



Judaism—The True Religion?

I. Introduction

- a. Part Seven: “How do we relate to Judaism and Christianity?”
 - i. The Messianic Jewish Movement is not a sect or hybrid of Judaism or Christianity
 - ii. It is a prophetic, firstfruits restoration of the Jewish people to God
- b. Previous Session: Many come in with a chip on their shoulder: “The Church is Apostate”
 - i. Noted several areas of disconnect between the traditional Christianities and the Messianic Jewish movement
 - ii. Despite incompatibilities and the very real possibility that the Church may indeed be apostate, there still remains some common ground
 - 1. The authority (and content) of Scripture
 - 2. The humanity, deity, Messiahship, and atoning work of Yeshua
- c. Purpose of this session: to explore the phenomenon of Christians running away from the Church screaming, “The Church is apostate!” headlong toward the Messianic Jewish movement shouting, “The True religion!” (a “fulfilled” Judaism)
 - i. Examine the attraction many (especially Gentiles) have toward the traditions and teachings of Judaism
 - ii. Explore different facets of Judaism in an attempt to determine how we can relate to it as Messianic Jews
- d. Reiteration for the sake of context
 - i. Torah keeping, Talmudic observances, and living culturally Jewish lifestyles are three distinct goals.
 - ii. As Messianic Jews, we have a responsibility to the Jewish community—to maintain a connection with our fellow Jews, past, present and future, yet not at the expense of the Word.
 - iii. We do not disparage or denigrate traditions, however, we must recognize that the Judaisms of the past 2,000 years are Judaisms that flatly reject Yeshua as Messiah. Rejection of Yeshua calls into question all doctrines and beliefs as the developed during the last two millennia.

II. The Religion Swap

Sunday worship attendance	For	Shabbat worship attendance
Christmas (winter holiday/gift giving)	For	Chanukah (winter holiday/gift giving)
Easter (Resurrection Sunday)	For	Passover and “First fruits”
Worship	For	Torah study
Unformulated prayers	For	Traditional prayers
Crosses	For	Stars of David

- b. Adoption of Jewish cultural practices
 - i. Tallit and kippah for men / women’s prayer shawls and head coverings
 - ii. “Yiddish-kite”—stereotypical Brooklyn Jew imitation

- c. While cultural expressions often accompany our spiritual beliefs, it does not necessarily follow that when one's spiritual beliefs change that they automatically undergo a severe cultural change as well. Consider Acts 15:28-29.
- d. Some come through the door having pre-prepared their Jewishness, and they are either oblivious to the congregational expression, or they don't care. This indicates several problems:
 - i. We as a movement are not adequately self-defined
 - ii. As a movement, we have not yet established a clear purpose and mission for the Gentile believers among us
 - iii. Our congregations are not well-founded on community ideals and priorities, but are still mostly just collections of individuals with individualistic needs and desires (root problem everywhere).
- e. Being Messiah-like and Jewishness are not one and the same. Following Yeshua and living according to the Judaisms are two completely different things.

III. Concerns About Judaism

- a. Judaism's legacy
 - i. Preservation of Hebrew language and Scriptures
 - ii. Continual reminder of dispersion through cultural identity
 - iii. Unique heritage, religion and history
- b. Rabbinic Authority
 - i. Authority for how to live a Jewish life comes not from Scripture, nor from God, but from the Rabbis.
 - 1. Jewish Encyclopedia (Kohler) on Rabbinical Authority— "The power or right of deciding the Law, in dubious cases, or of interpreting, modifying, or amplifying, and occasionally of abrogating it, as vested in the Rabbis as its teachers and expounders."
 - 2. Authority to change the written Torah; Pirke Avot ("men of the Great Synagogue"); "make a fence to the Torah"
 - 3. This is the filter through which we must view the teachings of the Rabbis: part of their manifold purpose was to exert their authority over Scripture.
 - ii. Everyman's Talmud by Abraham Cohen (excerpts p. 147)
 - 1. Hillel: "So must you likewise depend upon me for the interpretation of the Torah" (Shab.31a)
 - 2. Num. R. XIV. 10: "The Holy One, blessed be He, gave Israel two Torot." The written given in order "to fill them with precepts whereby they could earn merit." The oral "whereby they could be distinguished from the other nations."
 - 3. By using the term "Ishmaelites," Christians are meant. "Since the Church adopted the Hebrew Scriptures, they ceased to be the peculiar possession of Jews. Therefore the Oral Torah, which was not accepted by the Church, safeguarded the distinctiveness of the Jewish people living in a Christian environment."
 - 4. Conclusion
 - a. Judaism has two Torahs (one written, one oral)
 - b. We must rely on the Rabbis for the interpretation of Torah
 - c. The Oral Law was given so that Israel could be distinguished among the Christian nations

- iii. This puts Messianic Jews in a tough spot
 - 1. One possible solution: adopt Rabbinics in general while taking issue with their authority and specific teachings that contradict Scripture
 - 2. Support for this solution: the Rabbis' teachings sometimes parallel those of Yeshua and the apostles.
 - 3. Let's put this to the test: Do the teachings of the Rabbis provide us with significant insight into the Scriptures that the Scriptures themselves do not already reveal?
 - a. The "Golden Rule" example
 - i. Comparison
 - 1. Matthew 7:12, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Torah and the Prophets."
 - 2. Shabbat 31a (Hillel), "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah."
 - ii. It bears a resemblance to Yeshua's words, therefore, it is possible to find parallels of Yeshua's teachings in Talmud
 - iii. Does Hillel give us insight into Yeshua's teaching?
 - 1. Does resemblance indicate influence? Did the Master learn how to expound on Torah from the Rabbis?
 - 2. Luke 2:40-47, "And the child [Yeshua] grew and was strengthened in spirit, being filled with wisdom... and when he became twelve years old... they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and questioning them, and all those hearing him were astonished at his understanding and answers."
 - b. Interaction is not tantamount to influence. Resemblance only reinforces Yeshua's connection with His Jewish people.
 - 4. I wholeheartedly reject the notion that any amount of Yeshua's teachings was not original—that he simply reiterated or agreed with the various teachings of the day. Where we find parallels between the words of Yeshua and the teachings of the Talmud, or of certain sects of Judaism, to me, this neither bolsters the validity of Yeshua's words, nor elevates the wisdom of the Rabbis. It simply reinforces Yeshua's Jewishness and His connection with His people.
- iv. Even though we may take exception with specific teachings and do not accept their authority over Scripture, should we nevertheless grant the Rabbis a special place of influence in our lives?
 - 1. The Rabbis have value insofar as they constitute the foundational doctrines of post-Temple Judaism
 - 2. This does not translate into them being reliable, useful teachings
 - 3. Post-Temple Judaism was not founded on the Scriptures, but on the teachings and authority of the Rabbis.
 - 4. At minimum, this should cause us to be concerned with any proposal that the Messianic Jewish Movement should be a "renewed, developed, or contextually reapplied" Messianic version of Rabbinic Judaism.

5. If the problem is, “How do we as Messianic Jews retain our distinctiveness—even in the Body of Messiah—as Jews?” the solution is not Rabbinic Judaism.
- c. Kabbalah
 - i. Many don’t realize how embedded Kabbalah is in modern Judaism. I STRONGLY URGE YOU TO NOT PURSUE OR LEARN MORE ABOUT KABBALAH UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES!
 - ii. Four definitions from the Jewish Encyclopedia
 1. Kabbalah—The specific term for the esoteric or mystic doctrine concerning God and the universe... as a revelation to elect saints... under the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy
 2. The Ten Sefirot—Potencies or agencies by means of which, according to the Cabala, God manifested His existence in the production of the universe... metaphysical... the corner-stone of the Cabala... based upon the Neoplatonic conception of God and the theory of emanation. **According to this doctrine, all that exists has been produced not by any creative power, but as successive emanations from the Godhead; so that all finite creatures are part and parcel of the Divine Being. These emanations, or intelligences as they are called, are the intermediary agents between the intellectual and the material worlds.**
 3. The Zohar—pretends to be a revelation from God... under the form of a commentary on the Pentateuch... contains a complete cabalistic theosophy [philosophy of God]
 4. Metatron—Name of an angel found only in Jewish literature... Elisha b. Abuyah... believed there were “two powers” or divinities. Metatron bears the Tetragrammaton... early commentators... identified the prince of the world with Metatron... he is, moreover, Enoch.
 - iii. From Essential Judaism (Robinson)—Jewish mysticism has influenced both ritual and liturgy... The influence of Kabbalah can be felt in the observance of the festivals, too... But the ultimate marker of the influence of mysticism in Judaism is not necessarily the specific changes in ritual or liturgy that it brought about. **Rather, it is the philosophical shift that underlies Jewish belief.**
 - iv. There is a growing interest among Messianics in Kabbalah. And why not? It permeates Jewish thought and practice. Just because we find something in Jewish teachings that bears a resemblance to Scripture, it does not mean that we should follow that teaching or find out more of what it says. Let’s not forget Paul’s warning in 2Co.11:14, “For even the Adversary transforms himself into a messenger of light.”
- d. More questionable Jewish practices
 - i. Gematria—according to TorahTots.com (for Jewish kids), “... an entire discipline of Jewish mysticism... devoted to finding hidden meanings in the numerical value of words.”
 1. Jewish encyclopedia—Jewish numerology... the principle on which Gematria rests... is essentially the same as that which is found in the Cabala
 2. Jewish numerology is still numerology. At best, it’s nonsense, at worst, it’s witchcraft.

- ii. Mezuzah
 - 1. Jewish Book of Why—In Talmudic time it was believed that the mezuzah possessed protective powers, that it could ward off evil spirits. [According to] the Zohar... the acronym Shaddai is to appear on the mezuzah... because its three letters are a synonym for God... “protector of the doors of Israel.”
 - 2. The traditional mezuzah is marked with the shin because of an ancient Kabbalistic belief in the mezuzah’s mystical, protective powers against evil spirits.
- iii. Magen David / Star of David
 - 1. Essential Judaism—The hexagram was believed to have magical powers and... used interchangeably by Arab mystics... the first written association of the magic of the hexagram with King David occurs in the Koran.... Purported to have great protective powers...
 - 2. Essential Judaism—Adopted as a printer’s mark by Jewish printing houses... by the nineteenth century... had become a standard Jewish symbol, an attempt to imitate Christian use of the cross. By then its roots in mysticism had been long forgotten.
- iv. Glass-breaking (Jewish wedding ceremony)
 - 1. Jewish Book of Why—...it was believed that the most effective deterrent to evil spirits and demons is noise
 - 2. Jewish Book of Why—The Kabbalists believed that demons are intent upon disturbing the happiness of the new couple and that by smashing and destroying a glass, the evil spirits will be satisfied.
- e. I find it interesting that many coming into the Messianic Jewish movement often reject Christian icons and practices that have roots in paganism, yet wholeheartedly adopt Jewish icons and practices that have roots in Jewish mysticism or superstition. If we’re going to criticize the Church for the abundance of pagan influence in its 2,000-year development, then we are mere hypocrites if we do not turn the same critical eye toward our beloved Judaism.

IV. Judaism—The True Religion?

- a. Summary so far
 - i. The religion swap—how people, especially Gentiles, tend to begin restoring their “Jewish roots” by swapping one set of superficial religious practices for another.
 - ii. Concerns about Judaism
 - 1. Authority of the Rabbis vs. Authority of Scripture
 - a. Rabbinic Judaism fundamentally incompatible with being a disciple of Messiah
 - b. Rabbinic teachings have intrinsic value, but this does not mean they should be renewed and Messianized
 - 2. Kabbalism—how it has infiltrated even the most innocent of Jewish traditions
- b. Reminder of my perspective—not a low view of Judaism
 - i. Torah-keeping, Talmudic observances and living a culturally Jewish lifestyle are three distinct goals. My relatively low view of Talmud compared to Scripture doesn’t affect my view of Torah or culture.

- ii. Kabbalah's infiltration of Jewish traditions doesn't lead me to have a negative view of Jewish culture—it only causes me to consider each Jewish practice on an individual basis. I do not personally have any need to monolithically adopt the whole of Judaism's culture in order to have a positive view of Judaism, nor to better display my Jewishness in everyday life. On the contrary, it is because nothing in my faith requires me to have such a view that I can look favorably upon Judaism and interact positively with it in my family and community life.
- iii. Judaism and the Jewish people are not inseparable. Contrary to many who are enamored with Judaism in spite of the Jewish people, even if I had a completely negative view toward Judaism (which I don't) that would not affect how I feel about my Jewish people, of whom I am a part, and from whom I am inseparable.
- c. Final thoughts
 - i. Many come into the Messianic Jewish movement thinking that they have found a true religion—the religion of Yeshua, an ancient, Biblical way of life. The fact of the matter is, the Judaisms are just as flawed and tainted by the world as the Christianities—and possibly even more so.
 - ii. Not all Jewish practice comes from mysticism or superstition, but a lot of it does. As Messianic Jews, our first line of identification with our fellow Jews is our lineage, not our practice—our Jewishness, not our Judaism.
 - iii. Our attitude toward Judaism should be one of respect, not reverence. We are obligated to fully understand the traditions and consider their effects before adopting or keeping them as our own.
 - iv. If Judaism were just another world religion, we wouldn't even be considering these traditions. As Jews, we have to come to terms with Judaism as part of our culture and identity.
 - v. Jewish traditions should be kept out of respect for and connection with the people—not as an effort to appear or feel more Jewish.
 - vi. Like any extra-Scriptural belief or practice, the teachings of Judaism must take a back seat to the teachings of Scripture. We find our fullness as Jews in the life of Messiah as we identify with Him.
 - vii. The purpose of the Messianic Jewish movement is not to find a true Christianity or to restore a true Judaism, but to participate in a prophetic movement of God's Spirit that will restore the Jewish people as a chosen nation, so that we can, in turn, be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. The Jewish goal of the Messianic movement is not to renew Judaism, but to be a renewed Jewish people—fully embracing our peoplehood and identity as Jews, yet leading the return of our people to God.
 - viii. Judaism may be the religion of our fathers, but "true" religion, according to Ya'akov 1:27, "pure and undefiled with our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their tribulation, and unspotted, to keep oneself from the world."