

FOREWORD

There is a Jewish proverb that sometimes comes to mind when I think of the Messianic Jewish community—*Hasavlanut—mach-atzeet hayedeeà* (“Patience is already halfway to knowledge”). The modern Messianic movement has come a long way over the past 250 years,¹ and yet there are a number of foundational areas related to the spirituality and identity of the movement that we are still trying to get a handle on. One of these areas is the focus of this book—the relationship between the Spirit and Torah in Messianic Judaism. In order to fully appreciate the conversation around this topic in the chapters ahead, it is important to understand some of the historical and ecclesial background leading up to it.

The twenty-first century Messianic Jewish community has its origins in first, an outpouring of the Spirit on the Jewish people in the 1960s and 1970s that led to the emergence of over 500 Messianic synagogues in a fifty-year period, and second, a Jewish renewal movement within the church that since the mid-eighteenth century has advocated for the importance of Messianic Jews and their children retaining their Torah-defined Jewish identity on the basis of covenant and calling. This is all to say that the Spirit and Torah are central to the Messianic Jewish movement’s past, present and—I would suggest—future.

The three largest Messianic Jewish organizations in the world that represent Messianic Jews and Messianic synagogues reflect this focus on the Spirit and Torah to varying degrees. The Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) and its congregational counterpart—the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS)—give voice to the principal role of the Spirit in Messianic Judaism and see Spirit-initiated revival as critical to

1. See Rudolph, “Messianic Judaism,” 21–36.

the Messianic movement fulfilling its *raison d'être*. The Spirit, they contend, points Jews back to a walk with God primarily guided by his Word rather than tradition:

The modern messianic Jewish movement is a move of God's Spirit, which is restoring Israel to a faith that is based in the Bible, not in the sayings of the Rabbis. The prophetic, end-time salvation of Israel is unfolding, and it is a blessing for the whole world. The vision of the IAMCS is to see the outpouring of God's Spirit upon the Jewish people.²

Here we are reminded that Messianic Judaism is inherently a Messiah-centered, Bible-based, Spirit-empowered expression of Judaism and that the Messianic movement defines itself to some extent in contradistinction to traditional Judaism. Along these lines, the IAMCS calls into question "the essential premise of rabbinic authority."³ In their publication *The Non-Torah: Exposing the Mythology of Divine Oral Torah*, the IAMCS describes the traditional Jewish narrative of an oral Torah given on Mount Sinai and later rabbis appointed by God to be its authoritative interpreters as "the foundation stone upon which the house of Rabbinic Judaism is built."⁴ While honoring the wisdom of the sages, and the value of traditional Jewish customs,⁵ the MJAA/IAMCS views the rabbinic construction and implementation of a divinely sanctioned oral Torah to be something that makes Rabbinic Judaism fundamentally off-course and inconsistent with Messianic Judaism:

2. International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues (IAMCS), *The Non-Torah*, back cover. The first line of the IAMCS's "Our Vision" statement declares, "The spiritual vision of the IAMCS is to see the outpouring of G-d's Spirit upon our Jewish people through Messianic congregations."

3. IAMCS, *The Non-Torah*, 34, 37.

4. IAMCS, *The Non-Torah*, 129.

5. "Tradition, culture and religious law made by the rabbis was indeed transmitted generationally. Some of it is good, some not so good. Some of it is outright bad. In any case, it isn't God's word. Accordingly, while Rabbinic tradition is embraced by Messianic Jews, it is with the understanding that tradition is part of the fabric of our lives. But it is not Torah" (IAMCS, *The Non-Torah*, 36; see also 34-35, 37, 128, 156-57).

There is no way to harmonize oral Torah theology with faith in Yeshua . . . The Rabbis have maintained the posture of rejecting Yeshua for nearly two millennia, and all the while maintaining that the oral Torah gives them the authority to say so on behalf of all Israel . . . After all, if God gave Moses the future halakha at Sinai, surely God also gave Moses the ruling of the Sanhedrin which rejected Yeshua, along with all future halakha that has maintained that future rejection for the last two millennia . . . Every Jew who accepts Yeshua as Messiah inevitably hears "but the Rabbis say Yeshua can't be the Messiah!" Indeed, the Rabbis say Yeshua is not the Messiah. But the Scriptures declare the truth that He is Messiah. The Rabbis say they are the ones who have authority to say who is the Messiah . . . If Yeshua is Messiah then it's game over for orthodox Rabbinic Judaism. Because if He is Messiah, then the whole halakhic ship is sunk. Halakha would become at best advisory, but clearly not a revelation from God to Moses.⁶

For the IAMCS, Rabbinic Judaism not only lacks the authority it claims to make *halakha* (Jewish law) and calls Jewish people to reject Israel's own Messiah but it also misses the mark in elevating *halakha* to a place where rabbinic decisions are at times viewed as God's Word.⁷ When this imbalance is brought into the Messianic community, the IAMCS has observed that it tends to result in bad fruit:

Since the late 1960's and 1970's, there have been those who have tried to interject orthodox rabbinic Judaism into the context of the Messianic Jewish revival. It has been well-established over the last forty to fifty years that any of these kinds of efforts which make "Torah" the issue, never seem to lead anywhere good. Oftentimes, they give rise to controversies, factionalism, and division.⁸

As an example of *halakha* raised to the level of God's Word, consider the custom of lighting *Chanukah* candles. During this eight-day

6. IAMCS, *The Non-Torah*, 131-32, 135.

7. IAMCS, *The Non-Torah*, 21-23, 34.

8. IAMCS, *The Non-Torah*, 144.

holiday, our family uses a traditional *siddur* and recites blessings before kindling the *Chanukkiyah*. The traditional opening blessing is:

Blessed are You, *Hashem* our God, King of the universe,
Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and
commanded us to kindle the *Chanukah* light.

But did God really *command* us to light the *Chanukah* lights? Meir Zlotowitz, an Orthodox Jewish rabbi and founder of ArtScroll Publications, addresses this question directly:

And commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light. This is the text of this blessing as recorded in the Talmud (*Shabbos* 23a). The Talmud proceeds to record the obvious question: “Where did He command us?” That is, since the kindling of the Chanukah light is of post-Biblical origin and ordained by the Sages of the pre-Mishnaic period, how can we imply that God *Himself* commanded us to kindle these lights, as if it were ordained by the Torah? The Talmud explains that the Torah commands us to follow the ordinances of the recognized Torah leaders—you shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall show you [*Deut.* 17:11]. Accordingly, a Rabbinic observance—such as the requirement to kindle lights on Chanukah—has Biblical sanction, and the term *v'tzivanu*, and he has commanded us, is quite appropriate.⁹

The implication of Rabbi Zlotowitz’s (and the Talmud’s) explanation is that in order to recite the first *Chanukah* blessing with *kavana* (that is, intention or direction of the heart) one has to acknowledge the authority of the rabbis to add to God’s commandments, i.e., to place *halakha* on the level of God’s Word. Personally, I find this highly problematic,¹⁰ which is why our family respectfully modifies the blessing and says:

9. Zlotowitz, *Chanukah*, 124.

10. “[T]he decision-making authority of the judges described in *Deut* 17:8–13 is to take the law of God and apply it to matters of controversy. The verse emphasizes the importance of respecting the decisions that they make. That is not to say that the word of these *shoftim* or judges is equivalent to the Word of God. The fact that *Deut* 17:11 says: ‘You are to act according to the instruction they teach you and the judgment they tell you—you must not turn

Blessed are You, *Hashem* our God, King of the universe,
Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and
put it in our hearts [*va'asher natan b'libenu*] to kindle the
Chanukah light.¹¹

These words I can say sincerely because my wife, Harumi, and I sense a leading of God’s Spirit to kindle the *Chanukah* light in our home. It is not a matter of Torah but *Ruach HaKodesh* (the Holy Spirit). My point in sharing our family tradition, and the reason behind it, is to underscore that the IAMCS makes a reasonable point when it raises concerns about the level of authority that Rabbinic Judaism attributes to *halakha* and how this can be squared with the Messianic Jewish view that rabbis can interpret God’s commandments but not create them (*Deut* 4:2; 12:32).

The third largest umbrella organization in the Messianic movement is the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC). In contrast to the MJAA/IAMCS, the Union, while agreeing with the Alliance that the oral Torah was not given on Mount Sinai, gives more weight to the importance of Torah and Jewish tradition in Messianic Judaism. This is reflected in the organization’s governing documents. For example, in the UMJC’s “Our Values” statement, the first core value listed is “Unity in Diversity.” In this context, the “ongoing significance of the Torah for Jewish life” is emphasized:

The UMJC represents diverse congregations united in our commitment to the authority of Scripture as the Word of God, the ongoing significance of the Torah for Jewish life, and the centrality of Yeshua as Lord and

aside from it; is meant in the context that the judges are applying the written law to everyday life. It does not mean that there is an oral Torah that they have as well, involving many laws given by God which are not recorded in what Moses wrote down in the Torah. Furthermore, it does not mean that whatever they say, whether written here in the Torah or not, is to be considered the Word of God” (IAMCS, *The Non-Torah*, 116–17).

11. This substitution draws on the language of *Exod* 35:34 and *Ezra* 7:27. For the Shabbat blessing, we retain *v'tzivanu* and replace *l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat* (to kindle the Sabbath light) with *lishmor v'lizkor et-yom haShabbat* (to keep and remember the day of Shabbat), drawing on the language of God’s commandment in *Exod* 20:6 and *Deut* 5:12 as reflected in *Lecha Dodi*.

Messiah. Deference and respect are key elements in our fellowship.¹²

Notably, the Spirit is *not* mentioned in any of the five values. Similarly, Torah and tradition are highlighted in the UMJC’s “Defining Messianic Judaism: Basic Statement” but there is no explicit mention of the Spirit:

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.¹³

While “in the context of the New Covenant” likely suggests an important role of the Spirit, this is not explained anywhere, even in the “Defining Messianic Judaism: Expanded Statement” which explicitly reiterates the importance of Torah and tradition:

In the Messianic Jewish way of life, we seek to fulfill Israel’s covenantal responsibility embodied in the Torah within a New Covenant context. Messianic Jewish halakhah is rooted in Scripture (Tanakh and the New Covenant writings), which is of unique sanctity and authority. It also draws upon Jewish tradition, especially those practices and concepts that have won near-universal acceptance by devout Jews through the centuries. Furthermore, as is common within Judaism, Messianic Judaism recognizes that halakhah is and must be dynamic, involving the application of the Torah to a wide variety of changing situations and circumstances. Messianic Judaism embraces the fullness of New Covenant realities available through Yeshua, and seeks to express them in forms drawn from Jewish experience and accessible to Jewish people.¹⁴

In the UMJC “Statement of Faith,” Torah is mentioned 6 times (with a paragraph focusing on Torah under the category “Messianic

12. UMJC, “Values.”

13. UMJC, “Defining.”

14. UMJC, “Defining.”

Jewish Life”),¹⁵ the Spirit 3 times, and tradition 2 times.¹⁶ By contrast, the MJAA “Statement of Faith” mentions the Spirit 12 times (with two paragraphs focusing on the Spirit under the category “God the Holy Spirit [*Ruach HaKodesh*]”). In the MJAA statement, there is no explicit mention of the Torah or tradition.¹⁷

UMJC leaders have written extensively on the topic of Torah and tradition while leaving a gap when it comes to guidance on the role of the Spirit in Messianic Jewish life:

Torah & Messianic Judaism

- Michael Rudolph with Daniel C. Juster, *The Law of Messiah: Torah from a New Covenant Perspective*. 2 vols. Montgomery Village: Tikkun International, 2019.
- Mark S. Kinzer, “The Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah: Introduction to the Berlin Statement on the Torah.” *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 27 (2013): 83–87.
- Mark S. Kinzer, “The Torah and Jews in the Christian Church: Covenantal Calling and Pragmatic Practice.” Helsinki Consultation on Jewish Continuity in the Body of Messiah, Berlin, June 29–July 3, 2012.
- Stuart Dauermann, “Jewish Believers in Yeshua and Halachic Torah Observance: Whether, What, and How?” Pages 187–204 in *Chosen to Follow: Jewish Believers through History and Today*. Edited by Knut H. Hoyland and Jakob W. Nielsen.

15. “The Torah is God’s gift to Israel. It serves as the constitution of the Jewish people and thus also of the Messianic Jewish community, which comprises Israel’s eschatological firstfruits [sic]. The Torah does not have the same role for Messianic communities from the nations, though it does provide spiritual nourishment as a witness to the Messiah. The Torah also provides universal norms of behavior and practical life teaching for all. The Torah is to be applied anew in every generation, and in this age as is fitting to the New Covenant order (Matt 5:17–20; 2 Tim 3:16–17; 1 Cor 7:17–20)” (UMJC, “Statement”).

16. See UMJC, “Statement.”

17. See MJAA, “Statement.”

Jerusalem: Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 2012.

- David J. Rudolph, “Paul’s ‘Rule in All the Churches’ (1 Cor 7:17–24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variiegation.” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5:1 (2010): 1–24.
- Barney Kasdan, *God’s Appointed Times: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Celebrating the Biblical Holidays*. Clarksville: Lederer, 2007.
- Russell Resnik, *Creation to Completion: A Guide to Life’s Journey from the Five Books of Moses*. Clarksville: Lederer, 2006.
- *First Steps in Messianic Jewish Ethics: Defining Our Involvement with One Another and the World About Us*. Hashivenu Forum, 2013.
- Mark S. Kinzer, “Scripture and Tradition.” Pages 29–37 in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement*. Edited by Dan Cohn-Sherbok. Baltimore: Lederer, 2001.
- Russell Resnik, “Halakhic Responsibility.” Pages 39–46 in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement*. Edited by Dan Cohn-Sherbok. Baltimore: Lederer, 2001.
- David Friedman, *They Loved the Torah: What Yeshua’s First Followers Really Thought about the Law*. Clarksville: Lederer, 2001.
- Russell Resnik, *Gateways to Torah: Joining the Ancient Conversation on the Weekly Portion*. Baltimore: Lederer, 2000.
- Barney Kasdan, *God’s Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle*. Clarksville: Lederer, 1996.
- Daniel C. Juster, “Messianic Judaism and the Torah.” Pages 113–121 in *Jewish Identity and Faith in Jesus*. Edited by Kai Kjaer-Hansen. Jerusalem: Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 1996.

Tradition & Messianic Judaism

- *Siddur Kehillat Zera Avraham: Morning Service for Shabbat, Festival Amidah, Hallel*. Ann Arbor: Congregation Zera Avraham, 2020.
- *Siddur Kehillat Zera Avraham: Erev Shabbat, Zichron Mashiach, Havdalah*. Ann Arbor: Congregation Zera Avraham, 2020.
- *Machzor Kehillat Zera Avraham: Rosh Hashanah*. Ann Arbor: Congregation Zera Avraham, 2020.
- *Machzor Kehillat Zera Avraham: Yom Kippur*. Ann Arbor: Congregation Zera Avraham, 2020.
- *Siddur Kehillat Zera Avraham: Evening Service for Tisha B’Av*. Ann Arbor: Congregation Zera Avraham, 2020.
- Daniel C. Juster, *New Covenant Siddur: A Yeshua-Centered Messianic Jewish Worship Book*. Frederick: Tikun America, 2019.
- Kirk Gliebe, ed., *A Messianic Jewish Siddur for Shabbat and Festivals*. Translated by Barry A. Budoff. Skokie: Devar Emet Messianic Publications, 2017.
- Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, “Standards of Observance.” MJRC, 2014.
- Carl Kinbar, “Messianic Jews and Jewish Tradition.” Pages 72–81 in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*. Edited by David Rudolph and Joel Willitts. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.
- Seth N. Klayman, “Reflections of the Role of Torah and Jewish Tradition at Congregation Sha’arei Shalom.” Pages 65–84 in *The Borough Park Papers: Symposium III: How Jewish Should the Messianic Jewish Community Be? October 22–24, 2012*. Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2013.
- Joshua Brumbach, “Helpful Points to Consider: The Role of Torah and Jewish Tradition in the Messianic Jewish Community.” Pages 51–64 in *The Borough Park Papers: Symposium III: How*

- Jewish Should the Messianic Jewish Community Be?* October 22–24, 2012. Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2013.
- Daniel C. Juster, “Extra-Biblical Practices” and “Dangers to be Faced.” Pages 287–302, 313–17 in *Jewish Roots: Understanding Your Jewish Faith*. Revised Edition. Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2013.
 - Mark S. Kinzer, “Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the Twenty-First Century: A Biblical Defense of Oral Torah.” Pages 29–61 in Mark S. Kinzer, *Israel’s Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenantal Identity*. Edited by Jennifer M. Rosner. Eugene: Cascade, 2011.
 - Carl Kinbar, “Israel, Torah, and the Knowledge of God: Engaging the Jewish Conversation.” *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 24 (2010): 1–28.
 - Mark S. Kinzer, “Jewish Tradition and the Christological Test” and “Jewish Tradition and the Biblical Test.” Pages 213–62 in *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005.
 - Michael H. Schiffman, “Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century: A Historical Perspective on ‘Oral Torah.’” Hashivenu Forum, 2003.
 - Daniel C. Juster, “The Value of Tradition.” Hashivenu Forum, 2003.
 - John Fischer, “The Place of Rabbinic Tradition in a Messianic Jewish Lifestyle.” Pages 145–70 in *The Enduring Paradox: Exploratory Essays in Messianic Judaism*. Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2000.
 - Kay Silberling, Paal Saal, Elazar Brandt, and David J. Rudolph. “Forum: Oral Tradition and New Covenant Scripture.” *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 8 (1999): 39–59.
 - Stuart Dauermann, “Transmitting Tradition: The Biblical and Jewish Mandate.” *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 1 (1994): 155–79.

- John Fischer, *Messianic Services for the Festivals & Holy Days*. Palm Harbor: Menorah Ministries, 1992.
- John Fischer and David Bronstein, *Siddur for Messianic Jews*. Palm Harbor: Menorah Ministries, 1988.

The Spirit & Messianic Judaism

- Michael Rudolph, “Welcoming the Ruach HaKodesh in Jewish Space.” Pages 211–15 in *Collected Sermons and Writings: On Subjects Useful for Bible Studies and Practical Godly Living*. Vol. 1. Frederick: Tikkun America, 2020.
- Michael Rudolph, “Liturgy, Holy Spirit, and Time.” Pages 452–53 in *Collected Sermons and Writings I*.
- David Tokajer, *Spirit + Truth: Rediscovering the Holy Spirit from Creation through Today*. Daphne: David Tokajer, 2019.
- Carl Kinbar, “For the Common Good.” Pages 19–37 in *Gifts of the Spirit: Complete Conference Lectures*. Marshfield: FFOZ, 2013.
- Daniel C. Juster, “The Call to Holy Living: Section B—The Spirit and the Word.” Pages 61–66 in *Growing to Maturity: A Messianic Jewish Discipleship Guide*. Clarksville: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2011.

As seen from the above survey of governing documents and writings, the MJAA/IAMCS emphasizes the Spirit far more than Torah and tradition while the UMJC emphasizes Torah and tradition far more than the Spirit. It is not a matter of either/or but the relative weight of importance given to each area in their overall vision of Messianic Judaism.¹⁸ Positively stated, these three major

18. The trajectories set by these three umbrella organizations are not always reflected among their members. There are MJAA/IAMCS congregations that are more tradition-oriented and UMJC congregations that are more Spirit-focused, e.g., UMJC synagogues and chavurah groups affiliated with Tikkun International. Tikkun’s vision and values statement—“The Twelve Pillars: A Foundation for Tikkun Congregations & Ministries” (2018)—mentions the

Messianic Jewish organizations are complementary on the issue of the Spirit and Torah, and on a macro-level represent the broad spectrum. More negatively viewed, the Messianic Jewish community, as represented by the cross-section of the Alliance and the Union, has a major divide within it when it comes to its sense of priorities regarding the Spirit and Torah.¹⁹

And this brings us to the authors of this important work—Rabbi Joshua Lessard and Dr. Jen Rosner. While each presents their own perspective and there is no attempt to speak on behalf of others, the reality is that Joshua and Jen articulate views on the relationship between the Spirit and Torah that are largely in alignment with the thrust of the MJAA/IAMCS and UMJC positions respectively.²⁰ This is not surprising since Joshua is an IAMCS ordained rabbi and leads Tree of Life Messianic Fellowship, an IAMCS member congregation. By contrast, Jen is involved in UMJC circles. She is a protégé of Rabbi Mark Kinzer, a leading UMJC theologian, and

Spirit 55 times, the Torah 7 times, and tradition 2 times.

19. The Messianic Jewish community is not unique in grappling with the question of how to prioritize *both* the Spirit and Torah, “The relationship between the Spirit and the Word is an all-important one. Failure to realize this has accounted for many troubles in the long history of the Christian Church. People always tend to put the emphasis exclusively on one side or the other. The moment you separate the Spirit and the Word you are in trouble. There are some who say that having the illumination of the Spirit you do not need the Word at all. That was the tragedy of the Quakers. George Fox started with the right balance, but as he went on he increasingly tended to pay less and less attention to the Word and more and more to the ‘inner light,’ the illumination of the Spirit, the message received immediately . . . But then there is the other tendency, at the other extreme, to discount the Spirit, and to say that as long as we have the open Bible and the Word before us, and as long as we know it in some mechanical sense, we need nothing further. So the Spirit is forgotten, and you may have a dead orthodoxy, or a mere intellectual academic knowledge of the Scriptures, which really does not enable one to fight the battle against the devil and the principalities and the powers. The Spirit and the Word must be kept together always. The Spirit has provided for us the instruction found in the Word, but we cannot use it without Him. It can be a dead letter to us; ‘the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.’ What is needed is the Spirit opening the Word, and opening my mind and opening my heart” (Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Soldier*, 328–29).

20. A notable exception to this simplism is Jen’s focus on the significance of the Spirit in Messianic Judaism. See Rosner, “Witnesses.”

for a number of years was a member of a UMJC congregation in Los Angeles. While neither author represents the Alliance or Union in this correspondence, what the reader receives is a significant engagement with both communal perspectives on the Spirit and Torah from next-generation leaders who are affiliated in various ways with these two wings of the Messianic Jewish movement.

The dialogue in this book also models healthy theological discussion.²¹ Joshua and Jen are thinking together and learning from each other with each letter written and reflected on. There is a refreshing respect for the power of words in the debate and how words can both hurt and heal.²² As Rabbi Joseph Telushkin puts it:

In a dispute with someone, you have the right to state your case, express your opinion, explain why you think the other party is wrong, even make clear how passionately you feel about the subject at hand. But these are the only rights you have. You do not have a moral right to undercut your adversary’s position by invalidating him or her personally.²³

In this correspondence, it is clear that each side is listening to the other before responding. Since Joshua and Jen genuinely want to understand each other’s position, and not simply assume, they ask questions for clarification. There is a humility that comes through. They realize that, like the rest of us, they are on the learning curve.

There are a number of ways that we can more actively enter into the conversation between Joshua and Jen and get the most out of it. Here are several tips:

1. *We can adopt a holistic approach to truth.* A holistic approach avoids a one-sided perspective and concerns itself with the whole, including limitations and factors that affect implementation. As Klyne Snodgrass writes in his book *Between Two Truths*, “Truth is like a flower with deep roots. To enjoy it very long, we must take it all. If we take only the top part, it will

21. See Rudolph, “Guidelines”; Rudolph, “Reminder.”

22. Prov 12:18; 18:21; *Lev. Rab.* 33.

23. Telushkin, *Words*, 89.

wither in our hands . . . Holistic thinking will cause us to look for tensions. When we know that a statement is true, we ought to ask what its limitations are, what other statements need to be made to prevent misunderstanding or extremism, and how circumstances might affect the implementation of the statement.”²⁴

2. *We can choose not to rehearse old thoughts and feelings.* Thinking together with our authors involves thinking and not simply rehearsing what we have long believed. In his book *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, William Isaacs writes, “What is true thinking? To think truly is to say things that may surprise us—things we have not said before—that are not in our memory . . . To think is also to listen to our own automatic reactions and gain perspective on them. It is to ask, Now, why did I do that? . . . What we usually call thinking is often merely the reporting or acting out of patterns already in our memory. Like a prerecorded tape, these thoughts (and feelings) are instantly ready for playback . . . True thinking moves more slowly, more gently than this . . . Thinking has a freshness to it, like a flow of water softly moving through the mind, and requires space. The fruit of thinking is sometimes a seemingly simple, quiet idea that stands out among a crowd of passing thoughts. It arrives unannounced.”²⁵ Here is a good question to ask when wading through this book: How much of our “thinking” is coming from memory and is an automatic response? How much is based on original thinking about what we are reading?²⁶
3. *We can follow the disturbance.* When our listening is colored by a disturbance (perhaps something Joshua or Jen has said that rubs us the wrong way), it is helpful to follow the disturbance and ask why we are bothered. This often leads to true thinking and new insights. By considering the source of the disturbance—whether it is in us, from them, or both—and

24. Snodgrass, *Between*, 180–84. See Rudolph, “Guidelines,” 11.

25. Isaacs, *Dialogue*, 59–60.

26. See Rudolph, “Guidelines,” 12.

why it irritates us, we become more keenly aware of what the person is actually saying. We may also recognize a tendency in us to respond to the disturbance by listening in a selective way—we may find ourselves instinctively sifting what they have said for evidence that we are right and they are wrong. Sometimes reframing helps. We can choose to see the person who disturbs us—Joshua or Jen—as a protector of important values within the Messianic Jewish movement rather than a nuisance. Following the disturbance may lead us to see our own inconsistency—we may realize that we have the same problem as the person whose words disturb us.²⁷

Thinking together with Joshua and Jen about the relationship between the Spirit and Torah in Messianic Judaism moves us closer to the *achdut ha-emunah* (“unity of the faith”) that Paul talks about in Ephesians 4:13. I believe that the next generation of Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles will overcome the divide that presently exists between the MJAA/IAMCS and UMJC, and that this will result in the presence and power of the Spirit being experienced in the Messianic Jewish community in ways that we have never seen before. Joshua and Jen are, in a sense, priming the pump of a broader dialogue that needs to take place in the Messianic movement in order that we might see this unity realized.

As readers, we are invited to consider who has the more compelling case in the correspondence. In this regard, we are not only evaluating which position is more in alignment with Scripture, our final authority for faith and practice, but also which perspective actually works (or works best) on the ground, in real life, and not just in an ivory tower. What does each trajectory lead to when applied to the local Messianic synagogue, the home, and one’s personal walk with the Lord? Is one view more Pollyannaish than the other? Is there a way to bring them together? If we think only in the abstract, we can never answer these questions. We must get more specific.

One way to get more concrete is to apply the two approaches to individual commandments of God in the Scriptures and ask what the end results might look like, both practically and ethically. In this

27. See Rudolph, “Guidelines,” 13.

vein, I recommend either reading through the Torah while contemplating the two perspectives put forward in this dialogue or reading the two-volume set *The Law of Messiah: Torah from a New Covenant Perspective* (Tikkun International, 2019) as a next step after reading Joshua and Jen's book. This is because the authors—Rabbi Michael Rudolph (my father) and Rabbi Daniel Juster—maintain an approach to the Spirit and Torah that on the spectrum is somewhere between Joshua and Jen, and they apply this *modus vivendi* to each of the *taryag mitzvot* (613 commandments).²⁸

When reading Joshua and Jen's back-and-forth, it is important to keep in mind that the Torah itself is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16–17; 2 Pet 1:20–21) and has more than one purpose. There are at least twenty purposes of the Torah. They include:

1. To serve as the foundational revelation of God
2. To remind us of God's love, grace and power
3. To teach us how to love God and our neighbor
4. To teach us how to worship God
5. To establish the oneness and sovereignty of God
6. To teach us to be holy as God is holy
7. To point out sin so that we might return to God
8. To train us to exercise faith in God
9. To train us to be obedient to God
10. To reveal the heart and priorities of God
11. To reveal the wisdom and knowledge of God
12. To uphold the order of God's creation
13. To uphold God's standards of compassion and justice

28. "The resurgence of Jewish belief in Messiah Yeshua in the Twentieth Century has created a need for a fresh look at God's law applied with New Covenant principles and the Holy Spirit's interpretation, taking into account historic Rabbinic interpretations as well. This book seeks to fulfill that need by codifying and commenting on God's *mitzvot* wherever they may be found in Scripture—in the *Torah*, the *Nev'im*, the *Ketuvim*, the *Besorah* (Gospels) or the Apostolic Writings" (Rudolph with Juster, *Law*, 11).

14. To draw the nations to God
15. To foster unity among God's people
16. To give our children a heritage from the Lord
17. To demarcate Israel as a distinct and enduring nation by God's design
18. To prepare God's people for priestly service
19. To point us to Yeshua the Messiah
20. To train us to hear the voice of God

The Torah serves all of these purposes. Moreover, from the beginning, God intended Israel to observe his Torah with a heart turned toward him (Deut 6:5; 11:18; 26:16; 30:6, 14).

An area largely bracketed off in Joshua and Jen's discussion is the question of how Gentile believers in particular are supposed to relate to the Spirit and Torah today. This is a subject that requires extensive discussion and thus it is understandable that the authors felt it was beyond the scope of their correspondence. Nevertheless, since many of the readers of this book will be Gentiles in the Messianic movement and the wider body of Messiah, I would like to share several thoughts on this that are informed by having been part of the Messianic Jewish community for over 45 years and having reflected on this biblical-theological question for more than 30 years as a Messianic rabbi.

To begin with, while the Scriptures do not provide a list of *mitzvot* that are applicable to Gentiles, it is the historic view of the Jewish community, including the Messianic Jewish community, that God does not expect Gentiles to be circumcised or to observe Israel's festivals, among other distinctly Jewish commandments.²⁹

29. For a Messianic Jewish response to the Hebrew Roots movement, see IAMCS, "One Law, Two Sticks" and Juster and Resnik, "One Law." Some groups, like First Fruits of Zion (FFOZ), argue on the basis of Zech 14 and other texts that everyone in the age to come will observe Israel's festivals and thus the biblical ideal is for all Gentile believers to observe them today. There are several problems with this argument: (1) It overstates what the Scriptures actually say. Zech 14 may refer to representatives of the nations going up to Jerusalem to celebrate *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles) and not everyone in the

This has been the majority view within Judaism for centuries. Moreover, this approach is consistent with the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15 (cf. 21:25) and Paul's "rule in all the congregations" (1 Cor 7:17-24).

What about Gentile believers who sense that God is calling them to worship in Jewish ways? The MJAA/IAMCS and UMJC affirm non-Jews who are called to join Messianic synagogues. "Called" is the operative word since the overwhelming majority of Gentile believers do not sense a calling in this direction. Stated another way, the MJAA/IAMCS and UMJC are in agreement that while the Gentile wing of the church should appreciate its Jewish origins, its Jewish Scriptures, and its Jewish Messiah, Gentile believers are not deficient in their faith if they do not follow distinctly Jewish customs.

There is a difference between calling and commandment. Gentile believers should view universal Torah ethics as divine imperatives to be observed in the power of the Spirit. It is a commandment to worship the Lord alone. It is a commandment not to commit adultery. It is a commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself. In contrast to these universal Torah ethics, more characteristically Jewish customs are matters of personal calling for Gentile followers of Yeshua. If a Gentile believer is drawn to live out some of these more Jewish-specific areas, this should derive from their being led by the Spirit and not from a sense of covenantal responsibility, which is unique to the Jewish people. Also, the individual should view the practice as something the Lord has called *them* to

world. Other annual festivals are not mentioned; (2) Even if God calls the nations to observe *Sukkot* and other aspects of Israel's calendar in the future, why would that mean Gentile believers should celebrate Jewish festivals today? Are we supposed to do everything now that will be done in the eschaton? Where do we see this principle in the Bible? Consider Yeshua's teaching, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt 22:30). Should God's people, therefore, not marry in the present age? Behind FFOZ's view is an over-realized eschatology; and (3) The consensus of New Testament scholarship is that Paul did not instruct Gentile believers to keep Israel's festivals. See Paul's pastoral guidance in Rom 14:5-6. In 1 Cor 5:8, he writes, "Therefore, let us celebrate the festival," but the context suggests that he is talking about living out the spiritual meaning of Passover.

do and not something that God expects all Gentiles in the world to do (see Rom 14:5-6).³⁰

At The King's University, where I serve as director of the Messianic Jewish Studies (MJS) program, we have Jewish and Gentile students, MJAA/IAMCS and UMJC students, as well as students from Christian churches and mainstream synagogues. Dr. Jack Hayford founded the university to be a Spirit-empowered institution of higher learning.³¹ At the same time, the university is an approved school of the UMJC for rabbinical ordination and *madrikh* (teacher) certification training, hence there is a commitment to the importance of Torah and tradition in Messianic Jewish life. This explains why we have a Torah scroll displayed by the front entrance, one of the first things that someone sees when entering the school. This coming together of Spirit and Torah in the DNA of our university has meant that faculty members teach about the relationship between the Spirit and Torah to our students. Sometimes it is unpacked along the lines of Joshua and Jen's book, and other times it is broken down into something more simple so that students don't miss the forest for the trees.

When I teach "Messianic Jewish Theology" and want to bring my students back to the bigger picture of how the Spirit and Torah fit into the overall priorities of God's kingdom, I present Rabbi Juster's FYSTR model, which helps to strike the balance in a Messianic Jewish context. Rabbi Juster writes:

Messianic Judaism is New Covenant Judaism and Messianic Jewish theology must emphasize the benefits and realities of New Covenant life. This does not mean that we do not give the Torah and the Prophets their full due. However, the issue is one of emphasis. . .

The Bible exhorts us to give honor to whom honor is due (Rom 13:7). Those who have given us the post-biblical Jewish heritage are to be honored for all that is good, true and beautiful in the heritage of our people. Most cultures

30. Given concerns about covenant-related traditions and cultural appropriation, it is wisdom to walk this out with sensitivity to Jewish community norms and in consultation with a Messianic rabbi or pastor.

31. See Hayford, *Living*; Rudolph, "Count Zinzendorf."

have honorable traditions and practices due to the grace of God given to all people. For us as Jews, the Jewish heritage comes from our ancestral fathers and out of our covenantal relationship before God as his people . . . Our view of the Rabbinic heritage is that *we must be discerning; approving what is good and rejecting that which is not good or not in accord with the letter and the spirit of the Bible*. In addition, our adoption of any tradition even if it is good, when it is not commanded in the Bible, is to be embraced when we are so led by the Spirit; there is to be no rule beyond that. Only a person who has a renewed mind—with their heart priorities in order—can rightly evaluate, since evaluation is a function of the whole person.

I have traveled to many countries and pleaded in my teaching that we must all understand the centrality of Yeshua and the power of the Spirit as primary. If this is not established, we will not be able to evaluate with mature judgment. Yeshua is to be *explicitly* central and pervasive in our preaching and our worship. In John 5, Yeshua declares that the Father desires that we honor the Son as we honor him. Only then can we have God's powerful Presence among us. If we do not do this, we will not have his powerful Presence. We must teach people to seek the presence of the Spirit and to appropriate his power, without which we cannot accomplish God's works of love and service.

In teaching this, I have written an acrostic: FYSTR. The acrostic represents the relative emphases that we should seek. The New Covenant Scriptures provide us with these emphases. First we emphasize the Father and Yeshua in our worship and preaching. This is in accord with the consistent devotional expression in the New Covenant Scriptures and the consistent and pervasive affirmation that Yeshua is fully deity and fully man. Then we emphasize the Spirit, without whom we do not have the power of obedience or the ability to extend God's kingdom. The gifts and power of the Spirit are critical. Then there is the Torah—the teaching of God's ways—the very commandments themselves. Finally there is the Rabbinic heritage,

which has its proper place but only in accordance with the relative emphasis of the acrostic. We could add that the post-biblical Christian understanding is also a source of wisdom, provided always that it too does not contradict Scripture. We think that if we keep this proper order, we will see a strong and vibrant Jewish expression of our faith.³²

The FYSTR model is intended to be simple and can serve as a starting point for evaluating other models, including the ones encountered in this book.

I felt a special joy reading Joshua and Jen's work for the first time because both of them are affiliated with The King's University—Joshua as a graduate student in Messianic Jewish studies and Jen as a faculty member who teaches Messianic Jewish Theology among other MJS courses online. Together, they represent well the vision of our program and the hope of the MJAA/IAMCS/UMJC to bring the Spirit and Torah together in Messianic Judaism. Their dialogue advances this goal since it will help many in the Messianic Jewish world to think more deeply about these questions, and to deliberate in a way that is collaborative, generous and Spirit-led, as Joshua and Jen have done so beautifully.

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32. Juster, "Lecture 6-2," 1, 4.

At the Foot of the Mountain

Two Views on Torah and the Spirit

JOSHUA M. LESSARD
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Foreword by David Rudolph

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AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN
Two Views on Torah and the Spirit

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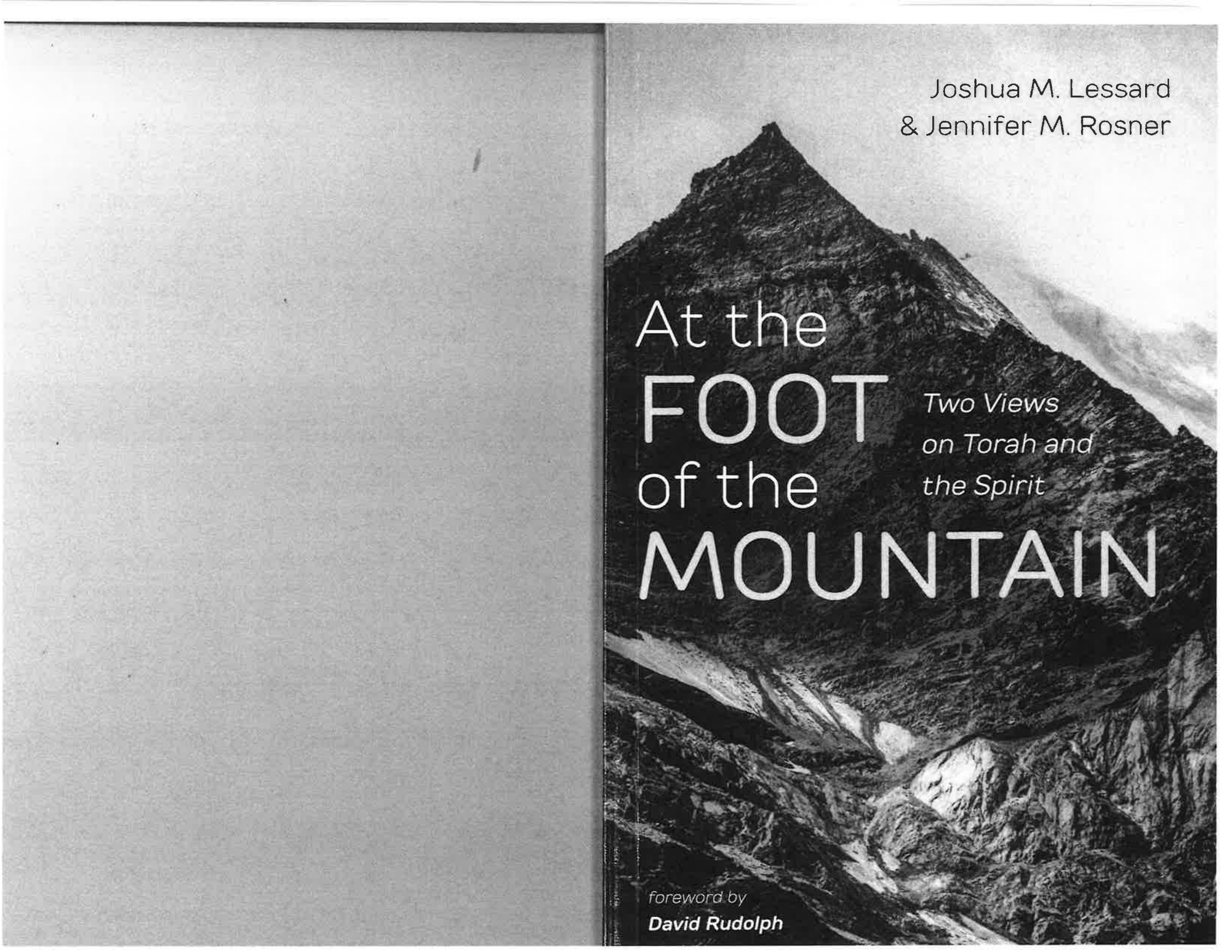
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