

Biblical Faith, a Judaism

I am a non-Jewish person involved in the Messianic movement. I get a little nervous when I see some Messianic Jews talk about how Biblical faith is Judaism. Do you think that Biblical faith is Judaism?

From a strict textual perspective examining the Holy Scriptures, the concept of faith (Heb. *emunah*, אֱמוּנָה; Grk. *pistis*, πίστις) has no real label—be that label Judaism, Christianity, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Catholic, Protestant, evangelical, charismatic, etc. At best, any labels that people have associated with their belief in God, the Holy Scriptures, and certain values and traditions they hold dear, are so that they can be associated with other people who likewise share the same views. These labels even *include* calling oneself “Messianic.” While it is not wrong at all for human-applied labels to be associated with a religious group or sect or particular ideology, the God of Creation and Messiah faith will ultimately be found to transcend them. Even with many religious movements, denominations, and groups in history possessing many positive and edifying perspectives and customs—many of them to be genuinely regarded as Holy Spirit-inspired—the Lord is obviously much bigger than them all!

Many non-Jewish Believers involved in the Messianic movement can be a little taken aback, when they see Messianic Jews say that they are either practicing Judaism, or that Biblical faith is Judaism. Obviously, it does need to be considered that to a variety of Messianic Jews, asserting that they are practicing Judaism, or that Biblical faith is Judaism, may have a certain meaning to some and a different meaning to some others. To some Messianic Jews, asserting that they are practicing Judaism—while obviously recognizing Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah—this means that they have not had to give up on their ethnic and cultural heritage of being Jewish, and that Biblical practices that have been undoubtedly associated with the Jewish people throughout history do not have to be discarded. *To believe in the Jewish Messiah hardly means that a Jew stops being Jewish.* To other Messianic Jews, asserting that they are practicing Judaism means that their whole religious and spiritual construct is not only informed from the Second Temple Judaism of Yeshua and the Apostles’ day, or from later Talmudic Judaism, but even as far as the Jewish mysticism of the Middle Ages.

No one in any sector of the Messianic movement needs to be hostile to when Messianic Jews state, “Yeshua did not come to start a new religion.” Anyone in today’s Messianic community should be able to recognize that when the Messiah says that He came to fulfill the Torah (Matthew 5:17-19), this means that His mission was one of bringing the Father’s plan to full fruition—not one of abolishing His commandments. There is no doubting that Yeshua of Nazareth was a Torah observant, First Century Jew—and that He even bid His followers to respect Pharisaical Jewish authority (Matthew 23:2-3). That Yeshua practiced Judaism is an historically and theologically valid conclusion to make.

As always, though, the question needs to be posed: **Do the teachings and actions of Yeshua ever go beyond, or transcend Judaism?** When presented carefully and respectfully, there are many Messianic Jews today who will obviously have to answer “Yes” to this, as they do not want to be legitimately accused of placing God in any kind of a “box.” At the same time, there are other Messianic Jews who might take offense by the idea that God is bigger than Judaism.

It is fair to conclude that the majority of people who make up the broad Messianic movement, be they Jewish or non-Jewish, do rightly recognize that our Bible studies, exegesis, and faith application is significantly informed from Judaism. This means that when seeking to understand the First Century world of Yeshua, consultation of extra-Biblical literature such as the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Talmud, and the Midrashim is likely going to be necessary to some degree. Respecting the Jewish Synagogue and our Jewish theological and spiritual tradition is a given. Incorporating many customs and traditions in worship on *Shabbat*, our remembrance of the appointed times, employing prayers and hymns from the *siddur*,

and other edifying practices from Judaism, are also witnessed. However, the Biblical text is still **the first and final authority** for us.

Areas of conflict are not necessarily over whether Messianic Believers practice a Biblical faith *informed* from Judaism. Areas of conflict are over whether Messianic Believers should be informed from Medieval Jewish mysticism and literature like the Zohar, as representing ideas and concepts present in the Jewish world of Yeshua a millennium-and-a-half earlier. Areas of strong theological disagreement, which can occur among those who tend to brazenly insist that Biblical faith is Judaism, can erupt when it concerns the equality of all people in the Messiah, the applicability or non-applicability of the Torah to non-Jewish Believers, or issues such as the plurality of the Godhead and its relationship to the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4. Should all of the concepts and ideas of post-Second Temple Judaism be synthesized with Apostolic doctrine? **Where do the teachings of Yeshua and the Apostles get to definitively stand on their own?** This is where the issue of whether today's Messianics practice Judaism *or* a Biblical faith informed by Judaism sees (considerable) divergence.

It can be difficult for a few Messianics to acknowledge that Judaism might be in the wrong in some important areas, and for them to make the choice to stick with a Scripture First (*Prima Scriptura*) hermeneutic. Yet, most of today's Messianic Jews, will not be regarded as practicing Judaism by many other Jews—for the explicit reason that they acknowledge Yeshua as the Messiah.

It is safe for us to recognize that the considerable majority of today's Messianic Believers practice a form of Biblical faith significantly informed from Judaism (and for that same matter, likely informed from the Law-positive traditions of Protestantism like Calvinism or Wesleyanism). Ultimately though, **Biblical faith is a practice of steadfast trust and reliance upon our Eternal, Unseen God** (Hebrews 11:1-2). Many of today's Messianic Jews rightly recognize that God is bigger than Judaism, but some definitely struggle with it. Likewise, to keep this all in proper perspective—we have to remember how many of today's Christians really fail to consider that God is bigger than Christianity...