

Jewish POV: Messianic Judaism

Among those in the Messianic world there is a claim that Messianic Judaism is the faith of the Jewish people who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and the savior of the world. Their claim is that Messianic Judaism began in the first-century CE.

Messianics maintain that Messianic Judaism continued until the seventh-century. With the rise of Islam as well as pressure from the Church and Rabbinic Jews, they ultimately assimilated into the more dominant Christianity. Messianics maintain that what we now know as Messianic Judaism is a continuation of this first-century faith that became lost in the seventh-century.¹

Messianic Judaism claims that the Jewish followers of Jesus remained Jews and their descendants remain Jews. By extension, anyone who is a Jew in the modern world and embraces Messianic Judaism is still considered a Jew by the Messianic community.

Messianic Judaism differs from Rabbinic Judaism in that we rely completely on the Scriptures. Our faith is the Judaism of the Bible (Biblical Judaism) and is centered on Messiah and the salvation He brings. We are brought near to God because of the atoning work of Yeshua, Israel's Chief Rabbi, who has fulfilled us as Jewish Believers and fulfilled Judaism itself. (Congregation Shema Yisrael)¹

Even though there were some attempts in the late nineteenth-century to establish Hebrew-Christian organizations the modern-day Messianic movement did not rise up until the 1960s and 1970s.

The new thrust that turned Hebrew Christians into Messianic Jews was distinctly charismatic. This reflected the influence of the Jesus movement. However the Evangelical missions to the Jews were and remained non-charismatic. (Peter Hocken)²

Basic Beliefs: Scripture

The Tanach and the Apostolic Writings are considered the inspired word of G-d. They are the works of righteous men who wrote as they were commanded by the Holy Spirit. They are infallible guides for life.³

The Torah is understood as Hashem's instructions for living. Torah teaches what is right and what is wrong. It is understood that Jewish believers within the Messianic community are obligated to keep Torah however non-Jewish believers are only to follow the commands given to them as seen in Acts 15.⁴

What makes this any different than Christianity?

Basic Beliefs: Rabbinical Writings

Rabbinical writings such as the Mishnah and Talmud are often used by those in the Messianic community to further their understanding of Torah and the issues surrounding the observance of Torah.⁵

The role of the Rabbinical writings are viewed as valuable commentary. The writings of the rabbis prior to 200 CE are regarded as being on a higher level than those that followed. However, Messianic Judaism teaches that the commentaries and instructions are to be disregarded if they contradict the teachings of Jesus or the Christian New Testament.⁶

There is an argument within the Messianic community that the believers are to heed Jesus' command to follow those who sit in the seat of Moses. However, since Jesus brought new teachings the believers are to reject the Rabbinical writings that go counter to Jesus' own teachings.⁷

What makes this any different than Christianity?

Basic Beliefs: Nature of G-d

Messianic Judaism believes that there is "one G-d, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The trinity is a belief within the Messianic community which is expressed as three individual persons within one godhead.⁸

Messianic Jews have focused on issues relevant to their own particular apologetic, pastoral and cultural needs. Where Messianic Jews have discussed God, the emphasis has been on the Trinity and the Incarnation . . . (Richard Harvey)⁹

What makes this any different than Christianity?

It is important to note that there are some within the Messianic community that are strict monotheists and reject the idea of the trinity. However, the strict monotheists are a small minority within the Messianic community. Even though they profess monotheism they are still not considered a part of Judaism.

Basic Beliefs: Jesus

Messianics believe that Jesus is the second person of the trinity who was born to a virgin. Messianics insist that Jesus' birth in Bethlehem fulfills the prophecy from Micah and his birth from a virgin fulfills the prophecy from Isaiah.¹⁰

Jesus is also believed to have led a sinless life. He was crucified to atone for the sins of all humanity. Jesus is said to have done all things well (Mark 7) and when faced with a challenge he asked who finds sin in him. At this challenge, the accusers ceased to speak.¹⁰

Messianic Judaism declares that Jesus' death was atonement for humanity through his blood as prophesied in Isaiah 53. Jesus was bodily resurrected as prophesied about in Zechariah 12. His ascension to heaven where he sits on the right hand of the "Father" is considered a fulfillment of Psalms 16 and 110. He will also return in glory as foretold in Daniel 7.³

What makes this any different than Christianity?

Basic Beliefs: Salvation and the Afterlife

Messianic Judaism believes "that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential."⁸ A new birth through immersion in the mikveh is a requirement for eternal life. Salvation is through faith and not works – this is a basic teaching of Messianic Judaism.¹¹

Messianic Judaism affirms that there will be a "resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation."⁸ There will be a judgment when Jesus returns and those who are the believers will be saved and ushered into heaven and the non-believers will be damned.

What makes this any different than Christianity?

The place of Jesus in Messianic Judaism is usually clearly defined. Contrary to Judaism, Messianic Judaism asserts that Jesus is the word of God become manifest (John 1:1;14), a belief that is identical with normative Christian doctrine regarding the nature and identity of the son of God. Furthermore, Messianic Judaism generally asserts that the Messiah has a dual aspect as revealed in Scripture. Instead of merely a physical Messiah who would save Israel from occupation and restore the Davidic Kingdom, Jesus first rescued the world from spiritual bondage – paving the way for true understanding and application of the Torah. The Messiah will return again – only this time he will indeed rescue the world from physical oppression and establish his unending Kingdom – again, a belief that is identical to the normative Christian view of the Messiah. (Bible Discovered – Christian Messianic Judaism History and Theology)¹²

... Hebrew-Christianity is not a form of Judaism and its members, even if they are of Jewish birth, cannot be considered members of the Jewish community. Hebrew-Christians are in radical conflict with the communal interests and the destiny of the Jewish people. They have crossed an unbreachable chasm by accepting another religion. Despite this separation, they continue to attempt to convert their former co-religionists. (Lawrence H. Schiffman)¹³

For us in the Jewish community, anyone who claims that Jesus is their savior is no longer a Jew and is an apostate. Through that belief she has placed herself outside the Jewish community. Whether she cares to define herself as a Christian or as a "fulfilled Jew," "Messianic Jew," or any other designation is irrelevant; to us, she is clearly a Christian. (Religious Tolerance)¹⁴

Jewish theology rejects the idea that the Messiah (or any other person) is a divinity and such an idea is regarded as idolatrous. Nor does Judaism view the role of the Messiah to be the salvation of the world from its sins (an idea widely accepted by Christians and Messianic Jews). Judaism does not accept Jesus as the Biblical Messiah, nor does it assign him any religious role at all.

Messianic Judaism is a part of Christianity which is even affirmed by the Messianics themselves.

In one sense, Messianic Judaism and Christianity are the same thing. There is only one faith. Messianic Jews and Christians share the same core beliefs. (Congregation Shema Yisrael)¹

Messianic Judaism is not a part of Judaism. Messianic Judaism holds beliefs that are antithetical to Judaism and cannot be rightfully called a movement within Judaism.

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¹“What is Messianic Judaism.” *Congregation Shema Yisrael*. n.p., n.d. [http://www.shema.com/messianic_judaism.php]

²Hocken, Peter. *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009.

³“Essential Statement of Faith.” *The Harvest*. n.p., 2010. [<http://www.graftedin.com/statementFaith.html>]

⁴Derek Leman “Beliefs.” *Messianic Jewish Musings*. Wordpress.com, n.d. [<http://derek4messiah.wordpress.com/beliefs/>]

⁵Derek Leman “What is the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature?” *Messianic Jewish Musings*. Wordpress.com, n.d. [<http://derek4messiah.wordpress.com/2009/02/04/what-is-talmud-and-rabbinic-literature/>]

⁶Rabbi Gavriel. “What are the primary theological differences between Judaism, Messianic Judaism, and Christianity?” *Congregation Beth Ha’Mashiach*. n.p., n.d. [http://www.bethhamashiach.com/Primary_theological_differences_Judaism_MessianicJudaism_Christianity.htm]

⁷“Halakah and Messianic Judaism.” *Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council*. n.p., n.d. [<http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27/sources-mainmenu-28>]

⁸“What are the Standards of the UMJC?” *Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations*. n.p., n.d. [<http://www.umjc.net/home-mainmenu-1/faqs-mainmenu-58/14-umjc-faq/19-what-are-the-standards-of-the-umjc>]

⁹Derek Leman “The Nature of God in MJT.” *Messianic Jewish Musings*. Wordpress.com, n.d. [<http://derek4messiah.wordpress.com/2010/01/26/the-nature-of-god-in-mjt/>]

¹⁰Frydiand, Rachmiel. “Why Messianic Jews?” *Menorah Ministries*. n.p., n.d. [<http://www.menorah.org/mjews.html>]

¹¹“FAQ About Messianic Judaism.” *Messianic Jewish Alliance of America*. n.p., n.d. [http://www.mjaa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=n_messianic_movement_faq]

¹²James. “Christian Messianic Judaism History and Theology.” *Bible Discovered*. n.p., 11 March 2010. [<http://www.biblediscovered.com/messianic-new-age-movement/messianic-judaism-history-and-theology/>]

¹³Schiffman, Lawrence. “Meeting the Challenge: Hebrew Christians and the Jewish Community.” *JCRCNY*. Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, Inc., 1993. [<http://www.jcrcny.org/library/spiritual-deception/meeting-challenge.html>]

¹⁴Robinson, B. “Messianic Judaism: Opposition from the Jewish Community, Etc.” *Religious Tolerance*. Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 23 August 2011. [http://www.religioustolerance.org/mess_jud4.htm]