



The Roots of “Messianic Judaism”

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In recent weeks, I have been getting acquainted with the Messianic Judaism part of the Christian Forum online. Discussion of the roots of Messianic Judaism has led to the compilation of some interesting documentation. It has also led to a discussion that shed some light on how at least some Jewish Believers have viewed the Torah and grafted-in Gentiles who understand the Torah is yet applicable today.

In brief, there are two large organizations that see themselves as definitive of Messianic Judaism, as well as a number of smaller ones. **MJAA-Messianic Jewish Alliance of America** was founded in 1915 with a three fold purpose:

- *To testify to the large and growing number of Jewish people who believe that Yeshua (Hebrew for Jesus) is the promised Jewish Messiah and Savior of the world;*
- *To bring together Jews and non-Jews who have a shared vision for Jewish revival; and*
- *Most importantly, to introduce our Jewish brothers and sisters to the Jewish Messiah Yeshua.* ¹

The other large group is **UMJC-United Messianic Jewish Congregations** which their site says was formed 25 years ago. ² This group is involved in the “discussion” that has gone on between First Fruits of Zion(FFOZ) and their former member, Tim Hegg (Torah Resources) over what it means to be a “Messianic Judaism” believer. The terms “one law” and “divine invitation” were developed here though it is not at all clear to me that coining the terms has been a positive development! One doesn’t have to be participating very long in the “Messianic movement” to

¹ http://www.mjaa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=n_about_us_history

² <http://www.umjc.org/>

find the divisiveness here, as well as in the confusion over what is called a “two house” position.

Here are some resources that will provide some history that has brought us to the current place with such discussions.

- ["The Messianic Jew-](#)
- [The History of Jewish Christianity](#)
- ["Chapter 20: The Rise of Messianic Judaism](#)
- [Ernest Lloyd - International Hebrew Christian | HaDavar](#)
- [The image of the Judaeo-Christians in ancient Jewish and Christian literature](#)
- [Jesus Christ in world history: his presence and representation in ... - Page 242](#)³

The MJAA apparently has roots in another organization--the HCAA: Hebrew Christian Alliance of America. This group has not been involved in the “one law” and “divine invitation” discussion. Both groups have separate membership status for those of Jewish origin and non-Jewish origin.

“From what I was able to find out, the material from the HCAA in the 1970s era did not seem to alter much from what they already had in place during the previous decades. A lot of the direct material that was stated in the 1970s may not be as available since the MJAA which it changed into may've started anew from the point they changed the name, making the HCAA materials of previous times in need of no further updating. It seems to be the case that the HCAA material that would serve as a reference point for a Statement of Purpose was already encapsulated in what was said before prior to the new MJAA coming into being.”

“Early congregations

*The first identifiable congregation made up exclusively of Jews who had converted to Christianity was established in the United Kingdom in 1813;[4] a group of 41 Jewish Christians established an association called "Beni Abraham", and started meeting at Jews' Chapel in London for prayers Friday night and Sunday morning;[5] In 1885, the first Hebrew Christian church was established in New York.[6] In the 1890s, immigrant Jews who converted to Christianity established the "Hope of Israel" mission on New York's Lower East Side while retaining Jewish rites and customs.[7] In 1895, Hope of Israel's Our Hope magazine carried the subtitle “A Monthly Devoted to the Study of Prophecy and to Messianic Judaism.” Hope of Israel was controversial: other missionary groups accused its members of being Judaizers, and one of the two editors of Our Hope magazine, Arno C. Gaebelien, eventually repudiated his views, and, as a result, was able to become a leader in the mainstream Christian evangelical movement.[8] **In 1915, when the Hebrew Christian Alliance of American (HCAA) was founded, it "consistently assuaged the fears of fundamentalist Christians by emphasizing that***

³ With thanks to the members of the Messianic Judaism thread at Christian Forums for their compilation work.

it is not a separate denomination but only an evangelistic arm of the evangelical church", and insisted that it would be free of these Judaizing practices "now and forever".[9] In the 1940s and 50s, missionaries in Israel adopted the term meshichyim ("Messianic") to counter negative connotations of the word nozrim ("Christians").[10]

Movement Established

The Hebrew Christian Alliance was formed in Britain in 1860.

The Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA) was founded in 1915, in part to emphasize to fundamentalist Christians that while it used Jewish forms, it was a cooperating evangelistic arm of the evangelical church.

In 1975, the HCAA changed its name to the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America.

This seems confusing as it seems thoroughly Church based, not very Jewish save for some Jews who seem to be leaving Judaism behind.⁴

Though I do not believe this view is representative of all Jewish believers in Messiah, it has been clearly expressed throughout this discussion-- in my brief paraphrase: that Jewish Believers do not need to keep Torah because they are free in Messiah thus they can participate in economic transactions or go out to eat on Shabbat or not, as they individually find conviction. I find this to be rather an extreme "grace alone" standard! On the other hand, Gentiles who understand it is important to honor Torah commands are viewed as being offensive to HaShem. As a grafted-in one, my thought is that perhaps it is really more offensive to them?

It appears that many Jewish believers in Messiah, for we are ALL believers in the God of Israel, are very concerned that they are able to maintain their cultural traditions and practices without question. They object to others who seem to "copy" them. I would also agree that "playing at being Jewish" is not appropriate! Yet on the other hand, while they do not want anyone to copy them, any teaching that does not look to the traditions or the sages is invalid in their eyes.

It appears that it is the label "Messianic Judaism" that is in contention here. I well recall a discussion with a local rabbi who coldly informed me that "There is no such thing as Messianic Judaism. Judaism IS messianic." Though labels can be helpful as a quick identifier, they can also become harmful when used inappropriately or misunderstood.

⁴ Quoted from CF thread participant, Anielo post 76 March 10 2012

We have discussed [“How shall we call Him?”](#) and determined that we want to honor His Word and command to call Him by His Name, rather than follow the tradition in Judaism to use a substitute name. We do not want to use His Name in vain and appreciate that caution, however we are concerned that failing to use His Name has left a vacuum in which many Christian Believers don’t even know His Name or connect Him with being THE God of Israel.

Since we at Set Apart Ministries do choose to honor His whole Word and intend no disrespect to our Jewish brothers and sisters, those who do or do not acknowledge Yeshua as Messiah, we may now need to reconsider “How shall we call us?”

It does appear that the dilemma of what to do with the incoming Gentile believers that raged in the first century has made a dramatic reappearance in recent decades.

As we draw ever closer to Messiah’s return, we do pray that by His Spirit we will find greater clarity as to what it means to walk after Him through understanding of the Whole Word.