who at one time was a professing Jewish believer and the president of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (now the International Messianic Jewish Alliance) agreed,

Revolutions swept away ghettos as well as dynasties. For many Jews, the freedom to choose their own lifestyle led to atheistic Communism, and for others, to nominal Christianity; 97,000 joined the Church in Hungary; 17,000 in Austria; 35,000 in Poland; 60,000 in Russia; 20,000 in America.⁶

Finally, the International Review of Mission, the most respected Missions magazine of its time, reported a decade after World War I ended:

The work of various denominations for the Jews is also having its effect. More than 100,000 Jews in Eastern Europe since the war have entered the Christian church. While political influences in these lands have doubtless played an important part in the conversions reported, due recognition must also be given to the preparatory work of Christian teachers and evangelists whose self-denying service opened a way for the public acknowledgment of a change of faith. In

⁴ Thompson, A Century of Jewish Missions, 264-65.

⁵ Thompson, A Century of Jewish Missions, 273.

⁶ Schonfeld, Hugh Joseph. *The History of Jewish Christianity from the First to the Twentieth Century*. London: Duckworth, 169–70.

*other lands, especially in the West, many Jews dissatisfied with Judaism are finding the answer to their deepest longings in the faith of Christ. In America, at least 20,000 Jews are now connected to various Christian churches.*⁷

These figures are surprising. Since they can be corroborated in report after report from various sources, including, in part, those of the Jewish community itself⁸, one cannot but affirm the integrity of these figures. Attempts to discredit these movements of Jews towards the Messiah Yeshua are to be expected and would continue to plague the good efforts of sincere workers among the Jewish people.

The only conclusion that one can come to is that the number of Jewish people professing Yeshua during this period was probably more than we thought.

Post War Numbers

The Jewish population of Europe in particular was drastically altered by the horrors of the Holocaust. According to the annual report by American Jewish Committee in 1946,

The Jewish population of the world has decreased by one-third, from about 16,600,000 in 1939 to about 11,000,000 in 1946, as a result of the annihilation by the Nazis of more than five and a half million European Jews.

*In Europe only an estimated 3,642,000 remain of the total Jewish pre-war population of approximately 9,740,000. The major part of the present world Jewish population—about 5,176,000—lives in the United States and Canada. The two continents have thus reversed their order of 1939, when Europe was the greatest center of Jewish population. Asia now has a Jewish population of about 892,000, compared with a pre-war estimate of 771,000. The Jewish populations in Africa and Latin America have increased slightly since 1939. The estimated number of Jews now in Africa is 640,000; in 1939 the Jewish population was 610,000. South and Central America have an estimated Jewish population of 578,000, as compared with the 1939 total of 524,000. The total Jewish population in Australia has risen from 33,000 in 1939 to an estimated 35,000 in 1946.*⁹

It is very difficult to estimate the number of Messianic Jews who survived the Holocaust.¹⁰ We might assume that the figures are similar to the rest of the European Jewish population –

⁷ Conning, John Stuart. "Religion and Irreligion in Israel." 8: 538-549." *International Review of Mission* 8 (1930): 538-49

⁸ McCagg, William O. "Conversion in Hungary." *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*. New York City: Holmes and Meier, (1987): 142-165

⁹ Blaustein, Jacob. "The American Jewish Committee, 39th Annual Report." The American Jewish Committee, New York City, 1946.

¹⁰ The previous population of Jewish people in Europe was 9.7 million, of whom 6 million were slaughtered. There were certainly Jewish believers among the survivors. Still two-thirds of the Jewish population of Continental Europe perished. *The following includes countries occupied by Germans, with percentage of their Jewish populations killed, and number of victims in parentheses:*

- Poland: 91 percent (approximately 3 million)

therefore two thirds of the Jewish believers or about 200,000 may have lost their lives during the Holocaust. We might also assume that the multitude of Jewish believers who survived and lived behind the Iron Curtain were not heard from to any degree as they became victims of Communistic atheism and the anti-Jewish policies of the USSR. Perhaps many of them were included in the numbers of Jewish believers who survived but were silenced by Stalin? We can only hope so.

However, there are some anecdotal accounts that might give us some idea of the condition of the Messianic Jewish movement after World War II.

The post-World War II activities in Holland provides us with some insight.

J. H. Grolle gave a report to the IMC meeting in Stockholm on September 14–19, 1948, where he summarized the condition of the Jewish people left after the destruction of the holocaust years.¹¹ He writes,

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- Greece: 87 percent (65,000)
 - Lithuania: 83 percent (140,000)
 - Slovakia: 80 percent (71,000)
 - Yugoslavia: 77 percent (60,000)
 - Latvia: 76 percent (70,000)
 - Netherlands: 71 percent (100,000)
 - Hungary: 66 percent (550,000)
 - Bohemia/Moravia: 66 percent (78,000)
 - Norway: 45 percent (762)
 - Romania: 44 percent (270,000)
 - Estonia: 44 percent (2,000)
 - Belgium: 38 percent (25,000)
 - Luxembourg: 28 percent (1,000)
 - Soviet Union: 33 percent (1,000,000)
 - France: 30 percent (77,000)
 - Austria: 27 percent (50,000)
 - Germany: 25 percent (142,000)
 - Italy: 17 percent (7,500)
 - Finland: 0.35 percent (8)
 - Denmark: 0.75 percent (60)
 - Bulgaria: 0 percent (0)

Haaretz, “The Holocaust Facts and Figures.” July 24, 2013 (<https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/holocaust-remembrance-day/premium-the-holocaust-facts-and-figures-1.5298803>)

¹¹ Another meeting was held a year later. The following Dutch Christian leaders attended the conference in Edinburgh to discuss missions to the Jews in the post-war period: R. Bakker, Reformed Church in Holland; C. Bouma, Reformed Church in Holland; C. B. Bavinck, Reformed Church in Holland; Jacques Van Nes, Reformed Church in Holland; Van Gelderen, Church in Israel, Holland; G. H. Grolle, Church in Israel, Holland.

International Missionary Council Report of the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews. London: Edinburgh House Press. 1949), 3.

Jewry in Holland went from 140,000 to 30,000. Very few went to synagogue and most were Zionists. Most were actually secular. The nature of the religion had changed. No longer was Yiddish generally known, nor the Talmud, and there were no long discussions on the Torah.

The methods used by the missionaries in Holland varied. They tried to reach the Jews by sending them small booklets on tactful subjects. Now and then there was the possibility of lecturing the Jewish students at the universities and having discourses with them. Special Bible classes for church members were created that were designed to attract their Jewish friends and acquaintances.

Grolle suggested that these methods were possible because during the war many Jews had found shelter in Christian homes and became acquainted with Christian households. He also stated that some methods were no longer useful. Preaching in the heart of the Jewish center was not practicable because there were no Jewish centers any more. Several special meetings were not working because the Jews refused to appear; neither was visiting Jews in their homes when the missionaries were Jewish believers, since they were not welcome in Jewish homes.¹²

According to Grolle's report:

Baptisms of Jews are no longer considered as abnormal. Young Hebrew Christians have formed a congregation called HaDerech, some 200 or thereabouts spread throughout the country. Generally, missionaries give catechisms to Jews and every year more than one baptism takes place, but this is only a fraction of the total number as many of the baptisms are taking place in the church, which is not reporting the information to the missions to the Jews and therefore the statistics on the number of Jews coming to know the Lord are difficult to determine.¹³

We see that the nexus of Jewish people coming to faith was outside the Jewish mission and congregational groups but rather through the local Dutch churches.

Roeloff Bakker, a Dutch missionary to the Jews and pastor presented a paper at the Edinburgh Conference of the International Missionary Council Christian Approach to the Jews in 1949 entitled "Methods of Jewish Missionary Work of the Reformed Free Church of Holland," where he stressed the need for all the Dutch churches to work among the Jewish people, and not to simply put this effort off to the Jewish missions as before.

He wrote of the new opportunities that Dutch Christians had because of the ways in which they helped the Jews in their midst to avoid imprisonment and death:

During the war time, many church members fought for the Jewish cause and introduced Jews into their family circles to hide them. The close contact with the family has in many cases had the results that through the blessing of God, hearts were opened to the gospel

¹²J. H. Grolle, "Post-War Efforts to Reach the Jews of Holland with the Gospel" (paper presented to the IMCCAJ, Stockholm, Sweden, September 14–19, 1948), 1–2.

¹³Grolle, "Post-War Efforts," 1–2.

*of Jesus Christ. These Jewish persons were also visited by the pastors in their parochial visits.*¹⁴

With the end of the last war and in the first year after it, 150 Jewish people were baptized in the Free Reformed Church in Holland. This shows that even the holocaust did not prevent Jewish people from coming to the Lord. Bakker described the approach to the Jews that was then in use in Holland:

*Now there is still work of a different kind which is carried on by the local church committee. As soon as it was possible after the end of the war, all addresses of Jews returning to their homes were collected. To many, letters of welcome were written. Others were visited. Today we have nearly the complete material of Jewish addresses in Holland in our hands. To those addresses, our monthly is regularly sent and after a certain time these addresses are visited by the home visitors of the local church committee. For this work the visitors are chosen according to their special abilities and are prepared for this work by the pastor or Jewish mission. These home visitors give a regular report of their work at the meetings of the local committee which take place once in two or three months' time. At these meetings the pastor is present too. These meetings are considered very important.*¹⁵

We might ask questions, “why should we listen to Bakker and what credibility did he have?”

Bakker continued his report and described the intolerable situation he himself endured for the sake of the gospel:

The president of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches of Holland was invited by the German Nazi authorities to discuss some special aspects of church activities. The president happened to be one of my colleagues in Rotterdam. He told me the point of discussion was our missionary work among the Jews. He told them, quite frankly, that the church would not be willing to drop this very essential part of the ministry. An “invitation” was then received by me and I went to the Germans and the same matter was discussed. It lasted some hours and then suddenly a report was read giving my sermons and prayers used in a Sunday service. This report was given by a Nazi spy who had attended the service for that purpose. They called me a dangerous man, a saboteur, a foe of the Reich and a friend of the Jews and the allies. They asked me my opinion. I told them my only desire was to be a good and humble minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinful mankind, the only redeemer of the Jews and Gentiles. My situation was clear to me and a silent prayer went up to the Lord that He might strengthen me.

When the trial was over, I was immediately arrested and put in prison. I urged them to let me telephone my home before leaving the Gestapo office, which they allowed, and I told my wife of the situation, said good-bye to my wife and son, dedicating them to our Lord.

¹⁴ Bakker, “Methods of Jewish Missionary Work,” 3. Included in J. H. Grolle, “Post-War Efforts to Reach the Jews of Holland with the Gospel” (paper presented to the IMCCAJ, Stockholm, Sweden, September 14–19, 1948), 1–2.

¹⁵ Bakker, “Methods of Jewish Missionary Work,” 3.

After spending some months in prison, I was deported, together with many Jewish prisoners, to a concentration camp. During all the daylight hours we had to do very heavy work in the woods and in the ditches with very little food but with much shouting and beating. There was very little opportunity for sleep in the dirty wooden barracks during the few hours of the night. Many prisoners died and I marveled that I was able to stand it. It was most terrible but it was also one of the most blessed spiritual periods of my life.

I experienced the presence of Christ in those horrible circumstances. To tell the details would take hours. Suffice it to say the Lord allowed me to be an ambassador of His and I was able to give testimony to many of the Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners. Many were saved and confessed Jesus as their personal savior and redeemer before passing away.

After being imprisoned for nearly a year it was a miracle that I got out of the concentration camp. Utterly weakened by starvation and bad treatment, I returned to my dear wife and son who praised the Lord for His goodness in Christ and thanked Him for the precious spiritual experience that He gave us in the midst of such difficulties. In a few months I was recovered sufficiently to start mission work again.

During this time, many of our Jewish friends were brought to concentration camps. The Nazis, more and more, showed their diabolical anti-Semitic nature. All the Jews of Holland were ordered to report for deportation to Poland. The sharp protests of the church did not help. What was to be done? How could the Jews be saved from death? Hundreds and thousands of Christian families knew how to do it. The Jews had to be hidden in their homes all over the country. It was a big job with many very difficult aspects, too many to tell here, and could succeed only with the help of God. All had to be organized and done in a very secret way. I had my part in it. That was the new mission work. The hidden people had to be visited regularly and their needs taken care of if possible. The longer the war lasted the higher the tension grew.

*Spies were active, but also were the illegal resistance organizations. Some hidden Jews were caught and together with their Christian hiders deported. Christian love for Israel was shown. Many a Jewish heart was moved by this. There were blessed experiences when the Lord opened these Jewish hearts. Many were converted and, in this way, not only the body but above all, the soul was saved by the grace of God. **Some hundreds of them who were hidden in Christian families gave their hearts to the Lord.***

The liberation came and the war was over. A cry of joy and thankfulness went up to heaven. There were tears of joy. Many loved ones lost their lives, but many souls were saved. How many? Only the Lord knows.

*After the war there was a new beginning of the Jewish mission. I got in touch with my dear friends and brothers, **Paul Yates, formerly Jocz, and Victor Buksbazen** (the director of the Friends of Israel Missionary and Gospel Relief Society at that time – formerly a missionary with the British Jews Society in Krakow before the war). We have had years of brotherly*

cooperation, close contact and praise to the Lord who richly blessed Jewish mission work in Belgium. I know you will not forget it in your Christian love and prayers.¹⁶

Bakker is typical of so many Dutch Christians who risked their lives for the sake of the Jewish people. Bakker himself went on to serve in Belgium as a representative of Friends of Israel.

Bakker, of course, was not the only Dutch Christian who paid a high price for his commitment to the Jewish people and their deliverance. Victor Buksbazu reported after a trip to Holland:

In Holland I visited a Hebrew Christian brother who told me how the Lord had wonderfully preserved many Jewish Christians through the kindness and friendship of the Dutch people. The Dutch people took a Christian stand against Hitler, protecting their Jewish compatriots at the risk of their own lives. **Many Dutch people paid the highest penalty while doing it. Hebrew Christians were rounded up by the Nazis and imprisoned in concentration camps together with other Jews. But there they were faithful to their Lord and testified for Him as long as life lasted. This made a deep impression upon the Jews who were forced to respect their faith and courage.**¹⁷

The Post War Renewal Movements

From a low point in the number of Jewish believers in Europe due to the Holocaust, various renewal movements began taking place, in the United States and Western Europe restoring the movement of Jewish people to Yeshua and giving birth to the modern Messianic movement. The first phase began in the later 1960's among the hippie baby boomers and the second phase among those who emigrated to the West and to Israel from the former Soviet Union. (See power point slide)

Contemporary Surveys Attempting to Determine the Current Number of Messianic Jews

As far as I know there have been very few analytical (non-anecdotal) surveys of the number of Jewish believers today. I personally did a survey of Jewish believers over a 2-3 period while serving with Jews for Jesus in the 1983 which was motivated by a desire to engage Jewish believers and asked a series of questions to glean some basic information about Jewish and faith commitments. It was not an especially academic survey though the collator was a professional mathematician. The sampling was just over 1,000 people and the names were mostly gathered through meetings held by Jews for Jesus representatives speaking or ministering in Evangelical churches and some Messianic congregations. The only questions about numbers was, "How many Jewish believers in Jesus do you know?"

A follow up survey was done in 2013 of 1,567 Jewish believers and the preliminary results published in 2015¹⁸ and a Doctor of Ministry project produced in 2016 by Andrew Barron of

¹⁶, "Report on Holland" *Israel My Glory* March (1950):11-13.

¹⁷ Buksbazu, "Report On Trip to Holland." *Israel My Glory* March (1948): 25.

¹⁸ Andrew Barron and Bev Jamison, "A Profile of North American Messianic Jews"; *Mishkan 73* (Jerusalem: Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 2015)

Jews for Jesus¹⁹, but again did not focus on determining numbers in Evangelical churches or Messianic congregations, but rather on the Jewish commitments etc., pathway to salvation and other critical descriptive issues. I am unaware of other surveys of the number of Messianic Jews, although a survey was recently done by Erez Soref at One for Israel and the results of this survey are published in the book, *Israel, the Church and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, published by Kregel Publications and edited by myself and Dr. Darrell Bock.

This survey is of course focused on Israel and the new numbers projected by Dr. Soref is in the range of 25-30,000 Israeli believers, based upon the average number of attendees and the number of fellowships or congregations determined in his survey of over 500 Israeli Messianic Jews.

The previous survey conducted by Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil Skjøtt entitled Facts and Myths About Messianic Congregations in Israel in 1998-1999²⁰ is a snapshot of the Israeli Messianic movement at that time. It is very helpful to have their survey and the update, but neither covered the numbers of Jewish believers outside of Israel.

The number of Jewish believers in Jesus in the United States which most of us in the field believed, including me, over the last decade was usually in the range of 50,000 to 125,000 or “a little less than 1%”. This would actually make the number in the United States 66,000 or lower and 125,000-150,000 globally. However, these numbers are not precise and are merely anecdotal in nature rather than drawn from quantitative research. The numbers theorized are also problematic as the understanding what it means to be Jewish is not well defined and neither is what it means to be a believer. Does this include only particular expressions of our Jesus faith? Are Catholics, Orthodox and others included?

What do we mean by a Messianic Jew? Are we focused on ethnicity or observance? Are all congregation be viewed as genuinely Jewish by all? What about mixed marriages? How ethnically Jewish does one need to be to be considered as part of this group of Jewish believers. The availability of genetic testing has changed the landscape to some degree as many who were not raised Jewish or in Messianic homes have discovered they are partially Jewish and want to identify as Messianic Jews. When asked, “are you Jewish” they might answer, yes. Should they be included in our quantitative analysis of the Messianic movement. How shall this group be counted? To what degree does one need to practice Judaism, in one form or another to be included. The prevalence of intermarriage and the vast numbers of children and grandchildren born of intermarried families further complicates how we determine who exactly is a Messianic Jew and how should they be counted.

This at least helps us understand why our Sages decided that one born of a Jewish mother is Jewish. However, we never thought that being deemed Jewish would become so popular!

Whatever numbers we have today, it is clear that the number is larger and more complex to determine as those who identify as Jewish in one way or another and also believe in Yeshua as

¹⁹ Andrew Barron, “A Representation of the Beliefs, Experiences, and Ideals of a Group of Jewish People Who Believe in Jesus” (diss., University of Toronto, 2016)

²⁰ Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil Skjøtt, *Facts & Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel* (United Christian Council in Israel in cooperation with the Caspari., 1999)

their Messiah is a moving target. A number of us should join together and produce a survey that probes more deeply into the Messianic movement in order to find answers to so many of the questions we have about the modern Messianic movement in terms of numbers, Jewish identification and practice and many other issues in order to better understand ourselves and to face the future with greater understanding.

Lifeway Survey

This brings us to the heart of my presentation as we try to determine the number of Jewish believers in Yeshua in the United States and secondarily, make some type of assessment on our movement worldwide. Allow me to explain what transpired over this last year in trying to get other questions answered – which to a greater degree we did, but in doing so we stumbled upon some insights into our numbers that was unexpected.

A survey was done by Chosen People Ministries and Joel Rosenberg and executed by Lifeway Research²¹, which is the very well-respected research arm of the Southern Baptists. The survey, which was initiated in cooperation with Joel Rosenberg was professionally done and I believe the numbers can be trusted.

Genesis of the Survey

LifeWay Research conducted the study September 20th – 28th 2017. The study was sponsored by Chosen People Ministries and author, Joel C Rosenberg. The survey was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population.

Methodology

- Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. The universe reflects all residences in the U.S. and the names selected was a random sample of these. That is what makes it a probability sample. Everyone had a chance to be selected.
- Persons in selected households were then initially invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®
- For those who agree to participate, but do not already have Internet access, GfK provides at no cost a laptop and ISP connection
- Sample stratification and weights were used for gender by age, ethnicity, region, education, and household income to reflect the most recent US Census data.
- The completed sample is 2,002 surveys
- A few respondents refused to answer a few questions. If any one respondent did this too much, they were removed. Sometimes, the number is lower because some respondents were not asked the question based on their response to a previous question
- The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 2.7 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups

²¹ “Evangelical Beliefs and Identity: Representative Survey of 1000 Americans.” *Lifeway Research* (2017)

Only Evangelicals

- Respondents were screened to only include adults with Evangelical Beliefs
- Evangelical Beliefs are defined using the NAE/LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition based on respondent beliefs
- Respondents are asked their level of agreement with four separate statements using a four-point, forced choice scale (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree). Those who strongly agree with all four statements are categorized as having Evangelical Beliefs:
 1. The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe
 2. It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior
 3. Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin
 - 4.

Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation

The survey of 2,002 people produced an unexpected number, which was not especially germane to our topic as the goal of the survey was to measure evangelical attitudes towards Israel. This number, a small and almost unnoticeable percentage of 2% of adult Americans with Evangelical Beliefs indicating they have at least one Jewish parent or grandparent.

Let me share the journey of how we arrived at these figures.

This number, by projection, is 870,771, reflecting a Lifeway formula which avers that 16% of the US adult population hold evangelical beliefs – almost 40 million people (as of July 2016 <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>). The Lifeway analysts then multiplied this population group by the percentage of those who claimed to have at least one Jewish parent or grandparent which was more precisely 2.1817%, in order to project the 870,771 number.

By using the broader Pew estimate of 7.8 million US Jewish adults, both by ethnicity and religion, (to be further explained), the percentage of adult American Jews with evangelical beliefs would be approximately 12 %.

Clearly, this is a broad estimate and an extrapolation, but this method of making projections of this nature is common.²²

Three Immediate Caveats:

1. Determining the number of Jewish people who held evangelical beliefs number was not the goal of the Survey, but rather it was done to determine the level of support

²² The percentage of error in the entire survey provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 2.7 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

evangelicals have for Israel, the Jewish people and Jewish evangelism. Ethnic data was collected to be able to parse the Survey results by groups; White Evangelicals, African Americans, Hispanics etc. The question regarding Jewish ethnicity was not the focus of the Survey.

2. We did not ask any more information of those who responded other than if they had one or more Jewish parents or grandparents. We did not ask if they practiced any type of Jewish observance. We only know that they self-identified as having Jewish ethnicity.
3. The number of those who responded out of a Survey of 2,002 respondents was only 2%, a seemingly insignificant number. But when you understand the meticulous way the Survey information was gathered you will see that 2% or 40 people is quite significant. But, we cannot read more into the numbers than the questions asked.

Corroboration

It is important to see how these numbers align with similar surveys. Since, the comparative surveys, especially from a quantitative perspective, are limited, there are only a few that help us to see if these numbers may be corroborated in any way. Two recent Surveys are helpful for our analysis.

Pew

The 2013 Pew Survey entitled, *A Portrait of American Jews*²³ sample size was larger than the Lifeway Survey by 30%, a total of 3,475 (mostly phone interviews) compared to 2,002 (web-based forms), but both Pew and Lifeway are considered substantial surveys.²⁴ The Pew Survey discovered that 2.4 million people claimed Jewish ethnicity but were raised in a religion other than Judaism, primarily Christianity – about 1.6 million individuals. 100,000 indicate that they are both Jewish and Christian and another 400,000 that they are part of another religion besides Judaism and Christianity.²⁵ We do not know what religions these are as Pew did not report on it.

This causes us to ask a most basic question, “how did the Pew Survey determine if a person was Jewish”? This is of course one of the most critical questions we must answer in order to understand our Messianic Jewish movement. It is comforting to know that this is a never-ending

²³ “Portrait of Jewish Americans.” *The Pew Research Forum*(2013). <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

²⁴ A total of 3,475 Jewish respondent interviews were completed in English or in Russian - - 2,786 with Jews by religion and 689 with Jews of no religion. Of the 3,475 Jewish respondent interviews, 1,098 were completed on cellphones while 2,377 were completed on Landlines (LL). (Among Jews by religion, 793 cell phone interviews, 1,993 LL; among Jews of no religion, 305 cell phone interviews, 384 LL.) In addition, 1,190 interviews were completed with non-Jews (current self-identification) of Jewish background as well as 467 Jews of "Jewish affinity."

²⁵ “Portrait of Jewish Americans,” 23

debate within the non-Messianic Jewish community as well, especially in light of our quickly shifting generational demographics.

The ways in which Pew determines the number of Jewish people is nuanced, but the conclusion reached is both similar to others and yet in some way pointing to some new directions on how to determine these numbers. Pew, more than anyone else reflects the changing demographics of the Jewish community in the United States (and in Israel as well.)

The Pew report suggests that there are 5.3 million adult Jewish people in the United States.

According to the report, a broader definition was taken by Pew.

Because there is no scholarly consensus on who exactly qualifies as Jewish, and no clear demarcation of where the line dividing Jews and non-Jews lies, this study takes a broad approach in determining eligibility.²⁶

The report continues,

If Jewish refers only to people whose religion is Jewish (Jews by religion), then the survey indicates that the Jewish population currently stands at about 1.8% of the total U.S. adult population, or 4.2 million people. If one includes secular or cultural Jews – those who say they have no religion but who were raised Jewish or have a Jewish parent and who still consider themselves Jewish aside from religion – then the estimate grows to 2.2% of American adults, or about 5.3 million. For the purposes of the analysis in this report, these two groups make up the “net” Jewish population.²⁷

Pew also separates the children’s figures from the adults. When 1.3 children are added, the total Jewish population in the United States swells to about 6.7 million.²⁸

²⁶ The full interview was offered to anyone who described themselves as Jewish or partially Jewish by religion, to anyone who identified themselves as Jewish or partially Jewish aside from religion, and to anyone who was raised Jewish or partially Jewish or had a Jewish parent – even if they do not think of themselves as Jewish. (p.120) In total, 5,191 respondents were deemed eligible for the study and received the full questionnaire. This includes 3,475 Jews (2,786 Jews by religion and 689 Jews of no religion), along with 1,716 other respondents (1,190 people of Jewish background, 467 people of Jewish affinity, 38 people who did not fall into any of these analytical categories, and 21 people who indicated they reside outside the geographic area covered by the sampling plan). While the study describes the characteristics of people of Jewish background and people with a Jewish affinity in Chapter 7, this report focuses mainly on the Jewish population. (Portrait of Jewish Americans, 120-123)

²⁷ *Portrait of Jewish Americans*, p.23

²⁸ Combining 5.3 million adult Jews (the estimated size of the net Jewish population in this survey) with 1.3 million children (in households with a Jewish adult who are being raised Jewish or partly Jewish) yields a total estimate of 6.7 million Jews of all ages in the United States (rounded to the nearest 100,000). Using a more expansive definition, one could add children living in households with at least one adult of Jewish background. This could include approximately 200,000 children who are being raised both Jewish by religion and in another religion, as well as roughly 100,000 children who are being raised in another religion and partly Jewish aside from religion. In that case, the 6.7 million estimate would rise to about 7.0 million. (Portrait of Jewish Americans, p. 25-26)

However, Pew also ands courageously identifies another group that is left out of the core findings of the survey which is of special importance to our quest to identify the number of Jewish believers in Jesus in the United States. The results for this group may be found in chapter seven of their report.

This group, made up of two parts, include those with a Jewish background²⁹ but raised in a different religion other than Judaism. Additionally, Pew points out another group that they call, Jewish affinity. Both were surveyed, but the results are recorded separately in chapter 7 of the Pew report and kept distinct from the rest of the survey.

The “affinity” group does not claim Jewish ethnicity and are primarily religiously motivated. This is a difficult group to peg and understand, though we see some of these folks perhaps in our modern Messianic movement. The term “Messianic Gentile” could apply to some of them perhaps? But, the Jewish background group are those who did claim Jewish ethnicity through one or both parents or one or both grandparents, on the mothers or fathers’ side.³⁰

The Jewish affinity group is said to be projected as 1.2 million people.

The Jewish background group of 2.5 million and of more interest to us as they claim Jewish ethnicity. This group includes a large sub-group of approximately 1.6 million people who claim Jewish parentage and were raised as Christians.

Aside from the children, when considering this group those who were raised in another religion but consider themselves as having Jewish ethnicity, would push the total Jewish adult population in the United Sates to 7.8 million people (5.3 plus million and the 2.5 million adults plus – together equaling 7.8 million).

Pew further reports,

²⁹ The 1,190 people of Jewish background – U.S. adults who were raised Jewish or had at least one Jewish parent, but who now have a religion other than Judaism (most are Christian) or who say they do not consider themselves Jewish (either by religion or aside from religion). (Portrait of Jewish Americans, 17)

³⁰ Jews by religion – people who say their religion is Jewish (and who do not profess any other religion); Jews of no religion – people who describe themselves (religiously) as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular, but who have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish and who still consider themselves Jewish in some way. These first two groups constitute, for the purposes of this analysis, the “net” Jewish population. In addition, the survey interviewed: Non-Jewish people of Jewish background – people who have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish but who, today, either have another religion (most are Christian) or say they do not consider themselves Jewish; Non-Jewish people with a Jewish affinity – people who identify with another religion (in most cases, Christianity) or with no religion and who neither have a Jewish parent nor were raised Jewish but who nevertheless consider themselves Jewish in some way. Some say, for example, that they consider themselves partly Jewish because Jesus was Jewish, because “we all come from Abraham” or because they have Jewish friends or relatives. Most of this report focuses on the net Jewish population (Jews by religion and Jews of no religion). Whenever the views or characteristics of U.S. Jews (or just “Jews”) are discussed, this refers to the combined categories of Jews by religion and Jews of no religion. The characteristics and attitudes of people of Jewish background and people with a Jewish affinity are discussed separately in Chapter 7 of this report. (Portrait of Jewish Americans, 18)

Narrower or broader definitions would result in smaller or larger numbers. For example, if one were to exclude adults who self-identify as only “partly” Jewish, the 5.3 million figure would decrease by about 600,000, to approximately 4.7 million. Alternatively, one could define Jewish more expansively, to include all Americans who have at least one Jewish parent or were raised Jewish, regardless of whether they now have another religion, such as Christianity. In that case, the survey suggests the total adult Jewish population (including all Jews by religion, Jews of no religion and people of Jewish background) would make up about 3.3% of American adults, or approximately 7.8 million people.³¹

Also, if 1.6 million Jews by ethnicity were raised in Christian homes, as Pew implies, that would mean 1.6 million of the Pew revised US adult Jewish population of 7.8 million Jewish people would be about 20% of the US Jewish population. We are not suggesting that each individual is an evangelical as we have no way of knowing their beliefs based upon the Pew Foundation survey. Rather, we are only stating this number for the sake of comparison to the percentage discovered through the Lifeway Survey.

How many among the 1.6 million are true believers and who identify as Jews beyond ethnicity is a question for another survey!

The Future Generation

It must also be remembered that as according to Pew there are an additional 1.7-8 million children of various stripes of Jewish ethnicity that are not represented in the above numbers.³² And the Pew Survey comments that they do not have information about the level of observance or tradition kept by the children as they were not surveyed, and the adults were not especially asked.

The categories used to classify children in this report are not exactly the same as the categories used for adults (i.e., Jews by religion, Jews of no religion, people with a Jewish background and people with Jewish affinity). This is because the survey asks adult respondents about their religious identification, while for children, it relies on reports from adults about how the children are being raised. Because the survey interviewed only adults ages 18 and older, how the

³¹ If one were to adopt an even broader definition of Jewish identity and include all Americans who say they consider themselves Jewish for any reason – even if they do not have direct Jewish ancestry – the survey indicates the adult Jewish population would be roughly 3.8% of the overall adult population, or about 9.0 million people. (*Portrait of Jewish Americans, 24*)

³² Combining 5.3 million adult Jews (the estimated size of the net Jewish population in this survey) with 1.3 million children (in households with a Jewish adult who are being raised Jewish or partly Jewish) yields a total estimate of 6.7 million Jews of all ages in the United States (rounded to the nearest 100,000). In total, the study estimates that 1.8 million children reside in households with at least one Jewish adult. This includes approximately 900,000 children who are being raised exclusively Jewish by religion; about 100,000 children who are being raised as Jews of no religion; and 300,000 children who are being raised partly Jewish and partly in another religion. In addition, survey respondents report that about 400,000 children are *not* being raised Jewish at all, despite residing in a household with at least one Jewish adult. (*Portrait of Jewish Americans, 25*)

*children view their religious identity – including whether they consider themselves Jewish or partially Jewish – is uncertain.*³³

However, depending on the level of Jewish identity they are raised with this group is extraordinarily important to our Messianic community for a variety of reasons. A good proportion might be the children of the 1.6 million adults raised Christian, though Pew does not especially make this connection.

Barna

Another survey which is helpful in our research is one that was initiated by Jews for Jesus and executed by the **Barna Group on Jewish millennials which discovered that 21% of the Jewish millennials surveyed (500 plus) believe that Jesus is the son of God.**

According to the report in the Jerusalem Post, the Barna Survey reports,

Are Jewish millennials the most religious generation? And do one-fifth of them think Jesus was *God in human form*? *Yes and yes, says a new survey of 599 Jews born from 1984 to 1999.*³⁴

*The data on Jesus might be especially surprising to Jews who, if they agree on nothing else, believe that Jews for Jesus and its “messianic” philosophy are beyond the pale. The survey found that 21 percent of Jewish millennials believe Jesus was “God in human form who lived among people in the 1st century.” And 28 percent “see him as a rabbi or spiritual leader, but not God.”*³⁵

According to the Pew Survey, Millennials, defined as 18-29 years old, account for 20% of the overall Jewish population. Assuming the US adult Jewish population is the expanded Pew version of 7.8 million, this would mean that it is possible that a little more than 300,000 Jewish millennials believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

But, remember, the Barna survey did not ask them if they went to a church or a Messianic congregation or if they viewed themselves as Evangelical. Based upon the Survey we know far more about their practice of Judaism and commitment to Jewish life than what they believe. The Lifeway Survey is not limited to Millennials, although the Lifeway Survey indicates that those Evangelicals with Jewish ancestry appear to be younger. This is a trend identified by both surveys.

³³ *Portrait of Jewish Americans, 25*

³⁴ Highlights of the Pew Research Center’s 2013 Survey of u.s. Jews. publication place: Berman Jewish Data Bank; Pew Research Center’s Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013.

³⁵ Sales, Ben. “Jews for Jesus commissioned a study on [Jewish](https://www.jta.org/2017/10/31/news-opinion/united-states/jews-for-jesus-commissioned-a-study-on-jewish-millennials-heres-what-it-found) millennials. Here’s what it found.” Jewish Telegraphic Agency. October 31, 2017. <https://www.jta.org/2017/10/31/news-opinion/united-states/jews-for-jesus-commissioned-a-study-on-jewish-millennials-heres-what-it-found>.

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Additionally, those who participated in the Lifeway Survey are distinctively Evangelicals in beliefs, but not much is known about their Jewish commitments as this has not yet been surveyed. The Barna Survey results tells us more about their Jewishness but little about their belief system except that they believe Jesus is the Son of God. We do not know what they mean by this as the Barna Survey leaves this point undefined.

Alan Cooperman, deputy director of Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, adds, "They are saying that those things do not disqualify a person from being Jewish. [But] most Jews think that belief in Jesus is disqualifying by roughly a 2-to-1 margin."³⁶

The Surveys Compared

The Actual Question

Q46: "Are one or more of your parents or grandparents Jewish?"

2% responded – Yes, reflecting about 40, well screened individuals.

How Was the Number 870,771 Determined?

What number for a total of US Evangelicals was used?

Lifeway claims that the representative U.S. population that holds evangelical beliefs, based upon the latest US population estimates is 16%³⁷.

When asked, "Are one or more of your parents or grandparents Jewish?"

2.2% selected Yes. This percentage extrapolates to 870,771 adult Americans with evangelical beliefs who self-report that they have at least one Jewish parent or grandparent.

So, 11% of ethnically Jewish people (and more perhaps) who have evangelical beliefs

Additionally, though it is a small sample, two patterns emerged that should also be noted.

- Those with a Jewish parent or grandparent are more likely to be young adults (44%), ages 18-34.
- There were more who said yes to this question in the Northeast and fewer in the South (NE 34% with a Jewish parent or grandparent 9% without, S 34% with and 54% without)

³⁶ The Jerusalem Post, "One-Fifth of Jewish Millennials Believe Jesus Is the Son of God." November 1, 2017. <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Study-One-fifth-of-Jewish-millennials-believe-Jesus-is-the-son-of-God-512015>.

³⁷ "The US and World Population Clock," The United States Census, November 7, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>.

The Pew Survey (2013)

- A little more than 20% of the Jewish community raised in primarily Christian homes (though not described as Evangelical)

The Barna Survey (2016)

- 21% of millennials believe Jesus is the son of God – approximately 300,000 Jewish people
- Millennials represent 20% of the adult Jewish community – 1,560,000
- Not necessarily described as Evangelicals from the Pew Report, but

These numbers are clear indicators that the traditional, less than 1% number (78,000 people) for Jewish Believers in the United States is far too low. First of all, because the numbers of believers appear to be growing and secondly because the definition of who is a Jew is expanding.

It is clear that the Jewish community and Jewish families are rapidly changing. The surveys point this out in dramatic ways. Are going to try and preserve the past or is there a way for us in the Messianic movement to connect so many Jewish believers in local churches to their Jewish identity, their rightful role as part of the remnant and obligations as a Messianic Jews? Shall we continue to think in terms of recruitment and encouraging this large number of Jewish believers to be involved with our slice of the movement, congregations or what we envision as what it means to be a Messianic Jew in the 21st century. Do we have room for some new models?

What can we learn from the non-Messianic Jewish community and because of these incredible numbers of Jewish believers who are ethnically Jewish but embrace Christianity in one form or another. What can the mainstream, Jewish community learn from us as we see both sides in a way our fellow Jewish leaders cannot.

Conclusion: Messianic Ministry in the 21st Century

A New Perspective

- We must recognize that we are reaching a new type of Jewish family with a new perspective on Jewish identification. This should be especially understood as we lead and plant Messianic congregations
- Faith in Yeshua the Messiah is not as harshly viewed as in previous generations

- Since the majority of Jewish believers in Jesus are in Evangelical churches we must find ways to include them in the Messianic movement that goes beyond efforts to simply include them in our congregations and conferences?
- What is our responsibility to Jewish believers and their families who are satisfied with being part of a local church.

Five Questions:

- How can we leverage our relationships with Jewish believers in the church for the sake of Jewish evangelism?
- Do we consider, or should we consider...strengthening the Jewish identity of Jewish believers in the church as our responsibility as Messianic Jewish leaders?
- How can we develop and expand our programs for the children, so we can influence the next generation for the sake of Jewish continuity and testimony?
- How can we re-contextualize our understanding of Jewish identity in non-traditional ways that might be more appealing to a next generation of Jewish believing families?
- How can we bridge the gap between Israel and Jewish believers in the church both theologically and experientially?