

# Messianic Judaism as a Mirror of Church Mission

Lecture Handout 1 • Missiological Symposium, Turku • 11:00–12:00

## Thesis

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.

## Introduction

This lecture uses the metaphor of the mirror in three related senses. Messianic Jews function as a rear-view mirror to the Church's Jewish past, as a present mirror exposing unfinished reconciliation between Church and Israel, and as an eschatological mirror reflecting the future restoration of Israel, the one new humanity in Messiah, and the restoration of all things.

## Messianic Jews – who are they?

Messianic Jews are Jews who believe in Yeshua/Jesus as Messiah and continue to identify, worship, and live as Jews. Messianic Judaism may be described as a Jewish form of faith in Yeshua and, at the same time, a Messianic form of Judaism. It is expressed in Messianic congregations and synagogues, in family practice and communal worship, and in the wider lives of Jewish disciples of Yeshua in churches, Jewish settings, and mixed contexts.

- Common self-designations include: Messianic Jews, Jewish believers, Jewish disciples of Yeshua, and—historically—Nazarenes, Hebrew Christians, and Jewish Christians.
- The movement is diverse rather than monolithic: it varies culturally, geographically, liturgically, and theologically.
- Key themes include faith in Yeshua as Messiah, ongoing Jewish identity and peoplehood, covenantal responsibility, participation in the one body of Messiah, and concern for Jewish–Christian reconciliation.
- Typical practices may include Shabbat, Passover and the festivals, circumcision, bar or bat mitzvah, Jewish marriage forms, synagogue-style liturgy, Torah and New Testament readings, and varying degrees of halakhic observance.

Numbers remain difficult because of differing definitions and counting methods. My conservative estimate observes 150,000 self-identifying Jewish believers in Yeshua worldwide; broader estimates range from 150,000 up to 1.5 million, depending on whether the term includes only members of Messianic congregations or also Jewish believers in wider denominational settings, and how visible they are. Approximately 1,500 Messianic groups or congregations are often cited worldwide, with more than 1,000 in the United States and around 287 in Israel. Messianic Jews remain numerically tiny within world Jewry, but theologically and symbolically disproportionate. (Elephant – ant - waterflea)

Messianic Judaism is therefore not merely an anthropological curiosity. It is a lived reality that raises major questions for theology, ecclesiology, mission, history, and Jewish–Christian relations.

## 1. Messianic Jews as a mirror of the past

As a rear-view mirror, Messianic Jews recall the Church to its Jewish origins. Yeshua was, is and is to come Jewish. Mary was Jewish. The apostles were Jewish. The earliest community of disciples belonged within the pluriform world of Second Temple Judaism. The first ekklesia was not a non-Jewish religion that later discovered Jewish roots; it began as a Jewish messianic movement.

- The so-called Parting of the Ways was gradual, uneven, and incomplete rather than a single decisive break. (Boyarin, Goodman charts)
- Jewish believers in Yeshua became increasingly difficult for both communities to place: too Jewish for the Church, too Christian for the synagogue. (Birkat Haminim, Church laws)
- The long history of marginalisation did not erase their presence; Jewish disciples of Yeshua continued to appear across the centuries, even without one simple uninterrupted institutional line. (Domus Conversorum, Beni Abraham, British and International Hebrew Christian Alliances (1866, 1925))
- The unresolved question has remained constant: can one be fully Jewish and fully committed to Yeshua the Messiah?

In this sense, Messianic Jews are not modern novelties. They mirror the past by reminding the Church that the Jewishness of Yeshua and the apostolic community cannot be treated as a temporary preface to a later Gentile story.

## 2. Messianic Jews as a mirror of the present

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 dismiss Yeshua without confronting the ongoing presence of Jews who confess him. ("The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable" 6:43)

- 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.
- They are not only a bridge but also a provocation to both communities.

An important constructive proposal in this context is Mark Kinzer's "bilateral ecclesiology": one ekklesia or body of Messiah, but not one flattened identity. Israel and the nations remain distinct yet reconciled. Unity does not require erasure; difference does not require separation. In this way, Messianic Jews become a sign of a differentiated communion that neither Church nor synagogue has yet fully learned to inhabit.

At least three overlapping conversations remain necessary: between Christians and Jews, between Messianic Jews and the wider Church, and between Jewish believers in Yeshua and the wider Jewish community. Messianic Jews are not peripheral to these dialogues. They are a key *locus* where the dialogues converge.

## 3. Messianic Jews as a mirror of the future

Finally, Messianic Jews function as an eschatological mirror. They do not yet embody the full restoration promised by God, but they anticipate it. They point toward the restoration of Israel, the one new humanity in Messiah, and the restoration of all things.

- The New Testament speaks of God not rejecting his people, of the gifts and calling of God as irrevocable, and of the future salvation of Israel.
- Messianic Jews therefore point beyond private spirituality toward the restoration of Israel as a people within the purposes of God. (Land promises and the Covenant)
- They also suggest what the one new humanity of Ephesians 2 might look like: reconciliation without assimilation, unity without loss of Jewish and Gentile particularity.
- Their existence gestures toward the wider restoration of all things, in which Israel, the nations, and creation itself are healed in Messiah.

Here eschatological modesty is essential. Messianic Jews are not the fulfilment itself. They are partial, contested, and often fragile. Yet precisely in their fragility they remain a real sign of the future purposes of God.

## Conclusion

- Messianic Jews are a living sign that the separation of Church and Israel is historically incomplete, theologically unresolved, and eschatologically destined for healing.
- As a mirror of the past, Messianic Jews recall the Jewishness of Yeshua and the first disciples.
- As a mirror of the present, they expose the unfinished reconciliation between Church and Israel.
- As a mirror of the future, they anticipate the restoration of Israel, the one new humanity, and the restoration of all things.
- Messianic Jews are not simply a sign to be interpreted, but a living mirror in which the Church must recognise itself.

Messianic Jews are therefore 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.

## References

- Harvey, Richard. "Messianic Jewish Theology." St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology, 2025.
- Harvey, Richard. "The Messianic Jewish Reality." Caspari Center lecture / paper.
- Harvey, Richard. "Messianic Jews and Jewish-Christian Relations." Kirchentag paper.
- Harvey, Richard. *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009.
- Kinzer, Mark S. *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005.
- [Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews \(CRRJ\) » Documents of the Commission » "The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable" \(Rom 11:29\)](#)