

What should Messianic Jewish leaders be discussing within our own community about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

**Response to the Paper of Russ Resnik: *Jewish Perspective*
Vladimir Pikman**

Russ Resnik wrote an excellent paper. I find it is well augmented and balanced in all given points. For the most part I share the views and suggestions presented in the paper. It has nothing I could substantially critique or argue against.

One minor thing that I am concerned in the given points is an attempt of being nice and politically correct in the presentation of our views to the opponents. Messianic leaders usually tend to avoid conflicts by being “nice” and politically correct in discussions with their opponents. It is partially due to the American cultural pattern of avoiding direct conflict that has influenced various theological and practical debates. To a part it is also due to the survival instinct and humanistic influence that we as messianic leaders bear in ourselves. We tend to avoid any conflicts. On one side, it corresponds with the example of Yeshua, who was loving, compassionate and meek. However, it is not the only pattern of Yeshua we see in the Scripture. He gives us multiple examples of Him being direct in speaking uncomfortable truth. Surely, we must exemplify love and compassion. But we also must be clear and direct if needed. Messianic leaders should teach our communities this balance in regarding conflict.

While being in general agreement with the paper presented by Russ Resnik, I want to more extensively deal with an assumption that is present there and is very common in the Messianic Jewish movement. This assumption regards the “Jewish” view and attitude concerning Israel. Discussing our position as the Messianic Jewish movement we frequently assume that our Israel-position is *Jewish* in the way that the majority, if not all, Jewish people feel or think as the same. I want to examine this assumption by consulting with the common Jewish views regarding Israel.

After its starting, the Messianic Jewish movement in different parts of the world, tend to naturally ghettoize themselves in its worldviews and perspective on political and societal issues. The longer Messianic communities exist in a particular country the more they are segregated from the mainline culture of the Jewish people around. Being in many cases rejected by the mainstream Jewish community and trying to live according to Yeshua’s standards, we naturally develop our own culture and internal worldview. With time even considering ourselves “Jewish” and having limited contacts with the mainline Jewish community, we assume that being Jewish means what we believe it does.¹ As an example I can mention is the different answers given to the question “What does it mean to be Jewish?” In Messianic congregations the answer usually looks like a mixture of biblical perspectives on Abraham’s descend and Torah observance, while for American Jews in general it plays rather a secondary role. The answer “Remembering the Holocaust” is given to this question by 73% of American Jews.² I have never personally heard this answer given by a messianic believer in the US.

It is sad to see this isolation as Messianic communities have too few points of interaction with the broader Jewish community. Unfortunately, it is not just determined by our opponents but

¹ It seems that some Messianic communities even like to sit in their “fortresses,” being protected from the “evil” and “hostile” world around them.

² <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

also by our communities focusing too much on ourselves and on our internal issues. While discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in our communities it is helpful to keep the broader perspective in mind, which will increase the impact even on the Jewish people in general. Our discussion has to contribute to our outreach to the society and particularly to the Jewish community.

Because this symposium is the North-American one and addresses primarily American Messianic Jewish theological perspective, being done in an American context, in this response paper I will exclusively consider the position of American Jews regarding Israel. In doing this I am going to rely on the data from “*A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews*” (Oct. 1, 2013).³

Most American Jews feel at least some emotional attachment to Israel. Due to the multiple references to “Israel” in the Hebrew Bible, Rabbinic writings and Jewish liturgy, the attachment to Israel is stronger among Jews “by religion” (including Orthodox, Conservative and Reform) than among non-religious Jews.⁴ The Messianic Jews belong to those, who value the Bible and, more or less, identify themselves with tradition and liturgy. Therefore, it is not surprising that we resemble “religious” Jews in this regard. However, although it is difficult for us to comprehend, unexpectedly about 30% of the Jewish people in the US say that they are either not very or not at all emotionally attached to Israel. While for 43% of American Jews, caring about Israel is essential for being Jewish; the majority of the US Jews do not see it as essential or in the case of 9%, even important at all.⁵ About 57% of the Jewish people in the US have never travelled to Israel, while most of them could have afforded it.

While the Messianic movement mostly sees Israel as the “promised land,” given to the Jewish people by God, less than half of the Jewish people in the US would agree with that. Only four-in-ten (40%) believe Israel was given to the Jewish people by God⁶; 27% do not see it this way and 28% do not believe in God. Interestingly, this percentage is lower than the general public positive response to this question – 44% with 55% of Christians and 64% of the Protestant affirming this. It means that the Jewish people in general believe in Israel as the “promised land” less than the Gentiles in the US.

Regarding Israel keeping the territories, 44% of American Jews say the continued building of Jewish settlements in the West Bank hurts the security of Israel. The majority of the Jewish people in the US do not consider Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the most important long-term problem facing Israel.⁷

³ <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/10/jewish-american-full-report-for-web.pdf>

⁴ The emotional attachment is stronger with the age – the older Jewish group is the more they are attached to Israel.

⁵ The more aged and religious the person is the more essential for him it is to care about Israel.

⁶ Even only roughly eight-in-ten Orthodox Jews would affirm Israel as the land given by God to the Jewish people.

⁷ Respondents were asked what they think is the most important long-term problem facing Israel. Fully one-quarter of American Jews (25%) listed specific groups or countries – Palestinians, Arab nations, Iran and others – as Israel’s most important problem. One-in-five cited peace and coexistence; 14% mentioned violence in general; and about one-in-ten mentioned general threats like anti-Semitism (11%), relationships and conflict in the Middle East (11%) or Israel’s own domestic issues (9%).

Concerning politics, about 61% of the Jewish people in the US believe in a peaceful two-state solution and are optimistic that a way can be found for Israel and an independent Palestinian state to coexist peacefully. In this they are generally more optimistic than the average American (50%) and Christians (49%). Only 38% of American Jews think the current Israeli government is making a sincere effort to arrange peace with the Palestinians, while 48% say this is not the case.

More than half of U.S. Jews say U.S. support for Israel is about right (54%). In this they are more positive regarding the US Israel policies than the general public.⁸ Interestingly, more white evangelical Protestants than Jews think the U.S. currently is not sufficiently supportive of Israel (46% vs. 31%).

All these statistics indicate that it is incorrect to see the loyalty to Israel as the marker of Jewish identity and, from the American Jewish perspective, to say that it is *Jewish* “to speak of modern Israel with a special ... loyalty” (cf. Russ Resnik’s paper, p. 2). Israel is not “*always* a hot topic” for the Jewish people in the US (cf. Russ Resnik’s paper, p. 3), at least not for about 30% of them. The US Jewish perspective regarding Israel is not “a broadly positive view of Israel” (cf. Russ Resnik’s paper, p. 3) but in some cases is even more negative than held by the general public and surely than by Christians.

Now, after mentioning these statistics, I am coming to possible implications for Messianic leaders in our discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with our communities. For the Messianic movement it is important to cross the boundaries of our Messianic “ghetto” and to hear the voice of the Jewish community in general. Considering us as a part of the Jewish people, it is important to consider views of our people. Therefore, Messianic leaders should make their Messianic community aware of the variety of Jewish views in this regard. I would suggest that we rather stop thinking that all the Jewish people have the same position that we consider to be the proper one. Our position is not necessarily sociologically “Jewish.” While developing our position and discussing the conflict within our movement and congregations we probably better avoid saying that we are doing this as “Jews.” Our position and views are to be based on our interpretation of the Bible and applied to the particular circumstances we live in. In this, while not necessarily being mainstream “Jewish,” this position can speak to our Jewish people and even be used evangelistically. It can guide and lead our people toward the messianic “promised land,” where by “Messianic” I mean the ultimate fulfilment of the promise and prophecy that has begun with the arrival of our Messiah Yeshua.

Actually, what makes us *Jewish* in our involvement in the conflict’s discussions is not that we have the same view on Israel as the majority of the Jewish people do, but because we are the “Messianic remnant” inside the Jewish nation, those who are called to follow the Messiah.

As Messianic leaders we assume that we defend Israel and its importance primarily talking to Arabs, secular people, and Christians. Nevertheless, though it may sound strange, members of our communities should be prepared to explain the importance and role of Israel as the “promised land” given by God to our Jewish people first. As we could see, they need it more than Christians and the general public in the US. As the Messianic movement we need to remember to orient ourselves toward the Jewish community, sharing the gospel with our people, while the “promised land” is an integral part of the gospel.

⁸ By comparison, 41% of the general public thinks support for Israel is about right, while the rest are nearly evenly divided between those who say the U.S. is not supportive enough (25%) and those who say it is too supportive of the Jewish state (22%).