

# Zot Habrit

## This is the Covenant

A Journal of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel (MJAI)



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### A Word from the Editors:

The current issue of *This is the Covenant* is an enlarged English adaptation of the proceedings of two seminars which were carried out in Hebrew at the Messianic village of Yad Hashmona in the Judean Hills near Jerusalem. Both seminars were initiated and organized by the executive committee of the MJAI. The first seminar focused on the topic of "Our Jewish Identity in the Messiah Yeshua," and took place on Friday, January 26, 2001, during the bi-annual general meeting of the MJAI. The second seminar, on "The Trinity – What do we believe?," took place on Friday, February 7, 2003.

Although these materials appear in writing only now, they are still most relevant also several years later, and thus they remain "ever green." It is our hope and prayer that the two last seminars of MJAI, on Christian anti-Semitism and on Politics among Israeli Yeshua-believers, will appear within the next year.



Gershon Nerel and Hanan Lukatz

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# ZOT HABRIT - THIS IS THE COVENANT

## זאת הברית



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# I PART ONE

This issue is an English adaptation of the proceedings of a seminar on the topic:

## “Our Jewish Identity in the Messiah Yeshua”

Which was held in Hebrew at Moshav Yad Hashmona on January 26, 2001  
during the Annual Meeting of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel

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The original version of the seminar proceedings was  
published in the Hebrew edition of  
ZOT HABRIT (This is the Covenant)  
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## The Torah is Obligatory in Light of the Words of Yeshua

Gershon Nerel

The theological and national identity of Jews who believe in Yeshua is not a theoretical question. In everyday life we are required to relate to this subject on a personal and familial level as well as in the framework of our congregations. Our starting point regarding our Jewish identity usually revolves around the keeping of the Torah. Our Lord Yeshua already said in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Torah or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle will by no means pass from the Torah till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18). In principle, the Torah of Moses and the Pentateuch are still valid and even binding upon us. On the other hand, we are not “legalists,” and do not see in the Torah “laws” which have the final say in spiritual matters. In matters of interpretation and spiritual direction, the highest and ultimate authority from our standpoint are the words of Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



The central question is how are we to keep the Torah - according to the Orthodox Rabbinic Halacha, or the Reform-Conservative, or to actually pave a unique and independent path of our own? Set before us is the challenge to walk in an old-new way, the way of the Jewish followers of Yeshua of the first century in Israel, as described in the New Covenant. At the same time, we must also take into account the last two thousand years of history. We must explain the fact that in terms of atonement for sin and the salvation of souls, there is no difference between Jew and non-Jew. We must clarify, however, that there is indeed a distinct and legitimate Jewish identity for those that belong to the people of Israel.

Below are a number of practical examples of how we keep the Torah from our perspective, and thus express our Jewish identity:

1. We observe the law of circumcision (Genesis 17:10).
2. We observe the Sabbath and the holidays according to the biblical calendar (Leviticus 23).
3. We keep kosher according to the principle “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk” (Exodus 23:19, 34:26).
4. We do not “harm the edges” of our beards (Leviticus 19:27).

Of course there are many facets to this subject, however the ‘key’ for us is how to distinguish between the essence and the minutiae. The answer lies in the principle that the New Covenant is the key to understanding the Old Covenant, and the Old Covenant is the basis for understanding the New Covenant. In other words, Yeshua’s instruction is the key for keeping the Torah,



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such as observation of the Sabbath - not on Sunday as in churches - and according to the principle that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12), and "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Accordingly, when the Lord Yeshua said: "You have heard it said to the ancients... but I say to you..." He was positioning

himself as a reformer of the Torah, and as One who, in contrast to the Torah of Moses, for example, unequivocally forbade divorce (Matthew 5:31-32). It is perfectly clear to us that Yeshua Himself is the One who gave the Torah at Mount Sinai, and He is also the One who has the authority to explain, reform and amend it.

As Jewish followers of Yeshua, we are not subject to the Oral Torah, and we do not need to keep the traditions and customs of the rabbis. For example:

1. We do not keep the rabbinic *halacha* regarding the separation of milk and meat.
2. We are not required to wear a yarmulke.
3. We do not have to light Sabbath and Hanukkah candles.
4. We do not need to celebrate Purim, and certainly not as carnivalesque and clowning in the congregation.

Nevertheless, since today to some degree the rabbis "sit in the seat of Moses" (Matthew 23:1), we are not prohibited from receiving "general services" from the rabbinic establishment, such as:

1. Professional *Mohels* (Ritual Circumcisers).
2. Rabbinic Marriage - if and when the rabbis are prepared to marry us.
3. *Hevrat Kaddisha* (Ritual Burial Services) - if and when the rabbis are prepared to bury our dead.

Our problem today concerns the worldview and definition of "Messianic Judaism," which in actuality creates confusion and even internal contradictions, and not only from a semantic point-of-view. Chabadniks (Lubavitsch Hassidim), for example, along with other Messianists, like the followers of Rabbi Nahman from Ouman (Breslau), also speak of "Messianic Judaism."

What is the definition of 'Judaism'? It is a fact that secular Jewishness (and even secular Orthodoxy) exists, so there is actually a need to differentiate between Jewry and Judaism.

The problem that I see is that the "Messianic Judaism" of today, with its over-emphasis on the Law and tradition (for the most part, Eastern European tradition), takes center stage at the expense of the gospel of the Kingdom of God and the words of Yeshua. What I have

seen of today's "Messianic Judaism," with its confused "Messianic *Halacha*," reflects a situation of distorted proportions. It is our obligation to focus on the words of Yeshua himself. We are to remember well what Yeshua said regarding the rabbis and scribes, as follows:

Only in the State of Israel can we express our Jewish identity without need for Halacha and rabbinic tradition

"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).  
"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).  
"Blind guides, fools and hypocrites" (Matthew 23).  
"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered" (Luke 11:52).

Only in the State of Israel can we express our Jewish identity without need for *Halacha* and rabbinic tradition. The Hebrew language which we use, keeping the Sabbath and the Jewish holidays as is customary according to the calendar adopted by the State, and the fact that we live out our daily lives here in Israel – for example in government schools

and the military – all enable us to identify with the people of Israel, and express our identity as Jews and as an inseparable part of the people. Therefore, my conclusion is that, in particular, "American Messianic Judaism" serves the purposes of those Messianic Jews that prefer to remain in the countries of Diaspora, and refuse to make aliyah to Israel under various pretexts. In the Diaspora, Messianic Jews develop "Messianic *Halacha*" in order to preserve and perpetuate the state of Diaspora. In the Land of Israel, we do not need this kind of American import.

In conclusion, as Israeli Jews, our theology and nationalism is anchored in the Old and New Covenants alone, and just as we do not need to belong to an extremist political party in order to prove our loyalty to Israel, so we also do not need to adopt diasporic traditions in order to feel and state that we are part of this people. The High Court judges in Israel have by their ruling already removed us from the community of Israel – solely because of our faith in Yeshua. Therefore, keeping rabbinical traditions and the compilation of a "Messianic rabbinical *Halacha*" are not what will help us integrate into our people. Only in the State of Israel, after two thousand years of Diaspora, can Jewish followers of Yeshua live as Jews outside of the rabbinic halachic establishment.

(In the ideas shared above, I am following in the footsteps of *Haim Joseph Haimoff* (Bar-David 1905-1991), who for decades paved a unique path for disciples of Yeshua in the Land of Israel.)





## OUR PURPOSES

- ❖ *To* serve the Messianic congregations and believers in Yeshua in the Land of Israel
- ❖ *To* give an expression for our Jewish and Israeli Identity as believers in the Messiah Yeshua, Son of God
- ❖ *To* strengthen the unity among the Messianic believers in the Land
- ❖ *To* be living witnesses for the truth of the Bible, Tanach (the Old Testament) and the New Testament
- ❖ *To* build and maintain relations with Messianic believers all over the world

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