

## The Identity of Jewish Yeshua-Disciples in the State of Israel According to their Written Declarations of Faith

*Written by Gershon Nerel*

This article focuses on on-line theological texts published on internet web sites belonging to various Messianic congregations and organizations active in Israel. All the texts form part of a "statement of belief," "article of faith" or "vision," the majority being composed in Hebrew, with some in English. These "declarative documents" express an explicit spiritual-ideological identity from which numerous practical implications also derive.

In addition to these on-line doctrinal texts, I have examined several statements of faith from the pre-internet era and a number of credos currently popular amongst congregations which have not been published publicly. Here, I would like to present a general overview from both a personal and historical perspective. In all, I examined twenty statements of faith, which I have classified according to the following categories:

Category 1: Statements of faith produced and used by the following congregations:

- a) The Jaffa Assembly (Yafo-Tel Aviv *Kehila Meshichit*)
- b) Grace and Truth Christian Assembly, Rishon L'Tzion
- c) *Beit Asaph*, Netanyah
- d) Jerusalem Assembly House of Redemption
- e) Spirit of Life Congregation, Nazareth
- f) *Tiferet Israel* (Glory of Israel), Tel Aviv
- g) *Kehilat Haderech* (The Way Congregation), Karmiel
- h) Beit Eliahu Messianic Congregation, Haifa
- i) *Roeh Israel*, Jerusalem (Netivyah)
- j) *Ahavat Yeshua* (Revive Israel), Jerusalem
- k) Tents of Mercy (*Ohalei Rachamim*), Kiryat Yam
- l) *Shemen Sasson* (Oil of Joy), Jerusalem
- m) *Hamaayan* Congregation (Wellspring), Kfar Saba
- n) Voice in the Wilderness Congregation (*Kol Bamidbar*), Kiryat Gat

Category 2: On-line content related to faith/doctrine belonging to non-congregational organizations

- a) Jews for Jesus
- b) Amen Amen
- c) Tivon for Yeshua (*Tivon shel Yeshua*)

- d) Messianic Social Forum
- e) *Pdut* (Redemption) - School for Judaism

Category 3: Principles of faith published in other places, such as journals:

- a) *The Torch*: "Journal of the Israeli Messianic Congregation being the renewal of the early original Messianic community" (edited by Ze'ev Kofsman, Moshe Immanuel Ben Meir, Yechiel Goldin, and Rina Price).
- b) Articles of faith adopted by the National Conference of congregational elders held at *Beit Asaph* in 2002, together with those of the same body presented at a pastors' and elders' conference held at *Moshav Yad Hashmona* (near Jerusalem) in January 2009.

Category 4: Cited exclusively for comparative purposes - The Hebrew Catholics (Israel Catholics) - who for their own part contrast their beliefs (as believers in Yeshua) with those held by Messianic Jews.

Following a study of the above-mentioned statements of faith, I wish to highlight several salient points as follows:

### **1 Combined identity**

Whether brief or lengthy, it is the intention of the majority of these creedal texts to express a "synthesized identity" combining several different issues, such as: the individual, the congregation, the Godhead, the nation, the world, the past, the present, and the future. They reflect an identification which pertains to such aspects as "belonging," "calling," "allegiance," and "self-determination," using a variety of nomenclature and appellation.

### **2 An ancient theme: "Nothing new under the sun"**

Preoccupation with identity issues is not a novel phenomenon among Jewish Yeshua-Disciples (JYD), but has been on their agenda for almost two thousand years, both in the Land and in the Diaspora. Questions related to these matters have both personal and collective dimensions: within the individual's life and in congregational and organizational frameworks.

### **3 Two principal contexts**

Issues relating to the identity of JYD have arisen to prominence in the State of Israel on two primary planes. The first level relates to the intra-congregational situation, within the dual context of local and expatriate believers in Yeshua who look both towards Israel and the nations, thus relating to both Jews and Gentiles in the universal body of believers. The second level relates to the shaping of identity vis-à-vis the mainstream of Jewry which does not accept Yeshua. For example, the expression of identity must be defined not only in relation to family members, friends/acquaintances, neighbors, and workplaces but also with respect to State institutions and organizations such as the government offices (the Ministries of Interior and Absorption, the Registry of Non-Profit-Associations - *עמותות*), financial bodies (tax exemption permits), the education system (schools), and courts (e.g., the Supreme Court). At the same time, identity also needs to be expressed in the face of the historic churches and overseas missionary organizations which frequently provide substantial support - material and spiritual - to local Israeli congregations. At times, such aid preserves the very economic existence of the latter, in addition to functioning as their theological sponsor.

#### 4 Dogmatization

Currently, a trend towards an increasing dogmatism in the expression of theological self-definition made by Israeli congregations is clearly evident. Texts which are principally and explicitly doctrinal in nature appear to be recognized as carrying the status of dogma - i.e., irrefutable axioms - without any willingness or openness to the protracted and in-depth discussion which usually takes place during normal maturation or growth in spiritual understanding and/or biblical exegesis. In other words, a form of rigidity similar to that characteristic of many ecclesiastical documents (whether Catholic or Protestant) appears to be entering such texts. Ordinarily, such texts resist any attempt to test or examine their statements made in the light of long years of theological and linguistic experience, growth, and maturity in the faith and knowledge of the Scriptures. Such dogmatization prevents the sharpening or revision of written statements, especially in cases where understandings and concepts have undergone change following a process of spiritual maturation in the lives of both the individual and the congregation. It also prevents acknowledgement of changes in the content of credos which might be required due to ongoing developments within the Hebrew language. Thus, one basic example is the appellation "Notzri" (נוצרי), namely *Christian*, which is usually avoided, and instead "Meshichi" (משיחי), namely *Messianic*, is adopted. Because the label "Notzri" is grasped within Jewry as a non-Jewish person, i.e. a Gentile, it is problematic for JYD.

#### 5 Nationality

Beyond the spiritual-faith significance of identity/identification and religious allegiance, the issue of theology also possesses direct and immediate ramifications with regard to other areas. The expression of one's theological identity also carries implications relating to nationality, although it should be noted that we are not speaking here of any form of race or racism. Within a socio-national context, prominence is given to the issue of "Israeliness." This focus on *Israeliness* frequently appears to replace conformity/compatibility with normative Judaism, for example, in the expression of belonging to the people of Israel and loyalty to the national State and/or the taking of a stance in relation to Zionism, especially "Biblical Zionism." This comes together with an emphasis upon serving in the IDF (such as elite units) and a stress on the fact that "we pay taxes up to our necks" (*Kehilat Haderech*, Karmiel, Hebrew version).

The element of *Israeliness* within identity is already found within a definition given of "Messianic Jews" in the Even-Shushan *Hebrew Dictionary* (1967) under the entry "Meshichi/Yehudi Meshichi" (Messianic, Messianic Jew), which still appears in the updated version of 2003: "Jews who have pronounced themselves to be Jewish in their nationality and loyalty to the State of Israel while being Christians in their religion." Thus, for example, we read in the statement made by the Jaffa Assembly: "We are a congregation of Israelis." Contemporary Israeli identity is bound up with a declaration of Yeshua as "the Messiah of Israel according to the biblical prophecies" or "the Messiah is an Israeli - Yeshua of Nazareth is the Messiah of Israel" (Jaffa Assembly, Hebrew version).

#### 6 Universality

Alongside a clear tendency towards emphasizing national Israeli identity and a distinctive Jewish identity, an awareness of a parallel and joint universal identity also exists, namely that of sharing faith and salvation with Gentile brothers and sisters from amongst the nations. This stress does not come at the expense of the sense of a national identity. In other words, an emphasis is placed upon the importance of universal salvation and forgiveness for *all* the peoples of the world, together with the urge to participate in sharing the Gospel to all the nations in the form of "the Law shall go forth from Zion" (e.g., *Roeh Israel/Netivyah; Revive-Israel*; Jerusalem Assembly House of Redemption).

## **7 Not a confined communal sector**

While various different identity-groups exist within the JYD body, there is no talk of "sectors" or "subdivision" such as constituted by the *Haredim* (Ultra Orthodox) within Israeli society. Thus, for example, Israeli JYD avoid a distinctive *Kashrut* system (supervision of dietary laws) of their own, as is common among Ashkenazi and Sephardi Orthodox Jews.

## **8 Identity anchored in a book - the "People of the Book"**

The statements of faith evidence a stress upon the importance of the canon of Scripture ("We believe in the Book of the Covenants"), even when direct awareness exists that this formulation actually constitutes "proof of conversion" and may in fact be regarded as "an official exit pass" (i.e., apostasy) within normative, mainstream Israeli society in all its aspects. It should be noted, however, that none of the statements of faith reflect any reference to a specific body and/or process as being responsible for the canonization of the New Testament.

## **9 Various formulations concerning Yeshua as the Son of God and the Son of Man**

On occasion, such statements form part of the definition of the unity of the Godhead, with allusion to Maimonides' "Thirteen Articles of Faith" (*RaMbaM*, 1135-1204).

## **10 Israel - people and state**

Many of the creedal documents highlight the centrality of Israel, people and state, in God's plan. Such texts refer to the following subjects: Israel's election, being God's "peculiar possession", as well as the biblical (Old Testament) promises to Israel and God's fulfillment of them in the present and the future (e.g., Grace and Truth Christian Assembly). Creeds also point to the fulfillment of the Torah in the Messiah (e.g., *Beit Asaph*), and Israel's centrality in the End Times, when the whole Jewish nation will believe in Yeshua.

## **11 Formulations by way of the negative**

Many statements of faith indicate a "negative" formulation, which constitutes an inseparable part of identity definition; for example, according to one statement - "we are not Christians" - emphasizing that JYD have not become Gentiles but remain Jews. Another statement stresses distance from established historical churches, general or specific, declaring "a Messianic congregation is not a church!" (Jaffa Assembly; Hebrew version).

It is also emphasized that what is being spoken of is not "religion" but "faith," as follows: "Faith in Yeshua is not a new religion but a direct and natural continuation of what is written in the Tanakh - the Old Testament" ("Amen Amen"). Additionally, statements announce that the universal Body of Yeshua "does not constitute a replacement of the people of Israel," i.e. the negation of Replacement (Substitution) Theology as it has been taught in various churches in the past and present (Jerusalem Assembly House of Redemption; Hebrew version). Likewise some creeds assert that JYD are not part of the "Christianity which became an independent religion dissociated from Judaism, but Messianic faith is a Jewish idea and its natural consequence" (Jews for Jesus; Hebrew version). Thus, also, *Kehilat Haderech*, the Carmiel congregation in the Galilee, proclaims that "we are not dependent upon a large majority or upon the Pope" (Hebrew version). Or, the website of *Tivon for Yeshua* declares that "we believe that both the Rabbis and the church leaders have gone wrong by putting the traditions of men on the same level (or even higher), as the Bible."

## **12 The Trinity**

While the statements of faith deliberately avoid using the term "Trinity," reference is still made to "three entities."

### **13 Not just Jews within Messianic congregation**

On the one hand, a trend exists within the statements of faith towards an increasing emphasis upon Jewish/ethnic/cultural affinities, such as: "We are Messianic Jews" or "a Messianic Jewish congregation." On the other hand, and in parallel, a semantic expression of *neutrality* also exists, indicating a reality in which a considerable percentage of the members of the congregation is in fact non-Jewish or they or their spouse are not Jewish according to the *halakha* (rabbinical ruling). This gives rise to such formulae as: "We are called a Messianic congregation" without any mention of "Messianic Jewish" - or the statement that, "We are called Messianic believers" or "We are a congregation of Israelis who believe in the Tanakh and the New Testament." It should be noted that the issue of religious conversion is not brought up in any of the statements of faith we examined.

### **14 Who is a "Messianic believer"?**

None of the statements of faith indicate sufficient awareness or sharp discernment of the fact that the terms "Messianic" and/or "Messianic Jewish" are also used by nationalistic-religious parties related to the "Greater Israel" political movement, such as *Mafdal* or *Zu Artzenu* ("This is our country"). "Messianics" thus also denotes the followers of the late R. Avraham Yehuda Hachohen Kook ("Kookites"), many of whom are settlers living in Judah and Samaria. In our day, the Orthodox *Chabad* or *Lubavitch* movement is also referred to as a "Messianic Judaism." In other words, in our generation a linguistic confusion exists regarding the meaning of the terms and titles "Messianic" and "Messianism."

### **15 "Inflation" in the adoption of terms taken from various historical creeds**

One cannot escape the impression that many of the doctrinal texts surveyed include terminology and concepts borrowed verbatim from historic churches and/or denominations. Terms taken from denominational statements of faith, both in Israel and the diaspora, are normally translated word for word in almost automatic fashion. This is particularly evident when comparisons are made with the language of the original texts, as for example: the Nicæan Creed (325 c.e.), the Chalcedonian Creed (451 c.e.), Calvinism in relation to the doctrine of predestination (most prominently in "Grace and Truth Christian Assembly"), as well as Lutheranism and Presbyterianism.

On the other hand, it should be noted that only one Jerusalem statement of faith explicitly expresses opposition to the indiscriminate adoption of church creeds (*Roeh Israel/Netivyah*, led by Joseph Shulam). While the vast majority of local creeds appear to be anchored in the doctrines of the Protestant churches, they in fact draw most of their content from the principles of faith composed by the Roman Catholic Church.

### **16 Use of non-biblical concepts**

Such a tendency reflects acceptance of linguistic expressions not taken directly from the Old and the New Testaments, such as: "God the Son," "God the Holy Spirit," *Sola scriptura* (Scripture only) - according to Luther's definition.

### **17 "Functional gender identity"**

The combination of creedal statements with a congregational charter relates to the definition of the "functional" place of men versus (or alongside) women in the congregation. Two examples are as follows: "The pastoral office is clearly limited to men. God specifically assigned the headship and authority in the local church to men" (Jerusalem Assembly House of Redemption), and on the other hand, one also finds the integration of women in practical spiritual offices, namely the functioning/organization of the congregation with women as co-pastors (or elders), such as *Shemen Sasson* congregation in Jerusalem.

### **18 "The restoration of the glory of the past"**

There is a clear tendency to bridge 2000 years of history and link back to the early-community model. Thus, for example, we find the use of the term "synagogue" in order to create a dual connection to Second Temple Judaism and an emphasis on Yeshua's presence in the synagogue on the one hand and to contemporary rabbinic tradition deriving from the pharisaic tradition on the other. Thus, for example, the *Roeh Israel* congregation in Jerusalem openly refers to "our synagogue." The same is also true with *Tents of Mercy* congregation in Kiryat-Yam, north of Haifa, where Israeli JYD proudly confess having their "Messianic synagogue," functioning as a Jewish cultural center, as well as a form of Jewish pluralism which opens its doors to non-Jews.

Torah-observance alongside the observance of some rabbinic tradition and *halakha* are increasingly characterizing more and more congregations. Thus, for example, congregations read the Torah portion of the week from a Torah scroll, and/or use of the Orthodox Prayer Book (*Siddur*), the recitation of psalms led by a cantor (*hazan*), etc. However, there is also awareness of the need to avoid situations that the latter can replace and/or contradict the Tanakh and the New Testament.

Ultimately any subjective connections to "all the *first* Messianic believers that were Jewish!" serve to maintain a unique self-esteem. By pronouncing that "there's nothing more Jewish than believing in Him" (Jews for Jesus), JYD flag their distinct identity as inheritors of their ancient forefathers in the land of the Bible "where everything began."

### **19 A broad openness to ideological/spiritual exposure**

The examined contemporary statements of faith contain no idea whatsoever of an "underground mentality," namely there is no concealment of beliefs (or "being in a closet") as it was, for example, in the Roman Empire when the early Yeshua followers needed to hide from their persecutors in order to save their lives. Unlike the ancient believers that lived in catacombs, i.e. the underground tunnels with recesses where bodies were buried as in ancient Rome, modern JYD freely and openly share their faith, without any fear of oppression or torture as it was in Communist countries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such "transparent Messianic creeds" are even reflected within the extensive literature of personal testimonies and memoirs, wherein Israelis recount how they came to believe in Yeshua and how they understand their belief. These brief autobiographies frequently contain individual creeds as part of subjective identity.

Yet, alongside those known and recognized as open Yeshua-believers, "hidden" JYD also exist, i.e., individuals and groups of "Nicodemus believers," after the fashion of Nicodemus in the New Testament who came to Yeshua secretly at night (John 3: 1-2). This "Nicodemus phenomenon" is particularly widespread amongst new immigrants (primarily from Ethiopia). A clear trend also exists, however, towards expanded public relations with the media, as well as overt outreach as part of a unique combination of apologetics and polemics. This can be seen prominently in the activities of "Jews for Jesus" in Israel.

### **20 Charismatic or revivalism identity vs. conservative identity**

The statements of faith point to a variety of explanations of identity. Some are characterized by Pentecostal and/or charismatic tendencies, while others are non-charismatic. The non-charismatic groups are close to the Brethren tradition, as it is for example with the Bethesda congregation in Haifa and the Jaffa-Tel-Aviv Assembly. Thus, for example, one of the "revivalist" statements of faith expressly states: "Our congregation places an emphasis upon rhythmic singing and spiritual worship alike" (*Tiferet Israel*, Tel Aviv), or, "We believe in ... the anointing of the Holy Spirit" (*Revive Israel*, Jerusalem).

## **21 Scriptural verses**

In many cases, the written theological-identity statement is not fully anchored in biblical verses (Tanakh and/or New Testament). Some declarations of faith lack any scriptural base.

## **22 "Conversion" - A Jew who believes in Yeshua does not automatically become a member of another religion**

There is an awareness of, and reference to, the fact that, over the course of history, Jews have chosen to formally convert to Christianity when they come to believe in Yeshua. "Generally speaking, however, a Jew can remain a Jew even when he believes in Yeshua as the Messiah" (Amen Amen). As a matter of principle, any aspect linked to conversion from the Jewish religion to the Christian religion is negated. *De facto*, this issue is closely related to the religious status quo in Israel, which is anchored in the Ottoman *millet* system.

## **23 Avoidance of creedal identification with Hebrew Catholics**

The refusal to identify doctrinally with groups of Jews that embraced the Roman Catholic Church has been particularly prominent in the wake of the legal precedent set by the Supreme Court (1962) in the case of Oswald Rufeisen ("Brother Daniel"), who joined the Catholic Carmelite monastery in Haifa. This conversion model was perceived by the Israeli public, and the Supreme Court too, as mere repetition of the medieval Jewish apostasy and assimilation within a "goyish institution" that absorbed the "*Meshumed*" (renegade Jew) and annihilated his Jewish identity. Also, later rulings of the Israeli Supreme Court regarding Messianic Jews, such as the Beresford Case (1989), simply followed the precedent of the *Rufeisen* case. This established the criterion that a Jewish believer in Yeshua inevitably becomes a convert to another religion (i.e. Christianity) and consequently, even automatically, is excluded from the Jewish community.

Thus, one observes a situation in which a clear distance is preserved between Messianic Jews and Hebrew Catholics, despite the fact that the latter are self-expressed JYD, largely because the Hebrew Catholics recognize the dogmatic authority of Rome and the Pope, and pledge allegiance to the *Magisterium*, i.e., the absolute teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

## **Summarizing Observations**

Amongst the various groups of JYD in Israel, several "theological identities" are to be found rather than one uniform identity constituting a single entity. Just as we are forced to speak of a variety of "*Christianities*" rather than about one monolithic "Christianity", or about "*Judaisms*" rather than a single "Judaism," so, too, we must recognize the multifaceted theological and practical mosaic characteristic of JYD.

It is no secret that, in the view of many people today, JYD are simply regarded as those who have adopted Protestant principles of faith in Hebrew translation. Some people even claim that the theological identity of JYD is based on evangelical exegesis in either its American or European form, to the extent of raising the flag of "Messianic fundamentalism" via a fundamentalistic reading of Scripture. As a prophetic movement of the End Times, however, JYD must examine Scripture themselves and not be afraid of reaching conclusions which

do not match the formulations produced by the churches worldwide. *De facto*, the majority of these ecclesiastical creeds have gained the stature of unquestionable dogma. For centuries, churches throughout the world have refrained from shaping their theological identity in alignment with JYD, very rarely basing their creedal statement on Hebrew terminology.

The truth is that it is not important what other people say about JYD, personally or widely, but rather how JYD themselves understand and represent the truth today. The whole truth is found in the Tanakh and New Testament as it is grasped via an exegetical process informed by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The challenge of JYD is first and foremost to make a thorough study of the Lord Yeshua's words rather than later human interpretation and tradition from the earliest days up until now, notwithstanding how worthy, faithful, serious, and spiritual such later additions may be.

The essential test facing JYD is linked to the well-known historical fact that creeds tend to override the Bible. Throughout history, most confessions of faith have become sacrosanct texts to the point that they have commonly disavowed the option of making later changes in the understanding and phrasing of faith principles following further study of the Tanakh and New Testament. Thus, when a *credo* becomes a *dogma*, it occupies the place of Scripture as the "compass" directing towards proper comprehension of the truth. This constitutes a true danger, leaving JYD confronted by the fundamental question: Why should we tolerate at all the totality, and at times even totalitarianism, of man-made creeds?

Paradoxically, while it is the nature of creeds to be brief, concise, and condensed, they usually challenge the comprehensiveness of Scripture from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. This is why, for example, many of the "Baptistic" churches worldwide prefer not to make themselves subject to brief statements of faith, even sharply opposing the composition of a statement of "declarative faith," choosing rather to maintain a non-creedal belief. Likewise, RaMBaM's (Maimonides) opponents castigated him for his *Mishneh Torah* work ("Repetition of the Torah" or "Restatement of the Oral Law") and his statement that it is not necessary after this work to examine the decisions in the Talmud. In other words, the problem is that "using human words as a tool to enforce orthodoxy is a misuse of creeds." Hence, the answers to theological questions should be found in the Bible and not in the creeds.

Additionally, one cannot ignore the real danger which exists when creeds are hypocritically abused as "spiritual" weapons and/or as "doctrinal" ammunition to fight theological opponents, defy exegetical challengers, and even excommunicate fellow ministry "competitors." Sadly, both history and reality prove that certain people do not hesitate to manipulate creedal texts in order to exalt themselves. This is accomplished, for example, by systematically discrediting opponents who refuse to automatically sign a certain creedal formula which a convinced group determines to consecrate. Alongside those who accept *bona fide* a certain credo, there are also others who accept such a text superficially and impulsively. Furthermore, people occasionally impose creeds for political reasons directed towards attaining power and influence over others, or even in order to obtain material benefits from various sponsors.

### **Concluding Recommendations**

In conclusion, several ideas and suggestions are relevant within our context. First, rather than using the terms "Messianic" or "Messianic Jewish" (which are today no longer "exclusive" to JYD), because every Jewish person who believes in a certain Messiah, without specification which exact messiah, is by definition a Messianic Jew, it is suggested therefore to return to the original designation found in the New Testament itself over 200 times, namely "*Jewish disciples of Yeshua*" or "*Jewish Yeshua Disciples*" (JYD). Additionally, in many cases, even the terms "followers of Yeshua" or "Jewish followers of Yeshua" (יהודים חסידי ישוע) are preferable over the designation "Messianic Jews." Moreover, instead of employing the prevalent term "Messianic Judaism," it is suggested to adopt the term "*Yeshua Judaism*" (יהדות ישוע) - even if it initially sounds strange to what one is used to, since a term such as this, which carries an immediate message, is preferable to a vague reference which demands a complex explanation.



Second, another challenge is to be freed from the binding fetters of the creedal formulations and versions, including the slogans of the historical churches, and to replace them with a biblically-authentic theology in Hebrew, based exclusively on Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the true challenge is to arrive, by careful examination of every word and sentence, at an understanding and expression of the principles of faith through the exclusive use of Hebrew terms which appear in the Tanakh and New Testament, namely the New Testament as it is translated into Hebrew.

As an example, one definition which appears in some creedal declarations of Israeli Yeshua believers states that "Yeshua is human in the full sense of the word;" but does this kind of statement authentically reflect the New Testament language? Humanity in its truest sense contains the element of sin, so while Yeshua did indeed have a holy body of "flesh and bones" (Lk. 24: 39) namely, he was not a phantom or ghost, he definitely was not a normal mortal (Lk. 1:26-35) and he always knew the thoughts of human people (Mk. 2:8). Therefore, why not just accept the simple phrasing that "Yeshua Hamashiah has come in the flesh" (1 John 4: 2)? Furthermore, when JYD talk/write about Yeshua as born of Miriam, they should beware not to attribute to her the holy position of "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*), the widely-prevalent view within the Roman Catholic Church.

Third, to add a signature to any declaration of faith should not be a light matter, if at all. Deep consideration of the implications of each individual clause is imperative. Besides, to sign such a document hastily and/or *en masse*, and without critically examining the contents, means to behave as a flock. The luminaries of the Bible, among them patriarchs, prophets and apostles, never moved in herds.

Fourth, by the definition of their appellation JYD must primarily focus on Yeshua in everything. Most of the statements of faith examined fail to relate to the issue of the *Mitzvot* (מצוות), the commandments, given by our Lord Yeshua and emphasized in the four Gospels. It seems that there is a fear, or even shame, to employ this term. But didn't Yeshua himself highlight his commandments? Yet in similar manner to the statements of faith of the historical churches, contemporary local congregations lay almost exclusive stress upon the concepts of faith and grace. While these are important subjects in their own right, exclusive attention to them comes at the expense of ignoring other, no less important subjects highlighted in Yeshua's teaching, i.e., the observance of his commandments. Therefore prominent place should be given to the Lord's commandments within congregational agenda, as part of the question of identity and being as JYD.

Finally, this article constitutes a preliminary outline offered to anyone who might wish to initiate the sort of series of discussions that are greatly needed for clarifying topics which have been raised here merely in brief. It is hoped that an ongoing conversation concerning such sensitive yet important theological issues may shortly be initiated. Hopefully, such a discourse will take place within a tolerant atmosphere, in a spirit of love of the Lord, love of the truth, and love of the brethren.

Presented at the Theological Forum of the *Israel College of the Bible* in Netanya, Israel (May 2009).

A short version of this article can be found in French in Gershon Nerel, "La confession de foi et l'identité des disciples juifs de Yéchoua en Israël," *Nouvelles d'Israel*, Beth-Shalom, no. 7, July 2009, p. 7; no. 8, August 2009, p. 7.

<http://www.baj.co.il>; [http://www.2echad.com/kehila/yehudi\\_meshihi](http://www.2echad.com/kehila/yehudi_meshihi).

<http://hesed.d-webs.com/lhe/agape/printv/32600.php>.

[http://beit-asaph.org.il/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=41](http://beit-asaph.org.il/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=41).

<http://www.jerusalemassembly.com/AboutUs/AboutUs.aspx?Section=statement&lang=heb>.

<http://hebrew.ruach-haim.com/creed/index.html>.

<http://www.tiferetyeshua.com>.

<http://www.kehilathaderech.org/derech/about>.

<http://www.beiteliahu.org/joomla>.

[www.netivyah.org](http://www.netivyah.org); [http://www.netivyah.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view](http://www.netivyah.org/index.php?option=com_content&view).

<http://www.revive-israel.org/about.php>.

<http://www.tents-of-mercy.org/congregations/tents-of-mercy-kiryat-yam>.

[http://www.shemensasson.com/statement\\_of\\_faith.php](http://www.shemensasson.com/statement_of_faith.php).

<http://kehilat-hamaayan.org.il>.

<http://www.voice-wilderness.com>.

[www.jewsforjesus.co.il](http://www.jewsforjesus.co.il).

<http://www.amenamen.nl>.

<http://tivon4yeshua.org>.

<http://www.messianic.co.il>.

<http://www.pdut.org/faith.htm>

Four editions of *The Torch* were published in Jerusalem between 1960 and 1962: see Gershon Nerel, "Halapid (The Torch): The Second Journal of Messianic Jews in the State of Israel," *Zot Habrit* (Journal of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel [MJAI]) 2 (2000), 7-8 (Hebrew).

See Tsvi Sadan, "Zo hatzharati, zo kaparati (This is my declaration, this is my atonement)," *Kivun* 63 (January-February 2009), 10-11 (Hebrew).

<http://www.catholim.com/spip.php?breve1430>; <http://www.israelcatholic.com/content/view/59/77/lang.en>;  
Cf. Tsvi Sadan, "HaYeshui: Sicha im ha'av David Neuhaus (The Jesuit: An Interview with Fr. David Neuhaus)," *Kivun* 66 (July-August 2009), 10-11 (Hebrew).

See, for example, Gershon Nerel, "Miut shuli mul shtei chevrot-rov: 'Yehudim chasidei Yeshua' lenokach hayahadut vehanatzrut (A Marginal Minority Confronting Two Mainstreams: Jewish Followers of Yeshua Facing Judaism and Christianity)," in *Being Different: Minorities, Aliens and Outsiders in History* (ed. Shulamit Volkov; Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem 2000), 283-97 (Hebrew).

See, for example, Gershon Nerel, *Messianic Jews in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967): Trends and Changes in Shaping Self-Identity* (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996) (Hebrew).

Cf., for example, Keri Zelson Warshawsky, *Returning to Their Own Borders: A Social Anthropological Study of Contemporary Messianic Jewish Identity in Israel* (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007).

See, for example, Gershon Nerel, "Hatzlav vehanasher hagadol lenokach yod-gimel ikarei emuna: Yehudim Chasidei Yeshua bameah ha'esrim veharambam - chikui vepulmus (The Cross and the "Great Eagle" vs. Thirteen Articles of Faith: Jewish Believers in Yeshua in the Twentieth Century and Maimonides - Imitation and Polemics)," Presentation delivered at the *Fifteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 3 August, 2009 (Hebrew); Gershon Nerel's personal archives. Also at <http://jewish-studies.org/ShowDoc.asp?MenuID=49>

Cf., for example, Joseph Shulam: "'Hashilush hakadosh' be'aspeklaria shel hayahadut (The Holy Trinity in the Light of Judaism)," *Zot Habrit* 19 (June 2004), 10-11 (Hebrew).

See, for example, Tuvya Zaretsky, "The Gospel and Jewish-Gentile Couples," *Mishkan* 47 (2006), 6-14; idem, "Challenges of Jewish-Gentile Couples," *Mishkan* 47 (2006), 15-18.

See, for example, Gideon Aran, "From Religious Zionism to a Zionist Religion" (PhD diss., Hebrew

University, 1987) (Hebrew).

See, for example, David Berger, *The Rebbe, the Messiah and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001).

See, for example, Ford Lewis Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).

See, for example, John Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (NY: Doubleday, 1961); Juha-Pekka Rissanen, *Ikarei ha'emuna bechesed elohim (Principles of Faith in God's Grace)* (Jerusalem: Shalhevetyah, 2002) (Hebrew).

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B.\\_B.\\_Warfield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._B._Warfield) .

Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wyclif to Calvin, 1300-1564* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1957).

John H. Leith (ed.), *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine, from the Bible to the Present* (3rd ed.; Louisville: John Knox, 1982).

See, for example, David Katz, *God's Last Words* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), x.

See, for example, Gershon Nerel, "Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews," in *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états* (ed. Simon Claude Mimouni and F. Stanley Jones; Paris: Cerf, 2001), 399-425.

See, for example, Gershon Nerel, "From Judaism to Judaism: Faith, Nationality and Universality within 'Non-Canonical' Literature of Jewish Yeshua-Followers in the State of Israel" (Hebrew), lecture at the academic conference titled "*Sixty Years of Israeli Literature*," Haifa University, March 3, 2008; on-line: <http://actv.haifa.ac.il/programs/Item.aspx?it=1162> ; [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKpEr3B\\_wpk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKpEr3B_wpk)

See, for example, [http://www.shemensasson.com/statement\\_of\\_faith.php](http://www.shemensasson.com/statement_of_faith.php) ; <http://beitelياهو.org/home/faith> ; <http://voice-wilderness.com/our-doctrine/> ; the so-called "Official Messianic Jewish Website" in Israel: <http://www.xn---5hccemhdbba3bfi8m.co.il/index-6.html>

See, for example, Daphne Tsimhoni, "The British Mandate and the Status of the Religious Communities in Palestine," *Cathedra* 80 (1996), 150-74 (Hebrew).

Nechama Tec, *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (Oxford: OUP, 1990).

For further discussion of the issue of shaping contemporary theological identity amongst JYD, see Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (London: Paternoster, 2009).

Cf. Gershon Nerel, "Creeds among Jewish Believers in Yeshua between the World Wars," *Mishkan* 34 (2001), 78-79.

See, for example, John Hall, "Creeds Build Barriers When Misused" (Associated Baptist Press); on-line: [http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2297&Itemid=117](http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2297&Itemid=117).

National Conference of congregational elders at Yad Hashmona, 2009; *Mashehu Mehashetah*, Messianic Youth Magazine, Hachotam, May 2011, pp. 8-9.

See, for example, Gershon Nerel, "Christological Observations within Yeshua Judaism," *Mishkan* 59 (2009), 51-62; Tsvi Sadan, Review of "Gershon Nerel: Christological Observations within Yeshua Judaism," *Kivun* 66 (July-August 2009), 19 (Hebrew).