



CHAPTER 2

Messianic Jewish Synagogues

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When Agudas Shalom Synagogue burned down, along with its Torah scrolls, prayer books, and library, the president of the synagogue, Sheldon, was so depressed that he couldn't get out of bed. The insurance adjuster asked, "What's wrong? The synagogue is totally insured." Sheldon didn't respond. Sheldon's friend from the synagogue came by and said, "We will rebuild the synagogue!" Still no stir. Finally, Rabbi Gervitz visited Sheldon and reminded him, "We are the same synagogue community today that we were before the fire." The president of the synagogue opened his eyes, nodded in agreement with the rabbi, and stepped out of bed.

A synagogue is above all a sacred community of Jewish people who gather for worship, prayer, study, benevolence, social justice, lifecycle events, outreach, and other Jewish community activities.¹ What distinguishes Messianic synagogues² from mainstream synagogues is the centrality of Yeshua, the prominent place of the New Testament, and the presence of Gentile followers of Yeshua who come alongside Messianic Jews to build a congregation for Yeshua within the house of Israel.

Community Life

On a typical Shabbat (Sabbath) morning, prior to the main service, Messianic synagogues often have an adult education class that meets to study the *parsha* (the Torah reading for the week) and a related New Testament text. As the hour for the morning service approaches, musicians are heard finishing their practice, and prayer among the leaders typically takes place in the rabbi's office.

The Messianic Shabbat service is more upbeat than the traditional synagogue service. Modeled after worship described in the Psalms of David, Messianic Jewish services commonly incorporate song, dance, and instrumental music, along with Hebrew liturgy from the *siddur* (prayer book).³ Although the average Messianic synagogue service includes instrumental music and dancing, some Messianic Jewish

1. Ron Wolfson, *The Spirituality of Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation into a Sacred Community* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2007), 144–45; Sidney Schwartz, *Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2003), 11–49, 226–68.

2. The earliest extant reference to a Messianic "synagogue" is Jas 2:2, "Suppose a man comes into your synagogue [*sunagoge*] wearing a gold ring and fancy clothes, and also a poor man comes in dressed in rags" (CJB) See chapter 1 of this volume for details about the Jerusalem Messianic Jewish community led by Ya'akov (James), the brother of Yeshua.

3. Shoshanah Feher, *Passing Over Easter: Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira, 1998), 139.



congregations follow a more classic synagogue model. High Holy Day services in Messianic synagogues tend to be more traditional and replete with Hebrew liturgy.⁴

The average length of a Messianic Shabbat service is two hours, and most congregations enjoy an *Oneg Shabbat* (a lunch and fellowship time) afterward,⁵ followed by activities. Some synagogues have a *havdalah* service on Saturday evenings to mark the departure of Shabbat.

Larger Messianic Jewish congregations usually have weekly meetings for teens, college students, twentysomethings, young marrieds, and other social circles within the community. The Shabbat/Hebrew school program prepares children for *bar/bat mitzvah*. *Chavurah* (fellowship) groups are venues to socialize, pray, and study together. Many synagogues have adult education institutes that offer courses on books of the Bible, Jewish history, Hebrew, and other areas relevant to Messianic Jewish life and thought.

Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel, is central to Messianic Jewish congregational life.⁶ He is the sustaining focus in every aspect of the synagogue. This is because, from a Messianic Jewish perspective, Yeshua is divine and participates in the unique identity of the God of Israel:

The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations holds that the One GOD, the GOD of creation, the GOD of Israel, the GOD of our ancestors, of Whom our tradition speaks, reveals Himself uniquely, definitively, and decisively in the life, death, resurrection, and return of Yeshua the Messiah.

Yeshua is the incarnation of the Divine WORD through Whom the world was made, and of the Divine GLORY through Whom GOD revealed Himself to Israel and acted in their midst. He is the living Torah, expressing perfectly in His example and teaching the Divine purpose for human life. Yeshua is completely human and completely divine.

As the risen Messiah and the heavenly Kohen Gadol (High Priest), Yeshua continues to mediate GOD's relationship to His people Israel, to those of the nations who have joined the greater commonwealth of Israel in Him, and to all creation. GOD's plan of salvation and blessing for Israel, the nations, and the entire cosmos

4. David J. Rudolph, "Contemporary Judeo-Christian Communities in the Jewish Diaspora," in *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture 1* (ed. M. Avrum Ehrlich; Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 146.

5. For *Oneg Shabbat*, members and regular visitors bring dishes without pork or shellfish (Lev 11). Some Messianic synagogues also avoid mixing milk and meat. For a Messianic Jewish perspective on Israel's dietary laws, see Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, Mo.: First Fruits of Zion, 2012); Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle* (Clarksville, Md.: Lederer, 1996), 97–110; David J. Rudolph, "Yeshua and the Dietary Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b," *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 16 (2003): 97–119; David J. Rudolph, "Jesus and the Food Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b," *Evangelical Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2002): 291–311. Online: <http://www.mjstudies.com>.

6. Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, "Introducing Messianic Judaism and the UMJC" (Albuquerque: UMJC, 2010), 1–26. Online: <http://www.mjstudies.com>. Cf. Daniel C. Juster, *Growing to Maturity: A Messianic Jewish Discipleship Guide* (Clarksville, Md.: Messianic Jewish Resources International, 2011), 155–56; Sam Nadler, *Establishing Healthy Messianic Congregations: Planters, Planting, and Planning* (Charlotte: Word of Messiah Ministries, 2011), 12; Russell L. Resnik, *The Root and the Branches: Jewish Identity in Messiah* (Albuquerque: Adat Yeshua, 1997), 142.

is fulfilled only in and through Yeshua, by virtue of His atoning death and bodily resurrection, and God's gift of life to both Jews and Gentiles, in this world and in the world to come, is bestowed and appropriated only in and through Him.⁷

The Messianic Jewish lifestyle and lifecycle points back to Yeshua's story: his life, his mission, and his displays of love, grace, and healing. This reflects the mindset that "Messianic Judaism is Judaism, in all facets of its teaching, worship, and way of life, understood and practiced in the light of Messiah Yeshua."⁸ Messianic Jews express their initial public identification with Yeshua through *tevilah* (immersion in water) in keeping with Yeshua's commandment (Matt 28:18–20). In Messianic synagogues, *tevilah* services often coincide with the fall and spring festivals.⁹

Messianic synagogues observe all of the major Jewish festivals and distinguish themselves from other Jewish congregations by interpreting festival tradition in light of Yeshua the Messiah. Rather than creating a new festival tradition, Messianic Jewish congregations enter into conversation with the present tradition and adapt it as needed to reflect their distinct beliefs.¹⁰

The typical Messianic synagogue mirrors the traditional synagogue when it comes to Jewish lifecycle events. Messianic Jewish boys are circumcised on the eighth day as a sign of the everlasting covenant between God and the Jewish people (Gen 17:9–13). It is a joyous community affair. Family members and friends from the synagogue are invited to the parents' home, where the ceremony takes place. Because there are only a few Messianic Jewish *mohelim* (covenant surgeons), parents typically employ a *mohel* from the wider Jewish community who is not Messianic. As part of the ceremony, the Messianic rabbi will read biblical texts about the covenant of circumcision (*brit milah*), usually including mention of Yeshua's circumcision in Luke 2:21, and offer up blessings and prayers over the child. The ceremony is followed by a *seudah* (party).¹¹

In some congregations, *brit milah* is combined with a baby-naming ceremony, where a Hebrew name is conferred on the male infant. The baby is brought to the front of the synagogue, where dedicatory prayers are offered up, with the *zakenim* (elders) of the congregation present alongside the parents and the baby. In the case of

7. Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, "Statement on the Identity of Yeshua," November 12, 2003. Cited 1 March 2012. Online: <http://www.umjc.org/home-mainmenu-1/faqs-mainmenu-58/14-umjc-faq/17-who-is-yeshua>. See Richard Harvey, "Yeshua the Messiah: The Shaping of Messianic Jewish Christology," in *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2009), 96–139; Mark S. Kinzer, "Finding Our Way through Nicaea: The Deity of Yeshua, Bilateral Ecclesiology, and Redemptive Encounter with the Living God," *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 24 (2010): 29–52. Cited 1 March 2012. Online: <http://www.kesherjournal.com/Issue-24/Finding-our-Way-Through-nicaea-The-Deity-of-Yeshua-bilateral-Ecclesiology-and-Redemptive-Encounter-with-the-Living-God>; Akiva Cohen, "The Christology of Matthew's Gospel and the Trinitarian Baptismal Formula," *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 39 (2003): 59–64; Michael Schiffman, "Messianic Jews and the Tri-Unity of God," in *Return of the Remnant: The Rebirth of Messianic Judaism* (Baltimore: Lederer, 1996), 93–104. Cf. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

8. Mark S. Kinzer, *The Nature of Messianic Judaism: Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species* (West Hartford: Hashivenu Archives, 2000), 11.

9. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (London: Continuum, 2000), 159–61; Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, 111–22.

10. For a discussion of how Jewish festivals and liturgy are incorporated into the Messianic Jewish synagogue, see chapters 3–5 of this volume.

11. Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 142–45; Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, 9–26.

a girl, there may be a *simchat bat* (joy of the daughter) ceremony. Naming of a baby ordinarily occurs when the mother first returns to the synagogue with her child.¹²

Messianic synagogues celebrate *bar mitzvah* (son of the commandment) ceremonies for boys when they turn thirteen and *bat mitzvah* (daughter of the commandment) ceremonies for girls when they turn twelve or thirteen. The young adult will lead portions of the Shabbat service, read from the *parsha* for that week, and give a *derash* (message) before the congregation. A Messianic Jewish *bar/bat mitzvah* also includes a reading from the New Testament, and usually the young man or woman will share about his or her faith as a Jewish follower of Yeshua. It is a joyful occasion attended by family and friends and often followed by a lavish party.¹³

Consistent with traditional Judaism, Messianic Jews marry under a *huppah* (wedding canopy), sign a *ketubah* (marriage contract), and break a glass at the conclusion of the wedding ceremony to shouts of “Mazel Tov!” (Congratulations).¹⁴ It is common for the Messianic rabbi to share with the bride and groom passages from the New Testament that speak about love in marriage and the importance of abiding in Yeshua.¹⁵ The ceremony is usually followed by a reception with food, music, and dancing.

Finally, Messianic Jewish families follow traditional Jewish practices related to burial and mourning:

A Messianic Jewish funeral is based on the traditional model with most Messianic rabbis drawing from the *madrikh* (handbook for rabbis). The body is buried within twenty-four hours if possible. *Kaddish* (a prayer of praise to God during mourning) is recited along with other traditional Hebrew prayers. *Keriah* (tearing of the garments) is performed. One addition to the traditional service is the reading of verses from the New Testament as well as the Hebrew Bible. . . . It is typical for a Messianic Jewish family to sit *shiva* (mourn for seven days), light *yahrzeit* (memorial) candles and consult their rabbi about the traditional mourning process.¹⁶

Because Jewish cemeteries are often unwilling to provide their services for Jewish followers of Yeshua, a few Messianic Jewish congregations have established their own cemeteries or have acquired the rights to dedicated plots within cemeteries.

Symbols, Ritual Objects, and Language

Messianic synagogue buildings are diverse architecturally but similar in content. Jewish symbols like the *magen David* (star of David) or *menorah* (seven-branched candelabrum) are often seen on the outside and inside of the meeting place. Many

12. Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 140–42; Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, 25–26.

13. Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 148–50; Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, 37–46. See also Elliot Klayman, “The Bar/Bat Mitzvah: A Liturgy,” *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 1 (1994): 122–35.

14. Stuart Dauermann, Michael Rudolph, and Paul L. Saal, “The Wedding Ceremony: Viable Models for Diverse Unions: Three Messianic Jewish Wedding Ceremonies,” *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 9 (1999): 89–115.

15. Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 150–53; Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, 47–70.

16. David J. Rudolph, *Growing Your Olive Tree Marriage: A Guide for Couples from Two Traditions* (Clarks-ville, Md.: Lederer, 2003), 127. See Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 153–55; Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, 71–85.

congregations hang banners of the tribes of Israel and display Jewish artwork with Hebrew lettering.

The Messianic Jewish sanctuary resembles its traditional counterpart, with an ark containing the *sefer Torah* (Torah scroll), the *ner tamid* (eternal light) hanging above the ark, and a *bimah* (raised platform from which the Torah is read and services are led), centrally located and arranged so that the congregation faces Jerusalem. Messianic Jews attach great significance to Jerusalem:

1. Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish nation, which God is returning to the Land of Israel and to faith in her Messiah, Yeshua.
2. Jerusalem symbolizes Judaism, Jewish history, and the Jewish people; it also symbolizes Christianity, Christian history, and the Church. Messianic Jews have roots in both histories and affirm both aspects of Jerusalem's symbolic significance.
3. Jerusalem is the city to which Yeshua the Messiah will return. From there he will rule Israel and all the nations.
4. God's *Torah*, understood as including New Testament truth as well as that of the *Tanakh* [the Hebrew Scriptures], has gone forth, is going forth, and will go forth from Jerusalem.
5. The first Messianic Jews lived in and ministered from Jerusalem. Today's Messianic Jews, as the believing remnant of the Jewish people, have established a community there and intend to be part of the process of ministering *Torah* from Jerusalem.
6. Regardless of their political views, Messianic Jews generally agree that living for God is a more important value than holding onto territory. Nevertheless, God's promises to the Jews concerning territory — the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem — are not canceled and are not to be neglected.¹⁷

Many synagogues use mainstream or Messianic Jewish *siddurim* (prayer books) that follow the order and content of traditional Jewish prayer.¹⁸ Men wearing *kippot* (head coverings) and *tallitot* (prayer shawls) dot the assembly on Shabbat morning.¹⁹

In addition to Jewish symbols and ritual objects, Messianic synagogues encourage the use of Hebrew to foster a Jewish ethos:

Messianic congregations are committed to Jewish continuity because they believe God is committed to Jewish continuity. Contemporary Messianic rabbis, like their mainstream counterparts, recognize the dangers of assimilation and labor to convey Jewish identity to the next generation of Messianic Jewish families. Messianic Jewish use of Hebrew expressions (even for New Testament terms) is in

17. David H. Stern, "The Significance of Jerusalem for Messianic Jews," in *The Enduring Paradox: Exploratory Essays in Messianic Judaism* (ed. John Fischer; Baltimore: Lederer, 2000), 102–3. See David H. Stern, "The People of God, the Promises of God, and the Land of Israel," in *The Enduring Paradox*, 79–94; Daniel C. Juster, "A Messianic Jew Looks at the Land Promises," in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (ed. Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden; Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2012), 63–81; David Miller, "Messianic Judaism and the Theology of the Land," *Mishkan* 26 (1997): 31–38.

18. For Messianic Jewish *siddurim*, see Barry Budoff, *Siddur Prayers for Messianic Jews* (Skokie, Ill.: Devar Emet Messianic Jewish Publications, 2006); John Fischer, *Siddur for Messianic Jews* (Palm Harbor, Fla.: Menorah Ministries, 2002); Jeremiah Greenberg, *Messianic Shabbat Siddur: A Messianic Prayer Book for Use in Sabbath Services and at Home* (Gaithersburg, Md.: Messianic Liturgical Resources, 2004).

19. Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism*, 161–66; Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs*, 123–39.



*Baruch HaShem
Messianic Synagogue Building,
Dallas, Texas*



*Baruch HaShem
Messianic Synagogue Ark,
Dallas, Texas*



Baruch HaShem Messianic Synagogue Torah Scrolls, Dallas, Texas



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*Tikvat Israel Messianic
Synagogue Sanctuary (above)
and Ark and Bimah (right),
Richmond, Virginia*



© Elisa Rudolph



*Beit Hashofar Messianic
Synagogue Ark and Bimah,
Seattle, Washington*



*Devar Emet Messianic Synagogue Torah Service,
Skokie, Illinois*

keeping with this spirit of resisting assimilation pressures in order to preserve Jewish identity. Jesus and the shlichim (apostles) were first-century Jews who taught in Hebrew/Aramaic. New Testament teaching was originally Hebraic. Messianic synagogues, therefore, see the use of Hebraic New Covenant terminology, such as the name “Yeshua” instead of “Jesus,” as the restoration of something that is historically accurate. It links Messianic Jewish families to their first-century roots.²⁰

Synagogue Leadership

A Messianic rabbi functions as a scholar, teacher, pastoral leader, guide, and representative of the Messianic Jewish community.²¹ The Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) defines a Messianic rabbi as

a Jewish follower of Yeshua qualified by a supervised course of study, authorized by his or her ordaining authority, and empowered by the Spirit through the rite of ordination to expound and apply Torah as fulfilled in and mediated through the person, teaching, and work of Yeshua. . . . In the context of congregational life, the senior rabbi appointed by that community serves among them as their Mara d’Atra, i.e., mentor, guide, and authority in matters of religious practice and teaching, encouraging growth and unity that express the life of the Spirit of God.²²

Messianic Jewish Theological Institute (MJTI)²³ and the Netzer David International Yeshiva²⁴ offer the core courses necessary to qualify for rabbinical ordination through the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC). Messianic rabbis are also ordained through the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS).²⁵ The UMJC offers a program for lay leaders that leads to licensure as a Madrikh (Hebrew for “guide”), a certification that is recognized in UMJC synagogues as valuable for teachers, synagogue officers, cantors, counselors, and other positions of leadership.²⁶

20. Rudolph, “Contemporary Judeo-Christian Communities,” 147–48.

21. A Messianic rabbi serves “as a custodian of Israel’s revelation and traditions, . . . [a]dvises the community on matters of ritual life, . . . [a]cts as a judge in disputes, . . . [s]erves as a spokesperson for the congregation, the Jewish people, and Judaism to the outside world” (Stuart Dauermann, *The Rabbi as a Surrogate Priest* [Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2009], 259–60, 276–77). See David J. Rudolph, “The Rabbi as Pastor-Theologian: Torah Scholars Qua Ecclesial Leaders in the Post-Biblical Jewish Context” (paper presented at the Society for the Advancement of Ecclesial Theology [SAET] Symposium, Chicago, October 12, 2009). Online: http://tikvatisrael.com/pdf/Rabbi_as_Pastor-Theologian_Rudolph.pdf.

22. Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, “The Messianic Jewish Rabbi.” Cited 26 February 2012. Online: <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27/the-messianic-jewish-rabbi>. The UMJC and IAMCS have ordained several congregational leaders who are not Jewish. Whereas the UMJC leaves the question of title up to the local synagogue, the IAMCS uses “rabbi” for ordained Messianic Jews and “congregational leader” for ordained Messianic Gentiles.

23. Messianic Jewish Theological Institute, “The MJTI School of Jewish Studies.” Cited 26 February 2012. Online: <http://sjs.mjti.org>.

24. St. Petersburg Theological Seminary, “The Netzer David International Yeshiva.” Cited 26 February 2012. Online: <http://www.sptseminary.edu/academics/the-netzer-david-international-yeshiva>.

25. International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues, “Welcome to the IAMCS Yeshiva!” Cited 8 March 2012. Online: <http://yeshiva.iamcs.org>.

26. Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, “Madrikh: UMJC Licensure.” Cited 26 February 2012. Online: <http://www.umjc.org/education-mainmenu-49/madrikh-program-mainmenu-87>.

The aging of Messianic synagogue leaders is a challenge that the Messianic Jewish community is facing. A recent demographic study found that two-thirds of all UMJC senior congregational leaders were between the ages of fifty-five and seventy.²⁷ In response, the UMJC has developed an initiative to attract younger leaders with the goal of seeing the average age of UMJC rabbis drop below fifty by 2020. The Kehilah (K20) program is a ten-year initiative that offers matching funds for congregations that mentor a young rabbinical intern, and it provides scholarships for those who enter UMJC-approved rabbinical training programs.²⁸

The Purpose of Messianic Synagogues

Messianic Judaism is “a movement of Jewish congregations and groups committed to Yeshua the Messiah that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, and renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant.”²⁹ The primary purpose of Messianic synagogues is to make it possible for Jews³⁰ who follow the Jewish Messiah to remain Jews³¹ and become better Jews in keeping with the eternal purposes of the God of Israel.³² This results in Messianic

27. David J. Rudolph, “A Wake-Up Call: Aging Trends of UMJC Congregational Leaders,” May 3, 2010. Online: <http://www.mjstudies.com>.

28. Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, “K20 Initiative Focuses on Future Leadership.” Cited 26 February 2012. Online: <http://www.umjc.org/donate-mainmenu-39/k20-program>.

29. Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, “Defining Messianic Judaism,” 2005. Cited 27 February 2012. Online: <http://www.umjc.org/home-mainmenu-1/global-vision-mainmenu-42/13-vision/225-defining-messianic-judaism>.

30. While there is no center of halakhic (legal) authority in the Messianic Jewish community to rule on the issue of “who is a Jew,” the movement as a whole is generally supportive of both the patrilineal and matrilineal definitions of Jewish identity. This is the official position of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance (IMJA) and the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS). The UMJC’s “working definition of Jewish identity (July 27, 2010)” states: “Jewish identity is best understood as neither a strictly religious category nor a strictly ethnic category, but as membership in a people. Such a definition seems to underlie Paul’s language in Philippians 3:4–5: ‘If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews . . .’ The primary criterion for defining Jewish identity is Jewish birth. Traditional Judaism recognizes one born of a Jewish mother as Jewish. Based on biblical precedent and reflecting the practice of some elements of the wider Jewish community, we also would consider one born of a Jewish father and a Gentile mother to be Jewish, if he or she identifies as a Jew. Since Jewish identity is not strictly ethnic, however, the discovery of Jewish ancestry beyond one’s grandparents does not in itself render one Jewish” (online: <http://www.mjstudies.com>). In addition, there is the implicit recognition of converted Jews, i.e., Jews by choice, who had a formal conversion ceremony under a recognized authority. See David J. Rudolph, “Appendix A: Who Is a Jew?” in *Growing Your Olive Tree Marriage*, 131–38.

31. Outside of a Messianic synagogue context, it is very difficult for Jewish believers in Yeshua to remain practicing Jews and to pass on Jewish identity to their children. E.g., more than four hundred thousand Jews became members of churches between the early nineteenth century and World War II, but less than one percent of their descendants are self-identified Jews today. See Mitch L. Glaser, “A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe 1900–1950” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998), 159–61; Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 49–51; Rachel L. E. Kohn, “Ethnic Judaism and the Messianic Movement,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (1987): 89; Philip Cohen, *The Hebrew Christian and His National Continuity* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1909), 37.

32. “One purpose is central to every goal we or any group of believers might have, and it is to live in the presence of God. . . . Without abiding in God, we can be a political movement, a therapy group, or a social club, but not the body of Messiah. To forward the expression of our faith in a Messianic Jewish way, I propose six goals, all subsidiary to this one purpose . . . : seeking emotional healing, defining and pursuing community, developing a proper expression of Jewishness, engaging in evangelism, preparing for the land of Israel to become the center of Messianic Judaism, refining our theology so as to help end the schism between the body of Messiah and the

Jews being “a visible testimony of Yeshua from within the Jewish people.”³³ Rabbi David Chernoff describes the unique mission of Messianic synagogues in this way:

We have an eternal covenant with God that goes back to Abraham. Our history is unique in that we were not just chosen out of many nations, but were formed by God through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be a special blessing to this world. God has a purpose and calling for the nation of Israel and this covenant relationship is eternal (Gen. 17:1 – 8). If God has made an eternal covenant with us as Jewish people, then it is incumbent upon us to keep our covenant relationship with Him. It is God’s desire for Jewish people not to assimilate but to continue to be Jewish. That desire and our eternal relationship with God are evidenced by preservation of the Jewish people for the past 2000 years, and the fact that God has supernaturally restored the State of Israel today. The primary way a Jewish believer can continue to live a life as a Jew and not assimilate away from his Jewish people is to be a member of a Messianic synagogue. In a Messianic synagogue, a Jewish believer can continue to worship the Lord in a Jewish way, celebrate the Jewish festivals, raise his children as Jews and be a testimony to his family and people.³⁴

There are presently over five hundred Messianic synagogues in the world today.³⁵ These congregations are committed to Jewish continuity and work hard to pass on Jewish identity to the next generation of Jewish followers of Yeshua. They provide a weekly Messianic Jewish community experience that focuses on the Lord, follows the rhythm of Jewish life, and fosters a connection with the wider Jewish world. North American Messianic synagogues have established summer camps for teens and young adults (e.g., Or L’Dor on the East Coast and Dor Segulah on the West Coast), as well as intercongregational youth retreats, music festivals, and Israel aliyah programs that inspire young Messianic Jews to deepen their walks with the Lord and with one another.³⁶

Intermarrieds

Messianic Jewish congregations are visited by thousands of Jewish-Gentile intermarried couples each year because Messianic synagogues offer a way to bring together core elements of the Jewish and Christian religious traditions:

Jewish people. . . . As Messianic Jews, let us connect intimately with our God, be true disciples who can transmit his love through Yeshua to others, and rise to the challenge of doing the works God has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10) in these momentous days” (David H. Stern, “Summary Essay: The Future of Messianic Judaism,” in *How Jewish Is Christianity? 2 Views on the Messianic Movement* [ed. Louis Goldberg; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 178 – 79, 192).

33. Paul L. Saal, “Messianic Jewish Communities by Design: Open Doors and Reserved Seating” (paper presented at the annual Hashivenu Forum, Beverly Hills, Calif., 2012), 29. Online: <http://www.mjstudies.com>.

34. David Chernoff, *Messianic Judaism: Questions & Answers* (Havertown, Pa.: MMI, 1990), 22 – 23; David Chernoff, *An Introduction to Messianic Judaism* (Havertown, Pa.: MMI, 1990), 11. Cf. David J. Rudolph, *Understanding Messianic Judaism: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions* (Denver: Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, 1993), 6 – 8.

35. David H. Stern, *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past* (Clarksville, Md.: Lederer, 2007), 271 – 72.

36. See Seth Klayman, “The Messianic Jewish Youth Experience: Our Past, Present and Future,” *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 11 (2000): 117 – 41.

Many intermarried couples are drawn to Messianic synagogues because the Jewish-Christian gap is bridged (Cohn-Sherbok 2000, xii). Inter-marriage tends to blur the traditional boundaries between Judaism and Christianity within the average family so that a quasi – Messianic Jewish religious expression naturally arises. Inter-married couples find common ground in Messianic synagogues. Children of inter-marriage find a home where they can integrate their identities (Rudolph 2003, 56 – 59, 111 – 114). Messianic synagogues challenge the “law of excluded middle” by asserting that children of Jewish-Christian inter-marriage can be simultaneously Jewish and believers in Jesus. For these reasons, Messianic (Judeo-Christian) communities are a very attractive option for inter-married couples and their children.³⁷

The exponential growth of Messianic synagogues since the 1970s is in part due to the growing number of inter-marrieds who are looking for a place they can call home. Many inter-married couples view the Messianic synagogue as a good option because it “honors the faith traditions of both spouses, conveys Jewish identity to the next generation and makes it possible for inter-marrieds and their children to worship together comfortably as a family.”³⁸

One of the strengths of the Messianic Jewish option is that it offers an identity rooted in history.³⁹ Messianic Judaism challenges the notion that Judaism and Christianity are mutually exclusive religions and contends that Christianity was originally a form of Judaism. The Messianic synagogue fits together pieces from both religious traditions in an attempt to restore an ancient communal identity. Yeshua the Jew, and the first-century Jews who followed him as the Messiah (the twelve *shlichim* [apostles], Miryam [Mary], Ya'akov [James], Sha'ul [Saul]/Paul, Timothy, Eunice, Lois, and others), serve as identity anchors for twenty-first-century Messianic Jews. Consequently, Messianic synagogues are able to provide a clear and historically based identity for inter-marrieds and their children.⁴⁰

Messianic Gentiles

An important demographic that distinguishes most Messianic synagogues from mainstream synagogues is the presence of Gentile followers of Yeshua (for the most part not married to Jews) who come alongside Messianic Jews to build a congregation for Yeshua within the house of Israel. “Messianic Gentiles” are non-Jews who are called by God to participate in the life and destiny of the Jewish people.⁴¹ They have a special

37. Rudolph, “Contemporary Judeo-Christian Communities in the Jewish Diaspora,” 148.

38. Rudolph, *Growing Your Olive Tree Marriage*, xi. Inter-marrieds also make an important contribution to the Messianic synagogue. See David J. Rudolph, “Inter-marriage Can Have a Positive Effect on Messianic Judaism,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement* (ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Baltimore: Lederer, 2001), 101 – 9.

39. See Gershon Nerel, “Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews,” in *Le Judéo-Christianisme Dans Tous Ses États* (ed. Simon C. Mimouni and F. Stanley Jones; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 399 – 425.

40. Rudolph, *Growing Your Olive Tree Marriage*, xi – xii.

41. In some Conservative synagogues, a Gentile who participates in the life and destiny of the Jewish people is referred to as a *K'rov Yisrael* (a relative or friend of Israel, close to the Jews). See Mark Bloom et al., *A Place in the Tent: Inter-marriage and Conservative Judaism* (Oakland, Calif.: EKS, 2005), 13 – 18.

love for Jewish people, involve themselves in the Jewish world, learn Hebrew, honor Jewish customs, and serve as members of Messianic synagogues for decades. “*Ahavat Yisrael* [love of Israel], more than any other model, describes the calling of Gentiles within Messianic Judaism. . . . Gentiles in Messianic Judaism are not here for themselves, but for Messiah’s own people.”⁴² Like Paul, who renounced his apostolic rights and freedom in order to serve the Corinthians whom he loved (1 Cor 9), Messianic Gentiles forego their rights and freedom in relation to Jewish life (Acts 15; 21:25)⁴³ in order to bless Messianic Jews and Messianic synagogues.

The demographic reality of Messianic Gentiles, including a second and third generation, raises a number of questions that the Messianic Jewish community is currently engaging.⁴⁴ Many of these questions relate to time-honored traditions in the Jewish world concerning the participation of non-Jews in Jewish life.⁴⁵ In mainstream synagogues, for example, Gentiles are generally not permitted to have a bar/bat mitzvah, wear a tallit, or read from the Torah⁴⁶ because these are all activities in which a Jew affirms his/her covenant responsibilities as a member of the people of Israel, something a non-Jew cannot do.⁴⁷ Some Messianic synagogues believe that these normative standards should be maintained for reasons of conscience and to

42. Russell L. Resnik, “Defining Messianic Judaism,” *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 16 (2003): 67, 70. Cited 4 March 2012. Online: <http://www.kesherjournal.com/Issue-16/Defining-Messianic-Judaism>. See Schiffman, “The Role of Gentiles in Messianic Congregations,” in *Return of the Remnant*, 113–20; H. Bruce Stokes, “Gentiles in the Messianic Movement,” Cited 26 March 2012. Online: <http://imja.org/gentiles-in-the-messianic-movement/>.

43. Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Council Decision,” chapter 16 of this volume. Cf. Toby Janicki, *God-Fearers: Gentiles and the God of Israel* (Marshfield, Mo.: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 49–72; Toby Janicki, “The Gentile Believer’s Obligation to the Torah of Moses,” *Messiah Journal* 109 (2012): 45–62.

44. E.g., can a Messianic Gentile who wants to become a convert to the Jewish people (i.e., a Jew by choice) do so? The debate over this question is still in session in the Messianic Jewish community. See *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 19 (2005): 7–85. Cited 1 March 2012. Online: <http://www.kesherjournal.com/Issue-19/View-issue>; Michael Wolf, “Conversion of Gentiles—‘No Way!’” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 133–39; John Fischer, “The Legitimacy of Conversion,” in *Voices of Messianic Judaism*, 141–49. Paul’s “rule in all the congregations” (1 Cor 7:17–24, my trans.) is a general prohibition against conversion and consistent with the thrust of apostolic teaching that Yeshua-believing Jews and Gentiles should remain in their respective callings because the ekklesia is a prolepsis of Israel and the nations in the eschaton (Acts 15; Rom 3:29–30; 11:11–36; 15:7–12; Gal 2; Eph 2; etc.). See David J. Rudolph, “Paul’s ‘Rule in All the Churches’ (1 Cor 7:17–24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variegation,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5 (2010): 1–23. Online: <http://www.mjstudies.com>. This notwithstanding, many biblical prohibitions, including New Covenant ones (e.g., Yeshua’s stance on divorce in Mark 10:10–12), have exceptions and the same may be the case with Paul’s rule. Some Messianic rabbis contend that a compelling case can be made for an exception in the case of Messianic Gentiles who marry Jews and want to embrace the Jewish people as their own, as Ruth did (Ruth 1:16).

45. See Jon C. Olson, “Gentile Yeshua-Believers Praying in the Synagogue: Why and How,” *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 23 (2009): 47–69. Cited 29 February 2012. Online: <http://www.kesherjournal.com/Issue-23/Gentile-Yeshua-Believers-Praying-in-the-Synagogue-Why-and-How>; Daniel C. Juster, “Jewish and Gentile Distinction in Messianic Jewish Congregations” (paper presented at the Tikkun Leadership Conference, 2008); Saal, “Messianic Jewish Communities by Design,” 21–23.

46. Mainstream synagogues explain that a Gentile cannot say the traditional blessing before the Torah reading, “Blessed are You, O LORD our God, King of the universe, *Who chose us from all peoples and gave us His Torah*. Blessed are You, O LORD, Giver of the Torah.”

47. Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue: A Resource for Congregations* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1990); Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, *A Supplemental Process Guide for Congregations: Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue* (ed. Dru Greenwood; Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1993); Jewish Reconstructionist Federation Task Force, *Boundaries and Opportunities: Report on the Role of the Non-Jew in Reconstructionist Synagogues* (ed. Shery Shulewitz; Wyn-

avoid blurring the distinction between Jew and Gentile in the body of Messiah, a differentiation that the New Testament upholds (1 Cor 7:17 – 24; Acts 15; 21:24 – 25). Other Messianic synagogues contend that these customs should be modified so that Messianic Gentiles may participate more fully in Jewish community life.

Gentile Christian Visitors

Many Gentile Christians visit Messianic synagogues to learn more about the Jewish roots of their New Covenant faith. Messianic rabbis welcome their Gentile brothers and sisters and seek to be a resource to them. Gentile Christian visitors should adapt to synagogue decorum in the same way that a guest would respond to the hospitality of his host by honoring the customs of the household he enters.⁴⁸ This is important because a Messianic synagogue is first and foremost a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and Jews who want to learn more about Yeshua of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel.

Conclusion

Synagogues are above all sacred communities of Jewish people who gather for worship and prayer, fellowship, study, *simchas* (celebrations), outreach, and other Jewish community activities. Messianic synagogues have a special calling to be a place where Jews who follow the Jewish Messiah can remain Jews and become better Jews in keeping with the eternal purposes of the God of Israel. This includes conveying Jewish identity to their children and being a visible testimony of Yeshua from within the Jewish community. Messianic Jews, Jewish visitors who are not Messianic, intermarried couples, Messianic Gentiles, Gentile Christian visitors, and family and friends of all the above, together form the unique amalgam of people found in a healthy and vibrant Messianic Jewish congregation. This diversity enriches, but it can also divert the Messianic synagogue from staying focused on its calling. Because of the different backgrounds that converge in a Messianic synagogue, and the variety of expectations related to community life that naturally arise from this heterogeneity, synagogue leaders have

cote: Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, 1998); Charles Simon, *The Role of the Supportive Non-Jewish Spouse in the Conservative/Masorti Movement* (New York: Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, 2005).

48. Many Gentile Christians who visit Messianic synagogues wrongly view the Gentile wing of the Church as apostate and think that Messianic synagogues alone represent authentic biblical faith. For a helpful corrective, see Boaz Michael, *Tent of David: Healing the Vision of the Messianic Gentile* (Marshfield: First Fruits of Zion, 2012). Other Gentile Christians erroneously claim that they are Jews due to a possibility of Jewish ancestry, often centuries ago, or based on what "the Lord told them" in a dream or vision. For a response to this challenge, see Boaz Michael, *Twelve Gates: Where Do the Nations Enter?* (Marshfield: First Fruits of Zion, 2012). Similarly, a large number of Gentile Christian visitors hold a "One Law" perspective and maintain that Gentile Christians should observe the Torah in the same way as Jewish people, contrary to Paul's letter to the Galatians and Acts 15; 21:25. For a mainstream response, see Daniel C. Juster and Russ Resnik, "One Law Movements: A Challenge to the Messianic Jewish Community," Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, January 28, 2005. Cited 1 January 2012. Online: <http://www.mjstudies.com>. Cf. Boaz Michael and D. Thomas Lancaster, "'One Law' and the Messianic Gentile," *Messiah Journal* 101 (2009): 46 – 70; First Fruits of Zion, "Divine Invitation: An Apostolic Call to Torah," 2010. Cited 26 February 2012. Online: http://ffoz.org/downloads/white_papers/. Messianic Jewish leaders have to walk a thin line between welcoming Gentile Christian visitors and guarding the vision, doctrinal standards, and traditions of their community. See Saal, "Messianic Jewish Communities by Design," 21 – 34.

to walk a fine line between being inclusive and upholding the Messianic Jewish vision and traditions of their congregation.

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