



The Magazine  
of the  
**BRITISH  
MESSIANIC  
JEWISH  
ALLIANCE**

*Inside...*

- Alliance Family News p2
- How to Build a Messianic Community p3
- Observing the Torah according to Yeshua (continued) p4&5
- Do we follow the Rabbis or Scripture? p6
- News from Israel p7
- Noticeboard p8

# Observing the Torah according to Yeshua

The Torah is still valid for Jewish believers in Yeshua. At the same time, however, we are not legalistic in our approach to the Torah. The ultimate and supreme authority lies in the teachings of Messiah Yeshua—the Son of God—together with the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The central question for us is not, *Should we observe the Torah?* but, rather, *How should we observe it?* Should we follow rabbinical orthodoxy and keep the *Halacha*, the traditions of Jewish Oral Torah? Should we adhere to Reform and Conservative Judaism? Should we choose an independent track of our own?

---

*We are observing the original national commandment given to the Hebrews*

---

We need to emphasise from the outset that there is no difference in Yeshua between Jew and non-Jew. In fundamental matters like sin, grace, forgiveness, salvation and eternal life there is no difference, whatever, between Jew and non-Jew. Yet, there exists a distinct and legitimate Jewish identity for those who belong to the nation of Israel, either being born as Jews or having married a Jewish person.

By mentioning some practical cases, we can provide examples of how Jewish

**GERSHON NEREL**  
(Israel)

believers in Yeshua are keeping the Torah. By so doing we are expressing a Jewish identity. These major examples are as follows:

We are observing the original national commandment given to the Hebrews, the eternal descendants of Abraham, namely we are keeping the act of circumcision according to Genesis 17:10. Interestingly, it was only 60 or 70 years ago, merely about two generations back from our time, that Jewish believers in Yeshua who wanted to circumcise their sons were at once discredited by non-Jewish believers. Particularly the Church clergy labelled them as “Judaizers” because of circumcising their sons. In reality, before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, many such Jews had to face the reaction of excommunication from various churches.

We are following the Biblical calendar, generally observing the days and the feasts originally designated as special and holy for the Jews. Thus, for example, our day of rest and of worship (in Israel) is the Shabbat, the seventh-day Sabbath, and not Sunday, as it is for so long the established tradition within all the churches. In other words, we observe the guidelines provided to Israel in the Biblical “Feast Chapter”, Leviticus 23. We accept the Holy Days according to their *Biblical timing and Biblical order*, as presented in that chapter.

Thus, for example, we should note that *Rosh-Hashana*, the Biblical New Year, is to be celebrated at Passover, in the springtime, and not in the Fall, as the

rabbis say. At the same time, the Biblical *Pesach* (Passover) is not linked to the Gregorian Church calendar, and therefore *Pesach* often does not correlate to the Church Easter.

---

*...their exists a distinct and legitimate Jewish identity for those who belong to the nation of Israel.*

---

We are keeping the elementary dietary laws of *Kashrut*, avoiding meat like pork and seafood. However, in dietary matters we also remind ourselves of the principle that still it is permitted for Jews to mix milk and meat. The Biblical text only forbids the slaughtering of the young-born animal together with the mother. Literally, the commandment says as follows: “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk” (Exodus 23:19; 34:26). Note also that non-Jewish believers are subject to some dietary laws according to the New Testament, for example, to abstain from strangled meat and not to eat blood (see Acts 15:20).

Men among us often do not completely shave their beard, following the commandment: “You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard” (Leviticus, 19:27).

*continued on page 4*

# Observing the Torah

continued from page 1

It is important for us to find the "key" that will enable us to discern between minor and major issues. The answer lies in the application of a golden rule: "The New Testament is the key to understand the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is the basis for understanding the New Testament". It is the teaching of Yeshua that is *the* key to explain how to observe the Torah.

---

## ...it was Yeshua who gave the Torah to Israel on Mount Sanai

---

We are not observing the Torah according to rabbinical traditions and restrictions. In keeping the Shabbat, for example, Yeshua is telling us that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12). Our Messiah also demonstrates that: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Therefore, to mention a contemporary example, it is right for us to use a car and to travel on the Shabbat to a Bible study or worship.

Furthermore, in the "Sermon on the Mount", when Yeshua teaches from the Torah that "It was said to those of old..." (Matthew 5:27), He immediately adds, "But I say to you"! Here Yeshua tells us that, practically, He himself is the reviser of the Torah. Thus, for example, in contrast to the Torah given to Moses, Yeshua absolutely prohibits the act of divorce (Matthew 5:31-32).

Today, it is completely clear that it was Yeshua who gave the Torah to Israel on Mount Sinai, and therefore Yeshua is the authority who interprets His own Torah. Obviously Yeshua can alter the Torah and even add to it new guidelines. Consequently, Jewish believers in Yeshua are free of keeping the *Torah ba'al peh*, the Oral Law, those customs and decrees originating from non-believers in Yeshua. Therefore, Jewish believers in Yeshua are *not* obliged to keep the *Halacha*, the rabbinical habits, because the *Halacha* intentionally ignores Yeshua.

Here are a few examples where the New Testament and *Halacha* clash:

When praying, Jewish believers in Yeshua are *not* required to wear a kippah on their heads. In fact, we read in the New Testament that, during worship time, men should take off their hats (1 Corinthians 11:7).

Contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua are *not* required to light Shabbat and Chanukah candles. Contrary to

traditional blessings, God did not command us to do these acts.

Messianic Jews are *not* indebted to follow the rabbinical Passover *Haggadah*, namely the songs and the texts traditionally read during the Passover meal. In other words, we should celebrate *Pesach* by reading and by interpreting *only* the narratives of the relevant biblical texts and, particularly, to focus on the Lamb symbolism and the Lord's Supper.

We are not obliged to celebrate the feast of Purim, definitely not as an occasion that legitimises drunkenness, or smoking, or adopting foolish carnival amusements in our congregations.

Yet, on the other hand, we Jewish believers in Yeshua are not totally ignoring the rabbinical establishment. On the contrary. The Orthodox and even the Reform rabbis are ignoring us and fighting against us. Because, as even today, in a sense, the rabbinical leaders are still sitting "in Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:2), we may receive some "general services", so to speak, from their institutions. Such services include, for example:

The service of professional and authorised *Mohalim*, circumcisers, to perform their work at the *Brit-Mila* (circumcision) ceremonies of our sons.

We have nothing against marrying our young couples at the Rabbinat offices, or through the services of a rabbi at our own ceremonies.

*Hevrah Kaddisha*—we can use the services of the authorised Jewish Burial Society, and bury our dead in the formal Jewish cemeteries.

Most of the rabbis and their delegates turn down our requests and deny any such services to Jewish followers of Yeshua. Furthermore, within the synagogues we are unwanted as *persona non-grata*, and frequently young couples need to leave Israel and spend much time and money in order to get married officially abroad. Because the rabbis reject them, these couples often fly to Cyprus, as the closest non-Arab country, to get married. When the time arrives, and our people pass away, we cannot always get a grave in the mainstream cemeteries.

While facing such a reality, we should ask ourselves, Why do we so strongly insist on adopting the definition of "Messianic Judaism" for our entity? Today, the term "Messianic Judaism" causes an enormous confusion within the Jewish world, and even creates inner contradictions.

Today the connotations of the concept "Messianic Judaism" are far from being exclusively attached to Jewish believers in Yeshua. The contemporary term "Messianic Judaism" is not merely generating a semantic labyrinth, but even contributes to the chaotic reality in connection to these words "Messianism" and "Judaism".

What is the contemporary definition for

Judaism? Which kind of "Judaism" is legitimate and authoritative today? What is the accurate definition today for "Messianic"?

Do we know of the existence of "Secular Judaism"? What about "Humanistic Judaism"? Are we aware of the existence of "Jewish Secular Orthodoxy"? Or of "Orthodox Jewish Secularism"? Do we really know of the modern phenomenon of "Political Messianism", and its outcome?

Today the terms of "Messianic Judaism" and "Messianic Jew" are more and more employed by other "Messianics". Among these is the "Chabad" Chasidic movement, with those who follow the late *Lubavitch* false messiah who died in New York in 1994. Some of his followers regard him as the divine creator of the world and even expect his soon resurrection.

Similarly, the term "Messianic Jew" is also adopted by the "Breslav Messianics", the followers of Rabbi Nachman of Ouman, who died more than a century ago in the Ukraine, and is regarded as a messiah by his vocal followers.

The designation "Messianic Jew" is used by *any* mainstream Jew who believes in the Thirteen Articles of Maimonides, declaring his "perfect faith in" and expectation of the coming of the Messiah.

---

## Simply, we are "Chasidei Yeshua", the followers of Yeshua.

---

Thus, as we are facing a very complex reality, we should use a much more clear term that can directly and immediately convey the message that we are only the disciples of Yeshua. Practically, we must distinguish between three designations, namely between "Judaism", "Jewishness" and "Jewry". Therefore it is appropriate for us simply to say that we are the Jewish disciples or followers of Yeshua. Simply, we are "Chasidei Yeshua", the followers of Yeshua. With such an accurate nomenclature there is no room left for confusion.

Meanwhile, however, we are still observing the invention of contemporary "Messianic Judaism", especially as it is crystallised in America. "Messianic Judaism" does of course refer to Yeshua, yet with an over-emphasis on the literal text of the Torah and on the rabbinical traditions. Mostly this is East-European tradition, concentrating for example on special food and on Chasidic and folk dances. Unfortunately, this type of "Messianic Judaism" is presenting itself as the central focus of the contemporary

# according to Yeshua

movement of Jewish believers in Yeshua.

This "Messianic Judaism", particularly in its American style, replaces the simple message of the Kingdom of God. Even worse, this kind of "Rabbinical Messianic Judaism" comes instead of the words of Yeshua, compromising the essentials with insignificant issues. Regrettably, that kind of humanistic or "Rabbinical Messianic Judaism" substitutes the traditions of men for the divine word of Yeshua.

---

*...focus totally on  
the words and  
teaching of Yeshua  
our Messiah...*

---

Today, "Messianic Judaism", in America and in other countries, is even creating its own "Messianic Halacha". This "Messianic Halacha" is producing much confusion—and chaos—among both first and second generations of Jewish believers in Yeshua. With this "Messianic Judaism" and "Messianic Halacha", all biblical proportions are completely distorted. For example, against the clear instruction of Yeshua, American "Messianic Judaism" calls its leaders and teachers "Rabbis" (Matthew 23:8). In this teaching, the Talmud and the traditions are quoted more than Yeshua.

It is our duty and responsibility to focus totally on the words and teachings of Yeshua our Messiah and Teacher. The Holy Spirit is our guide. We are not subject to rabbinical traditions. Therefore, we should remind ourselves also of the words of Yeshua concerning the rabbis and the scribes:

"Hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13).

"Hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matthew 23:15).

"Fools and blind" (Matthew 23:17).

We should especially remember the following words of Yeshua:

"Woe to you experts in the Torah (KJV: "lawyers"!!!), because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have prevented others going in who wanted to" (Luke 11:52).

Practically, it is only in the State of Israel that we Jewish believers in Yeshua are able to express our Jewish identity in a balanced way. In Israel we feel and show that we are Jewish without being dependent upon the rabbinic traditions—and without losing our Jewishness. The Hebrew



tongue, our daily language and the language in which we read Scripture, are already a significant factor in that process.

Thus, when living in the Jewish State it is very natural and simple to keep the Sabbath. In Israel the Shabbat is the national day of rest, and that is rooted in State Laws. It is the same with observing the other Biblical feasts – they are observed according to the Biblical calendar, anchored in the State legislation. Equally, during the feast of Passover, the regular shops are not selling normal bread and we eat only *matza*, the unleavened bread. Furthermore, according to the Israeli State legislation, most shops also do not sell *non-kosher* food.

Within the Jewish State it is our daily life that enables us to maintain and preserve our Jewish identity. This happens alongside our permanent witness for Yeshua. Thus, for example, our children normally attend the Israeli State schools, like in any other Jewish family in Israel, and we do not need to establish separate "Ghetto schools" of our own. We also serve as soldiers and officers in the Israeli Army. This we are doing, not only for the three years of obligatory military service, starting at the age of 18, but also during the reserve military service, which lasts for almost two additional decades. Such pragmatic matters enable us to identify with our nation as an integral part of our people.

Therefore, there are evidently two different ways to shape the Jewish identity in Messiah Yeshua: either in the Diaspora or in Israel. "Messianic Judaism", as it is currently shaped mainly in America and exported from there to other places, is a product of the Diaspora for the needs of the Diaspora. "Messianic Judaism" is a tool for those who actually wish to remain in the Diaspora and do not come and settle in Israel. They wish to safeguard and to perpetuate Jewish life in the Diaspora. For achieving this aim, they adopt rabbinical Judaism under the new slogan of "Messianic Halacha". The tools they choose for that survival in the Diaspora are the rabbinical traditions and rites.

Again, it must be underlined that the major outcome of this situation is that in

reality the teaching of Messianic Judaism replaces the message of the Kingdom of God. Messianic Judaism is an aim in itself. Indeed, the severe problem is that Messianic Judaism, especially in its American garb, takes the place of the teachings of Yeshua Himself.

Unfortunately, some new American immigrants strongly endeavour to import their "Messianic Judaism" to Israel. We do not need that import. Especially in the State of Israel it is clear that observing rabbinical traditions does not mean that one practices authentic Judaism. It is the real centrality of Yeshua – both in our hearts and in our teaching—that makes the big difference.

In conclusion: as Jews and as Israelis, our theology and our nationality are anchored in the Old and the New Testaments only. Following the logic that we do not need to become active or formal members of a radical political party in order to prove our loyalty to our State, we also do not need to adopt Diaspora traditions in order to feel and to prove that we are Jews and Israelis.

---

*...observing rabbinical  
traditions does not  
mean that one practices  
authentic Judaism.*

---

The Israeli Supreme Court, sitting as the High Court of Justice, already ruled in the past that from the purely legal point of view, interpreting Israeli secular legislation and following the norm within the nation, every Jewish believer in Yeshua is no longer regarded as a Jew. Therefore, *even if* Jewish believers in Yeshua strictly observe *all* rabbinical traditions, this will not help them to be considered by the authorities—secular or religious—as Jews.

During the forced Jewish Diaspora, for almost two millennia, Jewish believers in Yeshua were expelled from the synagogues and were excommunicated by the rabbinical institutions. This situation has dramatically changed since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. In the Jewish State we are full citizens—and not members of the synagogues. Practically, it is only in Israel that Jewish believers in Yeshua can redefine Jewishness outside the rabbinic institutions and still remain organic members of Jewry, within the national Jewish commonwealth.

*(Edited English adaptation of  
a lecture delivered in Hebrew on January  
26th, 2001 at the General Meeting of the  
"Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel"  
at Yad Hashmona, near Jerusalem.)*