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ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL
ISSUES JEWISH BELIEVERS FACE IN
THE BODY OF MESSIAH

Adrian Glasspole

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Welcome to the Olive Press Research Paper – an occasional paper featuring articles that cover a wide spectrum of issues which relate to the ministry of CMJ.

Articles are contributed by CMJ staff (past and present), also by Trustees, Representatives, CMJ Supporters or by interested parties.

Articles do not necessarily portray CMJ's standpoint on a particular issue but may be published on the premise that they allow a pertinent understanding to be added to any particular debate.

There are some issues which will always be issues; there are some struggles which will always be struggles. The “classic” issue for Jewish people who come to follow Yeshua is what I term the “Messianic Jewish Identity Crisis”. There are three major areas of life where every Jewish Believer in Yeshua whom I know finds challenges. These are Theology, Ecclesiology and Lifestyle.

I recognise that this short booklet may seem negative and condemnatory. That is not the intention or the purpose; yet the subject matter will bring some possibly painful issues to the reader’s attention. Neither will I suggest that there are easy solutions; if there are solutions they are not necessarily easy to find or implement. The debate continues, and suggestions are always welcome.

Terminology is a key area, and I want to address that here. Language is powerful and yet it can be slippery; “it means what I want it to mean...”

A Jewish person is, for the purposes of this booklet, a person who has at least one Jewish grandparent, or who has converted to Judaism¹ through a recognised Beth Din². The most widely used term for a person who follows the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth is “Christian”. This is the term for Catholics, Protestants, Charismatics and every other follower. For Jewish people, the term “Christian” is a minefield in itself. Any person who is not Jewish is, for many Jewish people, a Christian; the terms “Gentile” and “Christian” are interchangeable. While it is obviously not accurate, perception is reality. For many JBYs³, the term “Jewish Christian” is also viewed as anachronistic. The word “Christian” was a derogatory term for Gentiles who had become followers of the Jewish Messiah (Acts 11:26). As Jewish people are not Gentiles, therefore the term “Christian” should not be applied; or so the thinking goes. This short paper is not aimed at unravelling that ball of string. The terms “Jewish Christian” and “Messianic Jew” may be very similar; in fact when translated into Hebrew and then back into English, they are the same – משיחיים יהודיים Yehudim Meshikhim; but they are not the same. In the term *Jewish Christian* the “Jewish” qualifies the “Christian”; “Jewish” is the subset of “Christian” with which the person identifies. Likewise with *Messianic Jew*, the “Messianic” tells us what type of “Jew” the person is. I have no personal preference; whatever you call me, I’ve been called worse. However I dislike “Messianic Believer”⁴.

1 This is the same as the definition accepted by the British Messianic Jewish Alliance (BMJA)

2 Literally a House of Judgement; three or more Jewish leaders sit to rule on matters of Conversion, Marriage, Divorce and so on. The three needn’t be Rabbonim, though usually at least one is.

3 Jewish Believer in Yeshua. I prefer the term “Follower” to “Believer”, as a “Believer” believes, whereas a “Follower” follows. This is the meaning behind the Hebrew “halakhah”, which means “the Walking”. Rabbis train in Halakhah, as people need to know how to walk.

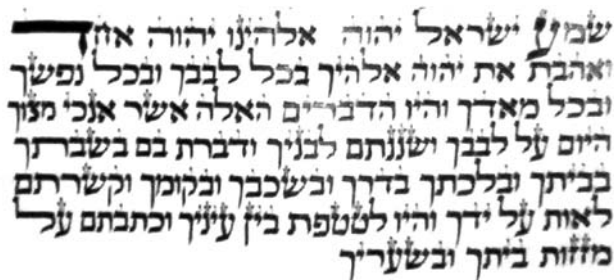
4 The reason is that, to me, it is a tautology. If a person self-defines as “Messianic” then it is clear that he or she follows Yeshua; if a person self-defines as a “Believer” then the same is true.

Theology

Much has been written in recent years regarding the theology of Messianic Jews, notably Dr Richard Harvey's "Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology"⁵.

Yeshua-believing (Christian) theology has been standardised over the last 1900 years through many Church Councils and statements, as well as in many attempts at systematising theology as with Augustine of Hippo, Calvin and Barth to name but a few. The vast majority of Yeshua believers agree on the same "big issues" – the authenticity and reliability of the Bible, the multiplicity in Godhead, the Messiahship of Yeshua and so on. "Multiplicity in Godhead" is a term familiar to many Jewish people. It is a phrase used by Kabbalistic writings to attempt to define "Ein Sof" – the One Beyond. In the Holy Zohar, something of a standard Kabbalistic text, we find this "Hear, O Israel, *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai* is one." These three are one... The mystery of the audible voice is similar to this, for though it is one yet it consists of three elements—fire, air, and water... Even so it is with the mystery of the threefold Divine manifestations designated by *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai* – three modes which yet form one unity" on page 43b (of the Soncino translation). The word "Trinity" is not an easy issue.

Many years ago I was talking with a mature JBY; he had trained as a Rabbi and was, at that time, recently retired from being a Church Minister. As a recent graduate from Theological College myself, I was interested in finding the views and definitions of other JBYs. What this wise man said has stuck with me. In short, The Almighty is far greater than any formula, and while the attempt to slot Him into a box is understandable, it can eventually lead to having on the one hand a small god, and on the other, falling into idolatry, as we have made an image of the Creator for ourselves. So, while "Trinity" is the most used term for attempting to describe the Creator, it is very limited. At the Council of Nicea the word *homousios* was coined. It means that the "Three Persons" are of one substance, though distinct Persons. Twice each day, Observant Jewish people recite the Sh'ma –



שְׁמַחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד
וְאֶהְבֵּת אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ
וּבְכֹל מַאֲדָךְ וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אִשֶּׁר אָנֹכִי מַצֹּחַ
הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְבְּךָ וּשְׁנֹנְתָם לְבִנְיָךְ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשֹׁבְרֹתֶךָ
בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתֶּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ וּקְשַׁרְתָּם
לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטַעֲפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל
מַזְוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ

“Hear! Israel! The L-RD, our G-d, The L-RD is One”. The word used for “one” is “Echad”, which means a compound unity, as in a flock of sheep. The other usual word for “one” is “Yachid”, which is simple singularity, as in one choir. The fact that The Almighty uses “Echad” here has been the subject of much Rabbinic discussion. RaMBaM⁶ was asked about the use of the word “Echad”, and whether it could be used to allow for Trinity. He said this, “He who errs, let him err”.

In every Anglican Communion Service there is the recitation of a recognised “Creed”, such as the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed. The purpose of this is to show that each person knows at least something about the people with whom they are celebrating communally. Many Evangelical Christian groups will be linked with the Evangelical Alliance or similar groupings, which will have a “Statement of Faith”. Again a key reason is to reassure people they are joining with like-minded people. Much of Christian acceptance is determined by orthodoxy, while much of Jewish acceptance is determined by orthopraxy. In other words a Christian is defined by his / her beliefs; a Jewish person is defined by their level of observance – are they Shomer Shabbat⁷? Do they keep strictly Kosher? Does he lay tefillin⁸? Does she wear a yarmulke⁹? That is a whole different series of studies and challenges!

This idea of putting importance on a Credo has become popular also in the Jewish Missions / Messianic Jewish world¹⁰. This can be seen with a look at many websites of Messianic Jewish groups / Jewish Missions¹¹.

There are accepted truths which at first glance appear to run contrary to Jewish accepted theological thinking. Chief among these is the theology of “Trinity”. While in the Jewish Missions world have developed apologetics¹², the issue of Trinity is thorny. There are no non-Messianic Rabbis (to my knowledge) who would support Trinity, and therefore it is a “no go area” for Jewish people. Again much has been written and there are a number of modern-day JBYs who have written extensive apologetic works, most notably Dr Michael Brown in his “Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus” series which now runs to

6 Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, was a Rabbi and Physician who lived in the 12th / 13th Centuries. He was born in Cordoba, Spain, in 1135 and died in Tiberias in 1204. In his famous 13 Tenets, read each day in the Jewish Prayer Book, he uses the word “yachid”.

7 Sabbath Keeping

8 Literally “prayers”; small leather boxes containing Scriptures. These are bound to the forehead and arm during morning prayers. Some use the term “phylacteries”, which is a Greek term usually denoting a talisman.

9 Skull-cap. Sometimes called a “kippah”. In traditional forms of Judaism, women don’t wear a yarmulke; however within the Reform and Liberal streams it is less uncommon..

10 There are and always will be differences between the two. A Jewish Mission such as CMJ will always be the organisation which will seek to convince Jewish people to follow Yeshua as Messiah. The Messianic Jewish Movement will seek to establish Congregations. For more on these differences see Rabbi Dr Mark Kinzer’s “Postmissionary Messianic Judaism”, or go to www.hashivenu.org which is Rabbi Dr Stuart Dauermann’s site.

11 CMJ does not have such a Statement. The main reason for this is that CMJ is a Mission Agency of the Church of England, and is a member of Partners in World Mission, the official grouping of Anglican Mission Agencies. CMJ is therefore “covered” by the Anglican Communion which subscribes to the historical Creeds of the Church.

12 It could be very successfully argued that one of the main tools for a Jewish Missionary is apologetics not evangelism.

five volumes¹³. With the vast majority of Yeshua-believing apologetics over time coming from non-Jewish writers and theologians, perhaps it is time for others within the Messianic Jewish camp to look again at key issues of theology and clarify those points for JBYs. This is not in any way to belittle the immense body of work from Dr Brown, and his work is unbeatable in its scope; however there are specifically “Messianic Jewish” rather than “Jewish Christian” issues which need to be delved into by others. This is a job for those with greater grey-cell power than this writer!

For the average Jewish person though, “Trinity” is a nonsense. Each day Jewish people (are supposed to) recite the Sh’ma twice. Morning and evening we remind ourselves of the unity of Godhead, and that we serve only One Deity. How and why would a Jewish person then start to worship three deities?

This may appear to fly in the face of some notable Rabbonim¹⁴ of the past, and indeed the present, who acknowledge that The Almighty is a multiplicity. See, for example, the Holy Zohar, where we read, *Said R. Eleazar*: “As the four sections of the walnut are united at one side and separated at the other, so are all the parts of the Celestial Chariot united in perfect union, *and yet each part fulfils a special purpose...*” in the section Shemoth¹⁵ (italics added). In his “Letter regarding the Holy”, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement writes, *He and His Name are One*¹⁶. Deeper study, with more time and more space, will show that the RaMBaM was not averse to the idea of this, based on the plurality of the Name¹⁷, the plurality of Elohim¹⁸ and the apparent plurality in the Sh’ma¹⁹, as we have seen.

Readers of the *Olive Press Research Papers* will be familiar with the term “Replacement Theology”. This is in many ways an exaggerated position, as few people will follow the “Church is Israel” idea as simply or as starkly as it is portrayed by some users of the term “Replacement”; terms such as “Fulfilment” are used. The bottom line is in essence the same, but straw man terminology isn’t helpful. However a good refutation is Derek White’s, available from *Christian Friends of Israel*.

Another area where many JBYs are uncomfortable is eschatology – the study of end times. One of the most popular eschatological scenarios involves a “rapture” of some kind. Almost all variations have “the Church” being raptured while “Israel” stays behind with the rest of the unbelievers, only to become sufferers in “the time of Jacob’s trouble”.

13 Published by Baker House and available through Olive Press.

14 Plural of “Rabbi”, which in its literal sense is “my master”

15 In the Soncino Zohar it can be found at Section 2, page 15.

16 Igeret HaKodesh, chapter 7.

17 Some attempt to have this as being 3 powers – I Am what I always have been and always will Be.

18 Literally, “gods” or “judges” or “lords”, yet used as a definition of The Almighty, Who is One. The opening phrase of the Bible has a plural Creator creating in a singular Person – ב.י.י.א.ש.י.ת.ב.ר.א.ש.ל.ה.י.ם.א.ת.ה.ש.מ.י.ם.א.ת.ר.י.ז.ה.א. In the beginning of God’s creating the heavens and the earth.

19 Much has been written regarding the use of the word “אחד” – Echad, denoting a compound unity and not the word “יחיד” – Yachid, denoting a singularity.

This is a double whammy for JBYs. Not only will they clearly not be whisked away in this particular rapture²⁰ scenario (they will stay as they are, still part of Israel) but they will then go through a communal suffering greater than the Shoah (Nazi Holocaust), and all because they are Jewish – while for seven years Gentiles who follow the Jewish Messiah will be partying!

An area where there is much furious debate is soteriology²¹, the study of salvation. While many in the Gentile side of the Body will possibly discuss “Once Saved, Always Saved”, there is a more pressing quandary for JBYs. In the Jewish prayer cycle we read the tractate known as “Pirke Avot”, the *Ethics of the Fathers*. This work is included in Prayer Books, such is its authority. It is, in essence, a concentrated “How to Live as a Good Jew”; though it isn’t Halakhah, it is about one’s personal holiness rather than “how to Keep the Torah”. There are many wise sayings, such as “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow”; it also contains Bible commentaries and expositions. A chapter is read each week between Pesach and Rosh HaShanah. In *Pirke Avot* we read, “*All Israel has a place in the world to come*” as the introduction to each of the six chapters. This is based on Isaiah 60 v 21, “*All your people will be called Tzaddikim*²²; *they will inherit the land forever...*” This seems to say that each and every Jewish person is saved by virtue of their being Jewish. However we also read in the Amidah²³ “*Let there be no hope for slanderers, and let all wickedness perish in an instant. May all your enemies quickly be cut down, and may you soon in our day uproot, crush, cast down and humble the dominion of arrogance. Blessed are you, O Lord, who smashes enemies and humbles the arrogant*”. This is Benediction number 12 of the 19, and is called Birkat HaMinim, the benediction of the “others” or “sectarians”. It is said by most to refer to the early Followers of The Way, but actually refers to Sadducees and Epicureans. Sadducees as they didn’t believe in the afterlife, and Epicureans as they didn’t believe in Torah Min HaShamayim, the Torah is given from Heaven.

This issue is answered in full by the Apostle Saul / Paul in his letter to the main congregations in Rome, in chapter nine. Not every person who is halachically Jewish can claim to be a part of safe Israel²⁴. How does this “All Israel has a place...” idea sit with Christian Soteriology? Most Christian soteriologies have a “saved or unsaved” bottom line, which is something alien to most Jewish people. If the Jewish people *were* chosen, then they are *still* chosen; after all, we follow the One Who has said through the prophet Malachi that He does not change. The Gospel is the power of G-d for the salvation of all

20 <http://www.cfi.org.uk/shop/productinfo.php?product=165> (accessed Feb 16th 2012) Christian Friends of Israel is a reconciliation ministry having good links with CMJ.

21 For more, see Martin Goldsmith’s OPRP, Practical Foundation For a Post-Holocaust Messianic Soteriology, 2011, available on CMJ’s website as a free PDF download.

22 Saints, or holy people.

23 Literally, the standing; one of the main prayers in the morning service. Jewish people stand when praying.

24 For more, see Rev Alex Jacob’s book, “The Case for Enlargement Theology”, available through Olive Press.

who believe; to Jewish people as a priority and equally to non-Jewish people, as we read in Romans chapter 1 verse 16. The Greek tense for the verb “to be” is present continuous. There have been some important books written on the subject of “Once Saved Always Saved”. Two of the best are those by R.T. Kendall and David Pawson, who see things differently from each other on this issue (*see Bibliography for details*). “Once Chosen, Always Chosen” is a matter of debate and will continue to be so. The nuances are many and far beyond the scope of this paper.

Ecclesiology

This Greek word simply means, “the study of the Ecclesia / Church”. This term may seem odd as an issue for Jewish people who come to acceptance of Yeshua as Messiah; however it is a root cause of the identity crisis. By far the majority of Christians are happy with the proposition that there is one “Body of Christ”, namely the Church. Where Jewish people fit in to that Body is a real challenge. Over many centuries the accepted position is that when a person becomes a follower of Yeshua they become a Christian and join the Church. For a Jewish person, though, this carries the implicit notion that s/he must in some way forgo his / her Jewishness. When a Jewish person confesses his / her sins, some see the necessity for him / her person to apparently their Jewishness to the list of sins for which they are repenting. When they become baptised, their Jewishness is washed away with all of their other sins. This is a frightening prospect for a Jewish person, and one against which we must all stand. The Almighty through the Scriptures has made a number of Covenants, all with the Jewish people; none of the Biblical Covenants are made with the Church. The New Covenant in Jeremiah chapter 31 is made with House of Israel and the House of Judah, not with the House of Church. In Ephesians chapter 2 the Apostle Saul / Paul talks of Gentiles being brought in to the Commonwealth of Israel, not the Commonwealth of Church.

As Brits we have a better understanding of Commonwealth than most other nations. Our Sovereign Queen Elizabeth the Second is the Head of the Commonwealth. Australians are Australians who have a Commonwealth relationship with the Queen as their Head of State and with other people from Commonwealth countries such as New Zealand, Canada and India. They are not British, and no attempt is made to entice them to become British; they have their own national identity. Likewise with the Commonwealth of Israel. The Almighty has made Covenants with Israel, and those from the nations²⁵ share in the benefits therein without losing their identity. It is only right and proper, then, that Jewish people who follow Yeshua the Jewish Messiah also retain their national

25 In Hebrew, גוים Goyim. It literally means nations and is in no way derogatory. In fact at Ezekiel 37 Israel is referred to as a “goy”, a nation.

identity. This is where the need for Messianic Jewish Fellowships and Congregations comes in. While JBYs are fully members of the Guf HaMoshiach²⁶ they are still Jewish. Just as we have Chinese Churches, Polish Churches and so on, so we have Messianic Jewish Congregations.

When a Jewish person decides to follow Yeshua they don't leave the Jewish Community and suddenly become a Goy; they remain Jewish. Yet as previously noted in some Rapture scenarios the Church is Raptured while Israel remains for "the time of Jacob's trouble". Aside from the scary thought that the Christian Deity wants to bring even more suffering to the Jewish people than we endured under Hitler and Stalin (not to mention the Hamas, Fatah and so on) this would be a massive problem for JBYs. Would JBYs be whisked away as members of the Church, or would they remain for another bout of suffering, as members of Israel? There are many, notably in the US, who support Rapture scenarios, and again this is not the place to support or rebut; I am simply making the point that some proposed scenarios are unhelpful.

Lifestyle

This is the word I shall use to cover everything, from what a person eats to how they worship.

How one interprets passages such as Mark 7 and Matthew 15 will determine whether Kashrut²⁷ is important for JBYs. For some these passages point to Yeshua nullifying the Food Laws; for others they do the opposite. Yeshua is here referring to the ritual washing of hands prior to eating. When He says (or the commentary between His words says) that *He made all foods clean*, what did He actually mean? Well, it is impossible (for me) that He meant "from now on it's perfectly OK for Jewish people to eat black pudding", as black pudding was never "food". Rather, it says that whether or not a person ritually washes their hands, does not make that person a "sinner". After all, Yeshua is on record as saying that He didn't come to abrogate the Torah; not even a Yod²⁸. So what about the vision in Acts chapter 10? The Apostle Peter had this famous vision of many unclean animals which he was told to strangle and eat. He of course remonstrated with The Almighty that he had never done such a thing. The interpretation of the vision is given in chapter 11, when he is told not to view any man as unclean. It wasn't about food; the vision was a hyperbole!

Should a Jewish man cover his head when praying and eating? The vast majority of Churches have the tradition that a man uncovers his head when praying; where does this leave JBYs? It is not a Biblical tradition, so this is a "subject to local ruling" thing. It would seem to me that asking or insisting that a man should go against his cultural tradition is

²⁶ The Body of Messiah

²⁷ The state of being Kosher; the most common usage is when applied to the keeping of Food Laws.

²⁸ Matthew chapter 5 verse 17. The following verses are also important to give this context.

insensitive at best, and at worst verging on the racist. Likewise regarding the Tallis / Tallit. It is usual for a Tallis to be worn by men in the morning service (never in the evening; it is a time sensitive command, which is also why women don't usually wear a Tallis). Some men feel very conspicuous if donning a Tallis in Church. (Church leaders, please allow JBYs to wear a Tallis if it is important to them. To forbid it would be an insult.)

Feasts and Fasts are increasingly an issue we see being raised. Pesach Sedarim²⁹ are very popular, and we at CMJ believe that to be a very good thing. What, though, about Chanukah? Purim? Sukkot? Christmas? Should JBYs keep Christmas? Should they be discouraged from keeping Yom Kippur / Rosh HaShanah...

The shades and variety of answers to these questions are plentiful, and I am not going to even attempt to give anything definitive and absolute.

You get the drift here.

Conclusion(s)

Becoming a follower of Yeshua³⁰ is a tough decision for any person from whatever background or ethnicity. For every person choosing this path it will be costly, lonely and uncomfortable; anyone who says otherwise is not being honest.

For a Jewish person, accepting that there is a possibility, however slim, that Yeshua is Messiah is a big step; to actually invest in Him to the extent that one becomes a follower is huge. Many will lose family, inheritance and standing. Some will lose the ability to shop in Jewish butchers, making it increasingly difficult to keep Kosher; this has obvious results. If they no longer keep Kosher and they go to Church, they have abandoned their people. This circular, self-fulfilling thinking makes it virtually impossible for JBYs to continue living as Observant Jews³¹, even if they wish to do.

For a Jewish person Church is a minefield of cultural differences. Standing to sing; sitting to pray; hugging; men and women sitting together; the list is almost endless. I am not suggesting that every Church needs to change everything just in case a Jewish person turns up one Sunday morning. I am saying that one thing we desperately need is the Messianic Jewish Movement, with its Congregations and support.

There are places and groups where Jewish people can worship as Jews, eat as Jews and act as Jews and at the same time acknowledge and worship Yeshua the King Messiah. Do we in this Movement have it right? No, not all of the time. Do we exclude non-Jewish people from our meetings, or our leadership? Not generally, though this is another hot potato.

29 The plural of Seder, which means order.

30 As distinct from saying a prayer and simply "believing in Jesus"

31 In Israel, the term "Hareidi" is used. This is derived from the Hebrew for "fear"; they are the ones who fear The Almighty.

CMJ has actually been involved in the Movement since its foundation in the early 19th Century, with the founding of the Hebrew Christian Prayer Union. We need that to continue.

Jewish people need the permission, not just the freedom, to be Jewish; especially in worship.

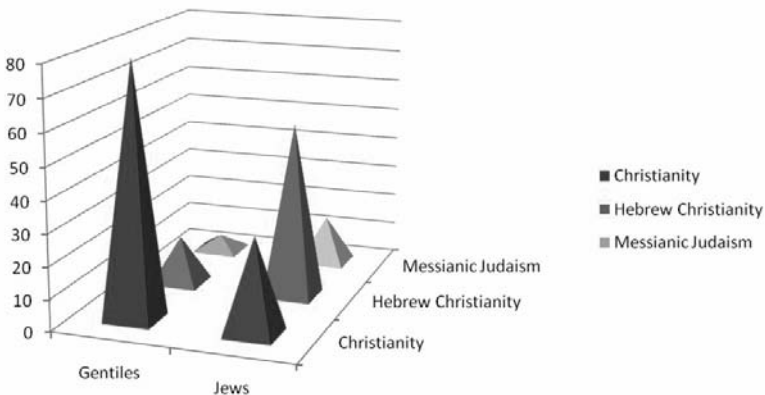
Jewish people need the space to work out the difficulties of new theological perspectives and ideas.

Jewish people who try to follow Yeshua need permission to fail.

Jewish people who try to follow Yeshua need permission to question accepted norms, even in theology.

Jewish people need YOU to pray for them.

A number of people have drawn pictures / graphs / tables to illustrate how those from other faith traditions fit in to the “Church”; notably Dr David Stern in his “Messianic Jewish Manifesto”, and Timothy Tennent and David Zeidan, regarding Muslim Background Believers. Here is my attempt, with acknowledgements to Stern, Tennent and Zeidan:



(The numbers in this graph are illustrative only).

It seems to me that a growing number of Gentile Christians are not simply acknowledging the Jewish roots of their belief system, but are following Torah precepts. This is also true of an increasing number of JBYs. While it used to be the case that Jewish people when acknowledging Yeshua would simply join the Church, more are realising that if The Almighty has a purpose for Jews as Jews, then He must have a purpose for them to be Jews and live as Jews. Pressure on JBYs comes from both the Church Community and the Jewish Community. The pressure is to conform to a normative lifestyle. Churches grow better Christians, and that is absolutely right; Jewish Communities grow better Jews, and that is absolutely right. Where does that leave a Jewish follower of the Jewish Messiah? Answers on a postcard, please!

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On the Web

<http://www.messianicjudaism.me/agenda/> is the blog of Rabbi Dr Stuart Dauermann, one of the leading Messianic Jewish thinkers

<http://cmjparsha.wordpress.com/> is the writer’s Parsha teaching blog

<http://roshpinaproject.com/> is a Messianic Jewish blog based in the UK

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