

Choosing a Healthy Entree:

Food for Thought About Successful Messianic Jewish Living

2013 Young Scholars

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Preface from initial presentation:

1. I used in the title “Food for thought,” to say that my intention is not to provide lots of answers, but to raise important issues that we Messianic Jews must wrestle with.

2. Following the food motif, I have carved out four general options for Jewish believers in Yeshua. My reason for doing this is not to put people in a box or even to speak to specific people— but rather to bring out the wide range of options for Jewish believers in Yeshua and to develop a framework for engaging them. These categories may be a bit of a caricature and they are all meant humorously, without any judgment on anyone’s individual practice. Of course, no one fits entirely into one category; we are all on a spectrum. But I hope that looking at the extremes will us to appreciate the diversity of our complex Messianic Jewish world and to help us better see what a middle ground might look like.

I. Introduction

In my experience, most Jewish believers in Yeshua really want to do right by G-d, to love Yeshua and to love others. But let’s face it; there is no prepackaged answer about how to live as a Messianic Jew. At the risk of being simplistic, it is like eating these days. Most people want to live healthy and happy lives. But with the slew of pressures from large corporations endlessly encouraging us to eat high cholesterol, high salt and high carbohydrate foods, it isn’t so simple. Also, when we try to get out and get healthy, everyone has an approach, claiming to be the only right way. We Messianic Jews find ourselves going against the grain of the entire religious structure of the Western World.

We are stretched between the Church and the Synagogue, and different groups among us have their own formulas about how to stay healthy spiritually.

We are all trying to figure out this complex Messianic Jewish enterprise. So, let me be playful with you. Here are four general categories of Messianic Jews. Of course, no one fits entirely into one category; we are all on a spectrum. But with this in mind, it can be helpful to make some generalizations in order to better understand ourselves.

First, we have Jewish believers in Yeshua who enjoy having ham supper after church with the pastor and family. These folks consider themselves Jewish converts to Christianity and have little interest or connection with the Jewish people. They really love Jesus, but have trouble relating to him as a Jew.

Second, we have Messianic Jews who love bagels and lox. These Messianic Jews may have a strong affection for Jewish culture, food, music, etc., but feel no obligation to Torah. For them, Yeshua's law of love replaces the Jewish law.

Third, we have Messianic Jews who love a Karaite Knish. The Karaites were a sect of Judaism that arose in the 7th-9th centuries, which opposed the development of Rabbinic tradition. Karaite Knish Messianic Jews see themselves as Jewish and obligated to the Torah, but not to the teachings and practices of Rabbinic Judaism. These folks would be prone to alter traditional Jewish practice; for example, using shofars on Shabbat services, occasionally putting tzit-tzit on their belt-loops and radically altering the traditional Jewish service.

And fourth, we have Messianic Jews who prefer frumy frappes and orthodox oreos. These Messianic Jews strongly favor traditional Jewish modes of expression, and often use Orthodox halacha as their point of reference.

Of course, the Sunday ham eaters sometimes love bagels and lox. Karaite knishers might decide to dabble with a frumy frappe, and we all, even the vegans among us, enjoy a good vegetable knish every so often.

Welcome to the Messianic Jewish Menu! I am going to analyze the recipes of the foods on the menu, and then suggest a healthy, life giving option, “The Chef’s special.” My intention is to both affirm and challenge everyone! We’re looking for a dish that helps us to grow in Messiah and in our commitment to the Torah He embodies, in a way which can work today’s world.

II. Sorting through the Menu

1. Ham Supper with the Pastor’s Family after Church

While these folks consider themselves Jewish converts to Christianity and have little interest in connecting meaningfully with their Jewish past, it is important that we do not simply dismiss such well-intentioned people. They represent a majority of Jewish believers in Yeshua. These people really love Jesus and we can understand why they would have trouble relating to Yeshua as a Jew. Throughout history the Church and the Synagogue have defined themselves as mutually exclusive of the other. The idea that Jewish people need to convert to a largely Gentile Christian faith when they believe in Yeshua goes back to what I’ll call “hard-core replacement theology.” When the Jews rejected Jesus, G-d rejected the Jews and moved on to the Gentiles.¹ Of course, we all know about this history. The later institutionalized Church allowed this theology to become a platform employed by the haters of the world to marginalize and even murder Jews.²

But Today, most ham-supper Christian Jews do not walk around saying that the Gentiles replaced the Jewish people for the crime of deicide. However, Christian culture and

¹ Iraneus around 200CE said: “G-d chose Jews in order to prepare them for Christ, but they rejected and murdered him. Because Jews rejected Jesus, G-d granted their inheritance to the Gentiles alone. Jews who boast of being Israel are disinherited from the grace G-d and no longer useful.” This is from a Handout from Jamie Cowen titled: BHS Yeshiva, Jewish History, Jamie Cowen, February 206, 2002
Quotes from early Church Fathers re: Anti-semitism

² Another variant of replacement theology is that after Messiah came the role of the Jewish people came to an end and the Church became the new Israel. In this idea the Church is a spiritual community, which transcends both Jew and Gentile. Preservation of Jewish identity is “a matter of theological indifference at best, and a moral sin at worst.” Soulen, R. K. (1996). *The G-d of Israel and Christian Theology* (pp. 1–2). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

theology developed in this milieu, and over centuries the outworking of these ideas have become deeply ingrained into today's western experience. As a result, most Jews and Christians today would understand that Yeshua-faith requires a Jew to become a Christian, to enter into a new social/religious group, and cease living as a Jew. Though these folks utilize softer language today and reject anti-Semitic sentiments, the underlying assumption is that the whole system of Judaism — Torah and Jewish peoplehood — has lost its divine purpose.

Because most of us at this conference would not directly identify with these values, my purpose in this paper is not to argue against replacement theology, but simply to identify it for what it can look like today: well-intentioned, truth-seeking Jewish people who deeply love Jesus, but who have understandably bought into a very powerful religious and social idea — often without realizing that choosing the Church as their primary religious affiliation will inevitably lead to zero grandchildren who identify as Jews. But, according to this this theology, assuring a Jewish future is not a high priority.

2. Noshing on bagels and lox

Our second food option sounds more palatable to many Jewish believers in Yeshua. Like our Ham Supper Jewish Christians, these folks generally choose the Church as their primary religious home. However they maintain a strong affection for Jewish culture and traditions. But for these people, the banner of Yeshua's law of love replaces the Jewish law, rendering Jewish expression largely unimportant. In addition to the theological concerns that this position is Biblically unsustainable,³ Bagels and Lox Messianic Jews unintentionally have bought into a form of historic replacement theology. Let me explain:

Most of these folks would not say that the Church has replaced the Jewish people, but more subtly that it has made participating in Jewish tradition unnecessary. Christianity has not replaced Judaism, but it has become the ultimate fulfillment of it. A Jewish believer in Yeshua is arguably still Jewish, culturally and in a spiritual sense, but Christianity is the new social-religious framework for the Messianic Jew to participate in.

³ For a detailed article about Paul and the Jewish law see: Nanos, M. (2009). *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations The Myth of the " Law-Free " Paul Standing between Christians and Jews*, 4(1).

However, this new religious framework is for the most part not Jewish at all, but built on the same hard-core replacement principle we talked about above.⁴

Even though Jewish cultural ties may be strong, this theology still nullifies all ongoing covenantal ties with the Jewish people and replaces it with a Gentile expression of the Messianic faith. All this begins to look a lot more like the great historic Christian conquest over the Jewish people. Again, we ask the question of these lovers of bagels and lox — where will the children and grandchildren be?

Because this is a Messianic Jewish conference and most of us already identify as Messianic Jews, I'm going to spend most of my time on the last two meals and then find a redemptive middle ground between the two.

3. Tasting the Karaite Knish

What makes Karaite Knish lovers different from our bagels and lox Messianic Jews is that they see themselves as still obligated to the Torah, but not to the teachings and practices of Rabbinic Judaism. Such Messianic Jews reject the notion that Jews convert to Christianity when they believe in Jesus. Many choose the Messianic Jewish Synagogue as their religious home. These folks love Torah in a sense, but argue that because the Rabbis are the crafters of Rabbinic Judaism who rejected Jesus and his followers, they deserve no authoritative voice in Messianic Judaism today.

A well-intentioned Karaite Knisher might react against the “tradition of the Rabbis” by reinterpreting Biblical commandments outside of the larger Jewish context. For example, she may feel that the Biblical commandment found twice in the Torah to not boil a kid in its mother's milk does not indicate that we should separate milk and meat products during meals.⁵ Another person might not wish to say the blessings “who has commanded us to wash our hands,” or “who has commanded us to kindle Shabbat candles,” because there is no specific Biblical commandment in this regard. While it is good to engage these

⁴ For a more indepth look at how replacement theology has influenced the development of the Christian Church at a structural level see: Soulen, R. K. (1996). *The G-d of Israel and Christian Theology* (pp. 1–2). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

⁵ Exodus 23:19, Deuteronomy 14:21

discussions of Jewish practice, I would challenge the idea that Rabbinic additions to specific Biblical commands should be rejected just because we can't find chapter and verse in Scripture.

I will challenge two assumptions that we find inside our Karaite Knish:

- 1) Biblical Judaism and Rabbinic Tradition should be separated as much as possible.
- 2) Yeshua practiced a tradition-free Judaism that opposed the Pharisees and the later Rabbis.

A: Biblical Judaism and Rabbinic Tradition should be separated as much as possible.

If we take a closer look, I would suggest that the categories of Biblical and Rabbinic are not mutually exclusive. I would argue that we cannot approach Messianic Jewish life and Torah living without thoughtfully and actively engaging Rabbinic tradition.⁶

Here is an example of what can happen: A Messianic Jew who attempts to avoid Rabbinic tradition will sometimes tie their tzitzit to their belt-loops rather than wearing a four cornered tallit katan.⁷ This is a way to reinterpret the biblical commandment to wear fringes on the corners of your garments. However, they will still use the Rabbinic method of tying the tzitzit knots, which is based on the Rabbinic breakdown of the 613 commandments. They might wear a Rabbinic kippah and talit during Shabbat services, hang a Rabbinic mezzuzah on their door and utilize a splattering of rabbinic prayers and melodies for a Shabbat service, without any consideration to how those prayers are

⁶ For a thoughtful and convincing argument for Rabbinic tradition in Messianic Jewish life see: Kinzer, B. M. S. (2003). The 2003 Hashivenu Forum Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century : A Biblical Defense of “ Oral Torah ”, 1–34.

⁷ Tzitzit are the knotted tassels that observant Jews wear to fulfill the Biblical commandment in Numbers 15:38. They are generally on a tallit Katan (four cornered garment) and on a Tallit, a Jewish prayer shawl.

traditionally used. Sometimes the traditional blasts from the shofar are used arbitrarily in ways utterly foreign and unintentionally disrespectful. Services often feel like contemporary Christian worship with a Jewish flavor. This approach can seem like a hybrid or artificial blend of Rabbinic and Evangelical practices with an adlib of ancient Biblical customs, all mixed together in a stew — let’s call it “*Messy-anic*.”

Without its Rabbinical additions it would be problematic to have a Biblical Passover seder that looked anything like what most of us are familiar with today. We’d have to leave behind the four cups, the four questions, the maror, salt water and parsley, charoset, afikomen and looking for Elijah. We might as well try sacrificing a lamb in our back yard while we are at it!

Even if we were to abandon everything “Rabbinic” as the Karaites attempted to do, we would just re-create our own tradition. It is impossible to follow the Torah and the commandments seriously without an interpretative tradition to guide the way.⁸

B: Yeshua Practiced a tradition-free Judaism that opposed the Pharisees and the later Rabbis.

We open up the first century with an array of developing Judaisms that Yeshua interacted with. The Pharisees are just one of these groups, and even within the Pharisees; there were divisions and sub-sets.⁹ After the destruction of the Temple, Judaism was in complete chaos. Some historians have suggested that no one form of Judaism survived intact. Rabbinic Judaism was later crafted by small groups of Sages, who, if they existed at all prior to the destruction of the Temple, were largely insignificant.¹⁰ While these early Rabbinic sages certainly drew from the innovative Pharisaical traditions (particularly the concept of an oral tradition of the elders) nowhere do they identify

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ For a detailed analysis of the pharisaical schools of Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel see: Harvey, F. (1985). *Jesus the Pharisee*. (W. and S. Publishers, Ed.) (pp. 1–5). Eugene, Oregon.

¹⁰ Miller, S. (2006). *Sages and commoners in late antique erez Israel: Rabbis in society: an expanding and diverse Network of Circles and Households*. (pp. 446–466). Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck.

themselves with one particular group.¹¹ Though the Rabbis clearly have strong Pharisaical influence they are not modern day Pharisees and we need to interact with them on their own terms. Let's look at one example of how the Rabbis and the Pharisees who opposed Yeshua differed.

Once, a group of Scribes and Pharisees challenged Yeshua about whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. He reasoned with them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."¹²

The later Rabbis interacted with this same legal issue and agreed with Yeshua's position.

“Rabbi Ela’azar spoke up . . . “Just as circumcision which [saves] only one member of a person supersedes the Sabbath, the entire body even more so.”¹³

From this text (and many others which we won't discuss in this paper), the later Rabbis would have engaged Yeshua on this topic in a very different way than these first century Pharisees.¹⁴

Moving on, let's take a brief look at Yeshua interacting with the Pharisees. Yeshua strongly rebukes the Scribes and Pharisees for religious hypocrisy throughout the Besorot (Gospels). However, he said of these same folks in Mattew 23, “The teachers of the law and Pharisees sit in Moses's seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”¹⁵ Even

¹¹ Cohen, S. J. D. (1987). *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (p. 154). Philadelphia: Westminster Press. “Rabbinic texts refer to Pharisees, Sadducees, and assorted other groups. . . but at no point do the rabbis explicitly declare that they are, or regard themselves as , the descendants of this or that group of second temple times, and at no point do they refer to any named individual as “X the Pharisee” or “Y the Sadducee.” Nevertheless, virtually all scholars see that the rabbis are descendants of the Pharisees.”

¹² Matt 12:11-12. NIV

¹³ Mekhilta, tractate Sabbath, 1

¹⁴ Boyarin, D. (2012). *The Jewish Gospels: The story of the Jewish Christ* (p. 61). New York, NY: The New York Press.

¹⁵ Matt 23:2 NIV

though Yeshua strongly rebukes these leaders for their double standard, he nevertheless seems to approve of their authority.¹⁶

A few verses later, Yeshua says to these same people, “You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law— justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!”¹⁷

Tithing mint, dill, and cumin was likely part of an oral tradition called the tradition of the elders. Yeshua does not rebuke the leaders for their tradition. He rebukes them for neglecting the more weighty matters of the Torah— justice, mercy, and faithfulness. In fact, he says, you should have considered the latter —justice mercy and faithfulness, without neglecting the former (the tradition of tithing mint, dill, and cumin.) Yeshua rebukes these teachers of the law for their double standard, but seems to approve of their tradition as long as it is kept in its proper place.¹⁸

The apostle Paul interacts with the traditions of his day as well. For example, When Paul enters Jerusalem in Acts 21, he is accused of teaching that Jews should turn from Moses, not circumcise their sons, and not live according to the customs.¹⁹ Paul unambiguously demonstrates that these rumors are untrue and that he is living in obedience to the law and these customs.²⁰ Nowhere does Paul say he observes Moses, apart from the customs and traditions.

Yeshua and Paul were not Karaites!

¹⁶ For more in-depth review see: Kinzer 27

¹⁷ Matt 23:23-24. NIV.

¹⁸ For more in-depth review see: Kinzer 22 and 23.

¹⁹ Acts 21:21B.

²⁰ Acts 21:24

4. Sipping Frumy Frappes and Munching on Orthodox Oreos.

Of course, I am being playful and using generalizations in order to discover a middle ground. In stark contrast to a complete reaction against Rabbinic tradition, Frumy Frappes and Orthodox Oreo lovers strongly favor traditional Jewish modes of expression, and often use an Orthodox interpretation of the Halacha as their point of reference. Because this category is the most nuanced and the one that I personally am most sympathetic toward, I will spend the most time investigating.

Often our Frumy Frappe and Orthodox Oreo lovers are misunderstood by our Karite Knishers, who might assume that a Messianic Jew who practices traditional Judaism has allowed Yeshua to slip into the background of his or her faith — like a pleasant garnish to the meal. While this is a real concern for some orthodox-oriented Messianic Jews, it certainly is not true of Messianic Jews who consider themselves observant in general. Furthermore, being a traditionally observant Messianic Jew does not mean that one has shifted to a “works based soteriology.” Most every believer in Yeshua, even our Ham Supper after Churchers recognize at some level that while under the love and grace of Messiah Yeshua, we are all obligated to some rules that G-d says should govern the way we live. However you configure it we will all mess up, whether we are talking about loving our neighbors or keeping our dishes separated. We all give it our best shot, while relying on Yeshua’s atonement for our sins and our ultimate sustenance and life. The real question is what standard — or better, *whose* standard — are we obligated to follow as we do our best?

I am aware that the term “orthodox” is not sufficient. There are many different kinds of Orthodox Judaism today and it is not accurate to lump them all together. However, other terms like “traditional” and “observant” can also mean very different things to different people. So I have chosen to use Orthodox in its most common and general sense.²¹ I want to challenge the idea that *because* we are obligated to Torah and have not rejected

²¹ More specifically a kind of Judaism that holds that there is one true Judaism and one Oral Torah, which defines it. They may view the Oral Torah as passed down verbatim from Sinai or as an evolving tradition from Sinai. Either way they presume that they have the only Halachic authority for all Jews.

Rabbinic tradition, modern Messianic Jews who really get it right should live and look like “Orthodox” Jews.

First I want to challenge the assumption that Being observant means greater and greater adherence to one fixed “Halachah” as we experience it in most Orthodox expressions of Judaism and second to draw conclusions from Yeshua’s interaction with the Scribes and Pharisees about how we might live as Messianic Jews, obligated to Torah and engaged with Rabbinic tradition.

A. The Development of Rabbinic Judaism

After the Bar Kokhba revolt and the slaughter and exile of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel in 132-135 CE, the Tannaim (literally “The Repeaters,” who we know as “The Rabbis.”) began recording the Mishnah.²² I’ll call this the “Great Jewish Discussion.” Out of fear that it would be lost in the exile, these Rabbinic sages began to record the Oral Torah — an oral interpretive tradition which some believe was passed down from Mt. Sinai to the sages.²³ There was a reason why it was called the Oral Torah. It was not supposed to be written down!²⁴ Some scholars would suggest this was in order to insure that it wouldn’t be a fixed law code, but an adaptable interpretive tradition that can be discovered through conversation and debate.²⁵ Perhaps this is why the Rabbis compiled the Mishna in the form of roundtable discussions with the sages, where often no conclusions are reached.

When we think of the Tannaim, we might be tempted to think of a large authoritative Rabbinical council that recorded the Oral Torah. We might assume these sages were chosen representatives of the Jewish people to record what would forever be Jewish law. However, the early sages were not as organized or influential as we might think. Both

²² The Mishnah was redacted around 220 CE

²³ Although it is highly relevant, I regret that I don’t have the space to look more deeply at the Oral Torah and how different Jews understand it. For an accessible review in the context of how it might apply to Messianic Jews see: Kinzer, B. M. S. (2003). The 2003 Hashivenu Forum Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21 st Century: A Biblical Defense of “ Oral Torah ”, 1–34.

²⁴ Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, *The Orality of Rabbinic Writing*, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud*, ed. Martin Jaffee, 2007.

²⁵ *Ibid.*,39

before and after the exile in 132 CE, these sages had very little influence in the Jewish community at large.²⁶ These sages functioned in small, localized communities of working families. Their disciples were family members and close friends and their schools were in their own homes. When they were not earning a living they crafted today's Judaisms. Outside of their own inner circle, Jews didn't know about them for hundreds of years!²⁷

It wasn't until the 500s CE that we have a highly developed and intricate system that becomes in any sense authoritative and influential in the larger Jewish community. It is not surprising, that the Jews needed to organize. They had to stand up and define their religion against the now institutionalized and increasingly anti-Semitic Church.²⁸

What started as a small group of sages who perhaps sought only to preserve their own Jewish lives in a world of exile, poverty and persecution, built the foundations for the Judaism that is practiced around the world.²⁹ Perhaps there is a parallel to we Messianic Jews building small and relatively insignificant communities about which most of the Jewish world are ignorant. This is an encouragement, because we see how important our Rabbinic sages turned out to be to the future of the Jewish people!

Even after the early Rabbinic writings were standardized, Judaism looked very different for the next thousand years than it does today. For example, the custom of wearing a kippah wasn't developed until the medieval period. The Siddur was not developed until after the 800s, and the order of services was not standardized until the invention of the printing press.³⁰ Later, distinguished Rabbis began to compile Jewish law.³¹ And it wasn't until the 1600s; when Jews began to separate milk and meat dishes in their

²⁶ Miller, 20.

²⁷ Ibid., 16

²⁸ Ibid., 20

²⁹ For those of you who haven't taken it, I highly suggest you take Rav Carl's MJTI classes on early Rabbinic Judaism. He brings fascinating insights into the development of Rabbinic Judaism that I think are relevant.

³⁰ Author, R., & Blecher. (2007). *The New American Judaism : The Way Forward on Challenging Issues from Inter-marriage to Jewish Identity* (p. 30). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

³¹ The most notable is Maimonides' Mishnah Torah in the 1100s and his famous thirteen principles of faith that are the bedrock for many Orthodox communities. In the 1500s, the Shulchan Orech became the standard for Jewish law

homes.³²

Writing about Orthodox Judaism as truly a late phenomenon, Rabbi Bletcher writes:

The word Orthodox means ‘uniform law,’ and it was the Shuchan Orech that made Orthodox Judaism possible. Although many people believe Orthodoxy represents the oldest form of Judaism, in fact it is not very much older than the modernist movements.³³

Even within Orthodoxy, uniformity is challenged. Contemporary Orthodox scholar Marc Shapiro wrote a book entitled, “The Limits of Orthodox Theology.” In his book, he challenges the assumption that the Maimonides Thirteen principals are the foundation of Orthodox theology.³⁴

One might argue that the other modern Jewish movements are as influential as the Orthodox in shaping American Jewry. The elaborate Bar Mitzvah ceremonies are a product of modern Judaism. The Reconstructionists developed the Bat Mitzvah ceremony for woman coming of age. Even the term “Judaism” is a modern concept.

Does one codified and set “Halachah” arise from our tradition that we all must adhere to? The term halachah comes from the root halach, which literally means to walk. The term is best defined as a way of walking or way of being. “The Halachah” typically refers to the established collective law codes of the Jewish people. But many Jewish thinkers today feel that this Halachah can be changed to fit the needs of our contemporary world. Bletcher writes:

Conservative Judaism believes that rabbinic edicts of the past must be understood within the social context of their times and that its committee on Law and

³² Kraemer, D. C. (2007). *Separating the Dishes: in Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages* (pp. 99–121). Routledge.

³³ Bletcher, 31)

³⁴ Shapiro, M. B. (2004). *The Limits of Orthodox Theology : Maimonides ' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (p. 95). Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.

Standards has the authority *to change the Halachah in response to new circumstances*.³⁵

The reality is that the Jewish world we find ourselves in today is perhaps as diverse as the Jewish world in Yeshua's day. If we view the tradition as more fluid and organic, which I am suggesting its development necessitates, then we might understand that Halachah is not fixed but something that we need to constantly engage. As Dr. Kinzer writes:

The Jewish reader is never alone with the text, but is always surrounded by the great Jewish commentators of the past and present, just as the text itself is surrounded by their words in *Mikraot Gedolot* (the classic Rabbinic study Bible). We sit and listen as they discuss and argue with one another, and then we are obliged and privileged to join the conversation.³⁶

My intention is not to challenge the authority of Rabbinic Judaism or to undermine these practices (I myself have a kosher kitchen), but to challenge the notion that Rabbinical Judaism is one uniform thing and that what we know today as Orthodox is the unchangeable benchmark for Jewish life.

Further, I challenge the common assumption that the traditional, Old World Judaism of Eastern Europe is an ideal expression of Judaism for the majority of modern American Messianic Jews.³⁷ Rabbi Arthur Blecher writes:

Three of the most consequential events in all of Jewish history occurred during the first half of the twentieth century: the mass migration of half of European Jewry to America, the destruction of most of Europe's remaining Jews, and the establishment of the modern State of Israel. The impact of any one of these episodes by itself would be powerful enough to permanently alter the self-concept of the people caught up in it³⁸ . . . The formation of a new Jewish religion in

³⁵ Blecher, 15. Italics are my emphasis

³⁶ Kinzer, B. M. S. (2003). The 2003 Hashivenu Forum Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition in the 21st Century : A Biblical Defense of " Oral Torah ", 1–34.

³⁷ Blecher, 18

³⁸ While I removed this from Blecher's quote it is relevant: "Yet all three took place within the span of a single lifetime. A fourth event, the creation of a new form of Judaism in the early years of the century, is rarely mentioned even though it was one of the most radical transformations in the existence of the Jewish people. Instead, Jewish historians emphasize the establishment of post-exilic Judean society 2500 years ago and the development of rabbinic Judaism two thousand years ago. Each of these metamorphoses took

America is as monumental a change as anything the Jewish people have experienced.³⁹

Blecher's point is that we need to understand modern Jewry in America as another radical development in Jewish history. Its innovations rival those back in the second century. Clearly, Judaism has evolved, dramatically. We are in the midst of a radical change and a strong case can be made that we should embrace those changes without absolutizing the small town shtetl Jewry in pre-war Eastern Europe.⁴⁰

B. Yeshua and the Pharisees

To further unpack our fourth meal, let's take another look at how Yeshua interacts with the diversity in his day and see what we might learn. Scholars debate about what Yeshua's relationship with the Pharisees looked like. Harvey Falk's book titled *Jesus the Pharisee* would suggest that Yeshua identified very closely with them and their practice.⁴¹ On the other hand, Danial Boyarin suggests the opposite. Danial Boyarin writes:

The Pharisees were a kind of reform movement within the Jewish people that was centered on Jerusalem and Judea . . . The justification of these reforms in the name of an oral Torah, a tradition passed down by the elders from Sinai on, would have been experienced by many traditional Jews as a radical change . . . it is quite plausible, therefore, that other Jews such as the Galilean Jesus, would reject such ideas as an affront to the Torah and as sacrilege . . . Jesus' Judaism was a conservative reaction against some radical innovations in the Law stemming from the Pharisees and Scribes in Jerusalem."⁴²

It might be tempting for Messianic Jews to read *Jesus the Pharisee* and think that because Yeshua was so close to the Pharisees we should embrace their spirituality. It would be

centuries to unfold.”

³⁹ Bletcher 7

⁴⁰ Bletcher, 18

⁴¹ Harvey, F. (1985). *Jesus the Pharisee*. (W. and S. Publishers, Ed.) (pp. 1–5). Eugene, Oregon.

⁴² Boyarin, 104

equally as tempting for Messianic Jews to hear Boyarin's words and jump to the conclusion that Yeshua simply rejected all tradition as unbiblical, radical innovation.⁴³

A better place to be is to recognize some ambiguity here. Though it seems plausible that Yeshua identified more with the simple Galilean Judaism in his hometown area, he participated fully in the conversation, showing deference at times and taking an opposing stand at others.⁴⁴ Let's look at Yeshua's approach to Halachic authority.

C. Yeshua's Halachic Authority: Sabbath controversy

Let's take a look at another Sabbath controversy in Mark 2.⁴⁵ Here's how this discussion goes:

And the Pharisees were saying to him [Yeshua], "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of G-d, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

(Marc 2:24-27 ESV)

Like the previous example in Matt 12:11-12, Yeshua engaged the Pharisees with a halachic style argument. However, his argument takes a new turn when he adds: "So the Son of man even is Lord of the Sabbath." (Marc 2:28) Daniel Boyarin writes:

⁴³ We have already seen how Yeshua seems to affirm the Pharisees and some of their practices, while he criticizes others. Also, we have argued that the Pharisaical oral tradition of the elders is not the same as the rabbinic tradition of today.

⁴⁴ Boyarin, 67

⁴⁵ In the Karaite knish section, I used Matt 12:11-12 passage to demonstrate that later Rabbis engaged the same Sabbath debates and sided with Yeshua's position. I suggested that this passage challenged the wholesale rejection of Rabbinic tradition.

Jesus makes a much more radical claim: not only does the Torah authorize healing of the deathly sick on the Sabbath, but the Messiah himself, the Son of Man, is given sovereignty to decide how to further extend and interpret the Sabbath law. (Boyarin 67)

Yeshua evokes the image of King David, a messiah figure, using his authority to eat bread from the Mishkan. If David can do this on his authority as King of Israel, kol vakomer (how much more so) is the Son of Man⁴⁶ able to speak with authority on this point. In this brief statement, Yeshua argues both that the Torah allows for preserving life on the Sabbath, and that the Son of Man has authority over the Law.⁴⁷

Reflecting on Matthew 5:17, Yeshua says, "do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."⁴⁸ Yeshua is not abolishing Torah or even the tradition of the elders, but in a sense fulfilling it. He is pointing toward the true meaning of the commandments and revealing his own authority within it.⁴⁹

Though the later rabbis took Yeshua's position in the Halachic discourse regarding preserving life on the Sabbath, they did not follow his second claim — that Yeshua is the Son of Man who is Lord over the Sabbath. No matter how "frum" a Messianic Jew is, he or she will always be confronted with this reality. This is something we Messianic Jews need to understand. We should not recoil from the pain of rejection, because we embrace a Messiah who is both human and divine. Instead, we need to engage the Jewish world by celebrating our uniqueness in Him.

What remains true, from Yeshua's day until today, is that all Jewish movements have their uniqueness. For us Yeshua needs to be our guiding source for Jewish living. He needs to be our ultimate Halachic authority. If we do not put Yeshua and His values at the

⁴⁶ When Yeshua uses the term Son of Man, he identifies himself with the heavenly figure in Daniel 7 who is given jurisdiction over all the nations. See Boyarin

⁴⁷ For more detailed review see Daniel Boyarin's Jewish Gospels page 67

⁴⁸ Mat 5:17 NIV

⁴⁹ Boyarin, 65

center of our observance, we might be following “traditional Halacha,” but not necessarily acting Halachically in the deepest sense of “walking before G-d.”

D. Yeshua and the Am Ha Aretz

Following the Master’s example, we have an obligation as Messianic Jews to be available to the outcasts of the Jewish world — that includes the millions of Jews who know very little about Jewish life and practice.⁵⁰ Think about his talk with the Samaritan woman⁵¹ and the way he was accused of eating with Israel’s low-life. If I were to guess these people were not holding the highest standard of observance.

We also see Yeshua eating with and engaging the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and Zealots. He interacted with the wealthy and the poor, the righteous and the sinner and even the Gentile. Yeshua did not spend his time outside the Judaism of his day, but rather inside the heart of it, where the people were.

We also see Paul adapting his own standards in order to eat with ordinary Jews, Pharisees and Gentiles.⁵² I suggest that as Yeshua’s followers, we need to be doing the same.

For us Messianic Jews, this means that we need to be flexible. We need to keep kosher, while being able to eat in non-kosher homes. We need to observe the Sabbath, while being able to drive to pick someone up who can't get to Synagogue. We need to be modern and adapt and make exceptions, while being un-assimilated, un-worldly and passionate about G-d. We should follow Yeshua at all costs, across land and sea as Jews.

Here’s the point. We need to be able to relate to Jews who come from secular, reform, or Christian backgrounds who will never be as observant as we would like. If your standards of observance are so high that it hinders relating to the Galileen or the

⁵⁰ I’m not making the assumption that living as an observant Jew necessarily means that one cannot relate to those less observant. I am merely saying that we need to consider this value as we navigate what our observance will look like.

⁵¹ See John 4:1-42

⁵² Rudolph, D. J. (2006). *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23*. Cambridge University. “1 Cor 9:19-23 is informed by Jesus’ example and rule of adaptation with respect to commensality. As Jesus became all things to all people through eating with ordinary Jews, Pharisees and sinners, Paul became ‘all things to all people’ through eating with ordinary Jews, strict Jews (those ‘under the law’) and Gentile sinners.”

Samaritan of our day, you might reconsider your approach. And to balance my point, if your standards of observance are so low that it hinders your relationship with the larger religious Jewish community or doesn't uphold your obligation before G-d to live as a Jew, you might need to take a second look at your practice as well.

5. The Chef's Special: Choosing a healthy entree:

We have taken a sympathetic yet critical look at each of our four dishes on the Messianic table. Let's sum up what ingredients we can use from each of the four options on the menu in order to whip up a Chef's Special that will embrace the nuanced complexities of our Modern Messianic Jewish calling. We'll call our new dish, the Symphony Salad!

A. Ham supper: While we don't want to convert to Christianity and leave our Jewish identities behind, we should still relate deeply and sympathetically with the Gentile expression of Yeshua faith as it has developed over the centuries. We don't "throw out the baby with the bath water." If it were not for the Christian Church, scriptures about Yeshua would not have been preserved as well as the concept of Yeshua's divine/human identity. We should see the Church as a colorful quilt of tradition, liturgical expression and teaching that we can and should relate to positively. We will not call the Church our primary home, but it should be our home away from home. We should feel comfortable participating in Christian worship and we need to be in regular relationship with Gentile Christians.⁵³

B. Bagels and Lox: While Yeshua claimed his authority over the law, he never said or did anything to abrogate it or suggest that his Jewish followers are not obligated to follow it.⁵⁴ Often these Bagels and Lox Messianic Jews are just so in love with Yeshua and don't know of another way. Let's also be equally in love with Yeshua, yet not allow centuries of replacement theology to rob us of our Jewish faith and heritage.

⁵³ For more detailed review of Messianic Jewish relationship with the Christian Church see: S.Kinzer, M. (2005). *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism : Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*. Grand Rapids MI: Brazo Press.

⁵⁴ We also understand that G-d's love extends beyond the Jewish people and that the Gentiles who believe in Jesus are by no means obligated to be obedient to Torah in the same way that Jewish people are.

C. Karite Knish: While we shouldn't entirely disregard Rabbinic tradition, we also shouldn't try to re-invent the wheel by ad-libbing a mishmosh of Jewish-Christian style practices. And we also can't allow a poorly conceived theology to justify lack of observance or knowledge about Jewish practices. However, we also will learn from the Karaite Knish lovers that Yeshua needs to be our point of reference in relationship with our tradition. We can't lose Him in the mix and we will not compromise on his values. At the end of the day, Yeshua is it and we are sticking with Him.

D. Frumy Fraps and Orodex Oreos: There are some in our Messianic Jewish community who gravitate toward Orthodox practice. I'm not challenging that and I am certainly *not* intending to make people less observant—quite the opposite. But I don't want to make traditional Orthodoxy the goal to which we all must strive. Instead, we are obligated to engage, participate and contribute to traditional Judaism as well as to other modern forms. We need to be educated and sensitive, and take a positive view of traditional practice whenever possible, but not at the expense of a higher Yeshua-value, like reaching those who are less observant or unaffiliated. We need to be able to relate to Jews who come from secular, Reform or Christian backgrounds who will never be as observant as we. And as I have said, stand strong with Yeshua.

Where to go from here: Commending The MJRC

I have argued that the modern Jewish world is very diverse, and our Messianic Jewish practices today should reflect this diversity. I have attempted to identify two extremes in the Messianic Jewish community: rejecting Judaism, the Torah or Rabbinic tradition on the one hand, or subscribing entirely to an absolute Orthodox ideology on the other. My intention is to find a middle ground where we can grow together in the richness of Jewish life. We cannot do this in isolation!

I want to commend to you that you get acquainted with the Messianic Jewish Rabbinical

Council.⁵⁵ The MJRC is a council of Messianic Jewish Rabbis and lay people who, as far as I am aware, for the first time in Messianic Jewish history, have gathered together to develop thoughtful standards for those Messianic Jews who would seek growth in Jewish observance. I suggest that we have a calling to live as Jews according to our conscience and abilities. But thinking and living Jewishly needs to be done in the framework of a community, not on our own. I believe that we also have a calling to represent Yeshua within the larger Jewish world and to actively participate in the Messianic body. We embrace our need to approach the larger Jewish world corporately, as a body of Messianic Jews and not only as individuals. In order to do that we must come together around shared Messianic Jewish life and practice.

Whether you agree with every decision of the MJRC or not, I think is of lesser importance than participating in this development. Even if the standards don't quite get it right every time, that's okay because we are giving it our best shot, *together*. What the MJRC provides is critical. It provides us with a communally meaningful, workable framework for living a Jewish life in Yeshua. As individuals, we don't have to sort out whether we will follow Conservative or "Conservadox" or one brand of Orthodox practice. We can instead follow *our practice*.

The Early Rabbinic sages were small, disorganized and had very little if any authority over anyone other than those in their immediate circles. Yet they transformed the entire Jewish world. I believe that what we Messianic Jews are doing will be of even greater value.

We've gone around the table and tasted some different kinds of Messianic Judaism. In my restaurant review, I commend to you the Symphony Salad. It is light and refreshing while hearty and nourishing in the deepest sense. It is thoughtful, accessible, and can accommodate a wide spectrum of Messianic Jewish practice. Let us invite our guest and take our seats at the great Messianic Jewish banquet.

⁵⁵ To learn about the MJRC visit www.ourrabbis.org