

**Evaluating Postmissionary Messianic Judaism:
Authority, Christology and the Church of God**

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Introduction

In the late twentieth century, a movement began among a substantial number of Jews who had encountered Jesus as Messiah and Lord, but refused to assimilate into gentile churches.¹ In a break from approximately 1,600 years of practice in the church, these new believers sought a way to bring together their identity as Jews and faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Their zeal for this endeavor led to the formation of the movement known as Messianic Judaism. To be sure, these early Messianic Jews were neither the first Jews to surrender to Jesus (credit the Apostles with that) nor were they the first Jewish converts in the gentile-dominated history of the church. History includes many Jews who either were forcibly converted to Christianity or came voluntarily, yet the vast majority of these gave up all identification with Judaism and integrated into the gentile culture of Christianity.

Even the increased evangelical outreaches to the Jewish community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries operated on a model of assimilation. At the height of the missionary era in the Protestant churches, exemplified by the spirit of the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, Protestants began outreach work among communities of Jews, forming what was known as the Hebrew Christian movement. This evangelistic effort continued the previous practices of assimilating Jews into gentile expressions of Christianity, but with a slight nod to their Jewish identity. However, these attempts often found limited success at growth. It was the later, large influx of younger Jews finding salvation in Jesus in the 1960s and 1970s, who began to question the need for Jews to abandon their specifically Jewish identity and

¹ See David J. Rudolph and Joel Willitts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 27-35.

practices. Yohanna Chernoff succinctly summarized their justification in her book, *Born a Jew. . . Die a Jew*, writing, “If *Yeshua* Himself, His followers and the early Jewish believers tenaciously maintained their Jewish lifestyles, why was it right then, but wrong now?”² For these Jewish believers in Jesus, their identity as Jews became a penultimate question in their embrace of what the rest of the world understood as a gentile religion.

Questions of identity are not new to Judaism or Christianity. Throughout history, Jews have always been known as a “peculiar people.”³ This people sees itself as a distinct group with a strong understanding of community, as Rabbi Kertzer writes, “It is hard to discuss Jews, Judaism, Jewish beliefs, Jewish spirituality, or Jewish anything, without first describing Jewish community. . . being a Jew does mean having a profound love and respect for the ideal of community.”⁴ The identity gets reinforced as the community revels in its own peculiarity.

Christians have a calling to find their identity in Jesus Christ, as Paul writes in Colossians, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”⁵ The redeemed community becomes the Body of Christ, uniting through all ages to believers in every generation through the preached word and celebrated sacraments, forming one community of redemption for the world.⁶

In both cases, the identity becomes a paramount part of the faith itself. Yet, since the fourth century, to be a Jew was not to be a Christian, and vice versa. Lines between the

² Yohanna Chernoff with Jim Miller, *Born a Jew. . . Die a Jew: The Story of Martin Chernoff, a Pioneer in Messianic Judaism* (Hagerstown, MD: Ebed, 1996), 124.

³ Cf. Deut. 7:6, 14:2.

⁴ Morris Norman Kertzer and Lawrence A. Hoffman, *What Is a Jew?* New and Completely Revised. (New York: Collier Books, 1993), 3.

⁵ Col. 3:1-3, NIV.

⁶ Cf. Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, Heb. 12.

communities hardened into distinct divisions. To be identified as a Christian meant eschewing anything that was Jewish. Likewise, to be a Jew meant rejecting Jesus: “Jews cannot affirm faith in Christianity without at the same time leaving Judaism,” declares Kertzer.⁷

Michael Card, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, a Gospel which he calls “The Gospel of Identity,” writes, “Perhaps the most fundamental human question is, ‘Who am I?’ Our peace rests in finding the answer to this question. The greatest moments of emotional stress and upheaval occur when our self-understanding is challenged or violated, when we don’t know who we are.”⁸ Card argues that the earliest community of Jews who treasured Matthew’s Gospel had an intense crisis of identity. Similarly, the Messianic Jews who formed the movement in the late twentieth century also had an identity crisis. They had grown up Jews, living in Jewish community, practicing Jewish customs, worshipping God in Jewish forms. They had embraced Jesus as Messiah, but saw the vibrant Jewish identity of that same Messiah and his earliest followers, and wondered why their own had to vanish.

These questions then surface: What is a Jew? What is a gentile? What is a Christian? Is there any overlap between them? What is a Messianic Jew? Through history these questions find different answers. Before Christ, Jews had a distinct identity among the nations, but had a divine calling to be a “light for the gentiles.”⁹ In the earliest church, some Jews argued for a loss of gentile identity with assimilation into the Jewish community.¹⁰ Then with increased gentile presence, it was Jews who were forced to abandon their identity and conform. Yet, through all time, Paul’s words in the book of Ephesians seem speak above these divisions:

⁷ Kertzer & Hoffman, 282.

⁸ Michael Card, *The Biblical Imagination Series*, vol. 3, *Matthew: The Gospel of Identity* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 20.

⁹ Is. 42:6 & 49:6, NIV.

¹⁰ Judaizing became the foundation of the very first theological crisis of the earliest church, and occasioned what some call the first Ecumenical Council. It was here that the Apostles first function as the authority of the new Christian church, see Acts 15.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”¹¹

Indeed, Paul refers to it as a mystery, “through the gospel the gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”¹²

Here we see a divine paradox, as only the God of paradoxes could create. In Christ, Jew and gentile become one humanity, sharing in the promises of Jesus Christ. What of identity? For the Jew, there is nothing but the particularity of Torah. “Unifying us all, even when we disagree with each other on important matters,” writes Kertzler, “is our commitment to live a life of Torah. . . Torah is our way of life.”¹³ For gentiles, identity is bound up in Jesus Christ, who has brought them from far off to nearness with God. Here now the mystery, and the striking distinction, “for the Word [Torah] became flesh [Jesus] and made his dwelling among us.”¹⁴ Therefore, in the Messiah, the identity of Jew and gentile meet, and in them, as in Messiah, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹⁵

However, for the Jew, who has known nothing of Christianity but ridicule, separation, persecution, and near extermination, these ideas seem foolish. It is precisely the Jewish identity, forming and cohering the Jewish community, which has protected the Jew from gentile Christian persecution. The development of Rabbinic Judaism, with its reliance on the way of Torah, seen

¹¹ Eph. 2:13-16, NIV

¹² Eph. 3:6, NIV.

¹³ Kertzler and Hoffman, 35-39.

¹⁴ Jn. 1:14a, NIV

¹⁵ Jn. 1:14b, NIV

through the lens of *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, served to shield, defend and define the Jewish people in every era of danger, and tightly define the lines of what constitutes Judaism. To be Jewish means something distinct. The fear of assimilation speaks back into Card's question of identity in crisis. In addition, Scripture in both Testaments is replete with examples of the uniqueness of ethnic Israel, and the powerful role Israel must play in the plan of God through to the eschaton. Thus, even in the Messianic Jewish community, lurks the temptation to redraw distinct lines, to rebuild fixed walls and to argue for Jewish exceptionalism.

This viewpoint exists today in a sector of the fledgling Messianic Jewish community. Though Messianic Judaism itself counts only about 350,000 adherents, this separatist view has a loud voice among them. While many Messianic Jews regard preservation of their cultural and religious identity as important and beneficial to the church, they would also prioritize their identity in Christ as vital to fostering unity among Jews and gentiles. However, some others, arguing for Messianic Jewish distinctiveness, in what they term a "post-missionary" era, press for a blend of Rabbinic Judaism and belief in Jesus as Messiah.¹⁶

Perhaps as an over-reaction to the forced "Gentilization" of Jewish converts to Christianity, Postmissionary Messianic Judaism suggests undoing much of the union between gentile Christian and Messianic Jew in order to highlight a distinctive Jewish identity. They justify this action as necessary to preserve Jewish religious identity that is consistent with the Biblical witness and authentic to potential converts in light of the church's historic mistreatment of the Jewish people. In the end, Postmissionary Messianic Judaism's push to seek endorsement

¹⁶ See specifically Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), as well as "Hashivenu," accessed April 1, 2019, https://www.eksendia.com/tm/school_website.aspx.

of their Jewish identity *from Jews*, has now made many of this group raise questions about some of the most foundational doctrines of historic Christian orthodoxy.

Syncretism, usually a practice which affects missionary work within pagan religions, can also appear in work with the monotheistic religions. When the gospel comes to any culture, there comes a sorting of practices which the culture must eschew, as inconsistent with Christianity, and those which can remain to be transformed. In all of this stands the danger of syncretism, which, in religion, is the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles or practices. While Judaism itself would seem easily brought forward and matched with faith in Jesus, as the first disciples did, modern Rabbinic Judaism as will be seen, is not the faith of the earliest Christians. This sets up the possibility for conflict and opposing principles. Out of this conflict comes a question of authority. Just as identity plays a unique role in Matthew's Gospel, so does authority, and in this case, the Pharisees' questions to Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?"¹⁷, resurface.

In this specific case, the desire for a distinct identity, and a conflict of sources for authority, has created an opportunity for syncretism of two distinct religious systems. Does the authority to decide questions of faith and practice for Messianic Jews rest in the historic rabbinate, or does it rest in the apostolate and the historic practices and orthodoxy of the universal Christian church? The ancient question of Jesus' authority appears in questions of Christology. Jesus' question to Peter, "Who do you say that I am?"¹⁸, rings fresh in these new disputes. Judaism is a people of Torah, yet with Torah enfleshed, how now shall we live? Lastly, what of the church, Jew and gentile? Antioch's ecclesiology disputes between Peter and Paul find renewed expression.

¹⁷ Matt. 21:23, NIV.

¹⁸ Cf. Matt. 16:13-20

These questions have dominated debates within Messianic Judaism in the last ten to fifteen years and created deep division within the movement.¹⁹ This necessitates this investigation into whether Postmissionary Messianic Judaism's chosen identity with Rabbinic Judaism and the wider Jewish community (over and against its historic identity with the gentile church) is contextually acceptable, as an accurate representation of Pre-Constantinian "Jewish Christianity," or whether this "Judaism" is nothing more than heterodox syncretism of the two faiths and further separates Jewish believers from their gentile brothers and sisters.

Structure and Methodology

Charges of syncretism and heterodoxy should not come blithely. Therefore, before turning to them directly, an investigation into the history of the faiths involved should serve as a beginning point for discussion. Because of the questions of identity, we shall look at what has historically defined these communities: Jew, gentile, Christian and Messianic Jew. Jewish-Christian relationships have been fraught with conflict through a turbulent history. The addition of a third party, Messianic Judaism, has added a new dynamic to the relationship.

Following this, we will investigate that movement directly. Is it truly a "Judaism," or does it constitute a variety of Christianity? In his book *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach*, Richard Harvey defines a typology of Messianic Jewish Theologies, delineating eight approaches. These range on a spectrum from nearly gentile-looking to nearly Rabbinic Judaism. Careful attention to these will assist in determining the supposed syncretism and heterodoxy, and each has slightly different answers to the questions at hand.²⁰

¹⁹ For the impact of the movement, see David Rudolph, "The Impact of Postmissionary Messianic Judaism On the Messianic Jewish Movement" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature National Association of Professors of Hebrew (NAPH) Session, Atlanta, GA, November 22, 2015).

²⁰ Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach*, Studies in Messianic Jewish Theology (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009)

Because syncretism regularly develops as a part of missionary work, and because the term “post-missionary” appears in the language of this vocal sector, some attention to missiology is in order. Missiologist Andrew Walls deals precisely with the topics of contextualization, indigenization and pilgrimzation in his book *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*. In it, he distinguishes the pieces of Christianity which are transcendent to all times and cultures, and those that are culturally distinct. His principles of “indigenization” and “pilgrimzation” find direct application here as Christian missionaries encountered the distinctly different religion of modern Rabbinic Judaism, and will help contour this discussion.²¹

Then, with historical context, theological and anthropological characteristics, and missiological definitions in hand, we will turn to the main questions. Where does heterodoxy lie within the various groups of Messianic Judaism? We will look squarely at the questions of authority, Christology, role of Torah and ecclesiology. What are the dangers caused by this development, and how could it affect the broader Messianic Jewish movement?

Finally, we will close with some more positive visions. The broad stream of Messianic Judaism, fused with its gentile brethren, has much to offer the church as a whole. Jewish believers in Jesus are a distinct gift to a church learning to re-appropriate its own theological roots. As Edith Schaeffer proclaimed with the title of her book, *Christianity is Jewish*, and who better than an ethnic Israel to show gentile Christians the strength of the olive tree into which they have been grafted?²² A short sketch of the Hebrew Roots movement, the ongoing significance of ethnic Israel, not bilateral, but unified ecclesiology in David Stern’s Olive Tree

²¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 8-13.

²² Edith Schaeffer, *Christianity Is Jewish* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1975)

Theology,²³ and approaches to Torah that are positive but Christ-centered will complete the discussion. As Gerald McDermott observes in his book, *Israel Matters*, “Israel shows who God is and who we are; that sacred history is not over; that the future is hidden as well as revealed; that we have not reached the end time yet; [and] that Israel and the Church are inseparably linked.”²⁴

Issues of Identity: Defining Judaism and Christianity

In the first edition of Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer’s engaging book, *What is a Jew?*, he introduced the topic of defining Judaism with an interesting anecdote, apropos in this context:

“A number of years ago, I invited a Japanese army officer, who was studying in the United States, to attend a religious service which I was conducting. At the end of the service, as we were walking home, he asked me, ‘What branch of Christianity does your church represent?’

‘We are Jews,’ I answered, ‘members of the Jewish faith.’

My Japanese friend was puzzled. He was a Shintoist, but he had read the Christian Bible. ‘But what are “Jews?”’

‘Do you remember the Israelites in the Bible – Abraham and Moses and Joshua?’

He recalled those stories.

‘Well, we are those Israelites.’

Major Nishi gasped in amazement. ‘What! Are those people still around?’”²⁵

In this simple story, the interrelationship of Judaism and Christianity, the interplay of the words ‘Israel’ and “Jew,” the idea of a religion vs. an ethnic people, the connection of the faith to the Bible, the concept of gentile, and the wide sweep of history all weave together to create an interesting discussion of classifications. In fact, depending on the historical time, all of these pieces play into the task of defining Jew, gentile and Christian. Therefore, a look at the history

²³ David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism*, rev. ed. (Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2007), 47-59.

²⁴ Gerald R. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently About the People and the Land* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2017), xvii.

²⁵ Kertzer and Hoffman, xvii.

of these interrelationships will be instructive for further work at understanding the group which claims to be a bridge between all three aspects.

Before the history, however, let us consider the precise definition of Judaism given by Rabbi Kertzer, as it provides a helpful backdrop to the discussion of Messianic Judaism through the history of Christianity, “A Jew is therefore a member of a people, by birth or by conversion, who chooses to share a common cultural heritage, a religious perspective, and a spiritual horizon derived uniquely from Jewish experience and Jewish wisdom.”²⁶ As will become apparent, this definition could include many more people than Kertzer may have imagined, especially if one considers Paul’s statements in Romans 11. For this reason, definitions become extremely important. Kertzer emphasizes four markers for Jewish identity: ethnicity, culture, religion and spirituality. So, these markers will shape discussion of identity through each epoch considered. We turn first to Ancient Judaism, broadly that timeframe which included both Biblical Temples and in which the Levitical sacrificial system existed.

Ancient Judaism

Ask a Jew, “Who was the first Jew?”, and the most likely response would be Abraham. Yet, Abraham predates both the words Jew and Israel, with the former referring to Abraham’s great-grandson Judah and the latter to his grandson Jacob, whom God called Israel. Those who would argue for Abraham’s foundation, point to God’s covenant of circumcision with him, his strong faith, and the promise of progeny and land. Indeed, here one sees an ethnicity, religion and spirituality all brought together in the man Abraham as he experiences the calling of God, “I will most certainly bless you; and I will most certainly increase your descendants to as many as

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

there are stars in the sky or grains of sand on the seashore. . . and by your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed — because you obeyed my order.”²⁷

Here begins the central feature of Judaism, a distinct people who receive a set of Divine commands and covenants about which they intentionally order their lives. In his comprehensive work, *A History of Judaism*, Martin Goodman writes, “At root, certain religious ideas percolate through the history of Judaism. . . Most important of these is the notion of a covenant which binds God specifically to the Jewish people and lays special duties on them in return.”²⁸ These duties shaped this people in a profound way and bound them together into the “peculiar people,” known throughout the Ancient Near East by their distinct customs, regulations and devotion to an invisible God who revealed himself to them through their history. This revelation came in written form, and as Goodman continues, “the historical books of the Hebrew Bible, which lay at the core of the religion, gave shape to both Jewish forms of worship, many of which were specifically configured to recall events in this salvation history, and to Jewish understanding of the relationship between man and God.”²⁹ The god takes and makes a people distinct for himself.³⁰

After exodus from slavery, giving of covenant, wilderness wanderings, conquest, monarchy, spiritual amnesia, exile and return, one would wonder that this people even survives. Yet after all of this formational history, by the second century, BCE, the faith finds a system of religion in three equally important pillars: Temple, Synagogue and Scripture. Here, historians generally begin the history of the *religion* known as Judaism, and in fact, the first Jewish historian Josephus writes his history in the center of this time.

²⁷ Gen. 22:17-18 CJB

²⁸ Martin Goodman, *A History of Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), xxviii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁰ *Cf.* Deut. 7:6 & 14:2.

The Second Temple, at this point an impressively magnificent structure, served as the center of Jewish ceremonial and sacrificial religious life. The synagogue functioned as the local center of learning and spirituality for a Jewish people flung all over the Mediterranean world. The Scripture, now codified into the books of the Old Testament, became a binding agent connecting the Jews from the synagogue to the Temple and helped them live out their daily lives devoted to God. This people, still claiming ethnic connection to the patriarch Abraham, now spanned the entire Mediterranean world and even began to have processes for admitting converts. Greeks who encountered the faith of the Jews found it attractively coherent and logical, thus the Jewish people and faith swelled to the largest minority group within the Roman Empire at the time.³¹ Those who joined the faith were “born again” into the family of Abraham.³²

Nevertheless, even with Diasporic communities, the center of the religion was still Jerusalem, and her Temple.³³ The Temple formed the axis around which all other pieces of Jewish identity rotated. Pilgrims still made the journey up to Jerusalem for the three feasts. Sacrifices still burned on the altar day in and day out, and though the majority of Jews lived in the Diaspora, the symbolism of the standing Temple was powerful. Goodman writes, “For the

³¹ There is much dispute in scholarship about the exact missionary nature of Second Temple Judaism. For two accounts of the character, see James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 23-26 and also Scot McKnight, *A Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

³² This phrase, famously appearing in John 3 in the evening discourse of Jesus with Nicodemus is actually a Jewish idea. There is some disagreement on the strength of the connection; nevertheless, many point to statements by Shim'on Ben-Lakish who refers in the *Talmud* to proselytes being “newborn infants,” and similar statements made by Rabbi Yose. The idea can also be linked to 2 Co. 5:17 and Paul’s “new creation.” See, for example, David H. Stern, “Yochanan 3:2-3,” in *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 165. For an alternative viewpoint, see C. Kingsley Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 206.

³³ Goodman indeed notes, “If the biblical chronology is correct, the Jerusalem Temple after its foundation by Solomon was the main focus for Jewish worship for a thousand years, from c. 1000 BCE to its razing by the Romans in 70 CE, with only a comparatively brief interruption between the destruction of Solomon’s edifice in 586 BCE and the building of the Second Temple by the returned exiles in the late sixth and fifth centuries BCE,” 41.

individual hoping that the rains would come and help the crops to grow, it was comforting to know that the daily sacrifices were being made on behalf of Israel to preserve the covenant with God.”³⁴ Throughout the world, taxes tied the Jew to the Temple, and questions of authority, though perhaps adjudicated by the local rabbi, could always be appealed to the Sanhedrin who resided in the Holy City. They sat in the seat of Moses, and that seat derived its authority from the very throne of God in the holy of holies and the altar there facing.

“The lines of structure emanated from the altar. . . The natural order of the world corresponded to, reinforced, and was reinforced by the social order of Israel. Both were fully realized in the [Temple] cult, the nexus between those opposite and corresponding forces, the heavens and the earth” writes Neusner, and he continues, “The cult defined holiness. Holiness meant separateness. Separateness meant life.”³⁵ The fact that the Temple existed, defined the Jew, for only Jews could enter, and in entering there was sanctification and wholeness. The Temple represented the bridge between God and humanity.

The local synagogue functioned as the place of education for the community, the gathered congregation read the Law and the Prophets accompanied by exegesis and perhaps preaching.³⁶ However, worship seems not to have taken a corporate character, as the Temple served that purpose. The standardization of liturgical practice to be used in the synagogue for regular worship happened in the period after the Temple’s destruction.³⁷ In fact, as Goodman explains, the sanctity of the synagogue paled in comparison with that of the Temple:

“In the eyes of most Jews, wherever they were, nothing that went on in the synagogue, whether teaching or prayer, could rival the central role of worship

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁵ Jacob Neusner, *A Short History of Judaism: Three Meals, Three Epochs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 46.

³⁶ *Cf.* Jesus entering his hometown synagogue in Luke 4, his preaching in the numerous synagogues in the Galilee, and the Apostles continuing the evangel in Acts by preaching in the synagogues first. See Goodman, 60-70; see also, Georg Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, trans. David E. Green (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 311-12.

³⁷ Goodman, 64-66.

through sacrifices and offerings in the Temple. That communal prayer in synagogues was valuable was taken for granted, and doubtless such liturgy was increasingly appreciated at greater distances from Jerusalem, but, unlike the sacrifices, prayer had not been decreed in any clear fashion in the law of Moses. No one seems yet to think that such prayer might substitute for sacrifice.”³⁸

This was the world of the earliest Christians, who themselves were Jews. In the intervening years of Christ’s ascension and the destruction of the Temple, Acts records that the Apostles and early believers made Temple worship a part of their daily life.³⁹ Scripture chronicles that the Apostles also made the required sacrifices, and kept the law as decreed.⁴⁰ Thus, the Judaism of the earliest Apostles was that faith as described above. Its pillars of Temple, synagogue and Scripture formed the framework for religion; in reality, the Apostles brought the message of Jesus to Jews in synagogues by preaching from Old Testament Scripture.

And then the world changed. Two dramatic events shifted this framework forever for both Jew and Jesus follower: gentiles in Antioch were baptized with the Holy Spirit (c 50 CE) and Rome sacked Jerusalem in 66 CE, culminating with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. For faiths defined by ethnicity, culture, religion and spirituality, these events provided a distinct wrecking ball to the pillars.

“All Judaic systems,” Neusner writes, “took [perhaps ‘take’] shape in the experience of defeat followed by restoration, loss of political standing, and exile from the land, then recovery of politics and renewed possession of the land.”⁴¹ In like fashion then, two new Judaic systems emerged in the next 300 years: Rabbinic Judaism and orthodox Christianity, each strongly connected to the past, but representing two very divergent new paths. This divergence we designate as The Parting of the Ways.

³⁸ Goodman, 69-70.

³⁹ Acts 2:46; 3:1-10; 5:20-21; 21; 22.

⁴⁰ See Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Acts 21:21, 302-303.

⁴¹ Neusner, *Short History of Judaism*, 38-39.

The Parting of the Ways

In his book *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, James Parkes comments on these two catalysts, Antioch gentiles and Temple destruction, in a helpful fashion:

“At the death of Paul, Christianity was still a Jewish sect. In the middle of the second century, it is a separate religion busily engaged in apologetics to the Greek and Roman world. . . To decide on the date at which the separation took place is no easy task, for there are many parties to be considered. When the armies of Titus approached Jerusalem, the Judeo-Christians retreated to Pella. At the same time, the rabbinical leaders retired to [Yavneh]. . . Had the Judeo-Christians been the only members of the new faith, the breach between them and the Jews might have been healed, for they also desired to observe the Law. But the rabbis at [Yavneh] were not unaware of their contract with gentile Christians who did not observe the Law at all.”⁴²

It was this contract which began the grand tearing of these two bodies of Judaism. Tearing two things apart is usually neither cleanly nor quickly done.⁴³ In this case, communities in two cities became the forces which began the rending. Yavneh (Jabneh, Jemnia) became the seat of a new religion known as Rabbinic Judaism, and “the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”⁴⁴

While many historians choose to simplify the division by dating it directly to 70 CE and arguing for a hard break at that point, history is never that simple. Just like German Christians did not go to sleep on October 31, 1517 as Roman Catholics and wake up on November 1, 1517 as good German Lutherans, so this division between Judaism and Christianity happened over time. It took approximately 300 years and had myriad causes and inflection points. That it did

⁴² Parkes, 77.

⁴³ Cf. Eccl. 4:12b.

⁴⁴ Acts 11:26b, NIV.

happen had much to do with the cultural and political climate as well as hard work to clearly define identity in distinct ways.⁴⁵

The outcome of the parting defined two distinct religions, with two very different expressions of faith, at odds with one another. The animosity had begun with the rabbinic responses to the teachings of Paul, but it was the Bar Kochba rebellion in 132-135 CE which began to cement the division. Until that point, both groups were united in their opposition to Roman rule, both having suffered because Rome did not distinguish between Jews who followed Jesus and those who did not. Nevertheless, Simon Bar Kochba's revolt earned him a title of Messiah among many Jews and religious leaders who lived in Palestine. Those who had already determined to follow Jesus refused to participate in the revolt. As a result, by the beginning of the second century, the paths found little overlap, especially in the Holy Land. It would take approximately another 100 years for the divide to be complete in the Diaspora.

Toward Christian Orthodoxy

In 325, Christian Bishops and clergy assembled in Nicaea at the request of the newly Christianized Roman Emperor. Their primary mission being the resolution of the questions surrounding the deity of Jesus, but other issues pressed as well. Romans, having dealt regularly with the "problem" of the "peculiar" Jews, had difficulty with the rather Jewish characteristics left in the practice of Christianity, regardless of the fact that many of their ancestors in faith had been distinctly Jewish. D. Thomas Lancaster writes of their need for identity, "It is not unlike the bitter hostility many Protestants hold for Catholics. It fills some deep psychological need to define oneself against something. Unfortunately, that 'something' is often one's parents, which

⁴⁵ For a full range of discussion on the division, see Parkes, 71-120. His work speaks directly to the roots of Antisemitism beginning with the Parting of the Ways. See also Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

is what Catholics were to Protestants – and what Judaism was to Christianity.”⁴⁶ By the Council of Chalcedon in 381, which completed the definition of Jesus’ divinity, Christianity had assumed a position of replacement of the nation of Israel, with supersessionism as an official teaching. In addition, the church had eliminated Torah observance, Passover celebrations with Jews and the observance of the Biblical Sabbath.

Orthodox Christianity, founded squarely on Nicaea/Chalcedon, with an attitude of superiority to Judaism, became a distinct religion. Yet, that religion found unification upon an important premise: Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, the fulfillment and *telos* of all the Torah and the Prophets. The Church Fathers would affirm that Jesus was the living Torah. Notwithstanding, those same Fathers rejected the heresies of Marcion who proposed the elimination of the Old Testament. However, with the full addition of gentiles, the church eliminated the distinct ethnicity barriers of ancient Judaism.⁴⁷ Christian identity was defined directly in Christ “through whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”⁴⁸ As Parkes concludes in his comments on the missional attitudes of Christianity vs. Judaism, “Judaism proclaimed, indeed, that God forgave sin, but Christianity proclaimed that God [in Jesus Christ] redeemed sinners.”⁴⁹

This religion proceeded to dominate the Near Eastern and Western worlds for the next 1,500 years. Regardless of the losses and conflicts with Islam, Christianity, with a supersessionist attitude and teaching, continually persecuted Jews. It would take the Protestant Reformation to begin to undo the theological damage done to the Judaism inherent in

⁴⁶ D Thomas Lancaster, *Restoration: Returning the Torah of God to the Disciples of Jesus* (Littleton.: First Fruits of Zion, 2005), 17.

⁴⁷ On the retention of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) as normative, see James H. Charlesworth, “Christians and Jews in the First Six Centuries,” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2011), 345-346.

⁴⁸ Eph. 1:7, NIV.

⁴⁹ Parkes, 120.

Christianity, but it would take the near extermination of the Jewish people in the Holocaust for the Christian church to push pause on its attempt to define its identity over and against Judaism and Jewish people. Nevertheless, Christianity has a distinct identity to that of the Judaism practiced today. Just as Christianity has developed its distinct character, so too Judaism spent the same time period defining itself over and against Christianity, and to this we now turn.

Judaism without a Temple: Torah, Rabbis and Authority

About four miles inland from the Mediterranean, the coastal plain town of Yavneh occupies a highpoint in geography as well as history. Situated about 45 miles to the east of Jerusalem, this city became the nexus of what would become the religion of Rabbinic Judaism in the wake of the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion of Jews from the Holy City. Here, after the sacking of Jerusalem, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai relocated his academy begun about 10 years prior. According to Samuel Sandmel, echoing others, “This Academy at [Yavneh] became the great hinge in the transition from Temple religion to Synagogue Judaism.”⁵⁰ Here, tradition tells us that the great Sanhedrin of the Temple was reconstituted under the leadership of ben Zakkai and Gamaliel II, a descendent of Hillel, the great.⁵¹

This new leadership, headquartered at Yavneh, set about the reconstitution of Judaism as a religion without a Temple. With Jews now expelled from the Holy City and much of the land of Israel (the Romans having renamed it Palestine of Syria), Torah alone became the foundation of all Jewish faith and practice. The sages of Yavneh had to provide an inspirational religious

⁵⁰ Sandmel, 138, Charlesworth 339. It should be noted that the happenings at Yavneh are part truth and part legend. The legend contains a story of a Council of gathered rabbis from around the Jewish world who met c90 CE to hammer out the future of Judaism. Perhaps this is later midrash to add some legitimacy to Rabbinic Judaism, and borrows from the later, similar gatherings of Christian clergy in ecumenical Council. Notwithstanding, the Academy at Yavneh, with its sages, did indeed exist, see Goodman, 260-288, Sandmel 236-251.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 137-139, 243-245, *et al.* Gamaliel II was the grandson of Gamaliel the Elder who was mentioned in the New Testament as the sage of the Sanhedrin in Acts and the teacher of the apostle Paul.

system for Jews of all times and places, which provided hope and meaning for the living of daily life. In the study of Torah and the exposition of the commands contained therein, Judaism would emerge from the ashes of Jerusalem. “What had now changed?”, writes Neusner, “Judaism had been a locative religion, centered on one place. It now became utopian, lived everywhere.”⁵²

Without a doubt, many of the events surrounding the relocation of the Jerusalem sages from the Temple courts to Yavneh comes to us in the form of myth and tradition, yet the myths tell a definite truth, as Christine Hayes writes:

“Although the picture of reconstruction that emerges from rabbinic texts is surely idealized, and streamlined – representing as rapid, formal, unified and widespread a process that was probably slow, informal, chaotic, and fairly marginal – it is true that within the space of two or three centuries, the main contours of rabbinic Judaism are in place and the rabbis, backed by the patriarch, are emerging as local leaders. Coming from all levels of society, these rabbis serve local communities as adjudicators, teachers and advisors.”⁵³

These sages systematized a faith that revolved around normative legal practice (*halakhah*, meaning “way”), codifying the laws of purity, tithing, prayers and liturgical practices. These practices would transform the sacrificial and sanctification acts previously enacted in the Temple and take them to the home or the synagogue. In this way, the synagogue would function as the Temple in all places and everywhere. Identity no longer was found within the land of Israel or with the institution of the Temple. “To be holy now meant to live not in the holy land but in any place, yet to remain Israel, the people God first loved, and to live in accord with the Torah, the revelation of God’s will. . . and the means of service would be obedience to and study of the Torah.”⁵⁴

⁵² Neusner, *A Short History of Judaism*, 85.

⁵³ Christine Elizabeth Hayes, *The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 99-101.

⁵⁴ Neusner, *A Short History of Judaism*, 85.

Identity as a Jew in Rabbinic Judaism would be in the peculiarity of those who practice *halakhah* according to the Torah and interpreted under the authority of the rabbinate. This set of interpretations became an expanded Torah, two Torahs: Oral and written.⁵⁵ The written Torah, given to Moses for Israel on Mt. Sinai, would form the basis for all work; however, without the second, or Oral Torah, one could not properly live Judaism in its correct form. Oral Torah formed the exposition and outer boundaries of the written Torah as a system of rabbinic common law. Thus, Judaism became a faith of action or deeds.⁵⁶ Questions and answers about practice flowed in and out of the rabbis through their careful exegesis of Torah. These, later codified in the rabbinic writings of mainly the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, became intricate and distinctive. Through the living of the *halakhah*, one found the spiritual significance of the religion. This reconstituted Jewish culture as communities focused on the day in and day out living of these commands. So, Rabbinic Judaism comes forward in history as the “normative” Judaism, a faith focused on the teachings of the rabbis,⁵⁷ who have brought forward the Torah of Moses in dual form to regulate all aspects of faith and the life of Israel.

Orthodox Christianity over and against Rabbinic Judaism

“Before the fourth century,” writes Charlesworth, “it is misleading to refer to Christian ‘heresy,’ because there was no dominant orthodoxy before this time.”⁵⁸ Indeed, Charlesworth

⁵⁵ See Hayes, “The Torah of the Rabbis,” 102-122; David S. Ariel, *What Do Jews Believe? The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 140-44.

⁵⁶ The classic comparison between Christianity and Judaism is that, Judaism is a religion of deeds and Christianity is a religion of creeds. In the simplest terms, this adage is correct, with Christianity focused on the systematic theology and orthodoxy coming from Nicaea/Chalcedon, and Judaism centered on the *mitzvot* of Torah. Nevertheless, Judaism certainly has made a creed of the *Sh'ma*, as well as the systematized 13 Principles of Maimonides, and Christianity counts “faith without works” as dead. Still, as with any adage, it contains a basic truth helpful in comparing the faiths. One faith is focused on the written Torah and the other on the living Christ.

⁵⁷ Especially those teachings of Hillel (the liberal), over and against Shammai (the conservative). With Jesus, these two men came to represent the larger of the schools in early Judaism. See, Charlesworth, 339; also Sandmel, 142 and Hayes, 98.

⁵⁸ Charlesworth, 343.

also makes the same claims for Judaism during the first four centuries. Factionalism dominated the Hellenistic time period, and he writes that the teachings of the time “are filled with incendiary rhetoric.”⁵⁹ Yet, he says, “it was a time of clear and formative self-definition” for both faiths.⁶⁰ Historians have now broadly concluded that the lines between the two communities during this time certainly were blurred. From very early on the Jewish and Christian leaders endeavored to distinguish clearly between the two communities. This way, those who crossed the border could be obvious and distinct. Nevertheless, the “very fact that religious leadership on both sides found it necessary to enjoin sharp borders again and again is itself eloquent testimony that the border was far from sharp in real life.”⁶¹

Yet by the end of this time period, two distinct and different religions emerged: Christianity, with its strong statement of faith and divinity of Jesus, and Judaism, with its defined *halakhah* of Torah. In addition, due to the blurred nature of the faiths before this time, one cannot talk of any coherent and consistent pre-Constantinian Christianity. This era of the church involved the defining of orthodoxy because of competing narratives of identity. In this time, after sorting through myriad texts for those authoritative for the faith, the church demarcated and closed the canon. From Gnosticism (and its sibling Docetism) to Donatism, and the one which caused the need for Nicaea/Chalcedon, Arianism, Christianity spent its formative years defining convention. Any attempt to resurrect an “ancient” or “early” Christianity as normative, ignores historiography, as Parkes comments, “To decide on the date at which the separation took place is no easy task, for there are so many parties to be considered.”⁶²

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 335.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 331.

⁶¹ Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 7-8.

⁶² Parkes, 77 and also *Cf.* Charlesworth, 336,

Indeed, as Sandmel writes in agreement, “it is not possible [even] from the Rabbinic literature to define precisely what Judaism was in 29-30,”⁶³ much less the Gospels themselves. The Rabbinic literature did not arrive until sometime near the end of the second century, with some scholars calling them a “myth of origins,” or “legends.”⁶⁴ As for the Gospels, scholars date them from the middle to the end of the first century. This timeframe coincides with the reorganization of Judaism at Yavneh. Thus, fully reconstructing the Judaism of the time of Christ is almost impossible. Sandmel comments, “To try to be too specific is to resort to caprice,” and he goes on to point out that even the Gospels were not intended “to give an exposition of Judaism, not to echo Rabbinic literature, but rather to give an exposition of Jesus,”⁶⁵ and this itself was quite over and against Judaism. Indeed, it was all writing meant to be polemic, and that increased as time went on.

The polemics and strong language coming from both Judaism and Christianity, in their many forms, created the environment ripe for the development of future antisemitism, as well as Jewish contempt and misunderstanding of Christian tenets of faith. With Jews pronouncing liturgical curses of Christians via the *Birkat haMinim*, and Christians accusing Jews of being the killers of God and of using the blood of Christians for Passover, one can quickly see how Christians, finding themselves in the politically dominant position, could reach for the axe to fell the olive tree on which they depended for their own life source. No doubt, as Charlesworth says, “The result is a tendency toward theological triumphalism, Western parochialism and an anti-Jewishness that shreds, if it does not cut the umbilical cord of Christianity.”⁶⁶ Indeed it would

⁶³ Sandmel, 342.

⁶⁴ e.g. Hays, 93; Goodman, 161.

⁶⁵ Sandmel, 341-342.

⁶⁶ Charlesworth, 358.

not be until Western Christendom did almost exactly that in Germany's *Endlösung*, or Final Solution, that Christians would realize their need for Jews.

After World War II, Christianity began the long work at rebuilding its relationship with the sibling it had long banished, but the age-old questions reemerged. What is a Christian? What is a Jew? What is the status of, now, Rabbinic Judaism in light of Jesus Christ? How does God's covenant with ethnic Israel continue, but at the same time God now works through the church? How does the Old Testament interact with the New Testament? These questions, first posed by the Church Fathers in dialogue with the Rabbinic Sages, enter the picture again. As Jewish and Christian leaders sat down to dialogue anew, a new party emerged confounding both groups because they attempted to blur ancient and distinct lines. It would be Jews who found hope in Jesus Christ who would question Christianity's long denial of its own Jewish Roots and Judaism's expulsion of those who follow Jesus of Nazareth. Messianic Judaism arrived.

Messianic Judaism

Questions of Origin and Historiography

Movements come and go, but the movements which survive have generally created a compelling vision for the future, identity for the present and narrative of the past. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Messianic Judaism, a movement possessing the first two items, began to search for and record its history. In this case, the scholarship both inside and outside the movement tend to recognize a genuine link between the first Messianic Jews of the late 1960s and the Protestant missional work to form the Hebrew Christian mission of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁷ This missionary work among Jewish communities

⁶⁷ No full volume history of the Messianic Jewish movement exists and, even as late as 2007, David Stern laments this in *Messianic Judaism*, 76. David Rudolph provides an historical sketch in "Messianic Judaism in Antiquity and in the Modern Era," in Rudolph & Willits, ed. *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and*

yielded converts to Christianity, and those new believers began identifying as Hebrew Christians. These Hebrew Christians, with gentile support, began forming missionary societies to bring the gospel to other Jews. Yet while these societies did form community centers and provide missional support for social and physical needs of the Jews with whom they engaged, the purpose for all efforts centered directly on evangelism.⁶⁸ This evangelism sought the outcome of faith in Christ with assimilation into existing gentile churches.⁶⁹ However, some converts refused to abandon their Jewish practice and identity. These began to call themselves “Messianic Jews.”

In response, stiff resistance formed within the gentile and Jewish leadership of the Hebrew Christian movement, denouncing this shift in identity as heresy. Calling the Messianic Jews “dangerous” and “Judaizers,” leadership of the Hebrew Christian Alliance, the largest of the missional organizations, repudiated this movement, and officially “banished” it from the Alliance.⁷⁰ Still, some Messianic Jewish leaders formed their own independent communities and the push to define their faith and practice as Jewish grew. With the cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the religious landscape of America, a large number of Jesus-believing Jews questioned the assimilation into gentile practice and bodies. They sought to live within their own Jewish communities identifying as Jews, but honoring Jesus as Messiah and Lord. And, by 1975, the Hebrew Christian Alliance, capitulating, changed its name to the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA). This body and the Union of Messianic Jewish

Biblical Foundations, 21-36. Finally, David A. Rausch provides an historical background in *Messianic Judaism, Its History, Theology, and Polity* (New York: Mellen Press, 1982); however, this book appears only 10-15 years after the time which most scholars date the modern movement beginning.

⁶⁸ Dauerman in Rudolph & Willits, ed., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 90-91.

⁶⁹ Rudolph points out that “these churches were more often than not Presbyterian churches that put on a veneer of Jewishness to draw Jewish people to the gospel. This was their *raison d’être*,” in Rudolph & Willits, ed. *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 30.

⁷⁰ Rudolph in Rudolph & Willits, ed., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 28-29.

Congregations (UMJC), formed 1979, are the two largest bodies of Messianic Jews in the United States.⁷¹

Historiographically, the movement seems to be an outgrowth of evangelical Protestantism. Formed due to missionary work of Protestant Christians, one could argue that Messianic Judaism is a variant of American Protestant forms of Christianity. In his historical and theological portrait, David A. Rausch argues exactly this. Harvey writes, quoting Rausch, “[Rausch] had previously studied American Fundamentalism and was ‘immediately drawn to the correlations between both theologies.’ After ‘many hundreds’ of interviews with Messianic Jews he concludes that ‘their theology is that of the Fundamentalist/Evangelical movement in which Hebrew Christian theology is rooted.’”⁷²

Indeed, could a movement like this have formed if not for the Protestant Reformation, the elimination of State-controlled churches and the democratization of America’s religious landscape? Stern suggests as much, remarking, “It has once again become possible for the Jewish believer in Yeshua to identify himself as both Jewish and Messianic, and to express this identification in a socially recognizable way. This has come about historically because of the great growth of freedom in the Western political, economic and social life during the last three hundred years.”⁷³ In spite of positive comments within the Messianic Jewish movement of Rausch’s work and the way it validated the movement, critics dismissed his connection of them to Fundamentalism.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30-31. The largest of the missional movements to continue the older model of missional engagement to assimilation is Jews for Jesus. Their model continues to use Jewish practice engagement to help transition believing Jews into a more gentile expression of Christianity. There are also sizable Messianic Jewish communities in the U.K. and Israel, but the center of the movement certainly rests within the United States.

⁷² Harvey, 29.

⁷³ Stern, *Messianic Judaism*, 58.

⁷⁴ Harvey, 30, citing Mitch Glaser, “Review of David Rausch’s *Messianic Judaism: It’s History, Theology and Polity*” in *LCJE Bulletin* (August 1983),6.

Instead, Messianic Jews preferred to see their expression of Christianity as connected to, derived from and continuing Jewish expressions of Christianity from before the Parting of the Ways. As it happens, Stern's 'manifesto' of Messianic Judaism is subtitled, *A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past*. Standing resolutely on the Jewish identity of Jesus, the Apostles and many of the Jewish believers who continued with varying amounts of Jewish identity (Rabbi Kertzer's ethnicity, culture, religion and spirituality), Messianic Jews see themselves as a modern continuation of a legitimate expression of Christianity. Even so, Stern also acknowledges,

"From the 5th to the 18th century there was no room, either in the Church or in the Jewish community, for Messianic Jews who wished to retain their dual identity. A Jew who wanted to honor Yeshua had to leave his people and join the Gentile-dominated Church. During that period the Church and the Jewish community developed their own histories, but Messianic Jewish history ceases to be communal and becomes the stories of individual Jewish believers in relationship to the Jewish, Christian and secular communities."⁷⁵

Consequently, the question arises, whence did the movement come? By the end of the fourth century, and certainly by the sixth, two distinct and different religions and communities had emerged: orthodox Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. In addition, the scholars of the Messianic Jewish movement admit that there is little or no communal history of Messianic Jews in the intervening years. Echoing Stern, Rudolph writes, "Direct evidence of Jews who practiced Messianic Judaism after the First Council of Nicaea is scanty."⁷⁶ He cites as justification for this lapse in the history by pointing to canon law and Constantine's sword requiring the renunciation of everything distinctly Jewish. Nevertheless, Judaism would never have accepted Jews who claimed faith in Jesus, as Jews either. Indeed, part of the formational work begun at Yavneh and continued thereafter, defined Judaism over and against Christianity. "Jews could not remain

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷⁶ Rudolph in Rudolph & Willits, ed., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 25.

within Judaism and believe that Jesus is God or that Jesus and God shared one substance.”⁷⁷

Therefore, regardless of Paul’s insistence on his own Jewish ethnicity and practice,⁷⁸ by the settling of orthodoxy in Nicaea and Chalcedon, Christianity would not look Jewish, and after the age begun at Yavneh and completed with the *Talmud*, Judaism would not recognize Jesus as Christ or Lord, defining itself with Torah observance and rabbinic authority.

Therefore, in light of the fact that the scholarship admits historical connection to the Hebrew Christian movement of the early twentieth century, but “scant” evidence exists for a continual history. Hence, little historical relationship exists between the modern movement and the ancient presence of Jews and Jewish practice within early Christianity. Having investigated the historiography of the movement, we turn to possible theological connections. How does the movement define itself theologically? In this move toward a theological discussion, we will begin to note what Esther Foreman has argued, that Messianic Judaism “occupies a space between Orthodox Judaism and Christianity.”⁷⁹ Using the theological landscape mapped by Richard Harvey, qualifying Foreman’s spectrum, we will evaluate questions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Messianic Jewish Theological Identity

In his 2007 work *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past*, itself a revision and update of his earlier, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, David Stern writes of theology:

“Christian theology tends to underplay or misrepresent Jewish phenomena. Jewish theology ignores the New Testament. Since any genuine reconciliation of the Church and the Jewish people must conform to biblical truth, what is needed before any program of action can be designed is a thought framework that can do justice to both the Messianic and the Jewish elements of any theological topic. The name

⁷⁷ Charlesworth, 350.

⁷⁸ Phil. 3:5-6

⁷⁹ Harvey, 24, citing Esther Foreman, “Messianic Judaism in London: A Study of a Continuum Between Judaism and Christianity” (MA Thesis, King’s College, London, 2002).

for such a thought framework is Messianic Jewish systematic theology. (However, in this book I do not offer a finished theology – if there is such a thing. Rather, I am pointing out topics which need theological treatment and hinting at ways to go about it.)”⁸⁰

Stern also later comments that, as of the time of his writing, no such work existed in good form.

In fact, to the date of this writing, no such complete work exists. One also could argue that such a work would not be properly a systematic theology, but instead a contextual theology, offering theological thought from the perspective of Messianic Judaism, with its foundation resting on historic Christian orthodoxy. But that would beg the question of this work, since there is a group within Messianic Judaism claiming instead that Messianic Jewish theology offers a contextual theology of Judaism.

Notwithstanding, the work which approximates the kind of treatment suggested by Stern is Richard Harvey’s *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach*. In his introduction, Harvey spends some time dealing with identity questions and recognizing that a historical solution to the identity question is not apparent.⁸¹ In addition, he suggests a background of Evangelical Protestantism for theology as well as history, “Messianic Jewish Theology has developed in the light of its Protestant Evangelical Background and its engagement with Jewish concerns. The doctrinal statements of Messianic Jewish organizations are uniformly orthodox [Nicene/Chalcedonian], but are often expressed in Jewish rather than Hellenistic thought forms, and are more closely linked to Jewish concepts and readings of Scripture.”⁸² In

⁸⁰ Stern, *Messianic Judaism*, 85. One could make the observation that Christianity’s underplaying or misrepresentation of Jewish theology is a lesser problem than Judaism’s complete ignorance of the New Testament.

⁸¹ Harvey, 8-13. He also provides an enlightening quote by Mark Kinzer, “After a quarter century of existence, one might have hoped Messianic Judaism would have progressed beyond matters of fundamental self-definition. Unfortunately, such is not the case. Our movement still struggles with basic identity questions,” Harvey, citing Kinzer, 9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4, also see 29-31, citing works by Rausch and Wiggins.

other words, he notes that Messianic Jewish Theology rests on historic Christian orthodoxy, but expressed in “Jewish thought forms,” addressing “Jewish concerns.”

Taking the three items individually, if the doctrinal statements are “uniformly orthodox,” that would suggest that these are *Christian* doctrinal statements, representing the Christian religious framework, and providing a distinctly Christian theology. Alistair McGrath defines theology as “‘the systematic study of the ideas of a religion,’ including their sources, historical development, mutual relationship, and their application to life.”⁸³ In this case, based on Harvey’s notations of “uniformly orthodox” implying Christianity, and the fact that Messianic Judaism recognizes the Messianic status of Jesus of Nazareth, despite the strict avoidance of the word ‘Christian’ in favor of ‘Messianic,’ the ‘religion’ in definitional question would be a form of orthodox Christianity, however qualified as Messianic Judaism. That is, a faith that recognizes Jesus as *Christos*, or Messiah, and follows him as such.⁸⁴

Here, questions of identity shine forth brightly. Since the fourth century, Christianity has defined itself over and against Judaism, and likewise Judaism has drawn hard boundaries, specifically at recognition of Jesus as Christ. In addition, during the timeframe before Nicaea, no standardized orthodoxy existed in either Judaism or Christianity, so appeals to these timeframes for a benchmark appear futile. Thus, theologically speaking, Messianic Judaism, by its tenets is some form of Christianity, because Rabbinic Judaism clearly defines itself without Jesus as Messiah.⁸⁵

⁸³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 101.

⁸⁴ Harvey writes of the avoidance: “The label, ‘Christian,’ with its jarring overtones to the Jewish people of Christians as ‘other,’ and the legacy of Christian anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, excluded them from the Jewish Community,” 9. In addition, David Stern goes to great lengths to avoid the term in his writing, providing a thorough explanation of it in *Messianic Judaism*, 31-34.

⁸⁵ E.g. Pilkington, “There are groups, known as ‘Messianic Jews’ or ‘Jews for Jesus,’ who today believe that they can maintain their Judaism whilst accepting Jesus as the Messiah. . . From the point of view of mainstream Judaism,

Yet, Harvey's second term indicates the use of "Jewish thought forms." Here, Jewish is an adjective modifying 'thought forms.' What does it mean that the thought forms are 'Jewish?' As Kertzler noted, the modifier expresses four things: religion, spirituality, culture, and ethnicity. Therefore, if we exclude religion, Messianic Jewish Theology is properly a contextual Christian theology, expressing ideas and thoughts of God within a Jewish perspective, emphasizing items and ideas distinct to the particular context of Jewish spirituality, culture and ethnicity. In other words, a Christian theology addressing Jewish concerns.

What are Jewish concerns? Those things which tend to keep Rabbinic Jews from recognizing Jesus as Messiah, and those which would, if a Jew moves toward Jesus, cause the greater Rabbinic Jewish community to draw a distinct boundary. These are items which would distinguish the doctrinal statements Harvey references, from general statements in line with historic orthodoxy.⁸⁶ These items tend to focus on specific objections which Rabbinic Jews have to Christianity, and, interestingly enough, are the same items which served as final demarcations when the faiths divided in the Parting of the Ways, *viz*: Authority, Christology, Torah adherence and Ecclesiology. In addition, all will be overlaid with concern for the caustic history of Christianity's teaching of supersessionism, or replacement theology, and its outcome of antisemitism. In the end, Messianic Jews focus directly on the church's history of specifically excluding anything "Jewish," and forced or expected renunciation of these upon faith in Jesus.

Instead, Messianic Jews tend to emphasize ideas and practices which are, spiritually, culturally and ethnically Jewish. Yet, the identity question again surfaces, because these

be it Orthodox or non-Orthodox, these groups are confusing the fundamental beliefs of both Judaism and Christianity."

⁸⁶ See, for example, "Statement of Faith," Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://www.umjc.org/statement-of-faith/>; "Statement of Faith," Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://mjaa.org/statement-of-faith-2/>.

emphasized items tend to be developed through the history of Rabbinic Judaism, a distinct and different, though related, monotheistic religion. The strength of the emphasis, and the approaches to the distinguishing doctrinal questions form the spectrum which Foreman identified, and Harvey maps into eight different groups.

Messianic Judaism's Theological Spectrum

Working directly from Stern and Kinzer's earlier writing, Harvey presents a typology of eight "streams" within Messianic Jewish theology. He notes that the work is "tentative," but Foreman's writing provides some additional context. Harvey summarizes Foreman, "Messianic Judaism occupies a self-created space on a 'continuum' between Judaism and Christianity. Within this 'conceptual space,' Christians, Messianic Believers [meaning gentiles within Messianic Jewish settings] and Messianic Jews can formulate their identity."⁸⁷ Therefore, Harvey places his types on this spectrum moving from those "closest to Protestant Evangelicalism from which the Messianic Jewish movement has emerged, to those who locate their core identity within. . . Jewish religious and theological norms."⁸⁸

That being said, having discussed the divergence of Christian religious and theological norms from Jewish religious and theological norms, there will come a point along this spectrum, a tipping point of sorts, where one has moved from the realm of one religion to another. Christianity, both in the pre-Constantinian years and afterward rests on the foundation as described by Paul, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."⁸⁹ And, specifically referring to the union of Jews and gentiles within this faith, "built on the foundation of the *apostles* and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief

⁸⁷ Harvey, citing Foreman, 24.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁸⁹ 1 Cor. 3:11, NIV.

cornerstone. In *him* the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”⁹⁰ This recognizes that Christianity begins in Jerusalem at Pentecost, with the outpouring of God’s Spirit, *apostolic* preaching and teaching of the Jesus as Messiah, and those following, notwithstanding their ethnicity, spirituality or customs (three of Kertzer’s markers). The Lordship and Messiahship of Jesus defines identity.⁹¹

Conversely, Rabbinic Judaism rests on the foundation formed by the teachings of the Rabbis at Yavneh, and continued in their tradition. This tradition holds the Torah as central, with the rabbinic interpretations thereof variously authoritative.⁹² While Judaism tends not to formulate its beliefs in a systematic fashion, this being a product of Hellenistic thought, the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides come the closest to a systematic exposition.⁹³ In addition, the writings of the first rabbinic sages, spiritual descendants of the Pharisees, form the boundaries of Jewish expressions of faith. These centered on *halakhah*, “the way” or “the walk” which found its definition in the Torah, and the Oral Law derived therefrom, but believed to have also been revealed to Moses.⁹⁴

Here lies the distinction important for later discussion. Rabbinic Judaism’s *halakhah* is Torah as expounded by the sages. These are understood to be the articulation of the commands

⁹⁰ Eph. 2:21-22, NIV, emphasis added.

⁹¹ Cf. Gal. 3:28, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile. . .”; Col. 2:16, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”

⁹² This has shifted with the rise of the (post)modern era. The formation of new expressions of Judaism after 1800: Reformed, Conservative, Reconstructionist, etc. has shifted the methods of interpretation and authority of the traditions of the rabbis, with the Orthodox groups still holding the more traditional methods. Nevertheless, each group has a system and method of incorporation of the foundational teachings emanating from the sages.

⁹³ Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, ‘Maimonides,’ also known as ‘RamBam,’ called the 13 Principles, “the fundamental truths of our religion and its very foundations.” These follow roughly on the themes of the Nicene Creed, without, of course, naming Jesus, instead affirming the expectation of Messiah’s arrival, and upholding the supreme authority and immutability of the Torah, with the primacy of Moses as teacher and prophet. See Maimonides, “The Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith,” Chabad, accessed April 13, 2019, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/332555/jewish/Maimonides-13-Principles-of-Faith.htm.

⁹⁴ Harvey, 125-127.

of Torah and the additional expositions, regulations and life patterns which Judaism has woven together through the centuries to define its specific lifestyle: Torah lived out. Its companion, *haggadah*, or “the telling,” is the communication of these *truths* of life to the practitioner in narrative form.⁹⁵ These are based directly on Deuteronomy 6:1-9 & 11:13-21 – the *Sh’ma*, which forms the central creedal expression of Jewish faith. In the “way of walking” and “the telling” the Jew finds *hachayim*, “the life.” In Torah is sanctification, Israel’s distinction among all things as the people of God. As Kertzler writes, “Torah is our way of life, all the vastness and variety of the Jewish tradition, as someone once called it. It is the very essence of Jewish spirituality. It is synonymous with learning, wisdom, and love of God. Without it, life has neither meaning nor value,”⁹⁶ or as the ancient sages assert, “Israel, God, and the Torah are one.”

Compare Christianity’s *halakhah*: It is a *person*, Jesus the Messiah, who declared himself (*ha* [the] *lakhah* [walk]) the Way, the Truth and the Life.⁹⁷ While most commentators focus on the “I am” portions of the statements in John 14:6 declaring Jesus’ divinity, one should not miss the power of Jesus’ claim to be *the Way, the Truth* (corresponding to *haggadah*, the telling of truths) and *The Life*. This statement in John’s gospel, written in the same timeframe that the sages began reforming Judaism at Yavneh, will form the cusp over which our spectrum will turn.

Harvey’s spectrum begins with what he calls, “Jewish Christianity, Christocentric and Reformed.”⁹⁸ This type is distinctly Christian with only minor reference to Jewish constructs. It is articulated primarily by Baruch Maoz and Stan Telchin. Theologically, one finds traditional

⁹⁵ The most significant *haggadah* of Judaism is the *Haggadah Pesach*, The Telling of Passover. God directly commanded Israel to tell the story of redemption yearly with the Festival of Unleavened Bread and the sacrifice of *Pesach*. Jesus specifically fused himself into this telling in what became the Eucharist. For more on this subject, see Matthew Sichel. “Sacraments Reimagined: Fulfillment, Continuity and the New Israel.” *Evangelical Journal* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 1-16, and Brant James Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* (New York: Doubleday, 2011).

⁹⁶ Kertzler, 39.

⁹⁷ John 14:6.

⁹⁸ Harvey, 267-268.

Reformed expressions of doctrine with high Christology and emphasis on the fulfillment of Torah in Christ. Jewish practice or observance should be rooted directly in, and conform with, the New Testament Biblical record. Maoz considers himself an “ethno-cultural” Jew. In this case, we see acknowledgement of only two of Kertzer’s markers, with a hard break from spirituality and religion. Harvey also notes that this type has not met with general acceptance by Jewish believers.

The second type, “Dispensationalist Hebrew Christianity,” functions as a dispensational alternative to the first type (rooted in Reformed Covenant Theology). The main articulator is Arnold Fruchtenbaum. The type uses Jewish tradition only for exposition of dispensationalist themes and ideas. The strong support of the nation of Israel and a clear theological system forms the main thrust. Here, focus rests in the approach of the Tribulation when dispensationalism teaches a mass acceptance of Jesus by Jews, and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Harvey writes of its doctrinal forms that, “Orthodox Christology is viewed through a conservative evangelical lens. There are some attempts at translation into Jewish cultural contexts, but a literal rather than dynamic equivalence is sought.”⁹⁹

Type three, “Israeli National and Restorationist,” focuses on restoration of Messianic Jews in the land of Israel as an eschatological mission. This type has little in the way of specific developed theology, other than a very distinct view of ethnic Israel, the land and the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah. To refute antisemitism and supersessionism, this type calls on Judaism and the nations to see what God is doing through Messianic Jews in the world today, especially as it relates to the land of Israel.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 268-269.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 269-270.

The fourth type, the most accepted and widespread view, Harvey titles, “New Testament Halacha, Charismatic and Evangelical.”¹⁰¹ This is the viewpoint articulated by David Stern, Daniel Juster and most of the leadership in the UMJC and MJAA. This variety sits at the center of the spectrum and provides what Harvey calls “an eclectic combination of evangelical innovation and traditional Jewish observance.” It accepts orthodox concepts of the Trinity and Christology; however, these are restated in traditional Jewish language and metaphor. The objective of this view is to elevate the Jewishness of the Christian faith, especially in its early apostolic form, without sacrificing orthodoxy as later defined by the mostly gentile church. Israel remains the people of God, but united directly to the gentile church in a way consistent with Romans 9-11. Stern’s “Olive Tree theology” forms the basis for ecclesiology.¹⁰²

While it resolutely and distinctly calls out the gentile church for its supersessionism and antisemitism, it states, “The Messianic Jewish community views itself as united with the Gentile wing of the Church in a partnership that is intended by God to reflect interdependence and mutual blessing. Such interdependence and mutual blessing can come about only through close relationship.”¹⁰³ It reframes Torah back to the Biblical witness, eschewing the authority of Oral Torah, but using it as a structure to understand the New Testament and the earliest teachings of the church. It sees the New Testament as a Jewish document, and Jewish concepts aid exegesis.¹⁰⁴

Though Harvey notes that the foundational work done by Stern and Juster lacks consolidation, this movement will likely complete that work as the more “Jewish” end of the

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 270-271.

¹⁰² Stern, *Messianic Judaism*, 47-59.

¹⁰³ Juster in Rudolph and Willits, ed., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 142.

¹⁰⁴ Primary in this mission, David Stern’s *Complete Jewish Bible* (CJB) translation and associated *Jewish New Testament Commentary* seek to reimagine the distinct Jewish nature of the New Testament. In the introduction to the CJB, Stern writes, “My first purpose is . . . to restore the Jewishness of the Bible, and, particularly, to show that the books of the New [Testament] are Jewish through and through.”

spectrum continues to speak loudly in opposition. This type sees an ethnic Israel as continuous, a valued cultural expression of Judaism, and the rabbinic traditions as an aid in devotion, providing a spiritual dimension to the faith. Here, we see three out of the four of Kertzer's markers. For the last marker, religion, this type adopts Christian orthodoxy in a Jewish expression as completely continuous with Judaism, and the true intent of God all along.¹⁰⁵

Of the fifth type, titled "Traditional Judaism and the Messiah," Harvey writes of its very early formative status, with the work of "several independent thinkers." These voices tend to come from Orthodox Jewish streams of observance, and a very New Testament focused view of following Jesus as a disciple. One might term this group a primitivist type of Christian faith, in that it seeks to understand exactly how Jesus and the early disciples might have lived Torah within their context directly and then apply it to life. Harvey states it in this fashion, "The emerging shape of this theology is not clear, but could result in 'Messianic Hasidism' with a possibly more Orthodox Jewish expression."¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, while this view does interact heavily with rabbinic sources, and attempts Torah orthodoxy in light of Jesus, it "preserves orthodox Christian beliefs." Indeed, this view recognizes the value of rabbinic sources and teaching, but passes it all through the authority of Jesus as the ultimate rabbi. The rabbinic authority in this view functions as one might view secular authority and not as revealers of Divine truth.¹⁰⁷

And with this slight nod to Rabbinic authority, we move to the cusp or the point on which the spectrum turns. "Who do you say that I am?", asked Jesus of Peter. This question of identity and authority brings the answers into focus. Peter responds with a declaration of Jesus identity

¹⁰⁵ See Edith Schaeffer, *Christianity is Jewish* for the full development of this thought from a gentile looking in.

¹⁰⁶ Harvey, 272.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, citing Powlison, 154-155

as “Messiah, the Son of the living God,”¹⁰⁸ which asserts the full divinity and Messiahship of the Jesus. Peter’s declaration, paired with Jesus identity in John 14:6 as “the Way, the Truth and the Life,” as well as John’s statement in the Prologue, “The Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son,” requires an admission of Jesus’ status as the Torah revealed and fulfilled. Jesus’ statement to Peter after his confession concerns authority. After having resolutely warned the apostles in vss. 5-12 to beware of the teachings of the Sadducees and the Pharisees (from whom Rabbinic Judaism descends), in vss. 19-20, Jesus directly announces the authority of the apostles, and later confirms his ability to do so as he commissions them to become heralds to the world in Matthew 28 and Acts 1.

The last three types on the spectrum question each of these elements: Jesus’ identity, his divinity and his authority as mediated to the apostles. The motivation for such a move appears to be originally rooted in a missiological concern to present a faith attractive to fellow Jews, that seems Jewish. Harvey writes, “One purpose is to refute the accusation of assimilation that is levelled at Jewish believers in Jesus by the Jewish community.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, even in the early dialogues between the Greek Fathers and Jews, during the Parting of the Ways, the Jewish complaint to early Christians, whether Jew or gentile, was that they had abandoned Torah observance, which is the primary sanctifying mark of Jewish faith.¹¹⁰ Paul’s encounter with Peter at Antioch, with the questions of gentile conformity with Torah, form the background.

Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, as articulated by Mark Kinzer and the organization Hashivenu form the sixth typology in Harvey’s spectrum. This movement, now very outspoken

¹⁰⁸ Matt. 16:16, NIV.

¹⁰⁹ Harvey, 273.

¹¹⁰ See, especially, Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, *First Apology* and *Second Apology*.

and somewhat organized, has formed a distinct division inside Messianic Judaism, and according to some in the UMJC, has threatened the theological cohesion of the Union. This type is extraordinarily focused on eliminating supersessionism, and has begun a rereading of many passages of Scripture which had formed the basis for supersessionist theology. However, these re-readings begin from a hermeneutic of postliberalism and postcriticalism, with an objective of completely reimagining the faith. Justifying this work by appealing specifically to the New Paul Scholarship, as originally articulated by E.P. Sanders, but having now broadened to a wide range of scholarship investigating the Jewish identity and practice of the early church, this stream pushes that school further.¹¹¹ It seeks to re-adjudicate Nicaea and Chalcedon in similar fashion because of their overtly antisemitic outcomes.¹¹² However, because Nicaea established Hellenistic and not Jewish foundations of the Christian faith by authoritatively announcing Jesus' divinity in Greek models, this type begins to cast doubt on this piece of orthodoxy.

Harvey writes, "Kinzer sees Jesus as divine, but within a Judaism not inhospitable to the possibility of the divinity and incarnation of the Son of God." Kinzer begins to imagine what seems to be a mystical vision for the incarnation as worked out in the nation of Israel, and almost presents a parallel way for Jesus to be accepted as Israel herself. Harvey continues, "The historic formulations of the Trinity are inadequate in Jewish contexts because they are steeped in Hellenism."¹¹³ Postliberalism generally questions the formulations of Nicaea as authentic, as well as the formulation of orthodoxy as a work of the Holy Spirit, preferring instead to see Nicaea as one of many ancient "options" available in the early Christian community. It instead

¹¹¹ Based on the idea that Paul never eschewed Jewish observance, this school argues for new ways of viewing the Jewishness of the early church. For the scholars in this stream which have specifically influenced this type, see Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 72, note 41.

¹¹² See Mark Kinzer, "Finding Our Way through Nicaea: The Deity of Yeshua, Bilateral Ecclesiology, and Redemptive Encounter with the Living God," *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 24 (Summer 2010): 29-52, http://www.keshetjournal.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=135&Itemid=435.

¹¹³ Harvey, 273.

looks to Constantinian Christianity as an imposition of the Roman empire which stamped out other equally valid expressions of Christianity in that time.

Additionally, Postmissionary Messianic Judaism sees the rabbinic sources as equally authoritative to the Scriptural record. Kinzer understands rabbinic tradition as the method by which God has sought to preserve the Jewish people, and therefore authoritative. He writes, “. . . if Yeshua-believing Jews are ‘to maintain faithfully their Jewish identity,’ they *must* observe Jewish practices rooted in Torah and defined by Jewish tradition, and they *must* participate actively as ‘members of the Jewish people.’”¹¹⁴ In this way, not only does this type shift the locus of authority to the traditions of Rabbinic Judaism, it advocates for a distinct identification of Messianic Jews with the Jewish people over and against the gentile Church. Kinzer calls this “Bilateral ecclesiology,” and admits this is “a substantial revision of traditional ecclesiology.”¹¹⁵ He sees Messianic Jews as fully a part of the Jewish community, and while sharing a faith in Jesus with the gentile church, Kinzer argues that Messianic Jews form a distinct and separate subcommunity.¹¹⁶

The seventh type, “Rabbinic Halacha in light of the New Testament” advocates for a completely rabbinically Jewish formation for Messianic Judaism with official *halakha* systems and interpretations in line with forms used in traditional Rabbinic Judaism. Joseph Shulam, the main advocate of this type, aims to restore as much of “Gentilized” Christianity as possible to Jewish forms and traditions. However, he advocates severing all links from Messianic Judaism to the gentile church, and Harvey notes that concerns exist within the Messianic Jewish community that Shulam has unorthodox Christology.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Kinzer, *Postmissionary*, citing Soulen & Wyschogrod, 182-183, emphasis added.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹¹⁷ Harvey, 274-275.

The last type, Harvey calls “Messianic Rabbinic Orthodoxy,”¹¹⁸ and he notes that it is a minority position. This type seeks to call Messianic Jews to focus on the four pillars of Jewish experience: God, land, people and Torah. “His advocacy of Torah observance is so strong that [he writes], ‘I dare say that it is less dangerous to follow the wrong Messiah than to follow the wrong Torah.’” This view has adoptionist Christology and does not see the Messiah as divine. It could be summarized as Arian Messianic Judaism, and because of traditional Jewish teachings on the indivisibility of God, rejects the Trinity.

These last three types, on the Jewish side of the cusp, seem driven by a hyper sensitivity to supersessionism and therefore, hold tightly to Jewish identity. However, as previously noted, Jewish identity centers directly on community and comes with Kertzer’s four marks: ethnicity, culture, spirituality and religion. Whereas the previous types seek to hold some combination of the first three, apprehending that the Jewish community will not recognize the “Jewishness” of anyone who will not hold all four, these last three types seek some creative articulation of Messianic Judaism which will espouse a religion that is Jewish. Yet, as the histories of Judaism, Christianity and their parting would suggest, Jewish religion and Christian religion are distinct and disparate. In the post Holocaust era, gentile Christian theology has begun the long process of eschewing supersessionism, but Judaism will continue to draw a hard boundary between the two religions as quite antithetical. Rabbis Hersh and Sikowitz, clearly articulate this stance:

“Celebrating Jewish holidays and rituals while identifying as Jewish does not make one a Jew, most especially when these actions are accompanied by a belief that has always been deemed *antithetical* to Jewish theology. The belief in Jesus other than as an historical figure is *completely outside the bounds of any Jewish theology* and has traditionally been one of the few grounds for excommunication from the Jewish people.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 275-277.

¹¹⁹ Jordan Hersh and Dan Sikowitz, “‘Messianic Jews’ Are Not Jewish,” *Frederick News Post*, April 5, 2015, https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/human_interest/messianic-jews-are-not-jewish/article_eb8c516c-9eaa-5874-8d44-ae89f46f8161.html, emphasis added.

The combination of religions which are antithetical, opposite and disparate is the definition of syncretism, a genuine danger in mission work to bring Christ to a distinct religious culture.

Syncretism, Missiology and Heterodoxy

“As mediators of the gospel, we need to critically assess syncretistic/contextual questions in the Church,” writes Lynn Shmidt, Professor of Missiology at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary. He continues, “The debate comes to light especially in the Majority World, where new believers strive to live in faith to Christ and yet retain their cultural identity. One of the more prominent examples of this struggle is Messianic Judaism.”¹²⁰ The proclamation of the gospel to Jews in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is not equivalent to the mission work done by Peter, Paul and the other apostles in the first century. In the earlier case, no organized form of any different religion existed, and the apostles came with astonishing, good news of a resurrected Messiah, who had changed their lives. It came with no cultural or religious baggage; for no history of Christian persecution of Jews existed. Jew telling Jew of the miracle of Jesus’ resurrection at Pentecost is as close to a culture-free gospel that may have existed.

However, as soon as the Acts 2 church began, a distinctive culture also began, which set itself apart from the Jews to whom it attempted to communicate. The word “church,” *ekklesia* in Greek, literally means “a calling out.” In this case, these disciples of Jesus had “come out” of the Jewish milieu found in the first century,¹²¹ and dedicated themselves to a community distinct

¹²⁰ Lynn D. Shmidt, “How Much Syncretism Is Allowed?,” *Missio Nexus* (blog), January 1, 2013, <https://missionexus.org/how-much-syncretism-is-allowed/>.

¹²¹ Though they considered themselves as Jews, there is no doubt that the Sanhedrin began questioning that immediately. *Cf.*, Acts 4:1-22; 7:1-60; 8:1-3; 21:27-22:25. See also Parkes, 121-150, especially conclusions about the first century on 149.

and unique, founded on Jesus *as Messiah*. Like the original *vocare* of Abraham, and of Israel, the church hears a call to “come out” from among the culture around it.¹²² Paul’s quotation to the Corinthian church, a distillation of God’s Old Testament call to Israel, expresses the heart of this, “Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.”¹²³ From this point on, any proclamatory activity would encounter a different context from the faith of those who followed Jesus. This included all Jews to whom the gospel would come in the Diaspora.

In timeframe from Nicaea to the early twentieth century, the church’s missionary activity with Jews represented neither contextualized ministry, nor even a hint of syncretism. Jewish conversion with full gentilization was either forced, or if it was voluntary, the Jew also fully assimilated into gentile Christian culture. The church saw Judaism on the level of other pagan religions, and after having chopped down most of Paul’s olive tree into which it had been grafted, attempted to dig it up and replant it in fully gentile soil. No quarter would be given for anything Jewish, religiously, spiritually, culturally or even ethnically, with the Holocaust representing the attempted ethnic cleansing which was the logical outcome of this effort.

With the reinvigoration of the missionary movement from the Protestant churches to Jews, almost 1,600 years after the Parting of the Ways, Christian missionaries encountered a people group as different from Christianity as Islam. Like Islam, anger and animosity characterized the relationship, and worse, Christians had a long history of being oppressors of Jews. To bring the gospel to the Jewish people in 1945, looked nothing like Peter’s preaching on the Day of Pentecost. The gospel would need contextualization to speak with a Jewish accent,

¹²² To be sure, the Essenes and the Qumran communities were also similar groups in the same timeframe which sought to be separated out of Israel. The church was not unique in that aspect of its “calling out;” however, unlike the Essenes and the Qumran community, the church had a call out to be a direct witness to the world around it about redemption that had arrived. For short discussions of these, see Sandmel, 163-167 and Goodman, 128-139.

¹²³ 2 Cor. 6:17 is a distillation of God’s call to Israel in Is. 52:11 when God envisions a call to Israel to return from Assyria as they had returned from Egypt.

and more so, because the Judaism of 1945 was modern Rabbinic Judaism, itself far removed from its normalization at Yavneh, and certainly the Second Temple Judaism of Peter and Paul.

Contextualized gospel proclamation to every culture is the goal; good missiology recognizes that there is no culture free gospel.¹²⁴ In every case, the gospel encounters a people with beliefs, traditions, rituals, domestic life, etc. It becomes the job of the missionary to help that people integrate faith in Christ into their lives in a way that upholds the dignity of that culture without compromising the heart of the message. Wilbert Shenk reflects on work of those who encountered a distinctly different culture, “Missionaries continually walked a tightrope between adaptation to culture and rejection of those features that could not be reconciled with the gospel. An uncritical accommodation led to syncretism that diluted or denatured the gospel, while failure to adapt would have meant that the gospel remained foreign and inaccessible.”¹²⁵ The operative question in each case: What was consistent with the gospel and what was not? What could stay and be transformed, and what had to fade?

Missiologist Andrew Walls has called this process of sifting, “pilgrimization” and “indigenization.” To explain, Walls uses a timeline description of Christian practice beginning in the first century. This description of a time-traveling “space visitor,” who sees Christian practice through the ages, gives a very helpful perspective to this discussion. He begins with a description of Christian practice in the first years:

“Let us assume his first visit to be to a group of the original Jerusalem Christians, about 37 CE. He notes that they are all Jews; indeed, they are meeting in the Temple, where only Jews can enter. They offer animal sacrifices. They keep the seventh day punctiliously free from work. They circumcise their male children. They carefully follow a succession of rituals, and delight in the reading of old law books. They appear, in fact, to be one of several “denominations” of Judaism.

¹²⁴ This is the heart of Leslie Newbigin’s quote, “There is no such thing as a pure gospel, if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture.” See Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 144.

¹²⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 127.

What distinguishes them from the others is simply that they identify the figures of Messiah, Son of Man, and Suffering Servant (figures all described in those law books) with the recent prophet-teacher Jesus of Nazareth, whom they believe to have inaugurated the last days. They live normal family lives, with a penchant for large, close families, and they have a tightly knit social organization, with many common meals taken in each other's houses. Law and joyful observance strike our spaceman observer as key notes of the religion of these early Christians.”¹²⁶

The next time Walls' visitor views the Christian community, he arrives in 325, attends the Council of Nicaea and notes a stark difference, “hardly one of them is Jewish; indeed on the whole they are rather hostile to Jews. They are horrified at the thought of animal sacrifices; when they talk about offering sacrifices they mean bread and wine used rather as it was in the house meals our observer noticed in Jerusalem.”¹²⁷ While the visitor does notice other similarities with the first century Christians, these believers tend to be preoccupied with theology, metaphysics, and Greek concepts. The visitor “wonders” at the comparison.

More wonders appear as the visitor arrives three other times to three different expressions of Christianity: Medieval Irish monks, 1840s to a meeting of English missionaries and in 1980 to a worship service in Nigeria. Walls remarks that in no case has the outsider observed any “freakish examples of Christians.” In each time and in each place, these Christians adequately reflect the faith, but it represents a wide array. Walls then asks if any coherence exists across all groups, and states that in every case, historical continuity ties them together, as the faith was transmitted from one group to the next. Yet, more importantly, Walls writes, “the person of Jesus called the Christ has ultimate significance. In the institutional sphere, too, all use the same sacred writings; and all use bread and wine and water in a special way.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Walls, 3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

In every time and place, argues Walls, the idea of an “indigenizing” principle exists. This principle is likely the most difficult concept for the missionary to handle. This is the idea that God can work in every cultural context, exactly as it is, and bring His mission to fruition. Walls points out that in the disaster of the Parting of the Ways, the gospel made its way into cultures “uncircumcised, defective in their knowledge of the Law and Prophets, still confused by hangovers from paganism, and able to eat pork without turning a hair. Yet this – and the fact that there were still many left to speak of Jesus as Messiah – was the direct result of the Jerusalem Council to allow Gentile converts ‘a place to feel at home.’”¹²⁹ The gospel must be able to transcend every culture, because God wants to save every human. Every human is welcome at Christ’s table, with every ethnic, cultural and spiritual background.

Yet, Walls cautions that with the indigenizing principle works the “pligrimizing” principle. Humanity is fallen, and when the human comes to Christ, so does every aspect, including the fallen pieces which God wants to transform and conform to his will. This includes cultural and religious practices out of step with the gospel. In addition, that person becomes attached to people and ideas outside of his culture. “The Christian has all the relationships in which he was brought up. . . But he also has an entirely new set of relationships, with other members of the family of faith into which he has come, and whom he must accept, with all their group relations (and “disrelations”) on them, just as God has accepted him with his.”¹³⁰

Lastly, the Christian, from any culture, time or place gets adopted into a family of faith which is not her own. This begins with an adoption into the history and family of the Jewish people. Here, Paul’s grafting of wild branches into the natural olive tree finds application. All people, from all time, find themselves fused to someone else’s background, history and culture,

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

which do not necessarily fit together nicely with their own. The stories, psalms, songs and history in the Bible are not those of the gentile who comes to Jesus Christ. They do not own them, but must learn to be owned by them. However, for the family to function well, the Jew, from whom the stories came, must be willing to have others adopt these stories and make them their own, for they really belong neither to the Jew nor the gentile. *They belong to God*, the Author of everyone's story. They are God's to use as He pleases, as Paul distinctly describes in Romans 9, "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?' But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?"

And this is where the rubber of missiology meets the road. Salvation history is being driven by God Himself. God has seen and knows every twist and turn which the story has taken. It is not ours to question how God will work through, or in spite of, those whom He has appointed to witness to the salvation of Jesus Christ, Jew or gentile. This is the deepest message Paul tells in Romans 9-11, and why he finishes the pericope with these words,

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"
"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"¹³¹

With all of that said, where does that leave the discussion of syncretism, missiology and heterodoxy? Above all, humility should govern every action in relationship to the communication of the gospel. In multiple places, Paul warns gentiles to act in utmost humility as they approach salvation in Christ.¹³² Yet, as Walls warns, and consistent with Paul's statements

¹³¹ Rom. 11:33-35, NIV.

¹³² Cf. Rom. 11:18-21, 25.

in Romans 9, “God shows no partiality.” Even the Jew, says Walls, must recognize the gifts, graces and contributions given to the church by “uncircumcised [gentiles], defective in their knowledge of the Law and Prophets, still confused by hangovers from paganism, and able to eat pork without turning a hair.”¹³³ In every case, the tension remain, which is what Paul is saying when he writes:

“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. *I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*”¹³⁴

Because, for Paul, the gospel is more important than even his position as an apostle, and his identity as a Jew. Indeed, he counts even his circumcision as rubbish in order that he know Christ and the power of resurrection.¹³⁵

Secondly, when the gospel encounters a culture, no matter what culture, it will both indigenize it and pilgrimize it. There is both room for particularities and still a universalizing factor with which it arrives. When it encounters an inconsistent cultural practice, idea, religious ritual or habit, God will transform it through the power of Jesus Christ. The universalizing adoption of all into Israel’s history will level the playing field, not just for gentiles as they approach Israel, but for Jews as well, for “God show’s no partiality.” Israel may have been “entrusted with the oracles of God,” but they ultimately belong only to God, and God will work as He sees fit, so walk in humility.

¹³³ Walls, 8.

¹³⁴ 1 Cor. 9:19-23, NIV, emphasis added.

¹³⁵ Cf. Phil. 3, in its entirety.

Lastly, and most importantly, there is an orthodoxy within the contextualization.

Through all salvation history, a common thread runs through each age. Ethnicity is important, but variable, for while God has certainly made covenant with Jews, “I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”¹³⁶ Culture comes into the gospel as it is, for God welcomes us as we are. Spirituality may vary, for as God has differentiated each human with a unique personality, each person’s mode of connection with God will vary. But religion is not variable. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”¹³⁷ Some things remain constant and unchangeable, regardless of the idiom, language, or cultural context used to communicate them. Orthodoxy, or “right praise/belief” will be consistent through every age. As Walls’ noted, there is, “one theme which is as unvarying as the language which expresses it is various; Jesus called the Christ [Messiah] has ultimate significance.”¹³⁸

In discussing orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy, Alistair McGrath cites Fredrich Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* as authoritative on the subject. Schleiermacher writes of the formation of heterodoxy, “either human nature will be so defined that redemption in the strict case cannot be accomplished, or the Redeemer will be defined in such a way that he cannot accomplish redemption.”¹³⁹ McGrath summarizes in this fashion:

1. The Christian understanding of the nature of *God* must be such that God can effect redemption of humanity through Christ.
2. The Christian understanding of the identity [and authority] of *Christ* must be such that God can bring our redemption through him, and him alone.
3. The Christian understanding of *humanity* must be such that redemption is [needed], possible and genuine.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Matt. 3:9.

¹³⁷ Heb. 13:8, NIV.

¹³⁸ Walls, 6.

¹³⁹ McGrath, citing F.D.E. Schleiermacher, 114.

¹⁴⁰ McGrath, 114, emphasis original.

Therefore, syncretism, or the combining of principles from two disparate religions, may or may not beget heterodoxy. In many cases, the syncretism may indeed be appropriate indigenization.¹⁴¹ However, if the syncretism violates one of the points, heterodoxy will result.

Consequently, returning to the themes and questions at hand, at what point on the spectrum of Messianic Jewish theology does syncretism beget heterodoxy? As has been argued, Christianity's encounter with Rabbinic Judaism brings together two *different* religions, though certainly related. Out of that encounter came Messianic Judaism, a contextualized version of Christianity, birthed from work of evangelical Protestantism. Missionaries brought Jesus Christ to a distinctive people group: Jews. Jewish identity is bound up in four markers: ethnicity, culture, spirituality and religion. As Messianic Jews formed their identity, a spectrum of theology emerged, from forms resembling gentile Christianity to forms resembling Rabbinic Judaism. On that spectrum the cusp between orthodoxy and heterodoxy exists where syncretism may have shifted the faith from one religion to another. So, with historical context, theology, anthropology and missiology defined, we now face this directly.

From Syncretism to Heterodoxy: Postmissionary Messianic Judaism

Postmissionary Messianic Judaism's Questions

In Kinzer's model of Messianic Jewish theology, he struggles with extraordinarily important questions; however, his answers begin to draw threads at the tapestry which defines the bedrock understandings of the Christian faith. Knowing that the Christian church has begun to deal with the flawed ideas of replacement theology, Kinzer sees an opportunity to throw into question other essential doctrines of the Christian faith. He writes:

¹⁴¹ In the end, distinguishing syncretism from contextualization may be a difficult job, and not all syncretism may be bad. For more on this, see the full discussion of Schmit, "How much Syncretism is Allowed?"

“Christian communal identity is founded on two critical convictions: (1) the mediation of Yeshua in all of God’s creative, revelatory, reconciling, and redemptive activity, and (2) the church’s participation through Yeshua in Israel’s covenantal privileges. These two convictions are embodied in the church’s two-fold biblical canon. They constitute nonnegotiable beliefs located at the core of the church’s existence. Nevertheless, the repudiation of supersessionism raises serious questions about these two convictions.”¹⁴²

Kinzer then argues that these two convictions cannot operate within a non-supersessionist framework. In other words, because of Kinzer’s conviction that the church has built itself on a three-point theological foundation of these two points plus supersessionism, and the fact that supersessionism is no longer theologically tenable, he argues for the full-scale repudiation of the other two points. In sum, Kinzer seeks to rebuild Christian theology from the bottom up, justifying the work because those who formed Christian theology got it incorrect because of their animus to Jews and Judaism.

Knowing that Christian theology finds its roots within Biblical exegesis, Kinzer must find a system of interpretation which can re-exegete passages which the church has used to justify supersessionism. Using postliberal and postcritical scholarship and methods, Kinzer argues that gentiles who have read the Bible have misunderstood the Jewishness of the New Testament, and in so doing, have misunderstood its message about four things: locus of authority, the meaning of Torah, Christology and ecclesiology. Additionally, he assumes that those who formed the bedrock doctrines of Christianity have refused to use “Jewish” theological methods and ideas and repudiated “Jewish” practice in an effort to define Christianity over and against Judaism. As if all of Christian theology rested upon the repudiation of “Jewish practice” declared at the Council of Nicaea, Kinzer’s system would claim that because the church now rejects replacement theology, it must now radically redefine its other foundational doctrines.

¹⁴² Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 12. Repudiating the first conviction would imply that Jesus may not be the locus of all mediatory work of God. This seems heterodox in itself with no syncretism.

His questioning of exegetical methods, however, rests on a flawed assumption. He writes, “I have argued that the biblical text contains a measure of ambiguity that cannot be eliminated simply by historical exegesis. This is especially the case when attempting a synthetic treatment of a topic, and even more the case when that topic is the *Jewish people*, the *Jewish way of life* and the church.”¹⁴³ However, Judaism coming out of Yavneh, and especially after the fourth and fifth centuries is not the Judaism of the early church. Kinzer seems to assume a “Jewish” adjective formed in some kind of vacuum, as if the theology written and thought by Peter and Paul, is equivalent to “Jewish” thought of the middle ages, or even that of today. Who are “Jewish people,” and a “Jewish way of life?” Who gets to define the answers to those questions?

Questions of Authority and the Role of Torah

Jewish people and a Jewish way of life, as defined within Judaism, have four different markers, ethnicity, culture, spirituality and religion. Repudiation of supersessionism would indicate that Christianity should never have begun a systemic elimination of those who belong to Israel ethnically.¹⁴⁴ It would also include a rethinking of eliminating things culturally Jewish, and even those things which would fit within Jewish spirituality. However, the fourth marker refers directly to the religion of Rabbinic Judaism, defined over and against Christianity since Yavneh. It is a religion with a locus of authority within the 1700-year development of rabbinic authority. It is a religion which reveres Torah as the final revelation of God. It is a religion completely bereft of a recognition of the revealed nature of Jesus as Messiah and God. Judaism following Yavneh has defined itself purposefully *absent* of Jesus.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 46. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁴ One would hope that the Holocaust would be the last example of direct Christian persecution of ethnic Jews.

By the Council of Nicaea, the Judaism known and seen by the Council had already begun its own separation from Christianity. These members knew Judaism as that which had thoroughly repudiated Jesus as Messiah and God. For this Council, to declare the elimination of anything “Jewish” from within the Christian faith, was a declaration that Judaism, as a religion at that point, had moved too far from something reconcilable with Christianity. It was a recognition that *halakhah* was not eliminated, but that those who could properly define it were those who understood that it was a Person and not a set of written codes.

Here the locus of authority for comes into focus. Who decides how to live; how to define the faith? Kinzer would argue that, “there are two basic questions: (1) Is the Torah foundational for Messianic Jewish life? (2) If so, what is the role of Rabbinic tradition in determining how the Torah is to be lived out?”¹⁴⁵ Leaving the first question of role of Torah aside, the next question deals specifically with the heart of authority. Kinzer’s declaration strikes at the heart of how Christianity has understood authority, as Harvey, quoting Kinzer, writes:

“The challenge for the Messianic movement in the 21st century is to ‘go beyond mere Biblical analysis and examine the historical developments of the past two millennia.’ Then it will be possible to ‘*acknowledge the authority of a tradition that has emphatically denied the Messiahship of Yeshua*’ and see it as the tradition that embodies ‘Oral Torah,’ and carries on the work of Moses from one generation to the next.”¹⁴⁶

In essence, this perspective advocates something *prima facie* syncretic: Rabbis who have rejected Jesus for the past 1,700 years, nevertheless define *halakhah* for Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah, as they legitimately sit in the seat of Moses, the seat of authority. To put it bluntly: Rabbis who have rejected Him, who is “The Way,” still have the authority to define “the way.”

¹⁴⁵ Harvey, citing Kinzer, 170.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 173, emphasis added.

Part of the identity of Judaism rests in the keeping of Torah as *halakhah* for all of life. Between *halakhah* (the walk, way) and *haggadah* (the telling) the Jew can ultimately find *hachaim* (the life). Therefore, the Torah and its interpretation become the key for living a life devoted to God. This is especially true of those who live devoted lives in the Conservative and Orthodox expressions of Judaism.¹⁴⁷ To live as a Jew, one lives Torah. This living of Torah becomes a vehicle for devotion to God and a way of sanctification which leads directly to life.

The Scriptural basis for this vision comes from Torah. Deuteronomy 30:15-16 reads, “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.”¹⁴⁸ To be a Jew, one relates to God via Torah, as the covenant which leads to life. In the keeping of the covenant, the life arrives. Torah, as one of the three pillars of Judaism, functions as the tying point between Rabbinic Judaism and its ancient antecedents. The other two pillars, Temple and the Land of Israel, were reinterpreted by the rabbis as Prayer and Charity. These form the heart of Rabbinic Jewish religious practice.

To live these three, one looks to the rabbinic authority for instruction, guidance and method. They, as representatives of Moses, directly mediate the covenant between God and Israel in the same way that the Levitical priesthood mediated the covenant when the Temple stood. Subsequently, Kinzer advocates for a continuation of this method for Messianic Jews to maintain their own Jewish identity. Yet, Kinzer goes a step further by seeking to build on the foundations of *all* rabbinic interpretations of Torah, Messianic and non-Messianic. Kinzer’s

¹⁴⁷ It may be instructive to note Mark Kinzer and many in his community, have come out of these two expressions.

¹⁴⁸ Deut. 30:15-16, NIV.

theology would create a system of *halakhah* for Messianic Judaism today (essentially ethics for Messianic Jews) built on Rabbinic Judaism and Messianic Judaism combined.

This is the mission of the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, a body that seeks to do the work which Postmissionary Messianic Jewish theology envisions. In answering the question of purpose, they write, “[because] the people of Israel collectively, rather than individuals as individuals, who were called into covenant with God, to honor God by living according to the Torah. This collective call meant that all Israel was responsible for the covenant fidelity of its individual members. A breach by anyone put the entire people in covenant jeopardy - the status of having broken the covenant - *which triggers dire consequences*.”¹⁴⁹ Laying the statement of consequence aside for the moment, though concerning in itself, this body believes that it has authority to “bind and loose” covenant observance and faithfulness.¹⁵⁰ However, they claim to carry on the authoritative work, not of the apostles, but of the rabbis who formed a distinctly different religion, Rabbinic Judaism: “the Jewish people and their recognized leaders have retained their legitimate halakhic authority, and God continues to operate among them and through them in order to shape their life in accordance with the Torah.”¹⁵¹ In the laudable, but

¹⁴⁹ “Halakhic Authority,” Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, accessed April 20, 2019, <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27/sources-mainmenu-28>, emphasis added.

¹⁵⁰ See Matt. 16 for this concept of binding and loosing. David Stern gives excellent summaries of this theological concept in *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, “Mattityahu, 18,” 56-58 as well as in *Messianic Judaism*, “Chapter 5,” and specifically 146-151. Stern struggles with this question of authority, which has been muddled by the work of Roman Catholicism. Nonetheless, his conclusion seems to be that authority to decide *halakhah* belongs completely within the Christian community (Jew and gentile). He directly questions including the *halakhah* of non-Messianic authority. He does not question the need for *halakhah*, but he writes, “‘Observing’ the *Torah* of the Messiah means accepting the guidance of the New Testament *halakhah* for our lives, while remaining sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Whether the Spirit wants us to obey the rule or break it will be decided within a communal, congregational framework in which our respected leaders and colleagues help us determine the mind of the Messiah, which ‘we’ – as a community, not each individual – have.”, 154.

¹⁵¹ “Halakhic Authority” Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council. See also Daniel Juster’s apt concerns in “A Response by Daniel C. Juster,” *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* (Winter/Spring 2006), http://www.kesherjournal.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16:a-response-by-daniel-c-juster&catid=17:features&Itemid=420.

extreme desire to avoid supersessionism, this perspective seeks to situate some intrinsic mediatory covenantal authority in non-Messianic rabbis based solely on their Jewish identity.

Here, the syncretism finds its fullest expression. Who mediates the covenant, and on whom is it founded? Seeking to justify their authority on Jesus' warnings in Matthew 23, they actually set themselves against it. What authority lies within Jewish leaders who have themselves ignored the redemptive work of Jesus Christ to mediate a covenant?¹⁵² "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."¹⁵³ The *halakhah* of the people of Jesus *is* Jesus. The center of the faith of Jesus *is* Jesus. Rabbinic Judaism, and those rabbis on which Postmissionary Messianic Judaism claims to stand, is a Torah-centric faith, where redemption is found in adhering to a life shaped and molded by Torah. The Messianic faith is a Jesus-centric faith, where redemption is found in seeking the life shaped and molded by Jesus, the living Torah, whose Spirit has come to dwell within and through the believer.¹⁵⁴ This in no way abrogates, eliminates or disposes of Torah. "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."¹⁵⁵

Where should covenant fidelity, and with it, identity rest? It rests not in Torah-centric observance, but in identity with a Jewish Messiah's sacrificial death. There is a dichotomy in practice between Rabbinic Judaism and orthodox Christianity which is instructive. The centerpiece of worship within the synagogue service of Judaism is the unveiling, parade and

¹⁵² Cf. specifically Hebrews 9. Hebrews is the Epistle which most emphatically and specifically speaks to the kind of theological movement being advocated by this stream of Messianic Judaism. This letter, written specifically to the Jews of the first century (which this movement claims to be recreating), should be the primary Scriptural source for evaluating these propositions.

¹⁵³ 1 Cor. 3:11, NIV. Consider also the very clear words of the writer of Hebrews, "But Yeshua deserves more honor than Moshe, just as the builder of the house deserves more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the one who built everything is God. Also, Moshe was faithful in all God's house, as a servant giving witness to things God would divulge later. But the Messiah, as Son, was faithful over God's house. And we are that house of his, provided we hold firmly to the courage and confidence inspired by what we hope for," 3:3-5, CJB.

¹⁵⁴ This is the vision of the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 31.

¹⁵⁵ Rom. 3:31, NIV.

reading of the Torah scroll among the worshipers. By contrast, the centerpiece of worship in the Christian church has been the celebration of Messiah's redemptive work on the cross in the Eucharist. That celebration, *no less Jewish*, returns the locus of God's relationship to humanity in the oblation of Jesus as sacrifice. In addition, it is in the breaking of the Messiah and the pouring out of his blood, which has brought both Jew and gentile into relationship with God and one another.¹⁵⁶ Torah enfleshed is Torah broken and Torah completed.

Observance of *halakhah*, while certainly an aid to devotion and a visible proof of faith, can never replace union with Messiah through that faith, and establishes no righteousness within the devotee.¹⁵⁷ When Postmissionary Messianic Judaism attaches "dire consequences" to infidelity to Torah, they instead seek to set up a system of righteousness independent from that which Messiah has given, as Paul writes of Pharisaical (Rabbinic Jewish) observance in Romans 10, "For the goal at which the *Torah* aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts."¹⁵⁸ To insist on *halakhah* as defined through history by Jews who misunderstand the *telos* of Torah is to do exactly what Paul writes in continuation, "that is, to bring the Messiah down, or. . . that is, to bring the Messiah up from the dead. What, then, does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.'"¹⁵⁹ The Spirit brings forth *halakhah* from within and not without.¹⁶⁰

Those who would fuse *halakhah*, as defined by non-Messianic Rabbis, with that declared by Messianic Rabbis, and attach a consequence for its disobedience, have begun to ignore the

¹⁵⁶ For a full discussion of the mediatorial work of Messiah (as displayed within the Eucharist), uniting both Jew and gentile into one faith, see Sichel, 1-16.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. James 2.

¹⁵⁸ Rom. 10:4, CJB.

¹⁵⁹ Rom. 10:6-8, CJB.

¹⁶⁰ This is Paul's specific point in Galatians 5. The outward observance must be the inward transformation wrought by Messiah. Thus, *halakhah* comes forth from the believing community as a natural outpouring through constant submission to the Messiah. "Since it is through the Spirit that we have Life, let it also be through the Spirit that we order our lives day by day," Gal. 5:25, CJB.

second point of McGrath's summary of heterodoxy: righteousness comes only through continued faith in Jesus. Paul writes, "that if you acknowledge publicly with your mouth that *Yeshua* is Lord and trust in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be delivered. For with the heart one goes on trusting and thus continues toward righteousness, while with the mouth one keeps on making public acknowledgement and thus continues toward deliverance."¹⁶¹

Jewish identity is bound up in Jewish association, not with Torah by itself, but with Torah enfleshed, broken and sacrificed. Torah is then only lived through, by and with the Messiah living *in* the believer. Somehow missing this, Hashivenu's principles state, "The Torah is not a lesser revelation of Yeshua, like an uncompleted puzzle." However, this misses the goal; Torah was never the *telos*; it was never meant to be.¹⁶² All *halakhah*, and authority to define it, must come from those who have met *Halakhah* himself, the One to whom both Moses and Torah point. Messiah and his sacrifice must be the center about which all other things rotate. This is a Jesus-centric faith, for Torah enfleshed is *Immanu El*, "God with us." The identity of Messiah is paramount for the *telos* of Torah. Therefore, Christology, or the identity of Jesus as taught by Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, receives examination next.

Postmissionary Messianic Judaism and Christology

At the heart of the gospel message lies the incarnation of God in Jesus. From the announcement of his birth in Luke, to the prologue of John, the divinity of Jesus runs through the Gospels. Paul's epistles take that language and provide depth and breadth to the theology.

¹⁶¹ Rom. 10:9-10, CJB.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, Again, this seems to represent an inadequate exegesis of Hebrews. *Cf.*, Heb. 10:1, "For the *Torah* has in it a shadow of the good things to come, but not the actual manifestation of the originals. Therefore, it can never, by means of the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, bring to the goal those who approach the Holy Place to offer them," CJB. Also, *Cf.* Rom. 8:1-16. Torah cannot justify or sanctify, only Christ does by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paired with Peter’s “Great Confession” in Matthew, one finds Paul’s early Christian *credo*, “Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” in Philippians. Acknowledging the foundational aspects of these texts, Kinzer’s work affirms these basic Biblical truths and admits they form the structure on which Christian orthodoxy is based. In his 2010 paper, “Finding our Way through Nicaea: The Deity of Yeshua, Bilateral Ecclesiology and Redemptive Encounter with the Living God,” he writes, “Paul [and the Gospels offer] a Yeshua-faith interpretation of existing Jewish tradition, and the Nicene Creed offers an expanded interpretation of Paul’s teaching.”¹⁶³ The Creed adequately summarizes the Scriptural witness.

Kinzer then goes on to make some extremely positive statements about the importance of Nicene orthodoxy and the exalted position of the Creed within the faith. Notwithstanding the usual Messianic Jewish complaints about the antisemitic tone of Nicaea, which he details, he encourages continued commitment to the Creed and its message. He writes, “unlike supercessionism, antinomianism, the inquisition, and the blood-libel, it is inappropriate for us to ask our Christian partners to repent of the Nicene Creed. The Nicene consensus on Christology has endured. . . and continues to define the basic contours of the Christian faith.”¹⁶⁴ In fact, his paper addresses the tendency within Messianic Judaism to struggle directly with the question of Jesus’ divinity. Even so, contextualization moves to syncretism. Instead of arguing directly *for* the Creed, Kinzer advocates “interpreting” it, and his method of interpretation involves a troubling blend of Christian orthodoxy with Rabbinic Kabbalah.

To use similar cultural/religious imagery from the non-Christian faith to explain Christianity, sits at the heart of mission. However, as earlier noted, distinguishing pilgrimzation from indigenization is paramount. Andrew Walls pointed to the powerful position of Jesus as the

¹⁶³ Kinzer, “Finding our Way,” 16.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

distinguishing mark through history for every Christian community. Subsequently, whatever the cultural manifestation, the expression must carefully ensure its connection to the distinguishing historic markers for the Christian community, of which Nicaea is principal. In this case, Darrell L. Bock's criticism of Kinzer is significant, "Nicaea does not need to be *interpreted* but *explained*. Our priority is with God's vindication of Yeshua, which leads to affirmation of deity."¹⁶⁵

In addition, Kinzer directly questions the boundary status for Nicaea, wondering, "should we exclude from our midst those Messianic Jews who . . . deny the deity of Yeshua? I am not convinced we should."¹⁶⁶ Responding, Bock cautions, "[Nicaea] is a real boundary that needs affirmation as a boundary. If it does not function as such, then it is not credal. . . [indeed] is this role as boundary marker not its ultimate point?"¹⁶⁷ Thus, two questions emerge. Does Nicaea function as a boundary for orthodoxy which cannot be crossed? Secondly, is Kinzer's "interpretation" of Nicaea using Kabbalah legitimate, or is it syncretism leading to heterodoxy?

The Symbol of the Faith: Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Christology

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (*æons*), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Darrell L. Bock, "Response to Mark Kinzer's Finding Our Way through Nicaea: The Deity of Yeshua, Bilateral Ecclesiology and Redemptive Encounter with the Living God" (2010), http://www.hashivenu.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=73&Itemid=268, "Issues, 4," emphasis added.

¹⁶⁶ Kinzer, "Finding our Way," 30.

¹⁶⁷ Bock, "Issues, 6."

¹⁶⁸ Phillip Schaff and David S Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998) 1:28-29. Throughout this paper, I have used the term Nicaea and its derivatives to refer to the work done at both Nicaea and Constantinople. These two Councils worked in tandem to establish orthodoxy

The heart of what Christianity believes has come forward systematized in this creed, a creed written and hammered out by the Church Fathers for the specific purpose of defining what the Christian faith is, and what it is not. For this reason, it has taken the moniker “Symbol of the Faith,” and is the only profession of the faith accepted by the wide variety of churches in both East and West. Its strength is the language which defines the nature of the second Person of the Trinity, whom Christianity teaches is Jesus of Nazareth, God in the flesh. To confess this creed is the equivalent of confessing the Scriptures it summarizes. It fully answers Jesus’ proposition to Peter, “Who do you say that I am?”

As such, it has formed nothing less than a boundary for orthodoxy over sixteen centuries. While the Creed responds directly to certain issues and heresies arising within the very Greek context of the third century, its status as a catholic creed speaks to its character and ability to function in every context. Consider that when the gospel comes to any culture, the Creed comes with it. Whether missionaries attempt to contextualize Christianity to African pagan settings or the polytheistic cultures of Hindu India, in every case, the essence of Nicaea comes forward. The missionary presents the doctrines contained therein and attempts to explain those doctrines. The churches in all the world confess the Creed directly (or implicitly) in the doctrine they articulate. Schaff summarizes, “It is therefore more strictly an œcumenical Creed than [any other].”¹⁶⁹

It functions as a simple definer of orthodoxy because of what it claims about Jesus, echoing Scripture: “He is the visible image of the invisible God. He is supreme over all

in the midst of the Arian heresy. The Creed (without the Latin *filioque*), while technically called Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan, generally takes the shortened name, though meaning the dual Council form.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

creation.”¹⁷⁰ To claim anything less than full divinity for Jesus would distort or dilute the message of the gospel, so the Church Fathers responded to this heterodox idea which came from the Arian circles of the church. While Kinzer acknowledges this background in his discussions, he neglects dealing with the fact that Rabbinic Judaism would, in many ways, fall within this Arian stream as well. In essence, Rabbinic Judaism, which generally respects Jesus as a rabbi or a prophet, is no different than Arian Christianity, which understands Jesus to be the first of all creatures, but *still* a creature.¹⁷¹

While Kinzer states that “for a Jew to believe in Yeshua as the divine Son of God – and not just as the human Messiah . . . functioned as a mutually accepted litmus test for distinguishing authentic Judaism from authentic Christianity,”¹⁷² he neglects to mention that seeing Jesus as just the human Messiah, is essentially an Arian heterodoxy. To do as he suggests, and not use Jesus’ divinity as a boundary marker, would be to allow the same practice which Nicaea sought to eliminate. To say that “Affirmation of the deity of Yeshua and affirmation of the covenantal obligation of Torah . . . are our center, but they need not constitute our outer boundary,” means that Kinzer seeks a mixed body of Arian and Nicaean believers. Instead of insisting on the necessity of a Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Christ and properly explaining it, Kinzer begins to water down the doctrine with postcritical and kabbalistic interpretation.

Kinzer uses postcritical methods to imply that Nicaean Christology over-shouts Jesus divinity. He writes, “many [esp. Western] Christians have a diminished sense of the inner order and differentiation within the divine life, and order that was expressed in the early Yeshua-

¹⁷⁰ Col. 1:15, CJB.

¹⁷¹ Kertzer, 275-285. Most modern Jews would admire Jesus as a teacher on the level of the other Sages of his time.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 3.

community by its normal mode of worshipping the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.”¹⁷³

While not openly questioning the practice of worshipping Jesus directly, he implies that this practice is a latter mutation in Christian worship, unknown to Jewish concepts. Indeed, the Eastern Church does have a more developed understanding of the Triune relationship, with each person having a distinct and different role in the economy, but the Eastern church wouldn't extend that to questions about direct Son worship.¹⁷⁴ Also, to claim that early church Jewish sensibilities would not encourage direct Son worship would ignore the Biblical record of the Disciples worshipping the risen Jesus.¹⁷⁵ In reality, Kinzer attempts to subordinate the Son to the Father more than either Church practice (e.g. Eastern Christendom) or Scripture will allow.¹⁷⁶

Kinzer's syncretism arrives when he begins to equate Kabbalistic apparitions of God (theophanies) with the idea of the distinct personage of Jesus as the Son of God. To say that a theophany of God in an anthropomorphic form is an acceptable way to explain the incarnation would be to conspicuously misstate the uniqueness of the Son with respect to the Father.

However, that is exactly what Kinzer implies.¹⁷⁷ This struggle of distinction happens due to the intensity with which Jews confess the unity of God through the *Sh'ma*. Kinzer seems to want to avoid dealing with how to reconcile God's unity with his plurality in Trinity, and instead tries to make a Kabbalistic spiritual interpretation function over and against the Trinitarian doctrine. In fact, the descriptions Kinzer gives seem to approach the ancient heterodoxy of Modalism, where

¹⁷³ Kinzer, "Finding our Way," 24.

¹⁷⁴ See Phyllis Tickle, *The Age of the Spirit: How the Ghost of an Ancient Controversy Is Shaping the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014).

¹⁷⁵ Cf., Matt. 14:33 & 28:17. Note these verses lie in the most "Jewish" of the Gospel accounts.

¹⁷⁶ Kinzer, "Finding our Way," 18. While he claims that Jesus should not be a secondary level of divinity, he includes no corresponding language to equate the Father and the Son, as in the Athanasian Creed, for example.

¹⁷⁷ See Harvey's discussion, 125-126, "Kinzer's attempt to re-formulate incarnational thinking within the Jewish tradition can be challenged."

God merely takes on three different “forms” rather than exists as three distinct persons.¹⁷⁸

Again, returning to Schleiermacher’s test for orthodoxy, this would violate the first premise as to the nature of God, and the second premise as to the identity of Christ.

In the end, one must ask why Kinzer would seek some kind of reinterpretation of Nicaea as opposed to an explanation or contextualization of it? Bock seems to capture an answer in his criticism, “The issue is that Jesus divides and does so within Israel (Luke 2:34-35). Loyalty to him and his person means that if one must choose between a Judaism that does not recognize the exalted Messiah God spoke for in resurrection and a church that confesses him, one must choose for the church and her teaching.”¹⁷⁹ Kinzer is not willing to have to choose between his understanding of Judaism and a Jesus faith, claiming that to do so would be supersessionism. Yet, attempting to blend to antithetical positions is the very definition of syncretism.

The heart of Kinzer’s Christological formations rest in his assertion that Jesus, as a Jew, continues to mystically reside within the nation of Israel (as the covenant community), and because God’s eternal covenant with Israel remains, Jews as community, whether Messianic or not, function as the covenant bearers to the world (gentiles). Laying this out, Kinzer begins to reintroduce reliance on the ethnic indicator of Kertzler’s four markers writing, “Messianic Jews are born into the covenant with the patriarchs and matriarchs, and then discover its full meaning and power in Yeshua. When someone in our world rejects the deity of Yeshua, they are putting in jeopardy the full realization of their covenantal identity, but not their covenantal identity itself.”¹⁸⁰ What Kinzer seems to assert here runs afoul of Paul’s warnings in Romans 9-11, and confusing the “stump” for “broken off branches,” he attempts to graft broken branches back into

¹⁷⁸ See the discussions in McGrath, 244-245. Again, the idea of the incarnation vs. the *Sh'ma* continue to cause issues for Jewish contexts.

¹⁷⁹ Bock, “Issues, 7.”

¹⁸⁰ Kinzer, “Finding our Way,” 30.

the stump. In addition, he seems to neglect John the Baptist's warnings, as Bock expounds, "[John] warns us that biology alone is not enough to be in covenant. I think it is one thing to say Israel as a nation remains in covenantal hope (this I affirm), but that does not mean that hope is automatic for individual Jews or given generations of Jews."¹⁸¹

What Kinzer ignores, in his insistence on ethnic covenant status and Torah adherence, is that affirming Jesus as Messiah and God is *required* by Torah. Contrary to his assertions, when Jews reject Jesus, they are actually rejecting *both* their covenantal identity realization *and* their covenantal identity. They reject Torah enfleshed, and thus reject Torah *outright*. This is exactly the argument Paul makes in Philippians 3 where he counts his covenantal identity, *specifically*, "as rubbish," in comparison to gaining identity with Jesus. Torah without Jesus is essentially meaningless. To keep every commandment meticulously, but ignore Jesus is to break Torah. Therefore, Nicaea and the divinity of Jesus must continue to function as a boundary marker, not a center. That mutually agreed upon boundary marker has functioned for centuries because Rabbinic Judaism can be identified with neither Messianic Judaism nor Christianity.

What of Messianic Jews? Where does their identity lie? It may be as ethnically, culturally and spiritually Jewish, but it cannot lie with Rabbinic Judaism the religion. The *ekklesia* to which Mark Kinzer regularly refers includes those who are "in Messiah," whether Jew or gentile, slave or free, male or female.¹⁸² However, Kertzler's fourth marker, Jewish religion, refers unambiguously to Rabbinic Judaism as defined by Yavneh and following. This faith has definitively rejected Jesus as divine, and with him, Torah enfleshed. There are indeed

¹⁸¹ Bock, "Issues, 6," referring to Matt. 3:9-10, "And don't suppose you can comfort yourselves by saying, 'Avraham is our father'! For I tell you that God can raise up for Avraham sons from these stones! Already the axe is at the root of the trees, ready to strike; every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown in the fire!" CJB

¹⁸² Cf. Gal. 3:28.

Jews who have affirmed Jesus. God has re-grafted them into Paul's olive tree, along with the wild gentile olive shoots. However, Kinzer continues to ignore the fact that branches lie on the ground. Instead, he attempts to hold on to them and subsequently, claim their continued status as attached to the tree. John writes of this, "Unless a person remains united with me, he is thrown away like a branch and dries up. Such branches are gathered and thrown into the fire, where they are burned up."¹⁸³

Identity with Jesus transcends (but does not eliminate) ethnicity; however, identity in Jesus must find *priority* over all other associations. The church of Jesus, whether Jew or gentile bids us leave all other things behind.¹⁸⁴ Paul declares, "I consider *everything* a disadvantage in comparison with the supreme value of knowing the Messiah Yeshua as my Lord."¹⁸⁵ Only God grafts branches, and those who live in the vine must leave their association with the branches on the ground. Accordingly, we have come to the last item to examine: ecclesiology, specifically Postmissionary Messianic Judaism's insistence on what Mark Kinzer calls, "Bilateral Ecclesiology."

Bilateral Ecclesiology and Paul's Olive Tree

"[We believe] in one holy catholic and apostolic Church,"¹⁸⁶ declares the Nicene Creed. Postmissionary Messianic Judaism recognizes the central significance of the Creed. For though Kinzer contends, "The Creed need not remain immune to all criticism," he concludes "it should always be given the benefit of the doubt. . . [which] is sufficient reason to begin our study with

¹⁸³ Jn. 15:6, CJB.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Lk. 9, Matt. 8.

¹⁸⁵ Phil. 3:8, CJB, emphasis added, and the "everything" specifically includes Paul's list of covenant fidelity markers. In essence, Paul is willing to erase his Jewish identity if it were necessary, so that he could gain Jesus.

¹⁸⁶ Schaff, "The Constantinopolitan Creed," 29.

the Creed, viewed alongside Scripture and in light of Jewish thought.”¹⁸⁷ His suggestion seems to comport with other theological approaches coming from the Protestant perspective, which value the Great Tradition of the church, using it as a resource, along with reason, to understand Scripture. On this method, N.T. Wright helpfully comments, “Scripture is the bookshelf; tradition is the memory of what people in the house have read and understood (or perhaps misunderstood) from that shelf; and reason is the set of spectacles that people wear in order to make sense of what they read.”¹⁸⁸ Accordingly, study of Kinzer’s suggested “Bilateral Ecclesiology” can begin in like fashion.

The clause in the Creed applies four adjectives, “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” to modify the direct object of the statement, “Church.” “Church,” in the original Greek being, *ekklesia* (called-out ones). Kinzer’s writing focuses heavily on defining this particular word. He tends to use the Greek word to distinguish the larger Jesus-community from the gentile institution, the “Christian Church,” to which he insists that Messianic Jews do not belong. Instead, he argues that the earliest Jesus followers understood themselves as a part of corporate Israel, “called out,” as a sanctifying population, and the vehicle by which gentiles could unite to God’s covenant community: Israel.¹⁸⁹

In essence, ethnic Israel, both Jesus-following and non-Jesus-following were God’s chosen covenant populace, and gentiles would unite to God’s covenant populace by way of faith in Jesus, relating to all Israel via the Messianic subcommunity of the *ekklesia*. Kinzer writes,

¹⁸⁷ Kinzer, “Finding our Way,” 6.

¹⁸⁸ N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 102.

¹⁸⁹ Kinzer bases this idea on exegesis of Pauline text, which he outlines in Chapters 2 & 3, of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*. There, he re-exegetes many passages and, in light of the elimination of supersessionism, he concludes that “The Jewish people as a whole retains its position as a community chosen and loved by God.” That is, he seems to indicate that ethnicity trumps all other characteristics, and that the other three markers of Judaism, culture, spirituality and religion would continue for that community as paramount to all others.

“Given that the Jewish people as a whole remains in a community set apart for God, and that the Jewish segment of the *ekklesia* represents and sanctifies Israel, and that faithful Jewish practice requires extensive communal support . . . the Jewish branch of the twofold *ekklesia* must identify with the Jewish people as a whole and participate actively in its communal life.”¹⁹⁰ We note that Kinzer identifies a “twofold” nature of the *ekklesia* which he describes with the adjective, “bilateral – one reality subsisting in two forms.”¹⁹¹

The word bilateral carries the following definition, “disposed on opposite sides of an axis; two-sided [and] binding the parties [of a contract] to reciprocal obligations.”¹⁹² Presumably, Kinzer sees the *ekklesia* having two opposite pieces with two different roles to play within the salvific mission, and he indeed writes, “the one *ekklesia* must consist of two corporate subcommunities, each with its own formal or informal governmental and communal structures.”¹⁹³ Here, he seems to indicate that the two subcommunities operate united together with a common mission, albeit expressed in different ways. However, this conflicts with what he has written elsewhere, “Messianic Jews are not called to be representatives of the Christian community operating within another religious community (i.e. the Jewish people) but to be fully part of the Jewish world in both *religious* and *national* terms.”¹⁹⁴

Again, we see Kinzer returning to an antithetical religion for his locus of identity, and the reliance on ethnicity for covenantal status. With two of Kertzler’s markers, and this idea that

¹⁹⁰ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 152. Kinzer’s troubling concept of an invisibly present Messiah in the midst of non-believing Israel comes into play here. As others have criticized, Kinzer is incredibly vague as to how and what this has to do with Justification. See specifically, Mitch Glaser, “A Response by Mitch Glaser,” *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* (Winter/Spring 2006), http://www.kesherjournal.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17:a-response-by-mitch-glaser&catid=17:features&Itemid=420.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² C.L. Barnhart, ed., *American College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1962), s.v. “Bilateral.”

¹⁹³ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 152.

¹⁹⁴ Kinzer in Rudolph & Willits, ed., *Introduction to Messianic Judaism*, 132, emphasis added.

Messianic Jews belong in a different community than gentile Christians, perhaps the modifying adjective Kinzer seeks would be *bifurcated* as opposed to bilateral. While rightly repudiating supersessionism, which attempts to discard all Israel and its faith foundation, Kinzer's approach seems to artificially sanctify a non-believing community, and to unite Messianic Jews not to the community of Messiah, but to the community that has outrightly rejected Jesus. Kinzer's work seems to paint a picture of *two* communities, not one, which relate to one another not on equal and communal terms, but politely caring for one another as neighbors who go to dinner every once and again to enjoy each other's company. In fact, he writes, "[Messianic Jews] are to represent the Jewish community in relation to the Church, rather than the reverse."¹⁹⁵

This vision of two communities runs directly afoul of the Creed's modifier, "one" for "Church," and though David Stern unexpectedly responds to Kinzer's ecclesiology favorably, as an accurate representation of Paul's Olive Tree,¹⁹⁶ both men again ignore the fact that Paul's vision includes *broken off branches*. Paul does *ardently and emphatically* call on the wild branches remember their grafted status and not think highly of themselves, for they too can be broken off, if not more easily. But Paul envisions only *one* tree, holy and set apart, following the teachings of the apostles and the *Halakhah* that is Jesus. This *one* tree includes only Jesus-believing branches; for, the identity of the Trunk we learn from the Lord himself in John 15, "I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener."¹⁹⁷

Thus, we return back to the questions posed at the very beginning: those of identity. Who is the covenant community? What is the *ekklesia*, and what is its foremost identifying marker?

¹⁹⁵ Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, 132. Indeed, one might recollect the old adage that "good fences make good neighbors," and wonder how high Kinzer believes he needs to rebuild "the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility," (Eph. 2:14b, NIV).

¹⁹⁶ David H. Stern, "A Response by David H. Stern," *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* (Winter/Spring 2006), http://www.keshetjournal.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15:a-response-by-david-h-stern&catid=17:features&Itemid=420

¹⁹⁷ Jn. 15:1, CJB.

Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, in its laudable, but perhaps misguided attempt to eliminate supersessionism endeavors to locate identity back into Jewish ethnicity and religion. However, this ethnicity, as God has already proved in both Testaments, is inconsequential. Just as Paul writes to the gentiles, “don’t boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you,”¹⁹⁸ so too Messianic Jews would be reminded of the spiteful spirit of Jonah, sitting under the plant, steaming at God’s favor on the Ninevites. God says, “I show favor to whomever I will, and I display mercy to whomever I will.”¹⁹⁹

Therefore, who are the covenant community? Scripture answers resoundingly: those who are “in Messiah Jesus.”²⁰⁰ Who is a Jew? “For the real Jew is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical. On the contrary, the real Jew is one inwardly; and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that his praise comes not from other people but from God.”²⁰¹ And, as Stern writes in his Commentary, the one who is *not* in Messiah, “is a branch cut off from the tree, hence *not a Jew*.”²⁰² In essence, the community of the covenant are those who are in the Vine, and only those. “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, *members together of one body*, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”²⁰³

This Jesus has come “as the climax of [Israel’s] story,” writes N.T. Wright. “Jesus came . . . to rescue and renew that people, not to destroy it and replace it with something else. Israel is

¹⁹⁸ Rom. 11:18, CJB.

¹⁹⁹ Ex. 33:19 & Rom. 9:15, CJB.

²⁰⁰ Cf. e.g., Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 3:14, 5:17, Gal. 2:16-17, 3:26-28, 5:6, Eph. 1:13, 2:10-13, 3:16, etc. In addition, confusion exists about the covenant itself. Israel’s Torah is the *first* covenant document, which God states, “Both Israel and Judah have broken.” God’s covenant is *new*, just as the people of it is *new*. Cf., Jer. 31:31-33

²⁰¹ Rom. 2:28-29, CJB.

²⁰² Stern, “Romans 2:28-29,” 337, emphasis added. See also, Yoram Eisenberg, “Who Is a Jew?,” *Active Christianity* (blog), n.d., <https://activechristianity.org/who-is-a-jew>.

²⁰³ Eph. 3:16, NIV, emphasis added.

to be fulfilled, not replaced: [renewed]. God has fulfilled the promises to Abraham; now things can proceed in a new way.”²⁰⁴ This community is “Israel ±,” not “Israel and/or,” and that new way is defined by the covenant community through all times, by all cultures, traditions and ethnicities. It is that diverse, yet unified community which Andrew Walls’ time-traveler witnessed. Those who form the covenant community are those who are united in Jesus as Messiah and Lord, whether Jew or gentile, as the true Israel, finding its identity in Torah enfolded.

As for Postmissionary Messianic Judaism and ecclesiology, Kinzer should admit that this is no longer the age of Constantine’s Rome, in which the empire’s unity forces only one expression of Christianity. The beauty of the Protestant vision is the colorful variety of faith expressions which each contribute to the tapestry of the people of God. No longer is there a central authority dictating “the chief negative commandment, ‘You shall not observe the Torah.’” Consequently, Messianic Jews can be full partners with Christian gentiles, not “as members of the [Rabbinic] Jewish religious community and heirs of its tradition,”²⁰⁵ but as members of Israel expanded and bound together in Christ, each expressing their devotion to that Christ in properly contextualized forms, teaching and helping one another serve him better.

Syncretism to Heterodoxy, Conclusions

It seems that in every subject investigated: Torah’s authority and role, Christology, and ecclesiology, Postmissionary Messianic Judaism attempts a blending syncretic system, uniting Rabbinic Judaism with faith in Christ. Further, this syncretism develops into heterodoxy, displacing *Yeshua hamashiach* as Mediator, Savior, Justifier and Sanctifier of the covenant

²⁰⁴ N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 112.

²⁰⁵ Kinzer, “Finding our Way,” 3.

community. Elevating rabbinic authority as defined in Yavneh over that which came from the Lord to the apostles, this theology seeks to prioritize Rabbinic Judaism's *halakhah* over Jesus the *Halakhah, Haggadah* and *Hachaim*. In so doing, those who have rejected Jesus become the "binders" and "loosers" of the covenant, and righteousness finds definition in Torah observance, not union with Messiah. Consequently, questions of Christology arise and find answer not in the historic orthodoxy of Nicaea, contextualized to meet a culture, but in a Christ reimagined in *Kabbalistic* visions to mollify a culture continually stumbling over the deity of Jesus.²⁰⁶ Rabbinic Judaism sees an Arian Jesus, and Postmissionary Messianic Judaism is not willing for that to be a boundary of orthodoxy. Then, seeking its identity with that same religious and ethnic community, instead of the new family of united Jew and gentile, this theology sees a bifurcated *ekklesia*, separated by Torah observance, ethnicity, mission and identity.

In his 2015 evaluation of Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, David Rudolph concludes, "Basic Jewish practice for Jews is related to covenant fidelity from the apostolic perspective. It is on this point that the case for Postmissionary Messianic Judaism ultimately stands or falls,"²⁰⁷ and based on the above, the case can be made that it ultimately falls. Concerns immediately exist with the continuation of this movement regarding to its relationships with gentile Christians and the greater church, its faithful communication of the gospel and its status within catholic orthodoxy. While Rudolph may be correct, that Postmissionary Messianic Judaism "has raised the level of theological discourse in the Messianic Jewish community,"²⁰⁸ the conclusions drawn

²⁰⁶ Cf., Matt 21, Acts 4, Rom. 9:30-33, & 1 Cor. 1:23, and Gregory Nazianzen, "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation, or clothe the Savior only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity," *Select Letters of Saint Gregory Nazianzen* Ep. CI (NPNF 2/7:440).

²⁰⁷ Rudolph, "The Impact of Postmissionary Messianic Judaism," 3.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

by Kinzer and their further implications for Christology and soteriology divides Messianic Judaism from orthodox Jesus faith. Therefore, a different vision of Messianic Judaism, more in line with historic orthodoxy would be in order.

Messianic Judaism as a Positive Anchor for the *Ekklesia*

Returning to Harvey's spectrum of Messianic Jewish theology, a framework that preserves Jewish ethnicity, culture and spirituality without syncretizing rabbinic Jewish religion, would accomplish the original goals sought by Messianic Judaism. That would fall near the cusp at the fourth or fifth type. However, Harvey writes that advocates of the fifth type, Traditional Judaism and the Messiah, "cannot be easily aligned, as their thinking has not fully emerged and it is difficult to locate their contribution precisely."²⁰⁹

On the other hand, Type 4 – New Testament Halacha, Charismatic and Evangelical, occupies a leading position among the existing Messianic Jewish community, and Harvey comments, "It is the dominant influence within the UMJC and integrates belief in Jesus as Messiah with Jewish tradition. It expresses Christian orthodoxy within a Jewish cultural and religious matrix, seeing a prophetic and restorative role for Messianic Judaism in the renewal of both Judaism and Christianity."²¹⁰ This theology would seem to fit the contextual requirements of missiology, preserve the Judaic character sought and fit within the bounds of historic orthodoxy. This framework has already influenced the renewal task Harvey suggested, and here we might consider just a sketch of the various impacts.

Messianic Judaism and Gentile Church Renewal

²⁰⁹ Harvey, 271.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

Messianic Judaism has much to offer the greater Jesus community, especially in the study of ethics and interreligious theology. God has always operated a business of redemption, and in the case of antisemitism, the sin ran deep and long. Beginning with the New Paul perspective popularized by E.P. Sanders and N.T. Wright, gentile Christians have begun to re-appreciate the Jewishness of their faith and learned to read the whole Bible from different perspective. Especially in Western Christianity since the Middle Ages, the church has approached ethics from a Natural Law standpoint, rather than written revelation. This mode works well when the prevailing culture is grounded in a Judeo-Christian worldview, but in the ever increasing secularization of society, Natural Law without a theistic foundation falls apart. Christians must once again remember how to be a “peculiar people,” and who better to show the way than those whose carry that very identity?

In his Introduction to *Exploring our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal*, Marvin R. Wilson writes, “Christians are becoming more sensitized to the Jewish Scriptures – especially the foundational value of Torah – the commentaries, and the essential teachings of Judaism. In this contemporary conversation, Christians are coming to discover and understand their indebtedness to Jews and Judaism.”²¹¹ If the boundaries remain where they should vis-à-vis orthodoxy, the vast array of literature on cultural and religious Judaism can only serve to enhance and enrich the way that Christians form their ethics.

This work has already begun with thoughtful scholars trying to revisit how Torah can function not as a covenant identity method (for covenant identity is in Messiah), but as a foundation for living the life Messiah actually brings. Torah must be the locus for how

²¹¹ Marvin R. Wilson, *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), xvii.

Christians answer the question, “How now shall we live?”²¹² Here, the Messianic Jew in dialogue and learning with the gentile Christian, can help bridge gaps, especially in the area of Old Testament study and application. As Wilson comments, “In the corrupt and hedonistic society surrounding the young churches of the Mediterranean world, pastors of emerging flocks drew particular inspiration from the fresh apostolic teachings and also from the Old Testament Scriptures.”²¹³ The secular West, now looking much like that of ancient pagan Rome, could use a reinvigorated ethic based on Torah as a reflection of the heart of God.²¹⁴ In so doing, Jesus’ words become meaningful, “So then, every *Torah*-teacher who has been made into a *talmid* for the Kingdom of Heaven is like the owner of a home who brings out of his storage room both new things and old.”²¹⁵

Israel, the Elect of God

Since the Holocaust, Christianity has had to completely re-evaluate its theology of Judaism, knowing that 1,700 years of antisemitism culminated in the Holocaust’s attempt to cut off its own nose to spite its face. It must learn to recognize that there will be no Christianity if there is no Israel and no Judaism.²¹⁶ Christianity’s relationship with Judaism, unlike that with the other religions of the world, is unique. Granted, Rabbinic Judaism is a religion bereft of Jesus, and it has no justifying power. Hence, it is important to guard against “dual covenant”

²¹² The work of Christopher J.H. Wright and Markus Bockmuehl is breaking new ground in this area. See Wright’s, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2004), and Bockmuehl’s *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). For the decline of culture and the need for a new view of ethics, see Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2005).

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 268.

²¹⁴ For how this concept works out, see See David A. Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 3 (September, 1991) and James M. Todd III, *Sinai and the Saints: Reading Old Covenant Laws for the New Covenant Community* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017)

²¹⁵ Matt. 13:52, CJB.

²¹⁶ McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 131-134.

theology, or the idea that Jews can be justified in the system of the Old Covenant. To move in that direction would be to ignore both the terms of the first covenant and its purpose.

Nevertheless, gentiles must find a middle ground between supersessionist readings of the New Testament and theology that advocates for salvation outside of Jesus Christ. Messianic Israel has a prominent place in Scripture's vision of the church.

Ours is an age of mutual learning and dialogue as opposed to confrontation. "Though polemics still marks much missionary apologetics – arguing *against* rabbinic Judaism," writes Gerald McDermott, "the trend has increasingly been to argue *for* the Jewishness of Jesus and the continued identity of those who follow him . . . [and] still largely excluded from the Jewish-Christian dialogues, Messianic Jews nevertheless bring a critical factor into the theological arena."²¹⁷ Missionary work must continue with and to Jews, just as with every religion and culture. More so, provided the Messianic Jewish voice operates within the realm of orthodoxy, Messianic Jews become a dynamic partner in dialogue for both gentile Christians and Rabbinic Jews. They become an interpreter to and for both communities.

Lastly, Israel, both the land and the people, feature prominently in Scripture through to the Revelation. In some powerful way, God promises that Israel will figure into the eschaton. Many of the words in prophecy remain obscure and dim; however, without a doubt, God has chosen Israel to be his nation. Even if one understands that to be only those members of the nation of Israel in Jesus Christ, gentile Christians should reach out with open arms to those whom God ordained to be a light to the nations. McDermott concludes, "As [Karl] Barth suggested, the Chosen People, in some way we do not understand, have the hand of God on

²¹⁷ Gerald R. McDermott, "Judaism: Theological Exchanges," in *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices*, ed. Terry C. Muck, Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

them, and when the nations encounter them, they are encountering God. Similarly, we gentiles enter into God's providential administration of his ongoing redemption when we encounter Israel as a people."²¹⁸

What Paul exactly meant when he wrote, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved,"²¹⁹ may be difficult to understand; however, certainly, Messianic Jews who know Jesus as Savior and Lord represent some fruits of this passage. As Paul called on the gentiles in the Mediterranean to pour themselves out in support of the Messianic Jews of Jerusalem,²²⁰ so the gentile church should pour itself out in support of those of God's chosen people who share the faith of Jesus. In this way, the church will fulfill the true vision of Paul's twisted together olive tree, grafted into the Vine, united in Jesus. In actual fact, both natural and wild branches, Jew and gentile must be grafted and *re-grafted*. Consequently, we end where we began, with Paul's vision for the church, both Jew and gentile, in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."²²¹

May it be so.

²¹⁸ McDermott, "Israel Matters," 128.

²¹⁹ Rom. 11:26, NIV.

²²⁰ See 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:1-9:15; Rom 15:14-32, as well as the theological implications thereof in David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

²²¹ Eph. 2:19-22, NIV.

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