

"Post-Mission" and "Messianic Judaism" – Semantics and Reality

(A Response to Dr. Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism Three Years Later: Reflections on a Conversation Just Begun*)

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Mark Kinzer's book *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids; Brazos, 2005) has generated a fresh and challenging discussion concerning the identity of Jewish believers in Yeshua (= **JB**Y), not only growing within the Jewish commonwealth, but also positioned between Church and Synagogue. In fact, the author deals with "re-definitions," as it is stated in the book's sub-title: *Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*.

This book has rekindled old debates among JBY themselves in the past 150 years. Discussions concerning the expression of "Hebrew Christian" and "Messianic Jewish" identity re-appear in modern history in waves.¹ The main difference from one "wave" to another is with the introduction of new words or new images, yet still remaining "the same lady with a different garment" - always repeating questions and answers which were already raised in the New Testament (Acts 15; Romans 9-11; Galatians 3: 21-29; Ephesians 2: 11-22; Revelation 3: 7-11).

Here I wish to evaluate the combination of two pairs of idioms:

- 1) *Post-Mission* (in one word, or, separated with an hyphen)
- 2) *Messianic Judaism*

The term "**post**," attached as a prefix to another meaningful word, immediately brings to my mind at least three current expressions within the cultural-social-political-religious realms:

- 1) "**Post-Modernism**": coming after the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, such as Fascism, Nazism and Communism, highlighting the concept of *relativism* - negating absolute truth - focusing on Post-nationalism and globalization.

- 2) **"Post-Christianity"**: coming after the values of Christendom, introducing secular thinking, presenting so-called "God-free" values, and even starting with neo-paganism.
- 3) **"Post Zionism"**: claiming that Zionism is no more relevant, thus separating Jewish nationality from the Biblical promises and covenants with Israel, often referring to revisionism, neo-*Canaanitism* of "Non-biblical Israeliness," even with proposals for finding shelter, protection and survival for the Jews outside of Zion, perhaps back in Europe or in North America...

Having these **"Post"** ideologies in the background, I am asking what is meant – literally – or what can be meant, by the concept "Post-missionary" or "Postmission"? (Perhaps a non-hyphenated word is preferable, just as it is commonly used nowadays with the word 'antisemitism').

I could easily come to the conclusion that it may mean a kind of an *"Independence Declaration"*: Now there is a new era in history, a new phase in the old relations between Gentiles and Jews - without the traditional missionizing or evangelization of the Jews. Namely, now we Jews shape alone our Jewish identity, without the instrumentality of Church "converters" sent by Gentiles to the Jewish people.

Who, then, should testify to the Jew?

Also in present times it is fully understandable that the Jewish people fear Gentile "missions," because "Christian mission," as it typically transpired in former times, continually "Gentilized" the Jew: undermined his Jewish identity, and this resulted in assimilation within "Goyish" society and mentality - and consequently losing Jewish distinctiveness. Sadly, similar processes continue even in these days.

This fear of "Gentilization of the Jew" is not imaginative. It is legitimate. I can even identify with it, mainly because of historical reasons: plenty of detailed evidence supports that this Gentilization is what has happened in the past in many various locales.

However, we also must admit that during the last two centuries, most JBY came to faith in Yeshua our Lord through churches, missionary organizations and individual non-Jewish believers. They deeply impacted the Jew, making him/her "envious" of a spiritual treasure which the Gentile believer possessed. This is exactly what happened with me personally in the 1960s in Beer-Sheva, through an American missionary couple of the C&MA, and an elderly lady of the CMJ. Yet I should also add that they did not attempt to clone me according to their denominations.

Shifting Mentality and Terminology

As the saying goes, "life and death is in words." It is no secret that when a Jew hears the word "Mission" - המיסיון - it is like a red cloth before a bull. Which Jew can agree with missionaries who come to the Jews, for example, with any kind of *Replacement Theology*? Such a theology or agenda, held openly or secretly, automatically leads towards the Gentilization of the Jews.

But, at the same time I also realize that Gentile organizations and individuals, those that have a genuine love for the Jews and understand God's plan for Israel as a distinct people through unique covenants and promises, can still contribute significantly in *witnessing* to a Jew about Yeshua the Son of God. However, I do think too that the principal lead of witnessing, at least in the State of Israel, should be by JBY.

The theological and linguistic move from "Mission" to "Witnessing" is NOT only a semantic game-play with words, but rather an authentic shift of attitude, fundamentally rooted in Biblical Zionism. A "witness," unlike an "average missionary," would retain a true "Jewish calling," willing to serve and testify to Jews for decades, helping the Jews to shape their unique identity in Yeshua. In other words, no more church and missionary "cloning" of the Jewish believer into the mother denominational image.

Today I know personally of some such faithful "witnesses" from the nations, fully identifying with God's Biblical plan for the Jews. For example, they try to be helpers within Messianic Yeshua congregations, or helping by coming from abroad: participating in Youth and Summer Camps, helping in preparation and printing books, supporting a Home for the elderly believers ("Ebenezer Home" in Haifa), as well as maintaining respectful personal relationships.

Not "Post-Missionary" but Rather" Co-Ministry"

I welcome trustworthy brethren from the nations that come to join the people of Israel and to become an integral part of their lives, when they come in the right spirit, for example, the attitude of Ruth the Moabitess. Thus they really become members of one family, without giving the Jew the impression that he is only the "guest" in the home. Such "non-cloning" brethren-partners are appreciated co-workers in the Kingdom of God through the family of Israel, alongside many other families worldwide.

What is, in a literal sense, "Messianic Judaism"?

By contextual definition, *Messianic Judaism* is any Jewish belief in a certain Messiah, be it the *Lubavitcher* Messiah of "Chabad," the Messiah of Breslav, the late rabbi of Ouman in the Ukraine, the political Messianism of *Gush Emunim* (Block of the Faithful), and even "secular messiahs", as some refer to Theodore Herzl and David Ben-Gurion. So, then, "Messianic Judaism" is not an exclusive appellation for JBY.

Rabbinical *Halacha* and the Secular Israeli Supreme Court

In the secular verdicts of the Israeli High Court (Rufeisen, in 1962; Beresford, in 1989) it was already made very clear, as a matter of precedent, that Jewishness is lost when a Jew is baptized/immersed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - even if externally the same person looks *Haredi* (with black dress), and acts as Ultra *Haredi* (for example: attends regularly – probably incognito – a *Haredi* synagogue).

So, by formal judicial definition, a baptized-Haredi-Jew is no longer a Jew for the purpose of the Law of Return, although, indeed, a Christian descendant/relative of a Jew may receive Israeli citizenship and an identity card, yet not registered at the Ministry of Internal Affairs or in the Rabbinic Courts as a Jew.

Rabbinical Interpretation of Judaism

One must acknowledge that rabbinical interpretations of Judaism include traditions of the Zohar, Gematria, Kabbala (Mysticism), *Gilgul Neshamot* (Reincarnation of the soul), veneration (even cult) of so called Holy Men and Holy Tomb Sites (*Kivrei Zaddikim*) etc. Is this authentic Judaism?! I have no doubt that we should stick to Biblical Judaism.

However, we should not at all despise or ridicule our orthodox Jewish brethren for still being blind spiritually about Yeshua. Much and constant prayer is needed for Israel that their eyes shall be opened to see the real Messiah. But internal critique, as we say "within the family," is not the same as external criticism: internal exhortation is not antisemitism.

We do love our people Israel even when we are in sharp disagreement about theology and lifestyle. The same way we also criticize our sometimes liberal brethren who may be in the churches, be they Lutherans, Anglicans, Baptists or Presbyterians, and still we love them and pray for them.

Judaism: Yiddishkeit ??

It is significant, in my opinion, to differentiate between Jewishness through "Diaspora traditions", on the one hand, and observing the basic *biblical* commandments on the other hand. In "Diaspora Traditions" I mean legacy around "***Yiddishkeit***" – men covering their heads with *kippah* (*Yarmulke*), which was adopted by Jews only since the later Middle Ages, playing "klezmer" music, and eating special food (gefiltefish), which are of East European Ashkenazi traditions. To that we may add the custom called in Yiddish "*Kapores* (*Kapparat* = atonement) *Shlogen*", i.e. slaughtering few days before *Yom Kippur* a

rooster for men and a hen for women, as a substitute and atonement for the sins committed during the past year. Today we don't need, even in a symbolic way, the animal waved around the head alongside the eternal atonement through the blood of our crucified Messiah, "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8).

Yiddishkeit, de facto, also includes the Jewish *Siddur* (Prayer Book), which contains so called "Godly *Mitzva*" (commandment) to light Shabbat and Hannukka candles, while in the canonical *Tanach* (Old Testament) or the New Testament there is not at all such a "divine" commandment for that. Moreover, why should JBY pray in public in a form of a *Minyan* (quorum of 10 men)?!

In keeping Biblical commandments I mean, for example, practices such as: having *Berit Mila* (Circumcision) on the eighth day, keeping the Biblical Holy Days – with Shabbat as *the* Day for congregational Holy Convocation (Leviticus 23), and not by another day which men introduce to replace the Shabbat, as well as eating only *Matzot* (unleavened bread) during *Pessah* (Passover). This important symbolism is also mentioned by the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 5: 6-8). Needless to say that fasting on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) is still relevant and is a unique way to identify with our people and to express our Jewish solidarity, although for sure this is not the way to receive forgiveness of sins.

Israeliness and Judaism

At the same time, some JBY wish to make Israeliness, at least in part, an expression of their Jewishness: adopting folk dance, some call it "Davidic" dance, and introducing ceremonies on *Yom Ha'Shoah* (Holocaust Memorial) and *Yom Hazikaron* (National Wars Memorial), and organizing congregational picnic on *Yom Ha'Azmaut* (Day of Independence). However, even this folklore or nationalism cannot replace Biblical Jewish identity. Even serving in the I.D.F., both in the regular service at the age of 18, and then in reserve military duty during additional 2-3 decades, does not replace Biblical commandments.

Thus, Israeli secular identity or secular nationalism are not substitutes for biblical guidelines, including the observance of *KASHRUT* (dietary laws). Indeed, as it was also in the past, *kashrut* is still relevant for JBY, for example the forbidden pork and seafood, as it is clarified in the Torah. However, I find no reason why JBY should keep *kashrut* according to the Rabbinic interpretation by avoiding the mix of milk with meat. And concerning dietary laws, according to the New Testament also non-Jewish believers in Yeshua should abstain from some non-kosher food, such as food with blood (Acts 15: 19-20).

Rabbinical Judaism and Yeshua

Just as it was 2000 years ago, contemporary JBY cannot please Rabbinical Judaism because of the same continued dispute concerning Yeshua's divinity – His divine nature as the Son of God. Modern Rabbinical Judaism actually feels closer to Islam than to Christianity - because Islam declares 5 times a day that "God is unique, HE has NO Son". But for All Yeshua-Believers the fact that there is a Father, a Son and a Holy Spirit is fundamental. Besides, we cannot hide the Cross and its true symbolism under a bushel.

Sadly, within contemporary rabbinical circles one still finds heavy blasphemies and denigrations about the name of our Savior and Lord Yeshua. I, for example, hear such expressions from Rav Yoseph Harel, who today is the Rabbi of Matte Yehuda, the Judean Municipal County, and this is the Rabbi who provides the *Kashrut* license for Yad Hashmona Guest House. He continues to provide the *kashrut* license and at the same time he pictures Yeshua and the New Testament in the darkest language, quoting the Talmud and later rabbinical texts. But, so far the business goes on between the Rabbinate and the *Meshummadim* ("apostates")...

Yes, at Yad Hashmona Guest House we have no problem to keep "technical *Kashrut*" at the Moshav restaurant, even to pay the salaries of 2 *mashgihim* (*kashrut* supervisors) and not only one *Mashgiah*, as it is normal. But we also face a constant struggle against rabbinical pressure to undermine our witness and identity. At the Moshav it is an ongoing struggle to resist rabbinic pressure to keep low profile Yeshua-presence, for example, to remove the New Testament from the Yad Hashmona Guest House lobby.

But what about the rabbis who still "sit on the cathedra/seat of Moses (Matt. 23: 2)? Yes, they do, so we should still accept their rules and administration in *technical* matters mainly, such as having a *Mohel* (circumcisor) for *Berit-Milah* (circumcision); conducting Marriage ceremony with a *Huppa* (Canopy); placing *Mezuzah* on doorposts, or for cases of burials by *Hevra Kaddisha* (*burial society*) in a normative cemetery.

Yet, I wish to underline, in theological and doctrinal issues such as uniting and interpreting the Old and the New Testaments, particularly with Messianic (Christological) and eschatological interpretations, we must depend on the canonical Scriptures through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We should always be selective in our acceptance of traditional Judaism.

Observing the Torah – NOT the LAW - According to Yeshua

This is exactly what we need: to observe the Torah according to the teachings of Yeshua our Lord. Indeed, the Torah is still valid, because Yeshua himself validated it (Matt.5: 17).

This means that:

- a) Israel's election and uniqueness remain always valid – namely, modern and ancient Israel is the same *one* nation.
- b) The territorial covenant made with the Patriarchs for the seed of Israel is irrevocable; the covenantal relationship between our Father in Heaven and Yeshua - and Israel - is authenticated through the *Brit Hadasha* (New Testament), and not via animal sacrifices.
- c) Israel's modern national/territorial restoration leads towards a future national spiritual revival, when Israel will acknowledge whom they pierced (Zech. 12: 10).
- d) Nowadays, JBY are the first-fruits of a collective Jewish "life from the dead", as the Apostle Paul prophesized (Rom. 11:15).
- e) Israel with Jerusalem as its capital city will be instrumental in the Millennial Kingdom of Yeshua, with a unique function through the Hebrew language.

However, the main question remains: How to keep the Torah?

Yeshua Himself gave the principles for that in the Gospels: He has the authority to interpret the Torah because He Himself was the one who gave the Torah to Moshe on Mt. Sinai. So, for example, Yeshua corrected the Pentateuch teaching, by stopping divorce, and changing the rule to stone sinners. Additionally, HE gave the "key" how to keep the Shabbat, as the Lord of the Shabbat.

But in their liturgy in the Shabbat services in the congregations, JBY gladly repeat the "*Shema Israel*" (Hear, O Israel) and the Aaronic Blessing. For sure JBY have no problem to repeat these sayings, yet it is very important not to replace the Lord's Prayer (*Avinu Shebashamain* – Our Father in Heaven) with the "*Shema*." Additionally, it is also edifying to complete the Aaronic Blessing with the Apostle's Blessing (2 Corinthians 13: 13).

Yeshua Judaism

In order to reach and accomplish the ultimate prophetic blessing for the entire world of believers, JBY, like all believers in Yeshua, must fully realize that it is not the Apostolic Fathers, with their holy Epistles, that hold the primary spiritual authority, but rather it must be Yeshua our Lord Son of God. He gave us His teachings in the Gospels. All believers in Yeshua must give top priority to the teachings, words,

parables, exhortations, and promises of our Lord, because HE is more than our *ADMOR*: "Adoneinu, Moreinu, Rabbeinu ve'Eloheinu" (Our Lord, Teacher, Master and God).

Yeshua Judaism has a special calling to teach both Israel and the nations. Hebrew and a Hebraic way of thinking are essential in this process, around the axis that must be the words of Yeshua our Lord and the help of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit.

JBY and the Churches

The real challenge for JBY and the historic churches is not about ecclesiology, or helping the nations to learn and understand *Yiddishkeit*, but rather to discover the Biblical elements of Jewish Christology and Jewish eschatology. Metaphorically, in the beginning of the 21st century all Yeshua believers may talk about a large and colorful building of twenty-one stories, representing twenty centuries of Church History. But the question is whether JBY should "jump" straight to the 21st floor, to deal with the present issues of exchanging social contacts and cultural traditions. The initial step should be to "enter" the first floor, namely to re-examine very fundamental concepts, especially matters of Christology: the Godhead, Yeshua's divinity and the incarnation.

I am convinced that particularly issues of Christology, such as the Trinity, and the Divinity and the "Humanity" of Yeshua must be first re-considered by JBY. Thus, Ecclesiology should not put Christology in the shadow.

Neither Gentilization Nor Judaization

Because the core issue in the Jewish-Gentile relations is the panic of the Jew not to be gentilized by the churches and their missionary, and the Gentile panic not to be Judaized, both gentilization and judaization must stop. The Gentile believer, for example, should not attempt to stop JBY eating Kosher food, nor the Jews try to stop other Yeshua-disciples to eat pork.

Each one should remain in his/her calling and status, just as men and women have distinct functional differences. So, there should be neither gentilization nor judaization.

The real and sovereign identity of JBY, in my opinion, can be shaped and developed only in the State of Israel: within a Jewish social majority, yet without *Yiddishkeit* and without the pressure of overwhelming Church traditions. It is only in the State of Israel that JBY are really at HOME, able to study and teach the Old and the New Testaments in their own way, being hosts and not guests. For sure "Messianic-Rabbinical Judaism" should not aim to maintain "Diaspora Jewish Identity" as a tool to perpetuate the

Diaspora and ignoring *Aliya* (immigration to Israel). We already live in the exciting end-times, and the place of all Jews is in the Land. At the same time, brethren from the nations are welcome to join us, as Ruth the Moabitess who married Boaz, yet without Moabizing him.

Messianic Yeshua Reformation (Tikkun)

I believe that the modern movement of JBY represents the beginning of a fresh global Jewish Yeshua *Tikkun* (Reformation). This is, de facto, the final Jewish stage of the Reformation movement which began in the 16th century. This evolves greatly around the Hebrew language. The aim is, in my opinion, a Teaching/Interpretation Reformation, leading towards a lifestyle which is based on putting Yeshua Himself in the center of Jewishness, and not mere "cosmetic introductions" of Jewish folklore.

However, the main efforts of JBY should not be in the sphere of organizing a new church, hierarchical institutions, legislations or a Messianic *Halacha*, but rather to fix and keep attention on local congregational learning. Three Jews that have five views cannot and should not have a pope or an archbishop.

We also should not forget the significant concept or entity of the **REMNANT**. There is an important remnant in Israel, including Orthodox Jews that genuinely seek the truth, yet still are blind about Yeshua. In fact there is a remnant within each and every nation. It is *only* the Lord who knows what is in their heart and what will be their future.

The Real Focus: to be prepared for Yeshua's Soon Return

I fully agree with Mark that eschatological inheritance is invaluable. But the ultimate goal in eschatological matters is the imminent return of our Lord. Therefore, our Master's commandment to us is NOT to be surprised by HIS soon Return, because HE will come as a thief in the night (Matt. 24: 42-44). This must be the leading theological teaching of all believers in Yeshua, the challenge and the hope for both the individual believer and the global *Kehila/Ecclesia*. All Yeshua believers must first be a living organism – as a small child that has no problem to obey and follow the Master (Matt. 18: 3-4).

The *time* factor is crucial. Time is running out. Our individual responsibility is to listen to our Master's voice, to focus on being ready, prepared, for the Second Coming.

Finally, therefore, our challenge and accountability as All Believers in Yeshua (ABY), not only JBY, is to be wise and not foolish. Namely, to be on the side of the five WISE Virgins that had oil both in their lamps and extra oil in their vessels --- and NOT to be like the five foolish Virgins that had only little oil in

their lamps yet nothing at all in the reserve for backup (Matt. 25). The oil represents the Holy Spirit and spiritual life. Our greatest responsibility relates to priorities. We must make the right biblical preferences in our discernments.

Robert L. Lindsey

Now a few words about Bob Lindsay's contributions to Israeli JBY, especially via the *United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI)*: 1) Lindsey was instrumental in preparing and publishing the first *Hebrew Concordance of the New Testament*, edited by Paul Re'emi (Jerusalem 1973/4), based on the translation of Franz Delitzsch (a translation, Biblical and *Mishnaic* style, which is greatly appreciated until today). 2) Lindsey edited the 4 Column *Vocabulary of Christian Terms* (Hebrew, Arabic, English, French), Jerusalem 1976.

In my principal views expressed above I am greatly indebted to the late Haim Yoseph Haimoff (Bar David), a real disciple of Yeshua our Lord (1905-1991), and a model pioneer in Eretz Israel.

Note:

ⁱ See, for example, Gershon Nerel, *Messianic Jews in Eretz-Israel (1917-1967): Trends and Changes in Shaping Self-Identity*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Hebrew), Dept. of Comparative Religion, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1997. English synopsis in *Mishkan*, 27 (1997) 11-25; Richard S. Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter 2007; Keri Z. Warshawsky, *Returning to their Own Borders (A Social Anthropological Study of Contemporary Messianic Jewish Identity in Israel)*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 2007.