

Messianic Judaism as a Mirror of Church Mission

*A Paper for the Missiological Symposium, Turku
Messianic Judaism, the Church, and God's Mission*

Richard Harvey, PhD

Introduction: A Living Mirror Held before Church and Israel

This paper argues that Messianic Jews are a living mirror held up to the Church and Israel, reflecting their shared past, their fractured present, and their promised future in the purposes of God. The metaphor of the mirror is used as theological analogy for understanding the relationship between Messianic Judaism and Church mission and is deliberately polyvalent. Messianic Jews function as a rear-view mirror, recalling the Church to its Jewish origins; as a present mirror, exposing the unfinished reconciliation between Church and Israel; and as an eschatological mirror, reflecting, however dimly, the future restoration of Israel, the one new humanity in Messiah, and the restoration of all things. This is not merely a sociological claim about a new religious movement (NRM). It is a theological and missiological claim about the unresolved relationship between Israel, the Church, and the nations.

The setting of this symposium makes the question especially appropriate. If Isaiah gives us the scriptural horizon of Israel, Zion, the nations, and the light of God going forth to the ends of the earth, Messianic Judaism challenges us to ask what became of that horizon in the subsequent life of the Church. Did the Church understand its mission as participation in Israel's vocation, or as the replacement of Israel's vocation? Did it recognise Jewish disciples of Yeshua as a living sign of the continuity of Israel's election, or as anomalies to be absorbed, corrected, or explained away? And what might their continued existence mean for Christian mission today?

The language of mirror allows us to hold together history, theology, and mission. A mirror does not create the image it reflects. It reveals what is already there, sometimes with clarity, sometimes with distortion, and sometimes with discomfort. Messianic Jews do not invent the Church's Jewish past; they disclose it. They do not create the present tension between Church and Israel; they embody it. They do not fulfil the eschatological restoration of all things; they point towards it in fragile, partial, and contested ways. For this reason, Messianic Jews are not merely a problem to be solved, but a sign to be discerned.

This paper proceeds in four movements. First, it defines Messianic Jews and Messianic Judaism as a contemporary theological and social reality.¹ Second, it considers Messianic Jews as a mirror of the past, recalling the Jewishness of Yeshua and the early ekklesia, the complex and incomplete so-called "Parting of the Ways", and the repeated marginalisation of Jewish disciples of Yeshua by both Church and synagogue. Third, it considers Messianic Jews as a mirror of the present, challenging both Jewish-Christian relations and

¹ For the purposes of this paper I understand "Israel" to be the covenant people of God, through the physical line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and the Twelve tribes. I see "Israel" and "Jew/Judaism/Jewish people" as referring to the same people, but from different perspectives, which include social identity, ethnicity, politics, religion, etc. I understand the term "Jew" to refer to those born into this physical line, through a Jewish mother (halachic definition) or father (Reform and Messianic), or through conversion (*giyyur*). As has always been the case, these definitions have been contested, the boundaries flexible and permeable. I understand the term "Gentile" to refer to an individual or nation that is not Jewish. See Harvey, What shapes Jewish Identity? And Harvey, Conversion.

Christian ecclesiology. Fourth, it considers Messianic Jews as a mirror of the future, pointing toward the restoration of Israel, the reconciliation of Israel and the nations, and the eschatological *tikkun olam*, the healing of creation. The argument is that Messianic Jews are a God-given mirror to help the Church recognise its origins, examine its mission, and imagine its future.

I speak to you as a Jewish disciple of Yeshua whose own story is woven into the wider history of European Jewish life, exile, assimilation, destruction and renewal. I was born in England in 1956 and brought up in a Liberal Jewish family, worshipping at synagogue and celebrating the Jewish festivals within the life of our large extended Jewish family. On my father's side, the family name was Hirschland; my German Jewish ancestors were rooted in Essen, where the Hirschland family were involved in civic life, business, and the synagogue. Some escaped Nazism, but others were murdered in the concentration camps; my grandfather changed the family name from Hirschland to Harvey in the 1930s, because a German-sounding Jewish name had become dangerous and difficult in Britain. On my mother's side, the Falk family came from Germany and Elias Weiss, who changed his name to Edward, came from Tarnow, Poland. The Falks and Hirschlands were successful businessmen, lawyers and doctors, but always aware of their roots amidst growing antisemitism. In 1974 I became a disciple Yeshua through the visionary experience of the empty tomb and put my faith in him as the Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the nations. I did not understand this as ceasing to be Jewish, but as discovering the risen Messiah within the story of Israel itself. Since then I have been involved in the Messianic Jewish movement, including as a founding member of the London Messianic Congregation in 1979, seeking to live and think as a Jewish disciple of Yeshua within the body of Messiah and in solidarity with the Jewish people. So when I speak about Messianic Judaism as a mirror of Church mission, I am speaking not only about an academic subject, but about my own life, my family history, and the unresolved relationship between Israel, the Church, and the nations.²

1. Messianic Jews: Definition, Demography, and Theological Significance

Before we can understand how Messianic Jews can function as a mirror, we need to ask who they are. The term Messianic Judaism is used in several ways. In a broad sense, all Judaism is in some sense messianic insofar as it awaits, hopes for, or interprets history in relation to the coming fulfilment of God's purposes. Michael Wyschogrod could therefore write that “authentic Judaism must be Messianic Judaism,” meaning a Judaism that takes seriously the conviction that Jewish history is moving toward an extraordinary act of God by which history will reach its climax. In the narrower sense used here, however, Messianic Jews are Jews who are disciples of Yeshua/Jesus as Messiah and continue to identify, worship, and live as Jews.³

Messianic Judaism can therefore be described as a Jewish form of Christianity and a Christian form of Judaism, challenging the boundaries and self-definitions of the two larger faith communities.⁴ It is expressed in Messianic congregations and synagogues, in family practice, in communal worship, in liturgical and halakhic reflection, and in the wider lives of Jewish disciples of Yeshua in churches, Jewish settings, and mixed communal contexts. Common self-designations include “Messianic Jews”, “Jewish believers”,

² Richard Harvey, *But I'm Jewish: A Jew for Jesus Tells his Story* (San Francisco: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 1996).

³ “[A]uthentic Judaism must be Messianic Judaism. Messianic Judaism is Judaism that takes seriously the belief that Jewish history, in spite of everything that has happened, is prelude to an extraordinary act of God by which history will come to its climax.” (Wyschogrod 1996: 254–255, cited in Richard Harvey, “Messianic Jewish Theology,” *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology* (2025).

⁴ Harvey, *MMJT*, II.

“Jewish disciples of Yeshua”, and historically Nazarenes, Jewish Christians, Hebrew Christians,⁵ Christian Israelites and Christian Jews. The term “Jews for Jesus” which is often used generically in popular discourse more specifically denotes a particular evangelistic organisation rather than the movement as a whole.⁶

The Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations offers a widely cited definition of Messianic Judaism as a “[M]ovement of Jewish congregations and groups committed to Yeshua the Messiah, embracing 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”⁷. This definition is important because it refuses to reduce Messianic Judaism either to private faith in Yeshua or to ethnic Jewish background. It emphasises communal life, covenantal responsibility, Torah, tradition, and New Covenant renewal. It also allows Messianic Judaism to be viewed not only as a religious movement but as a form of theological self-understanding.⁸

Messianic Jewish theology, correspondingly, may be defined as theological reflection constructed in dialogue with Judaism and Christianity and developed from within the life of Messianic Jewish communities. In my own formulation, Messianic Jewish theology is built on twin epistemic priorities: the ongoing election of Israel and the messiahship of Yeshua. Mark Kinzer gives a more extended programmatic definition: “Messianic Jewish theology is disciplined reflection on God's character, will, and works, and on God's relationship to Israel, the nations, and creation, in light of Israel's irrevocable election and God's creative, revelatory, and redemptive work in Messiah Yeshua.” Both formulations locate Messianic Jewish theology within the continuing relationship between Israel, the nations, and the ekklesia.⁹

Demography is difficult because definitions vary. A broad definition includes self-identifying Jewish disciples of Yeshua found in Jewish, Christian, and Messianic Jewish communities. A narrower definition limits the term to those who belong to explicitly Messianic Jewish congregations. Conservative estimates range from 150,000 to 1.5 million globally, depending on counting methods and whether hidden,

⁵ The term became popular in the early years of the nineteenth century with the formation of the LSPCJ. Daniel Defoe's 1705 use of ‘The Hebrew Christian, and the Christian Jew’ is best understood as an early satirical attestation of a phrase already intelligible to readers, rather than as evidence of an established communal self-designation. The paired terms function rhetorically, marking religious ambiguity and reversal, not yet the stable nomenclature of the later Hebrew Christian movement.” Harvey, “Origin of the term ‘Hebrew Christian’”, forthcoming.

⁶ Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 8–12; Harvey, “Messianic Jewish Theology,” sec. 1.1. “A theology constructed in dialogue with Judaism and Christianity, refined in discussion between reflective practitioners engaged with Messianic Judaism, developed into a new theological tradition based on the twin epistemic priorities of the continuing election of the Jewish people and the recognition of Jesus as the risen Messiah and incarnate Son of God.” (Harvey 2008: 282)

⁷ UMJC in Harvey, SAET, 1.1. “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.” (UMJC, 2005)
<http://www.umjc.org/home-mainmenu-1/global-vision-mainmenu-42/13-vision/225-defining-messianic-judaism>

⁸ Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, “Defining Messianic Judaism” (2005), cited in Harvey, “Messianic Jewish Theology,” sec. 1.1.

⁹ Mark S. Kinzer, definition cited in Harvey, “Messianic Jewish Theology,” sec. 1.2. Messianic Jewish theology is disciplined reflection about God’s character, will, and works, and about God’s relationship to Israel, the Nations, and all creation, in the light of God’s irrevocable election of Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and God’s creative, revelatory, and redemptive work in Messiah Yeshua. (Kinzer 2005:1)

denominational, and culturally Jewish believers are included. Estimates for Israel range from about 8,125 to upward of 30,000, with the Russian-speaking Messianic community now a significant and perhaps the largest component of the Israeli movement.¹⁰ Recent surveys estimate approximately 1,500 Messianic groups worldwide, including more than 1,000 in the United States and about 287 in Israel.

These figures are small in relation to world Jewry. [SLIDE Elephant, Ant, Waterflea] Messianic Jews remain numerically tiny, but symbolically and theologically disproportionate. Their significance cannot be measured merely by numbers. [SLIDE Vatican quote] The existence of Messianic Jews raises questions for social identity theory, anthropology, ecclesiology, missiology, and Jewish-Christian relations. It is a lived reality that challenges the inherited assumption that Judaism and faith in Yeshua occupy mutually exclusive religious worlds.

Thus Messianic Judaism is not merely an anthropological curiosity. It is a theological reality: a sign of God's ongoing election of Israel and a prophetic pointer to God's purposes for Israel and all nations through Messiah Yeshua. The question is not only how many Messianic Jews there are, but what their existence means. To answer that, we turn first to the past.

2. Messianic Jews as a Mirror of the Past: The Rear-View Mirror

As a rear-view mirror, Messianic Jews show the Church its Jewish origins. Yeshua was (is, and is to come!) Jewish. Mary/Miriam was Jewish. The apostles were Jews. The earliest community of disciples belonged within the pluriform world of Second Temple Judaism.¹¹ The first *ekklesia* was not a Gentile religion that later discovered Jewish roots; it began as a Jewish messianic movement. The New Testament writings bear witness to the community of James in Jerusalem, and early Jewish disciples of Yeshua continued to live as Jews, participate in Jewish life, and interpret Israel's Scriptures in light of the Messiah.¹²

This is now widely acknowledged in contemporary scholarship, yet its ecclesial implications are still often resisted. The Jewishness of Yeshua is not a decorative historical detail. It is foundational to Christology, ecclesiology, and mission. The Messiah of Israel cannot be abstracted from the people of Israel without theological distortion. The Church's mission cannot be rightly understood if the Jewish identity of the Messiah and the apostolic community is treated merely as a temporary cultural wrapper for a universal message.

The so-called “Parting of the Ways” between Judaism and Christianity was slow, uneven, and incomplete rather than a single decisive break. Scholars such as Daniel Boyarin, Adam Becker, Annette Yoshiko Reed, and others have challenged simple accounts of an early and clean separation.¹³ The boundaries between emerging rabbinic Judaism and emerging Christianity hardened over centuries, especially after 70 CE, 135 CE, and the Constantinian period. [SLIDE Goodman: Modelling Parting of the Ways] But Jewish

¹⁰ Harvey, “Messianic Jewish Theology,” sec. 1.1; Richard Harvey, “Messianic Judaism – Introducing the Messianic Jewish Reality,” Vienna paper, 2022.

¹¹ Boccacini, “Multiple Judaisms”.

¹² Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007); Harvey, “Messianic Jewish Theology,” sec. 2.1.

¹³ Veto chapter.

expressions of faith in Yeshua did not vanish immediately. They remained visible in patristic polemics, rabbinic references, and later marginal communities.¹⁴

The difficulty was that Jewish disciples of Yeshua became increasingly impossible for both communities to classify and accept. They were “too Jewish” for the Church and “too Christian” for the synagogue. Rabbinic authorities increasingly excluded them because of their faith in Yeshua, while ecclesiastical authorities increasingly distrusted them because of their continued Jewish practice. Early writers such as Justin Martyr, Jerome, Epiphanius, and John Chrysostom reveal both awareness of Jewish believers in Yeshua and anxiety about their significance, especially when Gentile Christians were attracted to Jewish practices.¹⁵

The result was a tragic narrowing of the Christian imagination. As the Church became increasingly Gentile (ethnic) in composition and culture, Jewish life in Messiah came to be seen less as a natural expression of apostolic faith and more as regression, legalism, or heresy. The very people who might have reminded the Church of its origin became marginalised within it. The mirror was pushed to the side. [SLIDE Snow White]

Yet the long history of marginalisation did not erase Jewish disciples of Yeshua. Even without one simple uninterrupted institutional line, Jewish believers continued to appear across the centuries. Medieval institutions such as the Domus Conversorum, while deeply problematic from a modern perspective, testify to the reality of Jewish converts in a Christian society often hostile to Jews.¹⁶ [SLIDE Domus Conversorum] The modern period saw the emergence of more organised forms of Hebrew Christian identity, especially through missions to the Jews and the formation of associations by Jewish Christians themselves.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were particularly significant. Missions to the Jews, including the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, played an ambivalent but important role. [SLIDE Palestine Place] On the one hand, these missions often operated within supersessionist assumptions and expected Jewish “converts” to assimilate into Gentile churches. On the other hand, they also created institutional spaces in which Jewish believers began to reflect on their identity, form associations, produce literature, develop liturgies, and ask what it meant to remain Jewish while confessing Yeshua.¹⁷

The Beni Abraham, founded in 1813 by Joseph Samuel Christian Frederick Frey, was an early example of a Hebrew Christian association. Later came the Hebrew Christian Alliance of Great Britain (1866), the Hebrew Christian Prayer Union, and the International Hebrew Christian Alliance (1925). Figures such as Joseph Wolff, Michael Solomon Alexander, Moses Margoliouth, Adolph Saphir, Alfred Edersheim, Paul Levertoff, and others illustrate the complex, sometimes painful, sometimes creative construction of Jewish and

¹⁴ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

¹⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*; Jerome, Letter 112; John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*; see Skarsaune and Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus*.

¹⁶ Harvey, <https://jewinthepew.org/2026/02/13/13-february-1824-600-years-of-domus-conversorum-ends-otdimjh/>

¹⁷ Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); W. T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews* (London: London Society, 1908); Kelvin Crombie, *A Jewish Bishop in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Nicolayson’s, 2006).

Christian “braided” identities. They were not merely passive recipients of missionary activity; they became agents of theological, cultural, and intellectual transmission.¹⁸

This is why the history of missions to the Jews cannot be reduced either to triumphalist missionary success or to coercive Christian failure. It is more complex. Missions were often vehicles of assimilation and supersessionist pressure.¹⁹ Yet they also inadvertently catalysed the development of Jewish Christian self-consciousness. Jewish disciples of Yeshua took the resources offered to them, biblical, institutional, linguistic, and liturgical, and used them to construct new forms of Hebrew Christian identity. By the late twentieth century, this process contributed to the emergence of contemporary Messianic Judaism, which reclaimed Jewish practice and communal life while maintaining faith in Yeshua as Messiah.

The rear-view mirror therefore reveals both continuity and rupture. It reminds the Church that Jewish disciples of Yeshua were present from the beginning. It reveals that the separation between Judaism and Christianity was neither simple nor innocent. It also reveals that the question has never disappeared: can one be fully Jewish and fully committed to Yeshua the Messiah? In this sense Messianic Jews are not modern novelties. They are a mirror of a suppressed and unresolved history. [Comment on Postcolonial missiology here if time]

3. Messianic Jews as a Mirror of the Present: Unfinished Reconciliation

Messianic Jews also function as a mirror of the present. They reveal that the relationship between Church and Israel remains unresolved. The Church cannot understand itself fully without Israel, and the Jewish people cannot simply dismiss Yeshua without confronting the ongoing presence of Jews who confess him. Messianic Jews expose the Church's continuing dependence on its Jewish roots. They expose Judaism's unresolved relation to Yeshua and to Jews who believe in him. They show that Jewish-Christian relations remain incomplete if Messianic Jewish voices are excluded.

This present mirror is uncomfortable. Messianic Jews are not only a bridge; they are also a provocation. [SLIDE Laepple cover] To the Church, they ask: Can your theology make room for Jews who believe in Yeshua and remain Jews? To the Jewish community, they ask: Can Jewish identity include those who confess Yeshua as Messiah, or must Jewish disciples of Yeshua always be treated as apostates? To Jewish-Christian dialogue, they ask: Can a dialogue about Yeshua, Israel, covenant, and the Church remain adequate if Jews who believe in Yeshua are not permitted to speak?

In German and wider European contexts, this question is particularly charged. The history of Christian anti-Judaism, forced conversion, social exclusion, and the Shoah has rightly made churches cautious about mission to Jews. Yet caution can become silence, and silence can become exclusion. The presence of Messianic Jews complicates the binary. They are not merely objects of Christian mission or Jewish suspicion; they are subjects who speak from within both Israel and the ekklesia.²⁰

In the post-war development of Jewish-Christian relations, one can trace a movement from moral condemnation of the Holocaust, to Christian study of Judaism, to actual encounters between Christians and Jews, to formal church statements on the Jewish-Christian relationship.²¹ A possible fifth phase requires the

¹⁸ Richard Harvey, “Radical Integration: Jewish Disciples of Jesus, Missions to the Jews and the Construction of Hebrew Christian Identity,” *Oxford Handbook of Jewish Christianity and Messianic Judaism*, forthcoming.

¹⁹ Include mention of Finnish Missions and missionaries here?

²⁰ Richard Harvey, “Messianic Judaism: An Insider’s Perspective,” *Kirchentag* article in Laepple 2016.

²¹ Harvey in Laepple ref – stages in Jewish-Christian relations.

inclusion of Messianic Jews as members, in some sense, of both Church and Israel. This is not to deny the sensitivities involved. It is to recognise that Jewish-Christian relations cannot be complete while excluding those whose very existence embodies the disputed boundary.²²

Theological voices from the German context have recognised something of this problem. Eberhard Busch describes Messianic Jews as an “undiscovered continent” who should not really exist, and yet do exist. Berthold Klappert suggests that “if the New Testament is a Jewish book written by Messianic Jews to proclaim Yeshua as Messiah of Israel and the nations, then Messianic Jewish Christians are important for understanding the New Testament and should become a kind of *nes amim*, a sign for the nations.” Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt argued that the Church cannot overcome anti-Judaism until it can say something theologically positive about Israel's No to Jesus. But if the majority Jewish No must be taken seriously, so too must the minority Jewish Yes to Yeshua.²³

This is where Mark Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology becomes especially important. [SLIDE 5 Points of PMJ] Kinzer argues that the *ekklesia* is one body in Messiah but not one flattened identity. Israel and the nations remain distinct yet reconciled. Jewish disciples of Yeshua are not merely assimilated into the Church of the nations; they constitute the *ecclesia ex circumcisione*, the Jewish corporate form of the one body of Messiah, alongside the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, the Church from the nations. Unity does not require erasure; difference does not require separation.²⁴

This proposal has significant implications for Jewish-Christian relations. It allows us to affirm the universal significance of Messiah without denying Israel's continuing covenantal vocation. It allows Messianic Jews to remain in solidarity with the Jewish people and in communion with the Church. It also challenges both missionary Christianity and some forms of missionary Messianic Judaism when they assume that Jewish faith in Yeshua requires departure from Jewish communal identity.

A present-day mirror thus reflects at least three needed conversations. The first is the conversation between Christians and Jews. [SLIDE Rabbi Wright] The second is the conversation between Messianic Jews and the wider Church. The third is the conversation between Jewish believers in Yeshua and the wider Jewish community. These cannot be substituted for one another. Messianic Jews are not peripheral to these dialogues. They are one of the places where the dialogues converge.

This has missiological implications. The words mission, proselytism, and conversion carry heavy historical burdens, especially in relation to Jews. Proselytising today often means inducing someone to leave one religious community and join another. But originally the language of proselytes referred to Gentiles who joined themselves to Israel. For Messianic Jews, faith in Yeshua is not understood as leaving Israel but as recognising Israel's Messiah. The question, then, is not whether there can be witness to Yeshua among Jews, but what kind of witness honours Israel's covenantal identity and avoids coercion, superiority, or erasure.²⁵

²² Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable” (Rom 11:29) (Vatican, 2015), §§14–15, 43.

²³ Eberhard Busch, Berthold Klappert, and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, cited and discussed in Richard Harvey, “Messianic Judaism: An Insider’s Perspective,” Kirchentag in Laepple, 2016.

²⁴ Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005); Mark S. Kinzer, *Israel’s Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

²⁵ On proselytism and Jewish-Christian relations, see Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Gifts and Calling*, §§40–43; Harvey, “Messianic Judaism: An Insider’s Perspective.”

Messianic Jews do not cease to be Jewish when they recognise Yeshua as Messiah. Indeed, many identify more strongly with their people after coming to faith. [SLIDE YBY Survey] It is therefore natural that they wish to share the Good News they have received with their people and with all nations. But that witness must be marked by patience, sensitivity, humility, and love. A missionary posture that smells of pride, superiority, or supersessionist displacement is wholly inappropriate. The present mirror therefore exposes not only theological error but missiological posture.

4. Messianic Jews as a Mirror of the Future: Through a Glass Darkly

Finally, Messianic Jews function as an eschatological mirror. They do not yet embody the full restoration promised by the Almighty, but they anticipate it. They point toward the restoration of Israel, the one new humanity in Messiah, and the restoration of all things. Here the mirror is not clear glass but, to use Pauline language, a glass through which we see darkly (I Cor. 13:2). The Messianic Jewish community is partial, contested, fragile, and often divided. Yet precisely in that fragility it remains a sign.

The New Testament refuses to allow the Church to imagine that the Holy One of Israel has rejected Israel. Romans 9-11 remains decisive. Paul grieves Israel's unbelief, but he does so as one who continues to affirm Israel's privileges: theirs is adoption, the glory, the covenants, the Torah, the Temple worship, the promises (and this includes the promise of the Land), the patriarchs, and the Messiah according to the flesh (Rom 9:4-5). Paul insists that God has not rejected his people (Rom 11:1), speaks of a remnant chosen by grace (Rom 11:5), warns Gentile believers not to boast over the branches (Rom 11:18), and declares that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom 11:29). The future salvation of Israel remains part of the mystery of the God of Israel's purposes (Rom 11:25-26).

Messianic Jews therefore point beyond private spirituality toward the restoration of Israel as a people. Their existence is not simply evidence that individual Jews can believe in Yeshua. It is a sign that Israel's covenantal story has not been dissolved into a generic religious identity. Jewish faith in Yeshua, when lived in solidarity with Israel, testifies that Israel remains within the purposes of God.

This future dimension must also be related to Ephesians 2. The one new humanity is not the abolition of Jewish and Gentile identity but their reconciliation in Messiah.²⁶ The dividing wall is broken down, hostility is overcome, and Jews and Gentiles are brought into one body. But reconciliation is not assimilation or homogenisation. If the one new humanity requires Jews to cease being Jews, then it is merely another form of supersessionism. If it requires Gentiles to become Jews, then it misunderstands the apostolic inclusion of the nations. The eschatological sign is unity with distinction: reconciliation without erasure, communion without collapse.

Messianic Jews are therefore an anticipatory sign of differentiated communion. They suggest, in provisional form, what it might mean for Israel and the nations to be reconciled in Messiah without either losing its identity. This is the significance of the remnant language in Romans. The remnant is not a replacement for Israel but a sign within Israel and within the *ekklesia*. Messianic Jews are neither the whole of Israel nor outside Israel. They are a witness within Israel and a sign to the nations.

The eschatological horizon is wider still. The restoration of Israel belongs within the restoration of all things. Mission is not merely the saving of individual souls, though it includes that. It is the participation of Israel,

²⁶ Andrew Remington Rillera, "Tertium Genus or Dyadic Unity? Investigating Sociopolitical Salvation in Ephesians," *Biblical Research* 66 (2021): 31–51. David Rudolph, "Toward Paul's Ephesians 2 Vision of the One New Man: Navigating Around Hebrew Roots and Replacement Theologies", *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 41 (2022): 3-31. (<https://www.keshetjournal.com/article/toward-pauls-ephesians-2-vision-of-the-one-new-man-navigating-around-hebrew-roots-and-replacement-theologies/>)

the Church, and the nations in God's redemptive and restorative purpose for all creation. Jewish disciples of Yeshua, therefore, bear witness not only to the Jewishness of Yeshua and the continuity of Israel's election, but also to the final reconciliation of all things in Messiah.

Here eschatological modesty is essential. Messianic Jews are not the fulfilment itself. They do not possess the kingdom in advance. They do not resolve all the tensions between Church and Israel. They are often weak, divided, contested, and misunderstood. But signs do not need to be complete in order to signify. A sign points beyond itself. In that sense, Messianic Jews are a living sign of the future purposes of God.

Conclusion: A Sign to Be Discerned

Messianic Jews are a living mirror in which the Church must recognise itself. As a mirror of the past, they recall the Jewishness of Yeshua, Mary, the apostles, and the earliest ekklesia. They remind the Church that the apostolic faith was not originally a Gentile religion with Jewish background, but a Jewish messianic movement into which the nations were graciously incorporated.

As a mirror of the present, Messianic Jews reveal that the relationship between Church and Israel remains unresolved. They expose the Church's dependence on Israel, Judaism's unresolved relation to Yeshua, and the incompleteness of Jewish-Christian dialogue when Messianic Jewish voices are excluded. They require fresh theological thinking, especially around bilateral ecclesiology, mission, conversion, and Jewish identity.

As a mirror of the future, Messianic Jews anticipate the restoration of Israel, the reconciliation of Israel and the nations, and the restoration of all things. They do so partially, fragilely, and imperfectly, but genuinely. Their existence is not just a sociological anomaly. It is a theological sign.

The missiological significance is therefore profound. If Messianic Jews are a mirror of Church mission, then mission to the Jewish people cannot be framed as the absorption of Jews into a Gentile-defined Church. Nor can it be abandoned as if Yeshua were irrelevant to Israel. Rather, mission must be transformed into humble, covenantally sensitive witness within Israel's own story. Such witness must reject coercion, triumphalism, and erasure. It must affirm Israel's ongoing election, the Jewishness of Messiah, and the calling of Jewish disciples of Yeshua to remain in solidarity with their people.

Messianic Jews are not merely a problem to be solved. They are a sign to be discerned. To ignore them is to remain short-sighted about the Church's origins, the Church's present calling, and the Church's future hope. To attend to them is to look into a mirror in which Church and Israel may glimpse, however dimly, the promised reconciliation of God's purposes in Messiah.

Select Bibliography

Ariel, Yaakov. *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Becker, Adam H., and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds. *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. *The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable (Rom 11:29)*. Vatican, 2015.

Gidney, W. T. *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews*. London: London Society, 1908.

- Harvey, Richard. *But I'm Jewish: A Jew for Jesus Tells His Story*. San Francisco: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 1996.
- Harvey, Richard. *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009.
- Harvey, Richard. *Messianic Jewish Theology*. St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology. 2025.
- Harvey, Richard. "Conversion to Judaism and Messianic Judaism".
https://www.academia.edu/5383494/Conversion_of_Non_Jews_to_Messianic_Judaism_Membership_and_Identity_Issues?sm=b&rhid=39826612289
- Harvey, Richard. "What shapes Jewish Identity?"
https://www.academia.edu/44823497/What_Shapes_Jewish_Identity?sm=b&rhid=39826563522
- Kinzer, Mark S. *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005.
- Kinzer, Mark S. *Israel's Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011.
- Rillera, Andrew Remington. "Tertium Genus or Dyadic Unity? Investigating Sociopolitical Salvation in Ephesians," *Biblical Research* 66 (2021): 31–51.
- Rudolph, David. "Toward Paul's Ephesians 2 Vision of the One New Man: Navigating Around Hebrew Roots and Replacement Theologies", *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 41 (2022): 3-31.
(<https://www.keshetjournal.com/article/toward-pauls-ephesians-2-vision-of-the-one-new-man-navigating-around-hebrew-roots-and-replacement-theologies/>)
- Skarsaune, Oskar, and Reidar Hvalvik, eds. *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007.
- Wyschogrod, Michael. *A Jewish Perspective on Incarnation*. In *Christology after Auschwitz*, edited by George C. Berthold, 254-55. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981.