

## WHAT IS OUR MESSAGE?

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“I have been occupied for some time past with a work which is of immeasurable greatness. I cannot tell today whether I shall bring it to a close. It has the appearance of a gigantic dream.”

--from Theodor Herzl's first entry in his diary, Shavuot 1895, a year before writing his treatise on Zionism

Messianic Judaism is a movement with a message.

The Messianic Movement was born of God's spirit, a miraculous birth. Because of the radical life-change most of us experienced, and because of our sense of destiny, our message is intimately connected with how we understand ourselves. Our identity and our message are intertwined. The clarity and content of our message depends on the clarity and content of our identity.

This paper is a bit like origami. It appears to have many angles and sides, but when it is opened up, we find that it is all of one piece. There are three main points. One, we need a message that speaks to the community of Israel, not just to Jewish individuals. Two, we ARE our message; as our identity as Yeshua-followers is more clearly integrated into our Jewish souls, our message will be more authentic and have more authority. Three, our message has to, not only integrate with the Jewish past and present, but communicate a compelling vision, even a gigantic dream, of the crucial calling of the people of Israel in the ongoing story of humanity.

We need to speak, and live, a message that is both relevant and challenging, not only to certain individuals who happen to be Jewish, but to the Jewish community as a whole. This means that our message must address issues of *Jewish community* and Jewish history that are often overlooked -- or at best only vaguely considered.

### A MESSAGE FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

There are both biblical and cultural reasons to develop a Jewish community gospel -- a gospel for the Jewish nation.

#### Biblical Reasons

First, the original biblical message is one that addresses the Jewish nation. Restoring this biblical message will restore the essential good news to the Good News. What is the good news? “Extra, extra, read all about it!” The headline news is that God has visited us (the Jewish people) as the first “installment” in the restoration of all things! (see, for example, Luke 1:68-75) The enduring hope of Israel--enduring in its modern form even to this day--the hope of justice and peace on earth, is near! “The kingdom of God (the restored kingdom of David) is near!” That is the news--and news of renewal, peace and justice is always good news!

Within this headline story is related good news that many have mistaken for the main story. That is the news that even sinners (those that repent) can participate in this kingdom, or government, of justice and holiness due to the boundless mercy of God, who has provided for us (the nation of Israel) an even better atonement for sin than the method previously provided. In fact, he will transform us on the inside with the creative power of his own spirit. ("I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees..." --Ezekiel 36:27)

Without the context of the restoration of the Kingdom of David, of God's government come to earth,<sup>1</sup> of the lion lying down with the lamb, of nations turning their swords into plowshares, the individualistic gospel of forgiveness and going to heaven floats aimlessly in a sea of religious currents. Without the biblical context of the restoration of God's creation with Israel at the center (see Romans 8:19-23), the doctrines of personal forgiveness and justification have come to mean salvation FROM this world, instead of participation in the salvation OF this world. And salvation from this world (to heaven) developed in Christian thought to mean salvation from the carnal practices of the Jews.

#### Cultural Reasons

Getting the message right in biblical terms is important, but it only gives us a place to begin. Our message is not a mathematical theorem or philosophy that finds its perfection in abstract form. Our message is only successful if it communicates to those for whom it is intended.

If someone asked you, 'What message do you want to leave your children?' how would you answer? Perhaps you would find a scripture like "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your ways" (Prov. 3: 5-7). This gives an excellent life principle that can be put to use in any situation. But the fact is, no matter what message any of us would leave, the words will only be as good as our relationship with that child.

There is a social reality that I believe to be God-given. I call it the "Arm in Arm Principle." Jews stand (metaphorically) linked arm in arm. The Jewish community forms a nearly impenetrable circle as individual Jews stand together with arms linked. Jewish individual have an innate resistance to breaking the communal circle. The last thing we Jews will give up, after we have given up any shred of religious practice or affiliation, is our Jewish identity, our sense of being connected to the historic and present people of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

So far, largely because of sociological and historical factors beyond our control, in order for Jewish people to come to Yeshua, we have had to pull them out of the circle, even while we tell them, and generally believe, they are still part of the circle. At this point in time, even belonging to a Messianic Jewish synagogue is outside of the circle.

**Jewish individuals will never receive the message of Yeshua the Messiah in any significant numbers until that message speaks to the Jewish community as a whole -- addresses the issues of *Jewish community, and Jewish identity* -- the question of the ongoing and eternal significance of the Jewish people.**

“The Jewish view of redemption begins with the assumption that the renewal of all things begins with God and Israel, not with God and the individual Jew...I suggest that our *Besorah* needs to emphasize that the Messiah is essential to individual Jews precisely because he is the Messiah/Redeemer of *all* Israel...While the place of personal response to the gospel should not be ignored, it is a significant loss to reduce Yeshua to the savior of individuals while barely mentioning that *Yeshua is central to the accomplishment of redemption for Israel, all humanity, and the cosmic order.*”<sup>3</sup>

[emphasis in original.]

#### INTEGRATING OUR IDENTITY

When I came to believe in Yeshua in 1971, the message we heard, and then preached ourselves, was “You can be Jewish and believe in Jesus” or “You don’t have to give up your Jewishness to believe in Jesus.” This of course was based on the facts that Yeshua spoke only to Jews, that all of his first century followers were Jews, and that the “gospel” message was straight out of the Jewish scriptures and tradition. It was offered first to Jews, who then spread it to the rest of the Mediterranean world. We relished pointing out the irony, when seen in the light of history, of the apostles’ deliberations over whether gentiles could believe in Yeshua without becoming Jews.

Why, then, did the gospel message, even as the Messianic Movement preached it -- the basic message of Yeshua’s atonement for the forgiveness of one’s sins and the promise of eternal life -- never seem Jewish to me?

Why, no matter how we tweaked and Yiddishized it, did it seem like a Christian message made kosher-style -- the spiritual equivalent of turkey ham? How could I share this message with my friends and family when it caused so much unrest in my own heart?

For decades I labored in a profound struggle to understand my identity as a Jew who believes in Yeshua, and to find articulation for the message I wanted to share with my beloved family and community. Even as an active rebbitzin, teacher and leader in the Messianic movement, inside I felt terribly lost. “I was found and then I became lost.” Yes, I was still Jewish and always would be, but what did that mean? I knew in my heart that Yeshua was indeed the Jewish Messiah-- why could I not find rest in Him? For many years a cloud of melancholy--hopelessness of ever integrating my heart with my mind, my spirit with my soul--hovered over me.

Though my crisis of identity was probably more persistent than most, I am far from unique. The identity conflicts of Messianic Jews have been documented by a number of researchers including Natalia Yangarber-Hicks<sup>4</sup> and Carol Harris-Shapiro.<sup>5</sup>

Yangarber-Hicks demonstrates, through written surveys filled out by Messianic Jews, that a significant population of Jewish believers in Yeshua feel uncomfortable and unsure about their identity in relation to the larger Jewish and Christian cultures. She also notes, “the importance of being grounded in one’s ethnic identity and its positive impact on emotional well-being has been emphasized by a number of social scientists ...”<sup>6</sup>

Harris-Shapiro sees similar identity conflicts among the Messianic Jews she interviewed. She summarizes: “Thus the Jewish self is a site of ambivalence and continual ‘working out’ of one’s Jewish identity... this love-hate relationship with Jewishness does seem to appear and reappear as a pattern of discourse. The struggle to affirm Jewishness and yet separate from Jewishness ranges over the whole life experience of the Messianic Jew.”<sup>7</sup>

These identity issues are not primarily the result of personal or organizational weakness in our movement. They are the result of the fact that our beliefs about the world and about ourselves are in direct conflict with the schema the rest of the world, including our own family and community, accepts as reality.

#### SCHEMA, NARRATIVE AND OUR MESSAGE

Why do we have to ask the question, ‘What is our Message’?

It is because we have found the gospel message that we hear and have heard from the churches, one that we ourselves have presented, albeit with changes in language, does not speak to us and our people.

An answer, to be meaningful, must meet a fitting question. Just as “a curse without cause does not alight,” an answer without a question does not find a home.

“The most serious obstacle which modern men encounter in entering a discussion about revelation does not arise from their doubts as to whether the accounts of the prophets about their experiences are authentic. The most critical vindication of these accounts, even if it were possible, would be of little relevance. The most serious problem is *the absence of the problem*. An answer, to be meaningful, presupposes the awareness of a question, but the climate in which we live today is not congenial to the continued growth of questions which have taken centuries to cultivate. The Bible is an answer to the supreme question: *what does God demand of us?* Yet the question has gone out of the world. ... the Bible...is a sublime answer, but we do not know the question any more. Unless we recover the question, there is no hope of understanding the Bible.”<sup>8</sup>

We preach that Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah, but none but a small group in Brooklyn is asking who the messiah is.

### Schema

Another way to look at the problem of an answer without a question is the idea of *schema*. A schema is an organizational or conceptual pattern in the mind. In order to incorporate new facts or ideas into our thinking, these have to fit into existing mental structures.<sup>9</sup> A schema is like a diagram or a map of one's world. It is through our various schemata that we make sense of the greater world. If an incoming fact or concept does not fit our schema we will normally do one of three things: we will ignore it, forget it, or we will alter it to fit our existing schema.

The traditional gospel message is some form of the following:

Everyone has sinned and come short of the glory of God. Sin must be punished and Jesus/Yeshua took the punishment for us on the cross/tree. Confess that you have sinned, believe that Jesus/Yeshua took your punishment, repent and ask God to be in charge of your life. Be baptized/immersed and receive the Holy Spirit/Ruach HaKodesh.

Everything in the above gospel message is derived from Jewish scriptures. It is not *wrong*, so what's wrong with it?

It does not fit a modern Jewish schema. it exists totally apart from our mental framework as Jews.

Intellectually, it does not answer our deepest questions. It refers to a schema that is not our own, that we don't understand or accept as true.

Emotionally, it doesn't hit the "pocket." It doesn't deal with questions of immediate concern for most Jewish people.

Culturally it feels alien, and, in some circumstances, hostile.

Spiritually, and eschatologically, it lacks the central focus of the "gospel" preached by Yeshua and his disciples: the coming kingdom.

Evidentially, It has not been historically effective. Plain and simple it has not produced much in the way of results.

What is missing? Any hint of how this salvation, this forgiveness, this eternal life, has anything to do with being Jewish, i.e. how does it inform and affect the purpose of the Jewish people, and our personal lives as Jews? It is entirely mute on the subject.

The Messianic Jewish subjects of Harris-Shapiro's study are reportedly not able to resolve the conflict they experience between these two schemata. They cannot mesh the *Jewish* and the *Messianic* into one framework of understanding. Generally they feel obligated to end up on the Christian side when it comes to theology and questions of eternity, while maintaining an emotional connection to their Jewish heritage.<sup>10</sup>

I could not incorporate the inherited Christian schema. It rattled around in my mind and soul, like a loose part, causing pain and irritation that presented itself as a chronic state of mild depression. How could something that clearly sprouted from Jewish soil have become so alien to the Jewish soul?

#### Insights into a Messianic Jewish Message

One of my first clear insights into a resolution to this identity crisis came while I was driving alone to Nashville, TN. This drive became an unusual time of worship and communion with God. I wanted to save some of my thoughts so I stopped off at a Circuit City and purchased a hand-held mini-cassette recorder. Just about an hour or two north of Nashville I recorded the following thoughts, transcribed here verbatim:

I just saw a license plate that said "forgiven." And it made me think about the fact that that's the gospel message that most people think about -- to talk about being forgiven, to express to other people that Jesus died on the cross that they might be forgiven. And I was thinking about the fact that what drew me, and what touched me, as I was becoming a believer back in 1971 was not that message at all, which even, as essential as it is, does not hit me in my center.

But the message that drew me was the message that Derek Prince preached, which was in essence, looking back on it, the message of the restoration of the kingdom. Prince taught that the coming back to the Land, that the resurrection of the land of Israel, the state of Israel, was indeed God's hand -- that it was GOD'S HAND. This is what drew me. The fact that God was still actively involved in the lives of his people. That God was still actively involved with our people, with Israel. And that my longings as a Jew, everything that I had grown up with, to long for, as a Jew were not simply religious tradition, were not simply something to keep us alive, to keep us together as a people, but were even from the hand of God.

This is what drew me to the Lord. And this is the gospel of the kingdom. I don't understand it fully. But I believe that is what we need to preach. Our gospel, our good news, for Jewish people is not necessarily, firstly, the message of forgiveness, but it is the message of the Messiah, which is the message of the resurrection, the restoration, of the Kingdom of David.

And to the ever-popular Jewish question: "If we have God why do we need

Jesus?” maybe this is part of the answer. That we need him because he is the herald who is to usher in the kingdom of God. He is our prince. He is the L-rd of Hosts who will enter the gates. (PS 24) He is our prince, our king, who will bring in, and sit on, the throne of David. And without him the purposes of God will not be fulfilled in this world, *and the purposes of God for Israel and our purpose as a people will not be fulfilled* -- that without the messiah we have no prince, we have no king, we don't have anyone to usher in the kingdom that God has planned, and that was part of his plan *for us* from the beginning.

The King of Glory -- He is the mysterious King of Glory. [Psalm 24] He brings the Glory of God. He is the Glory of God and he causes us -- the people of Israel, the Jewish people --to dwell in the glory of God.

Now, there was an answer to a real question! All my life I had heard in synagogue “Lift up your heads O ye gates that the king of glory may come in.” The question always followed, “Who is this King of Glory?” I kept looking around hoping someone would answer, but nobody ever did.

The traditional gospel message does not stand on neutral ground. It exists as part of a wider context that is commonly known to be Christian (non-Jewish). It does not speak to the Jewish mind, heart or culture, neither does it fully represent the message Yeshua brought. Let's look at a related idea: the essential nature of narrative.

#### THE “GOSPEL” IS PART OF A STORY

The Good News is not a novel message from God dropped into the Earth in the first century, along with a mystical “Son of God.” It is part of a story. In fact, the message that Yeshua brought--in his person and on his lips--is not a *new* story (as many tell it) but, rather, the turning point of an ongoing story. A turning point is “an event marking a unique or important historical change of course, or one on which important developments depend.”

#### The Power of Narrative

All human beings relate to a good story because it touches something essential about being human.

Narrative has been credited with being a “fundamental structure of human experience,” a “solution to a fundamental problem in life...creating understandable order in human affairs,” “the most fundamental way of grappling with new experience,” and a “primary act of mind.”<sup>11</sup>

We each live within a story, in fact, a set of stories. We act in our life alone, and we play a particular role within the story of our family, and we act within the story of our culture. Within each of these stories there are subplots in which we may play different roles and affect different outcomes. We may also understand ourselves as a player in the larger story of our contemporary world. Beyond that, we live and act in God's

complete story of the history of all humanity.

How we understand ourselves within these stories shapes our identity and shapes how we see ourselves in relation to others. How we tell a particular story--what we decide to leave in and what we decide to take out, as well as how we order the selected events--is crucial to the meaning that the story conveys.

The Jewish people is unique in that part of our story--the beginning, as well as prophetic utterances about our future--are recorded in a sacred book. The book we, and many others, consider to be the Word of God contains mostly the story of God in relation to the people of Israel.

We Jews have told our own story for generations. There are many variations, of course, but there are some events that are consistently part of the story, and some that are consistently left out of the story.

Christians tell their story as well, and, like the Jews, have variants, yet the essential framework of the story remains the same. The two stories are said to arise from the same texts, yet they are very different.

How we Messianic Jews understand and frame our narrative, will determine whether we will land within the context of the ongoing Jewish story or the Christian story. And this context will determine who will hear, understand and receive our message.

### The Flow of History

Picture if you will a large organic timeline of space and time merged into one broad sweep of the tedious and wayward journey of history. Imagine the members of this symposium standing around on our span of the timeline. Only it is not a line, it is a river perhaps, in a sweeping aerial shot that spans over 5000 years of Jewish history and the geography of the entire world. Along this river, this timeline, are our people milling about throughout history: in Jerusalem in every era, in Babylonia, in Rome and the cities of the Mediterranean, In towns up the Rhine river and into northern Europe, in the Spain of Yehuda HaLevi and Maimonides, in the shtetls of the Pale of Settlement, in ships bound for America, in gas chambers and hiding in forests, in synagogues in Brooklyn, fighting in the Sinai and on the Golan, and even living in mansions in Hollywood.

We stand at one particular place with the expanse before us yet out of focus. We stand among our people who have also been brought to this place by this cascading river. We, with the others, look back over who we have been and where we have come from.

How do we tell our Messianic Jewish story? What are the needs formed out of our history, and our thinking about our history? How do we understand our common heritage, particularly the centuries of exile and suffering, and even this strange

modern invention of secular godliness? How is our post-biblical history part of the plan of God? What are the cries of the hearts of the Jewish people around you? What is God's heart crying for them? Where is Yeshua as we look back over the river of Jewish lives that brought us to this place?

We have a message, but how does that message tell the story of the past and write the story of the future? We have rightly proclaimed the Jewishness of the new covenant and of the collection of literature erroneously, but conventionally, known as the New Testament. But the trajectory of that story, the way it has been told for centuries, has caused it to diverge by a vast distance from the Jewish story, a story that continued in another direction. My personal identity, as well as that of other Jews, is derived, in large part, from my understanding of myself as an ongoing part of the Jewish story. A meaningful message must share DNA with that story.

How do we retell the story of Yeshua, of the new covenant, of our own history, with a trajectory that runs straight through Jewish history of the last 2000 years and finds us smack in the middle of the Jewish community today?

#### Two Stories We Must Overcome

First, the bad news is we are not starting with a blank page. Before our story can be believable we have to confront two stories that stand as formidable barriers, in contradiction to the story we want to tell. These two stories are The Story of Exile and the Story of Christian Theology.

Strangely, the two stories look curiously alike--like looking at the same phenomenon from two sides of the looking-glass. In the Story of Exile, God sent us from the land of promise, the land of our inheritance, causing us, for age upon age, to wander, homeless, over the face of the earth, seemingly abandoned by the One who called us in the first place.

How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and every day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?  
Psalm 13

The second is like the first, but from the hand of man, rather than the hand of God. It is the story of expulsion. The expulsion of the Jews from the narrative of The Story of Christian Theology was played out many times over in history by the physical expulsion of the Jews from just about every country in Christendom. Most believed they were doing God's will because of their flawed theology.<sup>12</sup>

#### The Story of Exile

Exile is a physical state and a spiritual state. Though we as a people have returned

from exile physically, we have not yet returned, as a people, spiritually. In a way, Jewish self-understanding has never fully recovered from the destruction of the second temple and the subsequent genocide/expulsion of the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea. Though your average Jewish person today does not walk around in mourning over the destruction of the Temple, it remains the “background radiation” of all religious thinking that came after. Inasmuch as Judaism is shaped by the Talmud, it is largely shaped by the dilemma of the Exile.<sup>13</sup> We are the chosen people who spent the last 2000 years wondering when God would remember.

Echoing many Jewish humorists, Michael Wex calls this “the fundamental absurdity of Jewish existence...We are God’s chosen people; it says so over and over in the Bible, His favorites. And how does He show it? Just look at Jewish history: persecution and pariahhood are both tributaries of the one big river of *goles*--exile--the fundamental fact of Jewish life for the last couple of thousand years”<sup>14</sup>

Centuries of exile have produced, according to Wex, the culture that produced the Yiddish language, which is characterized by the *kvetch*. He explains, “If we stop kvetching, how will we know that life isn’t supposed to be like this? If we don’t keep kvetching we’ll forget who we really are...Kvetching lets us know that we’re in exile, that the Jew and hence the ‘Jewish,’ is out of place everywhere, all the time.”<sup>15</sup> Though the new Israelis banished Yiddish as the language of exile, they imported Yiddish inflection and attitude directly into Israeli Hebrew.

“Disappointment--awareness of the difference between things as they are and things as they’re supposed to be--is the basis of kvetching...”<sup>16</sup>

Edward Feld, in exploring the faith consequences of the Holocaust, says:

“We are past waiting for intervention from outside, for a glorious endtime that will transform existence. Our disappointment will no longer bear such a leap of faith. If the God we wanted so much did not appear when our need was so desperate, what use would that God be to us now?”<sup>17</sup>

With the humiliations and tragedies of exile, comes the sense of abandonment, a diminished hope in the power of God to act on our behalf. For many the Holocaust killed this hope entirely.

“No divine intervention will come from the outside to make history right again, just as there was no resounding miracle to save millions of innocent people from death...Traditional theologies that find an ultimate meaning displayed by history make no sense in light of the gas chambers and the rod of Dr. Mengele choosing who shall live and who shall die. The Messiah was buried at Auschwitz.”<sup>18</sup>

As holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once noted, what we say about God, we must be

able to say over the darkest pits of life. What we know about God, we must be able to profess in the midst of brokenness, in the middle of a very dark world, in the midst of disorienting pain, and the angst of "Why?"<sup>19</sup>

In order to overcome The Story of Exile, a story of endless disappointment resulting in lost hope, our message needs to sprout from the ground of the kind of faith Wiesel describes. This kind of faith does not come automatically with a simple prayer, or a good teaching. It is fought for in the dark places of the spirit. Have we truly asked ourselves "Where was God at Auschwitz?" We must face our deepest doubts and fears and find God there. We must wrestle until the dawn breaks, and then not let Him go until He blesses us with Life we can share. We wrestle to find faith in the dark places of lost hope, not merely for ourselves, but for our people. Our message depends on it.

Feld asks, "Do we not need a theological matrix to begin to understand and to articulate our own history? Do we not need to recover a sense of the holy?"<sup>20</sup>

### The Story of Christian Theology

"Not one major creed of the Church even identifies "Christ" in any way as a Jew, much less the King of the Jews. Not as Messiah, not as the son of David, not as the Lion of Judah. Instead of restoring the kingdom of David, the "Christ" of the creeds declares that the kingdom will never again exist."<sup>21</sup>

### The Christian Narrative

The following radio essay succinctly and eloquently tells the classic Christian narrative that explains how the Bible holds together as one story. This story is the Christian schema, the interpretive framework through which the whole Bible is understood.<sup>22</sup>

"There are five crucial moments in Scripture's definition of humanity. The first comes in Genesis when God said, "Let us make man in our image." Every human is a bearer of the likeness of God. Each of us is impressed with His mark. This is how and why we love and relate and reason and choose. This is the source of our mysterious and wonderful personhood.

"The second moment comes quickly on the heels of the first: the Fall. In the garden God pronounced that we were good, but our choosing to rebel against Him resulted in our deformation. Yet though, marked by sin, we retain the image of God. This ambiguity is why humans are at times angelic and at times demonic. Our estate is a mixed heritage: we were created good, so we show glimmers of the divine; but our sinful flesh is also in effect, so we cast the shadows of the demonic.

"The third moment is the crucifixion. Here God unequivocally states that we are utterly sinful, and yet utterly loved. Our sin is so great that only the crucifixion of the Son of God could deal with it. Yet, God's love for us is so great, that He would not let us go. At once, it is the divine proclamation of our debasement and our worth.

“ Fourth, the resurrection. Christ rose, and offers us the same opportunity: resurrection. Victorious over death, He offers us victory over the flesh and entrance into His Kingdom. This is the ultimate definition of human possibility. Fifth and finally, the promised re-creation of earth where the Kingdom of God will rule in full power and glory. As Christians, we ought to be defined by these five moments. They tell of our past, empower our present, and orient us towards our glorious future.”<sup>23</sup>

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This teaching offers important, even vital, insights into biblical truths, but like the traditional gospel message, the Christian biblical narrative has no place for the Jewish people, their history and their relationship with God. If the mind of God is to be understood as moving seamlessly from the Fall to the Crucifixion, why, then, the peculiar--and very lengthy--biblical story of the people of Israel, one filled with all manner of intimate pathos from the heart of Almighty God?

We cannot overcome The Story of Christian Theology alone. Thankfully there is a strong movement today among Christians, that seeks to overcome this grievous error in Christian theology. For our part, we need to clearly distinguish ourselves from institutional Christianity and Christian theology, while acknowledging its contributions and embracing those who truly embrace Yeshua.

Forays into Telling a Yeshua-narrative for the Jewish Community

We as a movement agree that God has not abandoned, has not forsaken Israel. But where was God over the last 2000 years? Where was Yeshua? Our message, our story, is not complete without coming to terms with this difficult question. Without it, our narrative has lost its audience for lack of continuity.

The Mystery of his Hiddenness

In our Messianic Jewish story, we must find the Messiah the central (though often hidden and mysterious) figure in the long continuous story of the intimate and intense relationship of the God of Israel with the people whom he chose to bear his name - the people of Israel. Unraveling the mystery of his hiddenness, both in the biblical account and in our subsequent history, to reveal his true identity, like that of Joseph to his brothers, is one task before us.

Joel Marcus' extraordinary little book, *Jesus and the Holocaust: Reflections on Suffering and Hope* explores Marcus' "intuition of an identification between Christ's suffering and that of the martyrs of the Holocaust."<sup>24</sup>

In Julia Blum's beautiful telling of the Akeda story she sees "...the father-son relationship, gradually displayed more and more fully...a path down which the father leads his son, a path on which the son starts out as just a son but...in walking down it, the son becomes the *lamb*, with none other than the father himself leading him to be sacrificed...In this is the mystery and secret of the Father's plan, the Father's love, and the Father's election: the Mystery of Sonship."<sup>25</sup> (p. 29)

She is referring, not to Yeshua here, but to Israel. Blum asserts that the ram in the thicket, not Isaac, represents Yeshua. Isaac, with Israel in his loins, represents the people of Israel. Isaac/Israel remains bound on the altar even as this story ends. Blum paints a tender picture of how both Israel's election and chosenness can be seen in the nation's historical suffering.

"Out of Egypt I called My Son." (Hosea 11:1) Matthew applies this verse to Yeshua, though it refers to Israel in the original text. There is a mysterious parallel and identification between the sonship of Israel and the sonship of Messiah that runs throughout scripture. It begins to make sense of our national suffering. It helps us identify with the Messiah. It speaks both of our chosenness and of our need to rely solely on God. This is a deep and sensitive question to explore with a lot of creative spiritual potential to uncover.

## WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF A MESSAGE FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

As a trained artist, I understand that a painted object will only appear real to a viewer's eye if it is in harmony with the foreground, middleground and background, in shape, size, tonal value, lighting and color. Likewise, our message, no matter how "true" needs to be part of a harmonious unified picture. The foreground, middleground and background of our picture is the Jewish CONTEXT which will give our message reality and beauty.

Overall, our message must have authentic Jewish CONTEXT.

It must have CONTINUITY with Jewish culture.

It must affirm and confirm God's special COVENANT with Israel.

It must have meaning for the Jewish COMMUNITY.

It must communicate a clear vision of the CALLING of the nation of Israel.

It must have CURRENCY.

It must have COMPASSION.

It must CHALLENGE our people.

It must also AMAZE and ASTOUND and give our people a vision for their prophetic destiny.

Finally, it will take COMMITMENT AND COURAGE on our part to see it through.

There is not space to look at each of these in detail, but following are some examples of how to flesh out these principles.

### CONTEXT

In the biblical text, the people of God is the people of Israel; God has set up no other people, no other kingdom, and no other "Israel" than the one he called into being from the time of Abraham or David. Yeshua broke down the wall of partition (that God had previously erected) so that God could bring in the "other sheep that are not of this

sheep pen,” but the pen is Israel’s.<sup>26</sup>

## CONTINUITY

Our message must have continuity with the Jewish past (both biblical and post-biblical), real consequence for the Jewish present, and build connection to the Jewish future.

I will put my dwelling place among you and I will not reject you, I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.  
(Lev. 26: 11-12)

God’s desire and intent from the beginning was that he would dwell with mankind, and that his human creation would dwell in his presence. This is clearly seen from Genesis 2 through Revelation. These words from Leviticus are repeated throughout Torah and appear again in Revelation 21:3.<sup>27</sup>

When sin caused God to send the first humans out from his presence, his intent did not change. He set out to bring all of humanity back to relationship with himself by calling out a “peculiar” nation in which he would dwell, first in a limited and conditional way, and finally in all of His Glory.

God’s indwelling presence is not a “New Testament concept.” God’s indwelling presence rested on the *mishkan* (tabernacle) in the wilderness and in the Temple in Jerusalem, This is the place that the Lord chose for his divine presence to pitch its tent in the world. The nation of Israel was, in essence, the incarnation of the Spirit of God, the body in which God dwelled. In this manner, the more concentrated and compact incarnation of the spirit of God in the *Memra*, the Messiah, exists in continuity with God’s habitation in Israel.<sup>28</sup>

Orthodox Jewish scholar Michael Wyschogrod sees this connection. “The covenant between God and Israel] depicts a drawing together of God and Israel. In some sense...it can also be said to involve a certain indwelling of God in the people of Israel whose status as a holy people may be said to derive from this indwelling. Understood in this sense, the divinity of Jesus is not radically different--though perhaps more concentrated--than the holiness of the Jewish people.”<sup>29</sup>

Though we know that Messiah, being deity, is worthy of our worship, whereas Israel is not, the continuity of God’s indwelling presence reveals much about God’s character and his purpose for Israel and all of mankind.

## COVENANT

Our message must foundationally affirm and confirm God’s special covenant with the Jewish people in a way that is both faithful to the scriptures and makes sense to today’s Jews.

First, we need to affirm that God has not rescinded any of the special covenants He has made with the Jewish people, particularly the Sinai covenant. Yeshua himself said, “I have not come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill them.” (Mt 5:17)

For much of Christian theology “fulfill” became a synonym for “abolish.” If it is ‘fulfilled,’ it is finished and so it can be discarded. We have to actively counteract this pervasive view about Torah. Mark Kinzer is very helpful in looking at difficult passages regarding Jews and Torah.<sup>30</sup>

Second, it needs to be made clear that the new covenant is made with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. (Jeremiah 31) There is no Biblical covenant made with the Church. There is no New Covenant made with individuals who “get saved.” The only covenant that brings eternal life and citizenship in the coming Kingdom of God is God’s covenant made with the House of Israel.

Third, God has chosen to cut an eternal covenant with the Jewish people, not based on merit, but based purely on his grace. Jeremiah 32: 40 says, V’karati lahem brit olam. “I will make an everlasting covenant with them.” The faithfulness is all on God’s side.

## COMMUNITY

Our message must be directed to, and relevant to, the whole Jewish community as a *community*, while it is also a message to individuals within that community. One way to do this is to understand the communal nature of Yeshua’s atonement.

Leviticus 16 gives the ordinances for Yom Kippur. It is clear that this once-a-year special atonement is meant to be an atonement for the whole house of Israel as a community. It is to be a lasting ordinance “for the priests and all the people of the community.” (v. 33)

This Yom Kippur offering is the model for the Messiah offering up himself, “once for all.” In a sense, the comforting message evangelicals are fond of is not true: “If you were the only person in the world, Jesus would have died for you.” Perhaps he would have; I can’t say. But that is not the way his atonement is presented in the scriptures. He dies for a nation, for the nation of Israel. Yes, individuals, Jew or Gentile, have to turn from their own way, and turn to God to receive the benefit of that national atonement, but the atonement is made for the nation of Israel.

The communal nature of the atonement gives the Jewish people as a nation the ability to live up to its calling as a people to be a light to the nations. The Jewish community already knows its calling. We call it Tikkun Olam, and many Jews see this as the heart of Judaism. We need to affirm this calling, while challenging our people to work for Tikkun Olam in partnership with the One who destroyed the power of evil.

History has shown that we cannot overcome the vast evil in the world solely by our natural gifts and generosity.

## CURRENCY

Our message must have currency--we must be able to trade our ideas in today's marketplace. Both usages of *currency* (the other meaning 'money') come from the noun, current. Both come from the idea of being "in the current" or "in circulation." If sharing our message is like trying to spend outdated coins, we will only be received with blank stares. Nothing will be bought or exchanged.

" 'Many people...insist on a single self-consistent verbal scheme into which they try to force all experience. In doing this they create a purely verbal world in which they can live a pretty autonomous existence...' This of course is what makes a cult--a group of people who thus isolate themselves from the evolving mainstream. *By staying within their own closed verbal world they forfeit the opportunity to lead others.*"<sup>32</sup>  
[emphasis mine]

Among the unending din of information and messages coming at us today, there is no shortage of messages aimed specifically at our people. In addition to the hundreds of excellent books, there are many websites and magazines devoted to Jewish thought and the Jewish seeker. Just a few of these are *zeek.net*, *Moment Magazine*, *Mishpacha Magazine*, books and articles by Jubus (Jewish Buddhists), popular articles and classes on kabala, conferences to bring the secular back into the fold, etc, etc.

How do we fit into this picture? What do the answers provided by these groups say about what today's Jewish people are seeking? Can we enter into intelligent compassionate discourse about these subjects?

To further complicate the picture we live in a postmodern, not a biblical, world. The subject of postmodernism is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is interesting to note that the concept of story and narrative finds a natural home here.

Postmodernism is fueled by:

authenticity

acceptance

love

emotional health

pragmatism (whatever works)

novelty (new is better than true)

feeling/experiencing is believing

the journey is better than the destination

Using these values we can challenge people with story. Inside, we all want to make a difference. Stories can fire up our God-given longing to be brave and meet adversity head-on for a higher purpose.

## CHALLENGE: AMAZE AND ASTOUND

Our message must make sense to our people, but it must also amaze and astound them, while communicating an exciting vision of our purpose as a people. In Acts 2:5&12, the “God-fearing Jews” were “amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’” In Acts 4:13 the people were “astonished” when they saw the courage of Kefa and Yochanan. In Acts 8:13, Simon the (former) sorcerer was “astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.” In Acts 9:21 “all those who heard him were amazed...” at the preaching of Saul of Tarsus.

Yeshua “...went through Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” (Matthew 4:23) He was preaching the kingdom, and he was demonstrating the kingdom. Large crowds of Jews began to follow him wherever he went.

Healing and miracles were quite clearly part of the message. Yeshua gave his Jewish disciples this charge: As you go, preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.” (Matt 10: 7-8)

The message had two parts: the announcement of the kingdom, and the demonstration of the kingdom. God’s realm, his kingdom, overcomes the sickness and death of this world. That is the good news, and it is amazing and astounding news. It is God dwelling with us. It is the Spirit of God dwelling in Israel, in Jewish flesh, breaking out of the boundaries of the Mishkan and the Temple, and, eventually, even out of Jerusalem--beyond the courts of the gentiles. It is our calling as Jews to bring this restoration to the nations.

Yeshua amazed the people, not only by his miracles, but by his teaching. “They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mark 1:22) He taught the people about the kingdom without concern as to whether they were officially “believers.” He discipled them “where they’re at.” We see Yeshua teaching about the kingdom, living the kingdom, demonstrating the kingdom, and he is amazing the people.

### Outgoing Holiness

In the Sinai covenant the holiness of the altar was protected by many safeguards; it was constantly threatened by the defilement of this world. Conversely, the people were threatened by the holiness in their midst--one false move and judgment followed.

But God had always intended to dwell in Israel, among the people. Because Yeshua was not a stone altar, but God in the flesh, he did not need to carefully guard his holiness, lest it be defiled. Yeshua brought a prophetic outgoing holiness<sup>33</sup> right to the

people.

That is the kingdom of God coming NEAR. The kingdom of God was always present in Israel in a limited sense -- dwelling in the Mishkan, in the pillar of fire, speaking through the prophets--but it was fenced off, both from impurity and from the gentile nations. It had to be kept separate.

Yeshua broke through these boundaries to bring the holiness of God, the kingdom of God, to Israel in a way that was beyond expectations. It was prophetic because it revealed the truth of God's ways to the people. It was outgoing and invasive because it actively invaded the realm of evil. It was not defiled by the unclean, but rather cleansed the defiled. In the same prophetic way, we are to speak and demonstrate our message in the Jewish community, so that the community of Israel can fulfill its work to bring the message and power of the kingdom of God to the world.

"The kingdom of heaven is near" doesn't mean, "you'll die soon and heaven is near (if you believe)". It means the presence of God is near; the holiness of God has come to this earth in an invasive way to scatter the forces of darkness. And while you are preaching it (says Yeshua), DO it too. Scatter the forces of darkness, demonstrate the power of God, bring the kingdom of heaven near. This is the heritage of the sons of Jacob. Raise the gauntlet of the prophetic destiny to which he has called our people. This is Tikkun olam with power.

#### COMMITMENT AND COURAGE

If we are not demonstrating the kingdom now in a way that astounds, amazes and challenges our people, we need to pray until this happens. Our message is incomplete without it.

Above and beyond the "rightness" of our message, is the utmost importance of our commitment to prayer--not just as individuals, but as klal yisrael b'yeshua, the People of Israel standing in Yeshua. We are called, together, to endure in faith and endure in prayer, which is the place we reveal what we really care about. "For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay." (Hab. 2:3) This is God's work. It is all predicated on God's promise and on His character alone. Our message is only as effective as the Spirit of God makes it, and that through the prayer of our community.

Difficult times are here. It seems evident that it will soon get worse. We need to persevere in prayer and faithfulness, and prepare to be people of hope in hopeless times. We need to be tough compassionate leaders that can stand with courage and faith in times of war and extreme hardship. We need to stand in stern and serious unity before God for the redemption of Israel. We are our message.

"Im tirtzu, ayn zo agada"

If you want it, it is not a dream.  
--Theodor Herzl

Notes for “What is Our Message?”  
(Rachel Wolf)

1. “Yeshua did not need to come into this world to reign in heaven. He was already reigning in heaven...Yeshua was born as the son of David so that he can rule from David’s throne in Jerusalem.”

Daniel Gruber, *The Separation of Church & Faith, Vol. 1, Copernicus and the Jews* (Elijah Publishing, 2005), 216. See also all of chapters 16 and 21.

2. “[Mordechai] Kaplan used to teach that there are three possible ways of identifying with a religious community: by behaving, by believing, or by belonging. Kaplan himself insisted that the primary form of *Jewish* identification is belonging -- that intuitive sense of kinship that binds a Jew to every other Jew in history and in the contemporary world. Whatever Jews believe, and however they behave as Jews, serves to shape and concretize that underlying sense of being bound to a people with a shared history and destiny. When that connection disappears, Judaism too will disappear.”

Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Jewish Publication Society, 1990), xvii

3. Carl Kinbar, “Communal Aspects of the Besorah,” *Hashivenu Forum* (2004), 15 and 28.

4. Natalia Yangarber-Hicks, “Messianic Believers: Reflections on Identity of a largely misunderstood group” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33 (2005): 127-139.

5. Carol Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism: A Rabbi’s Journey through Religious Change in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

6. Yangarber-Hicks, 140 (14)

7. Harris-Shapiro, 61

8. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1976; first published by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1955), 168-69

9. “A view of mind predicated on an information-processing model is critically at odds with sociocultural perspectives that assert that the genesis of thought, language, and, therefore, development lies in social and cultural activity. ”

Mary B, McVee et al., “Schema Theory Revisited,” *Review of Educational Research, Vol. 75, No. 4* (Winter 2005), 541

This article reviews schema theory in relation to learning and literacy in children but there are many applicable findings. The authors feel that learning is dependent on sociocultural factors.

10. Harris-Shapiro, 86

11. Jerome Bruner? [checking on this]

12. It is important to recognize that though, historically, the majority of Christian theologies have been anti-Judaic, there is, in our time, a large and growing, very vibrant, movement of Christians who are eager to understand the place of the Jewish people in God's plan. Most of these are faithful and generous supporters of Israel, and see their support of Israel as their spiritual duty. This move of God's spirit parallels the move of God among the Jewish people of the last generation, of which the members of this symposium are a part. We gratefully welcome the heartfelt support and prayers of these Christians. We are delighted to consider them part of the family.

13. Edward Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal: Finding Faith After the Holocaust* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 1994)

This idea that Rabbinic Judaism is shaped by the dilemma of exile is explored in chapters 1 through 9.

14. Michael Wex, *Born to Kvetch: Yiddish language and culture in all its moods* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 6

15. Wex, 6

16. Wex, 7

17. Feld, 138

18. Feld, 139

19. checking on reference for this Wiesel quote

20. Feld, xvi

21. Gruber, 221

22. This is a transcription of a portion of "A Slice of Infinity" from Ravi Zacharias Ministries (RZIM). It is important to note that I highly respect this ministry and have supported it in a variety of ways. I have gained innumerable insights from RZIM that have proved very useful for spiritual growth. My objective is not to berate this ministry but to understand that the theology that leaves out Israel is so entrenched in Christian thought that even an excellent ministry like RZIM, one that offers many unusually deep insights into the Bible and into life in general, can still miss this part of the picture.

23. Keith Cox, *Who Defines the Word 'Humanity,'? A Slice of Infinity, A Ministry of RZIM* (March 14, 2003)

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The quotation represents over two-thirds of the short radio essay.

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24. “Might one not suggest that there is an analogy, a likeness, a mysterious identification between the redemptive suffering of Jesus and the sufferings of other innocent victims, including Holocaust victims? After all, Paul himself says in Colossians (1:24) that he makes up what is lacking in Christ’s sufferings. And even some Jewish writers and artists have expressed a similar sort of intuition of an identification between Christ’s sufferings and that of the martyrs of the Holocaust. One thinks, for example, of the crucifixion scenes painted by Marc Chagall in the late thirties and early forties--scenes in which the crucified one is always an identifiably Jewish figure, and the background is usually a burning Jewish settlement or shtetl of Eastern Europe.”

Joel Marcus, *Jesus and the Holocaust: Reflections on Suffering and Hope* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 28-29

25. Julia Blum, *If You Be the Son of God Come Down From the Cross* (Chichester, U.K.: New Wine Press, 2006), 29-31

26. “The Biblical *ekklesia* [usually translated ‘church’] is the *kahal* [community] of Israel.”

Gruber, 62

27. “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.”

Revelation 21:3, NASB.

28. Mark S. Kinzer, “Beginning with the End: The Place of Eschatology in the Messianic Jewish Canonical Narrative,” *Pasadena Hashivenu Forum* (2002), 12-15

29. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 9.

Soulen is quoting from: Michael Wyschogrod, “Christology: The Immovable Object,” *Religion and Intellectual Life* 3 (1986), 79.

30. Mark S. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), particularly chapters 2 and 3.

31. Gruber, chapter 19

32. Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 32.

Greenleaf is quoting and commenting on the words of physicist and philosopher Percy Bridgman.

33. Kinzer, "Beginning with the End," 14

Scriptures References:

Luke 1:68-75 NASB

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant--As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old-- Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days."

Romans 8:19-23 NASB

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."