

## WHY MESSIANIC JEWS?

Rachmiel Frydiand

**To ask why we are Jews is to ask why a bagel is a bagel.** A bagel tastes like a bagel and not like a doughnut, although one bagelhater defined a bagel as a doughnut dipped in cement.

Now a Jew is a Jew, because he was born a Jew and because he wants to be a Jew. In most cases even if he does not want to be one, he will be compelled to admit it; otherwise, others will point a finger at him, asking, "Aren't you Jewish?"

The term Jew is related to Judah, Jacob's fourth son from Leah. Judah (Yehuda in Hebrew) means praise to the Lord. His mother Leah wanted thus to express her gratitude to the Lord for giving her this fourth son. The descendants of Judah were aware of this derivation, and sometimes were reminded of it by descendants of other tribes challenging them to live up to their name. We have to admit that some Jews succeeded in assimilating with their Gentile neighbors through intermarriage, change of name, and denial of their identity. Usually it was a long ardent process and took several generations to achieve. On the other hand, there were groups and individuals who, though not descendants of Judah or from any of the other tribes of Israel, succeeded in their efforts at being absorbed into the people called Jews.

This was not easy. The people of Shechem wanted to do it and even went through the full rite of circumcision of every male, yet were slaughtered and never succeeded to penetrate the hermetically sealed tribes of Israel (Genesis 34). Sometimes those attempting to join them gave them trouble, like the "mixed multitude" of Exodus 12:38, and the Gibeonites of Joshua 9. However, in most other cases these non-Jewish groups

seem to have been gradually absorbed and assimilated into the Jewish body by intermarriage. Large influxes took place in the Persian period, as reported in the book of Esther in the Bible, and in the Maccabean period, when whole tribes under threat of extermination, preferred circumcision. The most prominent are the Khazar tribes of the present central Russia who accepted Judaism. The story of their conversion was described and popularized by the famous philosopher/poet Yehuda Halevi.

Today, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, Rabbis are working hard at teaching and preparing prospective converts to Judaism. In some cases, at least, these converts are absorbed into the Jewish mainstream by intermarriage.

### Messianic Jews

Among the 14 million Jewish people there is a group of perhaps twenty or thirty thousand people, born Jews, who believe in the Torah and the rest of the Tenach and practice Jewish customs and religion. They also believe in Jesus. Some, if not most of them, prefer to call Him by His Jewish name, Yeshua. Although small in number, they are a vocal group, constantly challenging the Jewish spiritual and secular authorities with their presence, demanding recognition as Jews.

It would be easiest for these Jewish believers, among whom is also the writer of these lines, to accept the advice of rabbinic leaders and put aside our belief in Jesus. The Jewish authorities work very hard to achieve it. Organizations and individuals spend their time and hundreds and thousands of dollars towards this end. Among the best known are the Peilim, Karen Yeladdenu, supported by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Israel, and many more who do it as a full or part time job.

Why do Messianic Jews resist? What lies behind their obstinacy, not only contin-

uing to believe themselves but also spreading their faith to others? The answer as we see it is spiritual. This spiritual aspect can be summarized as follows:

### Prophecies Demand It

We believe in Yeshua (Jesus) as Messiah because He alone gives sense to the words of our Jewish prophets. There is Isaiah 53 with its minute description of the suffering servant who was despised and rejected, afflicted with pain and stripes, by whose "stripes we are healed." He then dies, is buried, yet is revived and suffers all this "for the affliction of my (Isaiah the prophet's) people." All this can best be applied to one person only - Yeshua of Nazareth. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 98) teaches that this chapter refers to Messiah. The Targum of Jonathan begins the passage with the words Ha yatslakh avdee Mashikha, "Behold my servant the Messiah shall prosper. .. " Common sense says it must refer to Jesus.

The same goes for many other prophecies which speak of the time of His birth, like Daniel 9:26: *And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, ...* (The city and sanctuary were destroyed A.D. 70. Messiah had to come and be cut off before then.) The manner of His birth in a supernatural way is recorded in Isaiah 7:14: *Behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* Isaiah 9:6 (5 in Heb.) says: *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.* The place of his birth is foretold by Micah, the prophet in verse 5:2 (5:1 in Hebrew): *But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have*

*been from of old, from everlasting.*

The manner of His death is found both in Psalm 22:17, *"they pierced my hands and my feet"* (Masoretic text - "Like a lion they are at my hands and my feet"), and in Zechariah 12:10, *"They shall look unto me whom they have pierced,"* which the Talmud in Sukkah 52 applies to Messiah ben Joseph.

We have heard arguments against His Messianic claims by the fact that some prophecies like Isaiah 2 (breaking swords into plowshares) and Isaiah 11 Lamb and lion dwelling together) have not been fulfilled as yet and that our explanations for a future fulfillment by His second coming creates too long a hiatus (of close to 2,000 years). But what is 2,000 years in the sight of God, waiting patiently for His people to respond and accept His Anointed One - Yeshua, ben Elohim?

### PERSONAGE SPOTLESS

We hold on to our faith because of the spotless Person He was. His contemporaries testified of Him that *"He doeth all things well"* (Mark 7:37). He could challenge his contemporaries saying to them, *"which of you convicteth me of sin?"* and they held their peace. Some modern Jewish and non-Jewish scholars point out His lack of originality in many of His sayings. Would it have been better if He had contradicted the words of the prophets? Others assert that His teaching is too idealistic (e.g., the turning of the other cheek), and therefore impractical. But who can find fault in a Man who constantly goes from the South to the North of Israel, then Judea and Samaria, doing good, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, making the lame to walk again and preaching the Good News of salvation to the poor, the needy, and the outcast? Rejected by the leading Pharisees and by the High Priests, He died a martyr's death by crucifixion at the hands of the cruel Roman sol-

diers. But this is not the end of the story, for His 12 disciples plus a number of others see Him alive after He died and proclaim Him the risen Saviour. For this assertion nearly all of them had to pay with their lives, dying like their master a cruel death from the hands of pagans and of unbelieving Jewish leaders. Yet these believing Jews never flinched. They knew for sure that He is alive.

### PERSONALITIES OF HIS FOLLOWERS

We are convinced that He is Messiah because of the transformation in the personalities of His followers. Who could transform Simon Bar Yonah, the fisherman on the shores of Galilee, to become the leader of Messianic Jews in Israel and abroad, and finally to be acknowledged the first bishop and highest authority next to Jesus by millions of people of the whole world?

What about Saul of Tarsus, convinced that he, with the letters he had from the High Priest, would completely knock out all belief in Jesus? He met the risen Yeshua on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus (Acts 9) and from a persecutor of the Gospel he became a proclaimer of the Good News. He himself was greatly persecuted by unbelieving people everywhere until **he finally died a martyr's death at the hands of the Romans in the time of Nero.**

### PEOPLE WHO ACCEPTED HIM

From the first book, Bereshit, to the last prophet in the Tonach, Malachi, the Messiah's activity involves "the people" or the nations. Yaacov Aveenoo foresees it and says:

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.* Genesis 49:10

Isaiah the prophet sees Him as the "root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to Him shall the Gentiles seek" Isai-

ah 11:10

In Isaiah 49:6 Messiah is proclaimed with these words:It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel:

*I will also give thee a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.* Malachi says of Him (1:11):

*For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles.*

### PEACE THAT MESSIAH GIVES

Jewish believers in Messiah Yeshua found that only in Him they have rest, peace, and satisfaction. They heard Messiah's invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). They verified it in their own lives. They read the record of His promise, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). They found Messiah to be the Great Gentleman who always keeps His promise. The result is that we can say together with one of the first hosidim of Messiah Yeshua, Simon bar Jonah, called Simon Peter:

***Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Messiah, the Ben Elohim.*** (John 6:68-69)

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6161 Busch Blvd., Suite 205

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**How about you? Have you received your Redeemer, the Stone whom the builders rejected? In Him is life, light and joy and in His sacrifice is forgiveness of sin.**

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### For further information contact::

**-Menorah Ministries -**  
P.O. Box 460024 Denver,  
CO 80246-0024  
Voice: 303-355-2009 Fax: 303-355-6901  
E-mail: [menorah@menorah.org](mailto:menorah@menorah.org)  
Internet Page: [www.menorah.org](http://www.menorah.org)



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