

The Messianic Jewish Movement and its relation to Torah

- A theological field study -

Master Thesis

by

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KURZZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die vorliegende Arbeit zur Messianisch Jüdischen Bewegung und ihrer Beziehung zur Torah erforscht exemplarisch anhand von 10 Interviews mit ausgewählten Jeshua-gläubigen Juden in Leitungsfunktionen die verschiedenen Aspekte der Beziehung zur Torah. Dabei entsteht durch die Auswahl der Interviewpartner eine für die Bewegung als ganze typische Bandbreite von verschiedenen Positionen, die sich zwar in vielen Punkten überlappen, doch vielfach grundverschieden sind und zum Teil einander widersprechen. Besonderes Augenmerk wird auf die theologisch begründeten, divergenten und sich widersprechenden Positionen gelegt, mit dem Versuch, diese verständlich zu machen.

Nach einer kurzen Einführung zur Messianisch Jüdischen Bewegung werden Aspekte der Messianisch-Jüdischen Doppelidentität beleuchtet und ihre Relevanz für die Beziehung zur Torah aufgezeigt. Diesem folgt ein Überblick über die Foren, in denen Jeshua-gläubige Juden über ihre Beziehung zur Torah diskutieren. Die umfangreiche Bibliographie am Ende der Arbeit erlaubt Einblick in einen lebhaften, noch längst nicht abgeschlossenen Diskussionsprozess innerhalb der Bewegung. Eine knapp kommentierte Begriffsdifferenzierung dient als Übersicht über die wichtigsten Bedeutungen von Torah, die in der Messianisch Jüdischen Bewegung Verwendung finden. Nach diesen Vorarbeiten wird die Feldstudie präsentiert. Eine Beschreibung des Forschungsfeldes und methodologische Reflexionen sind den Interviews vorangestellt. In den Interviews werden zunächst die Assoziationen mit dem Begriff Torah erfasst und die begriffliche Füllung und Verwendung geklärt. Hier schon zeigen sich einige gravierende Unterschiede. Die theologischen Positionen und Verständnisse von Torah werden mit dem biographischen Kontext und Hauptwirkungsfeld und mit Nennung der wichtigsten formenden Einflüsse dargestellt. Festgehalten werden zunächst die Punkte, in denen bei allen Übereinstimmung herrscht, denn sie dienen als gemeinsame Basis. Alle studieren die schriftliche Torah und erachten diese wie auch den übrigen Tanach und die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in der vorliegenden Form als göttlich inspiriert und autoritativ verbindlich. Alle haben für sich einen positiven Zugang zur Torah, entsprechend ihrer eigenen Begriffsdefinition, gefunden. Für alle weist die schriftliche Torah und der Tanach auf Jeshua hin. Alle sind sich einig, dass Jeshua die Torah nicht außer Kraft gesetzt, sondern erfüllt hat. Und alle fühlen als Jude in irgendeiner Weise eine Verantwortung gegenüber der Torah. In Bezug auf das Halten von Geboten sagen alle, dass sich keiner dadurch den Weg in den Himmel erwerben kann. Gottes Treue gegenüber Seinen Verheißungen für Israel wird von allen bekräftigt, doch ob der neue Bund in Jeshua den alten Bund vom Berg Sinai abgelöst hat, oder ob er einfach zum bereits bestehenden Bund von Sinai hinzukommt, ob rituelle Gebote nach Jeshua's Tod und Auferstehung und der Zerstörung des Tempels weiter gehalten werden sollen, ob die Gebote zur Absonderung von den Nationen weiter gehalten werden sollen, ob und unter welchen Bedingungen rabbinischer Halacha gefolgt werden soll und was die Einzelnen in ihren Familien und Gemeinden tun und lehren, dies wird Interview um Interview erörtert. Es zeigt sich, wie verschiedene Leseweisen und Gewichtungen von Schlüsselschriftstellen die verschiedenen Positionen hervorbringen. So wie die Verschiedenartigkeit der Positionen in Beziehung zur Torah bereits ahnen lässt, sind die Interview-Partner zur Frage nach einer Messianisch Jüdischen Halacha geteilter Meinung. Doch auch hier wird der Begriff Halacha von den Repräsentanten verschieden gefüllt. Zum Schluss der Feldstudie werden die Versuche, Messianisch Jüdische Halacha zu produzieren und die Probleme und Kritikpunkte, die von anderen Interviewpartnern dagegen geäußert wurden erläutert. Den Abschluss der Arbeit bilden ein theologischer Rahmen, der all die verschiedenen Positionen und Beziehungen zur Torah fassen kann und einige Ansatzpunkte für eine mögliche Messianisch Jüdische hermeneutische Theologie der Torah.

ABBREVIATIONS

CJLS - Committee on Jewish Law and Standards - The Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative Movement)

CTOMC - Coalition of Torah Observant Messianic Congregations

FFoZ - First Fruits of Zion

IAMCS - *International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues*

ICB - Israel College of the Bible

IHCA - International Hebrew Christian Alliance

JFY - Jewish followers of Yeshua

JBY – Jewish believers in Yeshua

MJAA - Messianic Jewish Alliance of America

MJAI - Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel

MJRC - Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council

UMJC - Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations

NT – The book of the "New Testament", also called "Apostolic writings" or in Hebrew transliteration "Brit HaChadasha" by many in the Messianic Jewish movement, containing the individual books, listed in canonical order:¹

Gospels: Matthew (Mt), Mark (Mk), Luke (Lk), John (Jn).

Acts

Letters: Romans (Rom), 1 Corinthians (1 Cor), 2 Corinthians (2 Cor), Galatians (Gal),

Ephesians (Eph), Philippians (Phil), Colossians (Col), 1 Thessalonians (1Thes), 2 Thessalonians

(2 Thes), 1 Timothy (1 Tm), 2 Timothy (2 Tm), Titus (Ti), Philemon (Phlm), Hebrews (Heb),

James (Jas), 1 Peter (1 Pt), 2 Peter (2 Pt), 1 John (1 Jn), 2 John (2 Jn), 3 John (3 Jn), Jude.

Revelation (Rv)

¹ I opted here for the most commonly used names in English. Within the Messianic Jewish movement, many prefer to use as names transliterations of the Hebrew counterparts.

PREFACE TO THE ONLINE PUBLICATION

As Anti-Semitism is worldwide sharply on the rise, we have to stand together as one people, with joint hopes and aspirations for the future. "יחד ננצח" - "together we will win" is the slogan which carries us through the current war in response to the atrocities of October 7th. What is true for the political camps threatening to divide Israeli society, is even more so true for the religious divides, which run deeper and on an existential level beyond politics. We need to be ready to learn and listen to each other, trying to bridge gaps and being prepared to deal with even the most uncomfortable internal problems and unresolved issues.

Since their birth as a modern movement, the existence of the so called "Messianic Jews", Jews, who claim their religious Jewish identity while believing in Jesus/Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel has been one of these very uncomfortable and irritating internal problems. They invoke a revolting gut feeling in a majority of Jews and seriously challenge the conception of religious Jewish identity as opposed to Christianity. Christian Anti-Semitism, fierce persecution of Jews, inquisition, forced conversions, blood label atrocities, pogroms and eventually the Holocaust – at first sight, Messianic Jews are naturally perceived as traitors. Although, they have nothing to do with these terrible events of history, feel just like the rest of the Jewish people about them and work to fight Anti-Semitism and prevent a reoccurrence of such things wherever they can.

I am offering this field research to the broader community not as a conclusion to a research topic, but rather as an introduction for those trying to listen and understand better, in order to engage in lively and fruitful pointed discussions.

May we be guided by an honest search for truth and the way of life that is pleasing to HaShem, our Creator, the G-d of Israel!

PREFACE

It has become an established practice of academic honesty to give account of the personal involvement of the author with the topic and to allow the reader to access the author's bias by disclosing the author's presuppositions and relevant background.

I am presently living within the Haredi (ultra-orthodox) Jewish community. I deeply care about the Messianic Jewish community, of which I had been part for more than a decade until meeting my husband of blessed memory, who challenged me on my seriousness about keeping Torah and the lack of knowledge and tradition to do so among the followers of Yeshua.²

A few brief words about my spiritual journey: As a child and young teenager - being spiritually hungry and growing up in Christian contexts, I had found my identity as a Christian. In my twenties in Israel, being aware that some of my forefathers had forsaken their Jewish identity to become Christians, it just didn't seem right to me to stop being Jewish when believing in the Jewish Messiah. Thus, I started reconnecting to my Jewish identity, which had been buried for several generations. I also perceived that the church was quite sick and needed to reconnect to their Jewish roots. Personally, my journey of reconnecting to my buried Jewish identity lead me to undergo formal orthodox Jewish conversion.

I decided to submit to Chazal not only in regard to practical Halacha, but also in regard to matters of faith and belief, including about the person of Yeshua and general messianic beliefs. It is yet to be seen where this will lead me and how the riddles will be solved.

A special thanks is due to Kathy Ehrensperger, who closely accompanied me throughout the time of the work on this thesis with constant encouragement and advise how to handle the numerous personal and corona-related challenges, as well as the challenges arising from the research in a field full of tensions and potential persecution from organizations dedicated to fight Messianic Judaism.

² Within the different contexts of my life different terms are in use to refer to the person at the center of the four canonic gospel accounts of the Christian scriptures. I'll refer to him throughout this thesis by his original Hebrew given name in English transliteration: Yeshua.

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores from a theological angle the relevance of Torah for the Messianic Jewish Movement and the various aspects of the relation to it. As an exemplary study it captures Messianic Jewish perceptions and understandings of Torah and following practice. Its core source materials are in-depth interviews with ten carefully selected Yeshua-believing Jews in leadership positions. The interview partners represent a range of different positions that is typical for the movement as a whole, and although they overlap in many points, they are in many cases fundamentally different and in some cases contradict one another. Particular attention is paid to the theological arguments leading to divergent and contradicting positions, with the attempt to make them understandable.

Looking at the Messianic Jewish community as a whole, all the different levels of Torah observance, which are encountered in the Jewish world population can be found. But the reasons for the varying degrees are not dependent on levels of piety and religious commitment, nor on the trust placed in the Jewish Bible, but on different hermeneutics, biographies and communal life settings. Also, there are some particular ways of Messianic Jewish Torah observance, which are not found anywhere else in the Jewish world. To my knowledge no academic research has been done on the Messianic Jewish Movement focusing entirely on its relation to Torah.

The movement is still emerging. The most important evolving components of the movement in regard to its relation to Torah are Bible interpretation, identity, authority, communal support and socially livable reality. The focus of this study is placed on today, with a short historical introduction to help understand the context and the connections.

Writing this thesis at the School of Jewish Theology, I'm am writing about the Messianic Jewish Movement not as a Christian movement, as some Jewish Anti-Missionary groups would present it, but as a Jewish movement, looking at it in Jewish terms. By doing so, I am aiming to present the topic from an emic perspective, defined as "relating to or denoting an approach to the study or description of a particular language or culture in terms of its internal elements and their functioning rather than in terms of any existing external scheme."³ All the interview partners, who participated in this study strongly identify as Jews and fully feel at home in the Jewish world. As fellow believers in Yeshua, Messianic Jews do have a kinship relation also to Christians. The introductory section 1.2 on identity explores these different components of the Messianic Jewish identity. Whereas Mark Kinzer wrote his "Postmissionary Messianic Judaism" primarily for Christians in an attempt to present to them the missing piece in their theology, which Postmissionary Messianic Judaism can fill, I am writing primarily with Jewish readers in mind. No other Jewish group in Israel is hated by all other groups of Jews, the religious as well as the secular.⁴ At large today unrightfully dubbed as a deceptive group of Christian missionaries aiming to carry out a spiritual holocaust by converting Jews to Christians, there is a great need for better understanding of the present-day Messianic Jewish Movement, whose self-perception might be captured by quoting the prophetic verse of Isaiah 58, 12:

וּבְנֵי מִמְדָּה תִרְבּוּת עוֹלָם, מוֹסְדֵי דוֹר-נְדוֹר תִּקְוָמָם; וְקָרָא לָהּ גֹדֵר פְּרִיז, מִשְׁבֵּב נְתִיבוֹת לְשִׁבְתָּ.

³ *Definition of emic* [online], Oxford University Press, available at: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/emic>, accessed 14.10.2021.

⁴ Cf. <https://www.godreports.com/2013/08/messianic-jews-hated-by-both-sides-in-israel/>, accessed 3.8.2021, though a lot has changed already through personal encounters with Messianic Jews and hasbara campaigns.

⁵ "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places, thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in." Quoted

The insider perspective not only refers to the self-definition and self-perception, but to the perceived meaning of life, the vision for the community, the understanding of history and G-d's plan of salvation for mankind and all of creation. I therefore also choose the emic methods of discourse and inquiry. They are the understanding of the biblical scriptures and their application on one hand, and the sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the observation of G-d's movements in history on the other hand. The predominant methods of G-d's guidance are His sovereign revelatory actions, the arrangement of personal-life and historical circumstances and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit reveals Yeshua as the way of G-d with men, and as such Yeshua is the method of thought and understanding and everything eventually points to him. And in terms of the community, Yeshua, as Messiah, is building his living temple with all those believing in him, and this building is still work in progress.

Besides presenting the different perceptions on Torah to the Jewish world, I hope to contribute to a fruitful discussion on and of Torah within the Messianic Jewish movement, by coining terms for different understandings of Torah, presenting the different positions in light of the evolving components, showing their legitimacy, problems and challenges and evaluating their theological potential.

1.1 THE MESSIANIC JEWISH MOVEMENT

Almost all presentations of Messianic Judaism by Messianic Jews start with its history and its historical background for mainly two reasons: 1) the prophetic aspects of everything connected to the Jewish people and their waiting for and acceptance of the Jewish Messiah within the eschatological context; 2) the importance of the connection to the early Jewish followers of Yeshua for claiming religiously-legitimate Jewish identity and authority to bring corrections and to teach the gentile Church and as an example for modern Messianic Jews. The first reason is widely shared by non-Jewish ministries with a Christian Zionist perspective, the second reason is of less importance to Gentiles, but existential for Messianic Jews.⁶

1.1.1 Historical background of the Messianic Jewish Movement⁷

Throughout most of the past 2000 years of history being a faithful Jew and believing in Yeshua were mutually exclusive attributes. In the very beginning it was of course different, as all of the first-generation disciples of Yeshua would consider themselves to be faithful Jews. This first community of Jewish followers of Yeshua did not survive as a distinct community, but was soon overtaken by the influx of masses of gentile believers, which then determined the course of history. Whereas in the very beginning there was a question whether gentile believers needed to become Jews in order to follow Yeshua, after this question had been decided in the negative, it was then later reversed by the gentile Church, which demanded that Jews, who wanted to join the Church needed to denounce their Jewish identity, break Torah, discontinue all Jewish traditions and become like the gentiles. The first followers of Yeshua gathered regularly at the central place of Jewish life, the temple and were part of the Jewish religious landscape of their time, but where the synagogue leaderships opposed

from www.mechon-mamre.org. "Repairing the Breach" is the actual name of the ministry of the Messianic Jewish couple Chaim & Dr. Kim Goldman (<http://www.repairingthebreach.global/>, accessed 19.8.2021).

⁶ On the importance of history see also David Stern: *Messianic Judaism: a modern movement with an ancient past*, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Clarksville-MD 2007, chapter III History.

⁷ My account of the historical background is selective. For a fuller account see Arnold Fruchtenbaum: *The Remnant of Israel: The History, Theology and Philosophy of the Messianic Jewish Community*, Ariel Ministries 2011 and H el ene Dallaire: "Messianic Judaism from the 6th to early-20th Century AD: Textual Evidence" p. 73-91 in *Chosen to Follow: Jewish Believers through History and Today* by Knut H. Hoyland & Jakob W. Nielsen (eds), Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem 2012.

their witness, they were persecuted. Further, when in Yavne after the destruction of the second temple the Pharisees took charge and decided by majority votes on the halachic path of Judaism without a temple, the Jewish followers of Yeshua, whose leaders have been given halachic authority by Yeshua himself and were operating with the counsel of the Holy Spirit did not subscribe to the authority of the Great Assembly of Yavne. According to the Talmudic tradition the Birkat HaMinim was inserted into the Amida Prayer to keep those, who would not submit to the rulings of Yavne out of the synagogue.⁸ It was also ruled there against accepting miraculous signs and guidance from the Holy Spirit (Bat Kol) for halachic decisions.⁹ Considering the great emphasis on the guidance of the Holy Spirit by the followers of Yeshua and their performance of miracles and the exemplary ban on Rav Elieser as he wouldn't accept the final ruling on the halachic matter, this in fact would ban all who would not ascribe to the Prushim majority rulings of Yavne and continue to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit for halachic decisions. And it is further said in the Talmud in the name of the prophet Elijah that G-d smiled and said *בני בניי - my children defeated me*. Is this the response of a pleased Father as usually interpreted in orthodox Judaism, or can this be understood parallel to Ps. 2:4 "He who sits in Heaven laughs" as disapproving of these plans and decisions of men?

The Church historian Eusebius writes that up to the Bar Kochba revolt the leadership of the Jerusalem Community of believers in Yeshua was Jewish, but the number of gentile members grew continually. They could not follow Bar Kochba, who was proclaimed Messiah by Rabbi Akiva, and did not participate in the revolt. This apparently constituted the final break with the Jewish community. After the revolt, in the re-founded Roman city Capita Aeolina there was a gentile church under Greek leadership.¹⁰ Some pockets of dispersed Jewish believers in Yeshua might have lingered for another few centuries, but did not survive as a distinguishable community beyond that, with the exception of maybe the Indian Knanaya.¹¹ In view of this history it appears that G-d accepted the decision of the Great Assembly of Yavne, and carried out the three times daily uttered "blessing" of Birkat HaMinim.

Interestingly, the emergence of racism in Europe in modern times in connection with liberalism, enlightenment and Jewish emancipation led to an awareness of Jewish identity, which wasn't bound to the rabbinic demands of a Torah observant life. Jewish nationalism and Zionism were birthed.

⁸ תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות כ"ח, ב' ⁸

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא נ"ט, ב' ⁹

¹⁰ Dr. Michael Lebowitz, <http://www.yashanet.com/library/temple/nazarenes.htm>, accessed 9.9.2021.

¹¹ The Jewish Christian Community of Jerusalem fled to Pella. Jews were after the revolt not allowed to live in Jerusalem. Some Early Church fathers equaled all Jewish Christians with Ebionites, which were considered to be heretics. In 375 CE Epiphanius mentions an Ebionite community, which had moved to Cyprus. (*Anacephalosis* 30.18.1; cf. Albertus F.J. Klijn & G.J. Reinink: *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects*, Brill, Leiden 1973, p. 29.) But there were also Nazarenes, which apparently moved to Aleppo and Basanites (*Panarion* 29.3.3). Some believe that remains of the Nazarenes survived up to the 11th century and maybe even continued as Pasagians into the Middle Ages. (cf. James Strong: *Cyclopædia of Biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical literature*, Harper, New York 1874, p. 660; John H. Blunt: *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties and Schools of Religious Thought*, Rivingtons, London/Oxford/Cambridge 1874, p. 408f.) It seems that another group of Jewish Christians called the Knanaya moved to India in the 4th or 8th century CE (?). They subsequently joined bigger churches, but exist as a culturally distinct community until today (cf. Ernst Fahlbusch: *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 5, Brill/Eerdmans 2008, p. 286; Robert Frykenberg: *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, Oxford University Press 2010). Also, the Syriac Church of Edessa is worth mentioning as it preserved a substantial amount of Jewish elements in their liturgy. For more research into Jewish Christian remnants see Hélène Dallaire: "Messianic Judaism from the 6th to the Early 20th Century: Textual Evidence" in *Chosen to Follow* by Knut H. Høyland & Jakob W. Nielsen (eds.) - Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem 2012.

Also, from the Christian side, after the reformation, when people studied the scriptures on their own, some started to take note of the eschatological function of the redemption of Israel at the end times.

Whereas the supersessionist and other anti-Jewish theologies held by the orthodox and catholic churches and by the early reformers would see the church as the spiritual Israel and would not see any place or importance for a continued existence of the natural Israel, among English Puritans through the Geneva Bible¹² and then Pietism under the influence of Phillip Jacov Spener emerged a different theology based on Romans 9-11. The eschatological place of a redeemed Israel was highlighted. Protestant missions to the Jews began to spring up alongside with Christian Zionism.¹³ These missions were different than the forced missions, which demanded from their converts to give up their Jewish identity. Converts from these protestant missions started to use the name "Hebrew Christians", affirming their Hebrew descent.

1.1.2 Three historical stages/ History of the Messianic Jewish Movement in our times

There is a natural explanation for the emergence of the Messianic Jewish Movement in our times as a result of the nationalist movements and Zionism; and there is a spiritual explanation for it - witnessing the fulfillment of prophecy and the eschatological unfolding of ultimate divine wisdom and purpose in history.

I will not relate the history of the present day Messianic Jewish Movement in detail, but rather refer to a number of scholars, who have written on it, among them Menahem Benhayim,¹⁴ Yaakov S. Ariel,¹⁵ David Rudolph,¹⁶ Daniel Juster & Peter Hocken,¹⁷ and as an outsider the dissertation of Hanna Rucks.¹⁸ For the purpose of this thesis I'll give only a very short account highlighting the aspects relevant for the relation to Torah, which are: Bible interpretation, Identity, relation to the Christian Church, relation to the Jewish people and the context of the Jewish believers in Yeshua and their congregations.

The main factors leading to the emergence of the Messianic Jewish Movement as it is today can be described as three historical stages of development.

¹² See the commentary of the Geneva Bible on Romans 11, cf. Dan G. Danner: "The Contribution of the Geneva Bible of 1560 to the English Protestant Tradition", p. 5-18 in *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 12-3 (Autumn 1981).

¹³ See Steven R. Sizer: *The Promised Land: A Critical Investigation of Evangelical Christian Zionism in Britain and the United States of America since 1800*, PhD dissertation at Middlesex University/ Oak Hill Theological College 2002; Thomas D. Ice: "Lovers of Zion: A History of Christian Zionism", Article Archives 29 - Liberty University, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/29 (accessed 19.8.2021); Martin H. Jung: *Christen und Juden: Die Geschichte ihrer Beziehungen*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 2008.

¹⁴ "The Emergence of Messianic Jews", p. 49-56 in *Jewish Identity & Faith in Jesus* by Kai Kjær-Hansen (ed), Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem 1996.

¹⁵ *Evangelizing the chosen people: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill/ London 2000.

¹⁶ "Messianic Judaism in Antiquity and the Modern Era", p. 21-36 in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* by David Rudolph & Yoel Willitts (eds), Zondervan, Grand Rapids-MI 2013.

¹⁷ D. Juster & P. Hocken, *The Messianic Jewish Movement: An Introduction*, Towards Jerusalem Council II booklet 2004. Cf. also Peter Hocken, "The Messianic Jewish Movement: New Current and Old Reality", p. 97-115 in his book *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements*, Ashgate Publishing, Burlington-VT 2009.

¹⁸ *Messianische Juden: Geschichte und Theologie der Bewegung in Israel*, Neukirchner Theologie, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2014.

The first stage is characterized as already described above by changes in Bible interpretation leading to an awareness of the eschatological role of Israel, by the Jewish emancipation and the formation of a secular Jewish national identity and by Christian Zionism and "culturally sensitive" Missions to the Jews.

When the first Aliyah waves brought two different kinds of groups of Jews to Israel, those who were driven by rather secular Jewish Nationalism as well as deeply religiously motivated groups returning to the homeland with eschatological hopes, something else happened simultaneously. In the words of Dan Juster and Peter Hocken: "The assertion of a renewed role for the Jewish people in the 'last days' led to a number of Jewish believers within the historic Protestant churches seeking to reclaim their Jewish identity."¹⁹ To fill the need for mutual support and fellowship in 1860 the Hebrew Christian Alliance of Britain was founded, followed in 1915 by the counterpart in the USA and in 1925 by the International Alliance. "Generally the Hebrew Christians within the Alliance did not see themselves rooted in Jewish religious practices or in Torah, however interpreted and applied. Rather, their identity was a matter of physical descent, language (Yiddish), and cultural familiarity. They sought to bring a Christian testimony to their own Jewish people."²⁰

As an example for Protestant Christian missions, which developed a notion of operating culturally sensitive might serve Christ Church. It was established by the Anglican Mission to the Jews in the old city of Jerusalem and is built in synagogue style. The Manifest of Congregation of Messianic Hebrews in Jerusalem from the time of the British Mandate reads as follows: "We therefore declare: a. That the Jews, if they so wish, have the right to keep the customs of the people of Israel when they receive Jesus as their Saviour. Only, that nobody is compelled in such matters. b. We refute all rabbinical customs which are against the word of God, as also Jesus and the apostles did. The New Testament is the only guideline for our ministry."²¹ The "true Christian freedom", which reminds of paulinic anti-law passages is emphasized and a "national freedom in the Gospel for the Jewish Christians" preached.²² But, at the same time, Arne Jonson in view of the new formation of a Jewish state believed that Jewish believers in Yeshua should behave as Jews. The earlier visionary declaration of Waldmann-Lucky from 1911 sees "this law-free position as something temporary" and seeks "a closer connection to the people's law-observing tradition. Possible attachment to the Talmudic tradition is to be free of the "exaggerations of one-sided fanatics, without contradiction to the gospel and only in the spirit of the great rabbinic-Talmudic thinkers."²³

The second stage brings about further changes in Bible interpretation in mainstream churches after the Holocaust with widespread renunciations of replacement theology. It sees the rebirth of the independent state of Israel with the formation of a national Israeli identity, the Jesus culture revival in the 1960-70, with a significant number of Jews coming to faith in Yeshua and the clear affirmation of the Jewish identity, expressed in the name change of the movement in 1980. The earlier Hebrew Christians could hold on to anti-Semitic Church doctrines and replacement theology, from which now the Messianic Jews strongly distance themselves. The Messianic Jews share the pain of the Holocaust, are proud as Jews of the newly found nation, join the fight against anti-Semitism. The interested reader will find a number of studies conducted on the theological changes after the

¹⁹ D. Juster & P. Hocken, *The Messianic Jewish Movement: An Introduction*, Towards Jerusalem Council II booklet 2004, p. 12.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

²¹ Quoted by Hanna Rucks, p. 138.

²² Manifest of Congregation of Messianic Hebrews, ibid.

²³ See Kai Kjær-Hansen: "Lucky and Waldmann's 'Declaration of Law-observing Hebrew Christians'", p. 39-45 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 60 (2009), p. 42, quoted by Hanna Rucks, p. 141.

Holocaust, on the Jewish as well as on the Christian side. The most significant change on the Christian side is the recognition that G-d's covenant with Israel is still in place. But it also brings a feeling of guilt and not wanting to offend the Jews, such that the Jewish identity of the Messianic Jews is cherished, but because they and their beliefs are rejected by orthodox religious Jews, the mainstream churches are irritated by the Messianic Jews. Are there two ways of salvation - the Torah for the Jews and Yeshua for the Gentiles? Isn't G-d's covenant with Israel based on the Torah? Of course, the Messianic Jews profess Yeshua as the way of salvation for Jews.

The third stage produces further changes in Bible interpretation through new perspectives on Paul and Torah positive NT interpretations. I am quoting Jennifer Nyström: "The Paul within Judaism perspective is one outcome of the post-Shoah effort to read the New Testament differently, in this case 'within Judaism.' In Tucker's language, the mission of the perspective is to promote 'a new reading strategy, a post-supersessionist one. Such an approach would maintain two key ideas: the irrevocability of God's covenant with the Jewish people and a continuing role for Torah as a demarcator of the Jewish people and their identity.'"²⁴ The NT is interpreted with the presupposition that the Jewish followers of Yeshua, including Paul, lived as Torah observant Jews, whereas the letters of Paul to the Gentiles can be understood properly only in the context of the believed beginning of the messianic age, in which the nations would recognize the G-d of Israel as the G-d of all creation and worship Him only. As a sign of the messianic age they would do that without becoming Jews. In the words of Kathy Ehrensperger: "Und nur unter dieser zeitlichen Annahme oder mit diesem Verständnis der Zeit sind die Ausführungen des Paulus an die nicht-jüdischen Gruppen zu verstehen, die sich auf Grund seiner Botschaft gebildet hatten."^{25,26}

In the process of redefining and rediscovering the Jewish religious identity the legacy of the first Jewish followers of Yeshua is being revived and there is a tendency in Messianic Jewish congregations, especially in the Diaspora, to become more Torah observant. The Messianic Jewish Movement exists now independent of Christian missions and formulates its own post missionary vision and function as part of the Jewish people and connecting the Gentile Church to Israel. As the movement grows and matures and supports its own theological institutions there is more theological work and reflection within the movement.

²⁴ The exact quote is from an unpublished earlier manuscript version of her dissertation, with which I worked. See Jennifer Nyström: *Reading Romans, Constructing Paul(s)- A Conversation between Messianic Jews in Jerusalem and Paul within Judaism Scholars*, Jennifer Nyström: *Reading Romans, Constructing Paul(s)- A Conversation between Messianic Jews in Jerusalem and Paul within Judaism Scholars*, Dissertation, 1st edition, Media-Tryck, Lund University 2021, p. 38, cf. p. 168, with reference to J. Brian Tucker: *Reading Romans after Supersessionism – The Continuation of Jewish Covenantal Identity*, New Testament after Supersessionism 6, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene-OR 2018, p. 1, and for a more thorough discussion to his whole introduction, p. 1-27. Cf. also Rudolph, David J.: "Was Paul Championing a New Freedom from—or End to—Jewish Law?", p. 33-50 in *Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Essays on the Relationship between Christianity and Judaism* by Gerald R. McDermott (ed), Lexham Press, Bellingham-WA 2021.

²⁵ Kathy Ehrensperger: "Die ›Paul within Judaism‹-Perspektive - Eine Übersicht", p. 463. "And only under this temporal assumption or with this understanding of time can we understand Paul's remarks to the non-Jewish groups that had formed on the basis of his message."

²⁶ See also Raymond Lillevik: "Jesus, Key and Keeper of the Torah - a Messianic Reading of the Bible", p. 31-36 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 73 (2015).

1.2 UNDERSTANDING THE IDENTITY OF THE MESSIANIC JEWISH MOVEMENT

At the core of the Messianic Jewish Movement is the claim of the Messianic Jewish identity. This claim locates it inside the Jewish world. The qualifying term "messianic" might not express well enough the simultaneous connection to the international body of followers of Yeshua. It could be confused with other modern messianic movements for example among the followers of Rav Kook or Chabad. But for the insiders there is no confusion about it and the connection is clear.

The internal discussion about identity started at the earliest beginnings of the movement and continues on until today. Academic field studies approached the topic from anthropological and psychological perspectives, or, in the case of Hanna Rucks how historically its theological positions evolved.²⁷ The inner-Jewish discussion examines whether it can accept the Messianic Jewish self-definition of their Jewish identity as legitimate Jewish and acceptable to grant a Jewish standing, or not.²⁸ The Christian world too is challenged to accept as part of the universal body of believers in Yeshua a group that crosses the established boundaries between Jews and Christians and claims membership in both the universal body of believers in Yeshua and the national body of the people of Israel.²⁹

What is the relevance of the identity discussions for our topic – the relation to Torah? I will argue here that a substantial Jewish identity cannot exist without relating to Torah. Thus, a somehow significant relation to Torah is already incumbent in the visionary and prophetic decision of the name change of the movement from Hebrew Christians to Messianic Jews. Not all Jewish believers in Yeshua today though would agree with the resulting emphasis on the Jewish component of the identity, even though they might strongly identify as Jews on an ethnic national level.³⁰ The personal paths of each one differ, as do the faith expressions, callings and contexts they live in.

1.2.1 Identity theory

Before we turn to the specific Messianic Jewish identity, a few thoughts on identity in general.³¹

An identity might be given or chosen, and it might be recognized or disputed by others. The answer to the question "Who are you?" returns a name, title, description or alike, which constitutes and defines identity. An identification is more than just a personal ID number. It is usually an identification with a family, group, place, occupation, etc... Thus, identity is not just a personal issue as it guides social interaction.

It is the norm that a person carries several identities simultaneously. Carrying an identity means feeling responsible within that identification. But beyond being called upon as carrier of a certain identity, there is an element of choice, e.g. to choose a name and to opt into an identity. A name or opted-in identity may express a vision as motivational force behind this identity. Thus, names in Jewish tradition at times contain prophetic statements. An inherited identity too offers the choice to

²⁷ See section 5.2. Previous field studies.

²⁸ See Pauline Kollontai: "Messianic Jews and Jewish Identity", p. 195-205 in *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 3-2 (2004) and (also for the response of the Christian world) Faydra Shapiro: "Jews for Jesus – The Unique Problem of Messianic Judaism", p. 1-16 in *Marburg Journal of Religion* 16 (2011).

²⁹ See also Stuart Z. Charmé: "Varieties of authenticity in Contemporary Jewish Identity", p. 133-155 in *Jewish Social Studies* 6/2 (2000) and Federico Dal Bo: "The Theological and Cultural Challenge of Messianic Jews. Towards a New Jewish Paradigm?", p. 33-58 in *"Pardes"* 21 (2015): Jesus in the Jewish Culture of the 19th and 20th century.

³⁰ See for example David Neuhaus.

³¹ There are vast amounts of literature on identity theories. I will suffice myself to name some of it which deals specifically with Jewish identity and with Messianic Jewish identity in the following sections. The aspects mentioned here stem from my own reflections as they seem relevant for the Messianic Jewish identity in relation to Torah.

actively embrace it with a vision, or to take it as a given and stay in the expected flow of it, or to reject it and rebel against it. Accordingly, a self-affirmed identity requires an active process of identification, which involves a process of choice and recognition. Recognition by whom? In order to fully function in a certain identity, beyond the Self-recognition of the identity, the recognition of the identity by those in the sphere of social interaction and by the relevant authorities is required.

1.2.1.1 Application of identity theories to Messianic Jewish identity

The Messianic Jewish scholar Richards Harvey explored the different aspects which shape the Jewish identity for the purpose of Jewish evangelism.³² Further, a paper recently published in *Kesher* by Jonathan Allen titled "Jewish identity and Faith in Yeshua"³³ provides an overview over different identity theories, which are relevant for the Messianic Jewish Movement, and integrates their insights into his biblical approach to the topic in order to better understand the components of the Jewish identity. I am interested in the question of identity in as far as it shapes the theological substance. The biblical approach to identity does this. In the words of Jonathan Allen: "The biblical world-view offers only a single identity, given and known by G-d: we are who we are made."³⁴ Only G-d knows the full true identity; we are discovering it, and are at times mistakenly living something, which is not our true intended identity. The self-affirmed and proclaimed identity thus grows out of the relationship with G-d, leading to a transformation, the discovery of purpose and answering to a specific calling by recognizing the G-d given tasks. Summarizing the different identity theories, I propose three possible sources to constitute an identity, which can be drawn upon independently, but which ideally would all converge together: G-d-given identity, Self-identification, identity recognized or established by others. In the case of the Messianic Jewish identity according to their internal faith principles the constituting order of these three sources is as listed. The G-d-given identity is discovered and accepted by self-identification with it, while it is recognized and helped to established by supporters, and disputed and (partially) rejected by opponents.

The problem of recognition of the self-identification by the larger Jewish world, which largely perceives Messianic Jews as a threat to Jewish existence, angrily rejects their "Jewish" claim and excludes them from the Jewish community is shown by Faydra Shapiro in her article "Jesus for Jews: The Unique Problem of Messianic Judaism".³⁵ But Messianic Jews do not let their opponents define their identity, but rather follow in the footsteps of their Messiah and happily embrace the rejection of their Jewish and sometimes Christian surroundings. Defying the norms of their social context they live "in the world, but are not of the world",³⁶ fueled by their recognition of their identity and purpose given by the Creator. Hence, Messianic Jews claim to be double elected, as Jews and as believers in Yeshua. Their double election gives them a self-conceived task of leadership among the Jewish people, because they found the Jewish Messiah, and among the universal believers in Yeshua, because they are Jews called to be a light to the nations. As such, they cannot be dependent on either one to define their task or identity for them, but they have to draw their strength and inspiration from a higher source and be secure in their own identity no matter what opposition there is. But likewise, they cannot effectively assume a position of leadership unless their identity is recognized by those they feel called to lead, and therefore they take action: Some engage in

³² "What shapes Jewish identity" *1999 LCJE New York Conference Papers* - 13th of August.

³³ Part 1 in *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 35 (Summer/Fall 2019), p. 3-27, and part 2 in issue 36 (Winter/Spring 2020), p. 19-40.

³⁴ "Jewish Identity and Faith in Yeshua, Part 1", p. 3(?).

³⁵ *Marburg Journal of Religion* 16 (2011), p. 1-16.

³⁶ Cf. John 17: 14-16, where Yeshua prays: "I have given them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world -- just as I myself do not belong to the world. I don't ask you to take them out of the world, but to protect them from the Evil One. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." (CJB) The concept appears several times in the NT.

organized Jewish evangelism, others try to state their case in the media and in front of authorities to change the status quo, and again others focus on correcting errors and teaching in the Christian world.

I'm not so much interested in the identifications ascribed to Messianic Jews by outsiders, even though much can be learned from it, nor am I interested per se in the reception and discussion of the self-identification in the Jewish or Christian world respectively. My sole focus is on the self-identification of Messianic Jews and on their self-recognition of their G-d given identity. Only in as much as the outside identifications or disputes produce again a reaction of the Messianic Jews, which shapes their self-perception, which in turn effects their theological thinking and religious life and influences their relation to Torah, it will be relevant for our study.

We will now look first at the Messianic identity component and then at the Jewish identity component. David Stern, one of the pioneers of the Messianic Jewish Movement, challenges Jewish believers in Yeshua to live both components of the Messianic Jewish identity 100%, 100% Messianic and 100% Jewish. Instead of dividing the identities into ethnic Jewish and spiritual Christian, as many do and did in the past, a distinction between believing in the G-d of Israel and His Messiah and belonging to the ecclesia (Messianic) and being part of the chosen people and called to a special level of holiness (priests) and responsibility to all of mankind (kings) as light to the nations (Jewish) is proposed. This may be said to be the core of the vision of the Messianic Jewish Movement in regard to its identity. Then we will proceed to identity as vision, which describes theoretically the path for the movement and its mission. This is followed by a section to identity in context, which looks at the practical identity negotiations in the Diaspora contexts and in the Israeli context. In reality, different contexts produce different results in the negotiating process of the identities. In order to understand the impact of a set of identities on a person's life the following three questions might help us: 1) Where is the strongest identification? 2) Which identification is sought to be strengthened? 3) Which identity is challenged? These questions can be asked for each given context, in which the person is operating. A third section looks at the implications of identity issues for the ecclesia with the question of a one law or a bilateral ecclesiology and its effects on the relation to Torah for Jewish believers in Yeshua.

1.2.2 Messianic identity

The envisioned full Messianic identity entails faith in Yeshua as Messiah of Israel, not being ashamed or afraid to live in this faith as a disciple of Yeshua keeping Yeshua's commandments according to the NT scriptures³⁷ and identification with the universal body of believers in Yeshua.

The universal body of believers in Yeshua I will call Ecclesia, following the example of Mark Kinzer.³⁸ This term is more historically neutral than "church", isn't associated with institutions and does not carry an inherent opposition to Jewish identity. In contrast to Ecclesia I use the term "the Christian world" to denote traditional Gentile-dominated Christianity with its various denominations and institutions.

Given that Yeshua himself and all of the first disciples were Jewish and they recognized Yeshua as the promised Jewish Messiah based on the scriptures of the Hebrew bible and remained Jewish, there shouldn't be a problem to fully live this Messianic identity as a Jew. Nevertheless, there are three reasons, a fully lived Messianic identity could challenge a distinct Messianic Jewish identity of Jewish followers of Yeshua.

³⁷ The NT canon is virtually not questioned and full trust is placed in the tradition of the NT scriptures as divinely inspired. See section 4 Terminology for the Messianic Jewish approach to scripture.

³⁸ *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Introduction, p. 22.

1. Several NT scriptures stress the unity of all believers in Yeshua, who are forming a living temple. The identification with the Ecclesia is necessary as there is to be one unified body belonging to Yeshua. It is to be one New Man, without divisions, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither male nor female.³⁹ But the meaning of this scripture is a riddle as the same Paul writes different rules of behavior to men and to women respectively. The riddle can be solved by saying that his statement addresses only one aspect, i.e. that no one is held back from a direct relationship with G-d, all have access to the "presence of G-d" (e.g. through prayer and through communion by eating Yeshua's body and drinking his blood in form of bread and wine), but there remain different functions and callings in this world. Albeit, some people take it further to mean that there is to be literally no distinction between Jew and Gentile any longer.⁴⁰

2. Full faith in Yeshua, as expressed by Paul, actually involves an identity exchange. He writes: "no longer I live, but Yeshua lives in me". This is in particular experienced in the baptism, but also every time communion is celebrated. The old person with all of its sins dies with Yeshua at the cross, and out of the baptism water, resurrected and empowered by the Holy spirit, arises a new creation in Yeshua. From here some argue that what has been good for the Gentile followers of Yeshua (i.e. church tradition) should also be good for those of Jewish decent, because the physical birth no longer matters, but only the spiritual rebirth, which Jew and Gentile experienced alike. However, the physical world continues to exist and people retain many of their prior individual properties after experiencing a spiritual rebirth. So, does this identity exchange leave room for other identities besides the identity in Yeshua, and if so, what importance do they have? Some say that everything else is of no importance to them. Nevertheless, different callings are generally recognized. The identities connected to these callings are sanctified, redeemed identities subordinate to the identity in Yeshua. People are encouraged by the scripture "to stay in the state in which you were called".⁴¹ Among others, national, ethnic identities could be such sanctified, redeemed identities.

3. But, the Jewish identity is a special case as it is part of the identity of the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua, and therefore all of his followers somehow partake in it. From here arose the Jewish roots movement, in which Christians are being taught the Jewish roots of their faith, helping them to better understand the scriptures and connect to the Jewish people in a positive, meaningful way. But how far is this supposed to go? Some Gentile Christians start to self-identify as Jews, saying that their faith is Jewish and they feel connected to the Jewish people, through their Jewish Messiah.

Those who believe that the Messianic age started with the coming of Yeshua in the flesh and his death and resurrection have to admit that it is nevertheless not yet fully there. How much is the messianic identity fulfilled and realized in a believer's life in our times? Where are we in the divine plan of redemption, personal and universal? The parameters of the coming of the Messianic age are further explored in section 1.2.4.4 Identity as Vision: Operating in the Messianic Vision.

1.2.3 Jewish identity

The UMJC issued in 2010 a working definition of Jewish identity, which states: "Jewish identity is best understood as neither a strictly religious category nor a strictly ethnic category, but as membership in a people. [...] The primary criterion for defining Jewish identity is Jewish birth."⁴² There are different purposes for the discussion of Jewish identity in the Messianic Jewish

³⁹ See Gal. 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female; for in union with the Messiah Yeshua, you are all one." (CJB)

⁴⁰ For a further discussion on it see section 1.2.6 Jew-Gentile distinction in the Ecclesia?.

⁴¹ See 1 Cor 7:20 "Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called." (CJB)

⁴² UMJC, "A Working Definition of Jewish Identity", <https://www.tikvatisrael.com/jewish-identity.html>, 2010, accessed 18.6.2021.

Movement. Among them are rather technical ones like the internal determination of a person's Jewish standing for marriage, to be counted for a Minyan or alike and for membership in messianic Jewish congregations. Another purpose is the legal fight for recognition of the Jewish identity of Messianic Jews for Aliya and other Jewish rights, which also includes the arguing for the religious legitimacy of Messianic Judaism as a fourth branch of Judaism. And yet again another purpose is understanding the movement's own vision and calling. The above quoted working definition might serve well the internal technical purposes. But to support the religious legitimacy of Messianic Judaism as a branch of Judaism and to understand the movements own vision and calling the Jewish identity needs to be explored further. Beyond physical descent there are more factors shaping the ethnic and the religious identity. Richard Harvey rightly states that "the particularity of the Jewish people can only be understood correctly through the theological matrix of G-d's dealings with the people of Israel."⁴³ Jonathan Allen⁴⁴ shows through the scriptures how national and communal identity is formed. We see an interweaving of ethnic bonds, cultural tradition and theology. Hence, the process of the formation of the Jewish people is from beginning to end in G-d's hands.

Yoel B. Wolowelsky, an orthodox Jew, who grapples with the halachic designations of Jewish identity in the case of Messianic Jews, makes a helpful distinction into two aspects of Jewish identity: Shem and Kedusha.⁴⁵ Jewishness according to the name can never be lost, and everyone who carries the name as a Jew has the never-ending obligation to live as a faithful Jew. But the holiness as a Jew, which allows a Jew to assume special religious functions and grants him corresponding rights may be lost if a Jew willfully turns to idolatry or other apostasy. However, if an apostate Jew repents he can regain his Kedusha, his Jewish standing of holiness. Claiming only the Shem, the name of being Jewish falls therefor short of a Jewish identity of substance, which is rooted in faithfulness to the covenant relationship with G-d.

Richard Harveys own answer to the question "What shapes Jewish identity?" is the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua. He completes or fulfills the Jewish identity. The Messianic Jews thus follow Yeshua on the path of an identity unrecognized by the majority of Jews. But this answer opens up a new question: If for Messianic Jews Yeshua shapes their Jewish identity, what then is the difference to Messianic Gentiles, whose identity is likewise shaped through Yeshua? (See section 1.2.6 Jew-Gentile distinction in the Ecclesia?) If holding on to a continued Jew-Gentile distinction, we might answer that Yeshua does not constitute the Jewish identity, but only shapes, completes and fulfills it. G-d's choice and calling of Israel was prior to the coming of Yeshua in the flesh. Jewish believers in Yeshua are called to fulfill their destiny as part of Israel partaking in its national calling as Jews.

So writes Baruch Maoz, who belongs to the network of Messianic Jewish congregations in Israel with reformed Evangelical Christian theology, on his website under the title "Jewishness & the Gospel": "Faith in Jesus is the most truly Jewish thing there is! It is high time to redeem the message from its historical contortions and to rediscover its solid roots in the Five Books of Moses, the books of Israel and of Judah's history, in the Psalms and in the words of the prophets. - Israel's future has to do with its faith in Jesus. Israel's destiny is to love, obey, enjoy and glorify Jesus. That is Israel's only true salvation."⁴⁶

An interesting way of dealing with the rejection of Messianic Jews as Jews by the mainstream Jewish community is tying the essence of the Jewish identity to the reaction to hatred and rejection, which is the Jewish reality throughout history. Rami Danieli in a video lecture published by the Messianic Jewish media channel Shelanu with the title "מי הוא יהודי" ⁴⁷ goes back to the very beginnings, when

⁴³ "What shapes Jewish identity", p. 74.

⁴⁴ "Jewish Identity and Faith in Yeshua - Part 1", p. 3-27 in *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 35 (2019).

⁴⁵ "Two aspects of Jewish Identity", p. 16-27 in *Shofar* 13/2 (1995).

⁴⁶ <http://www.themaosweb.com/cms/page/jewishness>, accessed 18.8.2021.

⁴⁷ <https://fb.watch/6bbgTFLSWE/>, published on the Shelanu.tv Facebook page on 14.6.2021, accessed 14.7.21.

the fourth son is born to Jacob's unfavorable wife Leah. She calls him יהודה, derived from הודיה = praise/thanksgiving as she resolves that now she will praise G-d. Thus, the essence of being a Jew is to give thanks and praise G-d even when being hated and rejected. With this approach anyone unsure of his Jewish identity because of a lack of acceptance by the surrounding environment is pointed towards affirming this very identity through the spiritual attitude of thanksgiving and praise. Instead of saying that the essence of being Jewish is to keep the Torah, as orthodox Jews would say, the spiritual essence of the Jewish identity of this Jewish believer in Yeshua is thankfulness and praise. From my own insider knowledge, I fill in the blanks to show the depth of this thankfulness and its connection to Torah. Thankfulness is what fills the believer when he has accepted Yeshua as his Lord and savior, - thankfulness that Yeshua has kept the Torah perfectly and taken the place of the sinners to pay for their transgressions (Is 53), offering forgiveness to those who repent, accept his sacrifice and believe in him, - thankfulness for G-d's revealed love, His faithfulness and goodness.

In 2001 the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel conducted a seminar about "Our Jewish Identity in Christ" with proponents of the main four different positions taken in the Messianic Jewish community in Israel. It was afterwards summarized and published in a special edition of the *Zot HaBrit* journal, first in Hebrew, then in English. The positions were: "1) Primary emphasis on the principle that 'There is no difference between Jew and Gentile in the Messiah Yeshua.' 2) Maintenance of Jewish identity through Torah observance, which remains obligatory according to the teachings of Yeshua. 3) Maintenance of Jewish identity through adoption of the rabbinic tradition of the people of Israel. 4) Independent application of Jewish traditions, according to the leading of the Spirit of G-d."⁴⁸

1.2.4 Identity as vision

Both the Messianic and the Jewish identity are at the same time a divine calling and therefore have a vision already built into that identity. Those carrying the Messianic Jewish identity say yes to their calling and to the divine vision, in which they are called to participate. This immanent vision though needs to be discovered, formulated and actively pursued. The visionaries of the movement perceive it as a prophetic movement in the sense that it is part of the fulfillment of the divine destiny.⁴⁹ The Jewish as well as the Christian communities are lacking something, which Messianic Jews can restore. The destiny of the Jewish people according to David Stern is to be "Light to the nations" (Is 49:6). It says in John 8:22 that Yeshua is the light of the world. Jewish believers in Yeshua can share this light of Yeshua to the nations and show their fellow Jews how to fulfill their destiny. "To praise, thank, confess, obey and make known the living God" David Stern identifies from the scriptures as the purpose of the followers of Yeshua (ecclesia) (p.3), which means to make disciples of all nations and bring them close to Israel (Mt 28:18-20; Eph 2:11-12).⁵⁰ Thus, "Messianic Judaism is necessary in order that Gentile Christians have the whole counsel of God."^{51, 52}

⁴⁸ *Zot Habrit: Journal of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel*, Sept. 2007, p.7.

⁴⁹ Called so for example by Gershon Nerel, on the website of Yachad beYeshua (<https://www.yachad-beyeshua.org/> accessed 8.10.2021), and many others.

⁵⁰ David Stern: *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement with an Ancient Past*, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Clarksville-MD 2007, p. 3.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See also Richard Harvey: "Shaping the Aims and Aspirations of Jewish Believers", p. 22-27 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 48 (2006) and Hashivenu Forum: "A Vision for a Maturing Messianic Judaism", published under "Core Values" at <http://hashivenu.org/>, accessed 19.8.2021.

1.2.4.1 Movement back to the roots

The rejection of replacement theology and the affirmation of G-d's faithfulness to the covenant with the Jewish people go together with a reclamation of Paul's Jewish identity as descendent of Abraham and Israelite in Rom 11 and a reversal of Church edicts prohibiting Jewish expressions of faith. David Stern, Gershon Nerel and Joseph Shulam all call for a restoration of a community alike to the first-generation Jewish community of followers of Yeshua in Jerusalem. This community was Jewish in every sense and fully committed in its Messianic faith following Yeshua. Extensive research of early Jewish disciples of Yeshua has been done by Ray Pritz in his dissertation *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*.⁵³ But the lack of a continuous tradition of a committed community of Jewish followers of Yeshua poses many questions and challenges. Mainstream religious-Jewish life today looks different than at the end of the 2nd temple period. The conditions are different, the social fabric is different, there is no temple, vast amounts of rabbinic traditions and rabbinic rulings changed the Jewish norms; and the presence of more than 2 billion Gentile Christians worldwide requires extensive fellowship and interaction with Gentiles for at least some of the Messianic Jewish community to be restored.⁵⁴

1.2.4.2 Jewish identity of substance - The importance of Torah

What makes a Jew a Jew - passive inherited nationhood or positive living in the covenant laws?

A nice drasha I recently heard on the reason for the negative wording in the Birkot haShachar – "who has not made me a gentile" – is that being a Jew depends on each one. G-d can make someone "not a gentile", but the person's positive action is required to live as a Jew. David Stern writes in his reworked Messianic Jewish Manifesto: "If we call ourselves Messianic Jews we must intend to back up our words with actions demonstrating that our Jewishness has substance."⁵⁵ Otherwise, he states, the Messianic Jew's Jewish identity might be nothing more than a cultural national identity like that of any other nation and culture, void of the special national calling and covenant as the people of G-d. The Messianic part too ought to have substance and be lived out fully in a "born again", sanctified life of faith.⁵⁶ They are to flow together with the aim to understand and follow the Jewish Messiah, and enabled through belief in the Messiah to live out the calling of Israel.

Stuart Dauermann, another visionary of the movement, focusses in on the required substance of the Jewish identity and on the nature of the special national calling and thus spells out in his book called *Son of David - Healing the Vision of the Messianic Jewish Movement* the components of the Jewish covenantal identity: "In our thinking, feeling, and doing we must restore the Jewish people to their identity as a people called by God to glorify him in the context of communal Torah living. Because this facet of the testimony of scripture has been neglected for centuries [by the followers of Yeshua, in the church], it is imperative that we reconfigure our thinking in this area." He criticizes the neglect or discarding of the covenant identity and the responsibilities of the Jewish people within the Messianic Jewish Movement and points to "prior, and to some degree subconscious ecclesial alliances, theological commitments, and even financial entanglements," with non-Jewish Church organizations as reasons for it.⁵⁷

The UMJC statement *Defining "Messianic Judaism"*, which was written by the Messianic Jewish theologians Mark Kinzer and Dan Juster, expresses clearly the sought for Jewish identity of

⁵³ Studia Post-Biblica vol. 37, Magnes Press, Hebrew University, Jerusalem; Brill, Leiden 1988.

⁵⁴ See also Arye Powlison: *My Law on your Heart - Living Yeshua's Jewishness* Vol. 1: *Restoring His Framework*, Rod of Aaron Publications Jerusalem, Israel 1995.

⁵⁵ David Stern, *Messianic Judaism* 2007, p. 26.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, chapter 2 – Identity.

⁵⁷ Stuart Dauermann, *Son of David - Healing the Vision of the Messianic Jewish Movement*, p. 35.

substance: "[A] movement of Jewish congregations and groups committed to Yeshua the Messiah that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in Torah, expressed in tradition, and renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant."^{58, 59}

1.2.4.3 Postmissionary Messianic Judaism

Mark Kinzer in his *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*⁶⁰ spells out his theological approach to Torah and how it translates into a vision for Messianic Judaism. As a Jew he subscribes to Torah observance as an expression of covenant fidelity. The covenant between the G-d of Israel and the people of Israel he perceives as being intact, with Yeshua being present in observant traditional Jewish life, but hidden.⁶¹ His vision for Messianic Jewish believers is to be fully at home in the Jewish world as a witness to the hidden Yeshua in it, whereas their mission is directed at the Christian world as connecting piece to the Jewish world.⁶²

1.2.4.4 Operating in the Messianic Vision of the "Son of David"

Stuart Dauermann looks at the actual office of the Son of David and the King of Kings and breaks down the title of Messiah into tasks to be performed. He challenges the Messianic Jewish community to do as the body of Messiah what the Messiah is supposed to be doing. The task of Messiah according to Maimonides is to gather the outcast of Israel, return them to the land of the forefathers and to build the temple. This all and more is found in Ez 37:21-27. From this passage in Ezekiel Stuart Dauermann derives an outline of what shall happen to the nation of Israel. I'm quoting what is relevant for the relation to Torah. From verse 24 is evident that "G-d will cause the Jewish people to live in covenant faithfulness to the statutes and ordinances G-d has given to our ancestors."⁶³ What does this mean for the Messianic Jewish Movement today? Stuart Dauermann states: "God is bringing the Jewish people back to covenant faithfulness, to renewed Torah living. We should be growing in our understanding of Torah and what obedience to Torah should look like for Messianic Jews.... Calling Jews back to Torah is inextricably part of the message of repentance and faith we are commissioned to proclaim. The time is coming when it will be difficult to find any Jews indifferent to Torah, for the prophets wrote that God would write the Torah on our hearts, and through his Spirit and by his Messiah cause us to return to covenant faithfulness."⁶⁴ To verse 26-27, which talks about the sanctuary and the dwelling place of G-d, he remarks: "We should be prayerfully seeking the Divine Presence, and by living lives of obedience and love throw out the welcome mat to the Holy One, seeking the manifestation of his presence in our midst."⁶⁵

⁵⁸ "Defining Messianic Judaism," UMJC Theology Committee, <https://www.umjc.org/defining-messianic-judaism>, 2002, accessed 18.7.2021.

⁵⁹ See also Luzatti: "What makes a Jew 'Jewish'?", Paper presented at Helsinki Consultation 2013 (not available on Helsinki consultation website anymore).

⁶⁰ Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: redefining Christian engagement with the Jewish people*, Brazos Press, Grand Rapids-MI 2005.

⁶¹ Cf. also Richard C. Harvey: "The 'hidden' Messiah in Judaism", published on academia.com.

⁶² See also IAMCS (Michael Wolf & Larry Feldman): "Unrecognized Mediation: A False Hope", <https://iamcs.org/about-us/position-papers-resources> and Mark S. Kinzer: *Israel's Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity* edited by Jennifer Rosner, Cascade Books, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene-OR 2011; Mark S. Kinzer: "Jewish Disciples of Yeshua & the Healing of the Two-fold Tradition: Eight Theses", Paper presented at Helsinki consultation 2014; Mark S. Kinzer: "The Enduring Sacramental Character of Jewish Life in Messiah: A Messianic Jewish Perspective", Paper presented at the Roman Catholic - Messianic Jewish Dialogue Group, August 27, 2013.

⁶³ Stuart Dauermann: *Son of David - Healing the Vision of the Messianic Jewish Movement*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene-OR 2010, p. 29.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

1.2.5 Identity in context

There is an ongoing process of negotiating identity in the different given contexts. For an emerging movement the factors connected to the pioneer-double persecution reality need to be taken into consideration, even though the Movement is not defined through it. Rather, it is the norm through all ages until the final redemption of this world for "true" believers to be pioneers in certain areas and to experience some opposition and persecution while going against mainstream society. Moreover, the present-day pioneers of the Messianic Jewish Movement were not born into a vacuum, and we do well to be aware of contextual and formative influences shaping their views and their identity.

1.2.5.1 "Kulturtransfer" & "Verflechtungsgeschichte"

Hanna Rucks in her historical theological approach draws attention to the notion of "Kulturtransfer", the transfer of culture into the Messianic Jewish Movement and the subsequent "Kreuzung und Verflechtung", the crossing and interweaving, which transforms both, the initial sender and the recipient. She formulates three questions: "Which individuals or groups were and are formative for Messianic Jews in their theologizing, i.e. who can be rated as 'senders'? Which national and religious context can these 'senders' be assigned to? And: Which of their concepts were and will be adopted by Messianic Jews and in which direction - possibly - transformed?"⁶⁶

The main sender pools can be easily identified as evangelical Christian Zionist, rabbinic, charismatic, but there are also others.⁶⁷

1.2.5.2 National identity- religious identity

The Jewish component of the Messianic Jewish identity and the importance it plays in the Messianic Jewish congregational life is undoubtedly influenced by the context of the general society in which the Messianic Jewish believer and his congregation are situated.

Richard Harvey describes the difference between Israel and the Diaspora: "The Diaspora nature of much of the movement emphasizes the religious expression of the Judaism as a means of cultural identification, whereas in the Land of Israel the majority of Israeli Messianic Jews do not need to assert their 'Jewishness' in such 'religious' ways, and react against the Orthodox influence."⁶⁸

In other words, the secular Israeli identity is capable to affirm Jewish identity on a national, Zionist, non-religious level and with minimal traditional cultural Jewish elements as common for the mainstream secular Israeli society. And even stronger than the reaction of the secular Israeli society to rabbinic religious demands, the majority of the Israeli Messianic Jewish community is reacting against the orthodox and ultra-orthodox rabbinic way of life including their outspoken opposition to faith in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel, which keeps them away from the predominantly orthodox religious congregations and institutions in Israel.

In the USA and some other Diaspora locations, where there is an abundance of lively Christian churches, Jewish believers awakened to their Jewish identity flock together in the Messianic Jewish

⁶⁶ Hanna Rucks: *Messianische Juden: Geschichte und Theologie der Bewegung in Israel*, Dissertation, Reihe: Neukirchener Theologie, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2014, p. 39, my translation. ("Welche Einzelpersonen oder Gruppen waren und sind für Messianische Juden in ihrem Theologisieren prägend, d.h. wer kann als 'Sender' gewertet werden? Welchem nationalen und religiösen Kontext sind diese 'Sender' zuzuordnen? Und: Welche ihrer Konzepte wurden und werden von Messianischen Juden übernommen und in welche Richtung - möglicherweise - transformiert?")

⁶⁷ For an insightful discussion of relevant influences see Elliot Klayman "The Diversity of Ideas and Torah Praxes Today Within the Messianic Jewish Movement", p. 14-30 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 73 (2015), p. 15f.

⁶⁸ *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach*, Dissertation, University of Wales 2007, p. 221.

Movement and seek to express their Jewish identity and connection to the Jewish people within the religious expressions of the Messianic Jewish Synagogue service and congregational life and tend to integrate much more traditional religious Jewish elements for these reasons. In their attempts to counteract assimilation and loss of Jewish identity they find common ground with the Reform and Conservative Jewish Movements, or even with Chabad missionaries and might work together with non-messianic Jewish congregations and entities to support Jewish national causes. Given the reality of an orthodox Jewish minority in the Diaspora, it is much easier to establish a religious Jewish identity outside of the orthodox Jewish framework.

1.2.5.3 Definitions – Messianic Jewish Movement

I'll use a narrow definition for looking at the congregational movement of Messianic Jewish Communities and its institutions in the Diaspora, and a broad definition of "Messianic Jewish Movement" in regard to the Israeli reality. Those in the Diaspora, which do not fit into the narrow definition will be mentioned in the following section 1.2.6 Jew-Gentile distinction in the Ecclesia?.

1.2.5.4 Diaspora reality- narrow definition

The narrow definition of the congregational movement in the Diaspora designates congregations, which seeks to find forms to express their Jewish identity and their faith in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua in a genuine way. These congregations are in general intended for Jews, but most are open to interested gentiles as visitors, affiliated members or even full members, resulting in many gentile majority Messianic Jewish congregations. National and international Alliances and ministry networks are open for membership of congregations and Messianic Jewish individuals. The different alliances and ministry networks represent different streams within the movement, which are distinguished in regard to adherence to Jewish tradition and keeping of the Torah commandments by similar differences as known from the mainstream Jewish denominations of reform, conservative and nearly orthodox. Albeit the reasons for it are not different levels of devotion, but a difference in emphasis and approach, vision and setting.⁶⁹ For a list of international alliances and ministry networks see section 2 on venues for discussion.

Among the Diaspora communities the USA takes the lead also in the Messianic Jewish Movement,⁷⁰ followed by England, South-Africa, the rest of America, Australia and since the 1990s also Ukraine and Russia, and Germany. The situation in Germany and adjacent post - Holocaust Europe is unique because of the special attention granted to Jews and the public efforts to re-establish and support Jewish life. Among those converting to Judaism since the end of the Holocaust, the percentage of Germans is very high in comparison to the numbers of the local Jewish communities. German Christians, including the theology departments at German Universities, are very active in attempts of Jewish-Christian dialog, and Messianic Jews are disturbing the established boundary markers of the Jewish-Christian dialog. The Perestroika in the late 1980s led not only to the German re-unification, but also to a revival of many former Jewish communities in Germany. As of today, 80-90% of the

⁶⁹ Here are two examples for networks with very different visions.

IAMCS - Our Vision: "The spiritual vision of the IAMCS is to see the outpouring of G-d's Spirit upon our Jewish people through Messianic congregations. The IAMCS is not designed to be a denominational structure, but rather to be an instrument in promoting Messianic revival and to provide for the needs of its members, whatever their affiliations." <https://iamcs.org/about-us/vision>, accessed 18.7.2021.

MJRC – Who Are We?: "The Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council (MJRC) ... consists of a group of ordained Messianic Jewish Rabbis and associated leaders who share a common vision for Messianic Judaism rooted in Torah, instructed by Tradition, and faithful to Messiah Yeshua in the twenty-first century." <http://ourrabbis.org/main/articles/23-purposes/1-who-are-we>, accessed 4.10.2021.

⁷⁰ For a field study on North American Messianic Jews see A. Barron & B. Jamison "A Profile of North American Messianic Jews" *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 73 (2015), p. 37-73.

Jewish population and of the members of the mainstream Jewish congregations in Germany migrated in the past 30 years from the former Soviet Union to Germany. The majority of these migrants came with very minimal religious knowledge of Jewish practice. Many were in the Soviet Union considered Jewish by paternal descent, but found themselves declared not to be Jewish by Halacha. With the influx of religiously uneducated and spiritually hungry Jews from the former Soviet Union about 40 messianic Jewish congregations and groups were founded in Germany by Jewish migrants, who came to faith in Yeshua in the 1990s. These congregations are open also to those who are not Jewish according to Halacha. German believers in Yeshua with an affinity to Israel and the Jews join the immigrant groups.⁷¹

1.2.5.5 Israeli reality - broad definition⁷²

Under the broad common Israeli definition falls everyone, who is a Jew and believes in Yeshua as his or her Messiah. Here, the questions of who is a Jew could be decided according to the orthodox Jewish recognized halachic status, but it seems more fruitful to apply together with the majority of the international Messianic Jewish Movement the reform standard and include also children of a Jewish father, who grew up with a Jewish identity and feel a responsibility as a Jew.

The Messianic Jewish Community in Israel as a whole has no hierarchic leadership and is maybe best described by organic relationships of a big family, which includes Jewish, International Gentile and Arab believers living in Israel. Based on language, location and personal preference people choose a congregation to attend, or opt for small house cell groups or fellowship within the contexts of ministries they are involved in. Hebrew speaking congregations have more Israeli born Jews than English, or Russian or Spanish speaking congregations, though many of the congregations function bi-lingual, and some offer translations for even more languages. Amharic speaking congregations are mostly Jewish, Arabic speaking congregations mostly Arabic. The numerous small congregations of Philipino caregivers are very little connected to the other believers in the land, as the caregivers are usually kept very busy within their jobs and stick to each other, though they have a significant impact in the Jewish families they faithfully serve. A number of them attends services of the Hebrew Catholics. Also, the various Christian catholic and orthodox monasteries throughout the land - mainly at the Holy Sites, as well as the Armenian community in Jerusalem mostly stay by themselves or cater to tourists and are very little connected to the Messianic Jewish community, though a number of Israeli Messianic Jews are licensed tour guides and interact with them as they guide their tours. Of the minority of the Israeli believers, which adhere to a more orthodox Jewish lifestyle most live more or less in hiding as believers in Yeshua while being part of the regular orthodox Jewish community and praying in their neighborhood synagogues.⁷³ Whereas most of the congregations, which Messianic Jews in Israel attend incorporate very few or no traditionally Jewish rituals or liturgical elements in their services, Jewish expressions are nevertheless found within the congregational life through Bible interpretation and a sense of authority to teach and correct (Torah out of Zion), while

⁷¹ See *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 58 (2009) on the topic "Messianic Jews in Germany". Stephanie Pfister "The Present Messianic Jewish Movement in Germany", p. 6-20 in *Mishkan* 58 (2009) and also her dissertation *Messianische Juden in Deutschland: Eine historische und religionssoziologische Untersuchung*, Reihe: Dortmunder Beiträge zu Theologie und Religionspädagogik. Bd. 3, 2. aktualisierte Auflage 2016; Avi Snyder "A Landscape of Change – Jewish Evangelism in Germany", p. 26-32 in *Mishkan* 58 (2009); Vladimir Pikman "The Future of Messianic Congregations in Germany – Challenges, Obstacles and Possibilities", p. 33-38 in *Mishkan* 58 (2009).

⁷² For this sub-section cf. also Richard Harvey: "Towards Messianic Jewish Traditionism in Israel – Between Comfort and Duty?", Paper presented at Helsinki Consultation 2014.

⁷³ To my knowledge there is presently no Messianic Congregation in Israel, which gathers three times daily for prayer in a Minyan.

engagement with Jewish religious traditions occurs on an individual basis and Jewish holiday practice takes place in the family setting. Jewish believers in Yeshua in Israel participate naturally in the general Israeli culture, and frequently use Jewish traditions to teach about Yeshua. Most are first- or second-generation believers in Yeshua.

The Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel offers financial aid, organizes periodic music conferences for new Messianic Jewish worship songs, a yearly national Shavuot gathering and different seminars, publishes a journal and provides a leader's email network. The high degree of independence typical for Israeli believers is seen in numerous individual and family-based ministries.

Several established influential leaders are informally recognized by most as "elders". Many leaders meet regularly for sharing what is on their hearts and prayer.

The two biggest ministry networks are probably Tikkun Ministries with several congregations, emissaries and ministries like Revive Israel and others with an internal leadership structure, and the King of Kings Ministries with their numerous affiliate congregations and ministries and other off-shoots, like the Israel college of the Bible - One for Israel, which have become structurally independent. Another loose congregational network exists among the congregations birthed or nourished by Dutch reform church missions and kindred congregations and ministries. Tents of Mercy has a network of five Russian-speaking congregations in the area of Haifa, which also established the Russian-speaking Haifa Theological Institute. Netivya ministries in Israel serves as a hub for many Messianic Jews searching for a distinct Jewish communal expression of their faith and supports an international network of affiliated congregations. Likewise, First Fruits of Zion with its new study center in Jerusalem has an impact as international teaching ministry for Messianic Jews and Gentiles, who want to connect to their Jewish roots. Also, two congregations connected to the MJRC were established in Israel in the last decade.

Discipleship programs for young Israeli believers are provided by Revive Israel, Lech-Lcha and the Youth ministry Netivah, formal theological training by the Israel College of the Bible, though most go abroad (mainly the USA) for their further theological education.⁷⁴

Organized Outreach is conducted through Media, internet and TV by Shelanu (Tikkun), One for Israel, Jews for Jesus, Chosen People Ministries and others.

Gershon Nerel examined the Jewish identity of Israeli believers in Yeshua according to written declarations of faith.⁷⁵ He observed a focus on "Israeliness" instead of dealing with the question of compatibility with normative Judaism. Thus, the identity is expressed in belonging to the people of Israel, loyalty to the state, biblical Zionism, distinguished service in IDF and being faithful "tax payers". This translates to the affirmation of the national identity as Jewish, whereas regarding faith and salvation their identity is shared universally with believers in Yeshua and the G-d of Israel, i.e. the ecclesia. Except for the biblical Zionism all other elements of this "Israeliness" match the description of any dedicated member of an ethnic group and loyal citizen of his state and fall under the aspect of Jewish according to name, but not according to holiness.

The biblical Zionism includes the notion to be "Light to the nations",⁷⁶ which is picked up as a task by Messianic Jews in Israel. "The law shall go out from Zion"⁷⁷ means for them that the standards and

⁷⁴ I am indebted to David Serner from Caspari Center, who pointed out to me some of the networks, congregations and ministries, with whom I was not familiar.

⁷⁵ Gershon Nerel, "The Identity of Jewish Yeshua-Disciples in the State of Israel According to Their Written Declarations of Faith", p. 61-74 in *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 27 (2013).

⁷⁶ Is 49:6, Acts 13:47, Is 42:6, Is 60:3.

⁷⁷ Is 2:3/Micah 4:2:

teachings for the Ecclesia are expected to come from Israeli believers in Yeshua and not the other way around. With this in mind Gershon Nerel criticizes the formulations of faith, which rely too much on church dogmas. The formulations of faith should be solely scripture based, composed with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and using exclusively scriptural Hebrew terms. He further remarks that Yeshua's Mizvot in the gospels are mostly neglected in the faith declarations of the Ecclesia and they should be part of the identity of Jewish disciples of Yeshua.^{78, 79}

1.2.6 Jew-Gentile distinction in the Ecclesia?⁸⁰

Acts 15 spells out the minimal requirements placed upon Gentiles who have come to believe in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua and the G-d of Israel.⁸¹ Keeping these minimal requirements, they can join the community of believers. On the range of application of the "neither Jew nor Greek" statement⁸² the question is decided whether there can be a bi-lateral ecclesiology of Jewish and Gentile followers of Yeshua, or an ecclesiology which calls for one law, one calling and function for all believers in Yeshua. And this again directly effects the relation of Jewish believers in Yeshua to Torah as a bi-lateral ecclesiology allows for a different reading of certain Pauline statements.

If the passages in the letters of Paul discouraging Jewish Torah observance are addressed only to Gentiles, then it can be concluded that Jews should continue to observe the Torah of Sinai, whereas Gentiles should not try to become Jews. This would mean different sets of rules and different communities.

If, on the other hand, these passages are read to apply to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, there are basically two interpretative options. Either, one has to assume that the obligation to keep the Torah of Sinai for Jews ended with Yeshua's death and resurrection, which inaugurated the Messianic era under the New covenant, such that the Torah of the old covenant is replaced by faith in Yeshua and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Or, one has to interpret them - as the "New Perspective on Paul" (J. Sanders and others) does – to talk about Torah observance as a means to gain salvation, which is rejected by Paul, while this allows for Torah observance as part of an obedient life to maintain the relationship with G-d after being justified by faith in Yeshua.

Tim Hegg from torahresource.com expresses such a position of Torah observance for all in his article "Bilateral ecclesiology is not biblical".^{83, 84} Ariel Ben Lyman HaNaviy with his commentary on the letter to the Galatians, *Exegeting Galatians - a Messianic Jewish Commentary* belongs to the same stream,⁸⁵ and so does Rick Spurlock of bereansonline.org.⁸⁶ There are Gentile groups using common Jewish symbols and expressions, which can easily be mistaken for Messianic Jews. The so called

וְהָלְכוּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים, וְאָמְרוּ לָנוּ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל-ה־ה' וְאֶל-בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, וְיִוְרְנוּ מִדְרָכָיו, וְנִלְכֶה בְּאֲרָחֹתָיו: כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה, וְדָבַר-ה' מִירוּשָׁלַם.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

⁷⁹ For expressions of Israeli Messianic Jewish identity see also Christine Eidsheim: *Negotiating a Messianic Identity: A Study on the Formation of Messianic Identity through Space, Art, and Language in Modern Israel*, Master's thesis in Religion and Society, Oslo University, Faculty of Theology 2019.

⁸⁰ This section was greatly reduced due to the limitations of this thesis. An expanded version is planned with a fuller treatment of the topic.

⁸¹ These minimal requirements are similar to the 7 Noachide laws, which later in history were developed in rabbinic Jewish tradition.

⁸² Gal 3:28. (CJB translates the original 'neither Jew nor Greek' with 'neither Jew nor Gentile')

⁸³ <https://torahresource.com/bilateral-ecclesiology-not-biblical/>, accessed 14.10.2021.

⁸⁴ The Coalition of Torah Observant Messianic Congregations (CTOMC) (<https://www.ctomc.ca/about.php>, accessed 19.8.2021) holds a similar position focusing on the oneness of the Ecclesia. See their "Statement of Faith" at <https://www.ctomc.ca/sof.php>, accessed 19.8.2021

⁸⁵ <http://www.tetzetorah.com/exegeting-galatians>, 2018, accessed 19.8.2021.

⁸⁶ Cf. Rick Spurlock: "The Torah and the Messiah", Torah Family, <http://www.bereansonline.org/studies/MessiahTorah.pdf>, 2004, accessed 19.8.2021.

"One Law One People" doctrine is refuted by most of the Messianic Jewish Movement including its alliances, the IMJA, the MJAA, the IAMJCS, the UMJC, Tikkun and the MJRC. So states the IAMCS position paper *One Law, Two Sticks*: "One Law doctrine is based on the idea that everybody everywhere ought to be keeping the Torah given to the Jews at Sinai. In their view, the law wasn't intended just for Israel, but for everyone. Moreover, neither the coming of Messiah, nor the atonement provided in the New Covenant changes anything in terms of what they see as the universal human need to relate to God through the laws of Moses."^{87, 88}

David Rudolph, alongside Mark Kinzer and others, formulates and defends a bi-lateral ecclesiology in his widely circulated paper "Paul's 'Rule in All the Churches' (1 Cor 7:17-24) and Torah-Defined Ecclesiological Variegation".⁸⁹ He cites Peter Tomson: "There is 'law theology' in Romans and Galatians, but its application is halakhically specific: it has distinct practical implications for Jews and for non-Jews. Both are justified by faith only—*therefore* non-Jews must not start observing the law and Jews must not stop doing so. Such is the message of Paul's 'ecclesiastical rule' in 1 Corinthians (7:17-20)".⁹⁰ In support of such reading he refers also to the "Paul-within-Judaism" scholars Anders Runesson, Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm.^{91, 92}

Very relevant for the ongoing discussion of Jew-Gentile distinction in the Ecclesia is the "Helsinki Consultation for Jewish continuity in the Body of Christ", which recently launched out and held their "First International/Interconfessional Congress of the Jewish Disciples of Jesus"⁹³ and now established the community platform Yachad beYeshua.⁹⁴ Two of my interview partners, Vladimir Pikman and David Neuhaus, are part of the Helsinki consultation from its beginning.

Two others of my interview partners, Dr. Michael Brown and Archbishop Dominiquae Biermann, are active in the diaspora with Jews and Gentiles, are not part of the Helsinki Consultation nor are they at this point part of the Messianic Jewish Congregational Movement in the Diaspora. But their positions in relation to Torah are definitely worth to be considered for this study. Their interview narratives will be part of the expanded version of this thesis.

⁸⁷ IAMCS position paper *One Law, Two Sticks: A Critical Look at the Hebrew Roots Movement*, <https://iamcs.org/about-us/position-papers-resources>, p. 1, accessed 19.8.2021.

⁸⁸ Addressed in this paper are many of the "Hebrew Roots" movement and the "Ephramites" and "Two-House" movements.

⁸⁹ P. 1-24 in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 5-1 (2010).

⁹⁰ Peter J. Tomson, "Halakhah in the New Testament: A Research Overview", p. 204-205 in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, by Reimund Bieringer, Florentino García Martínez, Didier Pollefeyt and Peter J. Tomson (eds), SJSJ 136, Brill, Leiden 2010, quoted by D. Rudolph "Paul's 'Rule in all the Churches'", p. 3 footnote 7.

⁹¹ See Anders Runesson: "Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I," in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, by Bengt Holmberg (ed), Mohr-Siebeck, Tübingen 2008, p. 80-81; Mark D. Nanos: "Paul and Judaism", p. 54 in *Codex Pauli*, Società San Paolo, Rome 2009; Magnus Zetterholm: "Paul and the Missing Messiah," p. 49-50 in *The Messiah in Early Judaism and Christianity*, by Magnus Zetterholm (ed), Fortress, Minneapolis-MN 2007. All references stem from David Rudolph's footnote 7, p. 3 in "Paul's 'Rule in all the Churches'".

⁹² Cf. also David J. Rudolph "Was Paul Championing a New Freedom from—or End to—Jewish Law?", p. 33-50 in *Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Essays on the Relationship between Christianity and Judaism* by Gerald R. McDermott (ed), Lexham Press, Bellingham-WA 2021.

⁹³ It took place in Dallas, Texas - August 27-30, 2018.

⁹⁴ <https://www.yachad-beyeshua.org/>, accessed 19.8.2021.

2 VENUES FOR DISCUSSION

For most Messianic Jews the initial and primary discussion about their understanding and relation to Torah takes place in informal, real life situations in the context of discipleship or in a family setting, with close personal friends, in a congregational setting, in youth or student ministries, or while working together in joint projects and ministries.

Facilitating discussion of theological and practical issues as Jewish followers of Yeshua is also one of the purposes of the national and international Messianic Jewish alliances. The most significant among the national alliances might be the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA), the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel (MJAI) and the British Messianic Jewish Alliance. In 2001 the MJAI conducted during its bi-annual gathering a seminar with the title "Our Jewish Identity in the Messiah Yeshua", and the contributions - which were subsequently published in the journal of the alliance, deal with the connection of Jewish identity and Torah. Of the international alliances and networks the following are being taken into consideration for this research: IMJA - International Messianic Jewish Alliance, IAMCS- International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues, UMJC - Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, MJRC - Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council, CTOMC - Coalition of Torah Observant Messianic Congregations, Yachad BeYeshua and the Hebraic Christian Global Community, and further the Tikkun network, the Chosen People Ministries network, Jews for Jesus and First Fruits of Zion (FFoZ).⁹⁵

Beyond these alliances and networks, discussion on an international leadership level was facilitated in the last two decades through three different initiatives.

"Hashivenu", an initiative of self-affiliated people supporting its goals, without formal membership or organizational structure, held from 1999-2017 the annually Hashivenu Forum. Some of the papers presented at the forum are published on its website.⁹⁶ Among the annual topics relevant for our inquiry are "Messianic Judaism and Jewish Tradition" (2003), "Messianic Jewish Hermeneutics" (2001), "Yeshua and Jewish Life" (2008), "Shaping a Messianic Jewish moral vision" (2013) and the 2004/2005 topics on redemption.

The "Boroughpark Symposium" aims to be a discussion forum at the encounter of the Jewish and Evangelical Christian worlds. Its steering committee is comprised of Messianic Jews, the papers presented at the Symposium stem mainly from Messianic Jewish leaders. So far there have been five symposiums, in 2007, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2020. Papers have been published as collections in book format. The 2012 symposium had the topic: "The role of Torah and of Jewish tradition in the Messianic Jewish community" and "Our relationship as Messianic Jews with the wider Jewish community."

The "Helsinki consultation for Jewish continuity in the Body of Christ" is comprised of a small number of committed Jewish leaders across the whole spectrum of the Christian and Messianic Jewish world. It was founded in 2010 and met since then until 2017 mostly annually for discussion. In 2018 it ventured out to hold the "First International/Interconfessional Congress of Jewish Disciples of Jesus" and in 2019 subsequently launched "Yachad beYeshua" as an international community of Jewish followers of Yeshua. Most papers of the Helsinki consultation are published on the

⁹⁵ The AMC- Association of Messianic Congregations, which refer their people to Arnold Fruchtenbaum for teaching and training, seem to have become only a loose ideological association, while waiting for a formation of a new association under a new leadership. See <http://www.messianicassociation.org/membership.htm>, accessed 23.5.2021.

⁹⁶ <http://hashivenu.org/forum-papers/>, accessed 15.2.2021.

consultations' website.⁹⁷ Relevant for the relation to Torah are the following topics: "Am Israel - our people" (2011), "Jewish Believers in Yeshua and the Torah" (2012), "Fulfilling the Torah in Jesus Christ" (2013) and "Authority, freedom and tradition in the life of Jewish disciples of Yeshua" (2014). A fourth international think tank initiative called "Towards Jerusalem Council II" is dedicated to repentance and reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile segments of the Church and serves as a vehicle to repair the breach and advocate Messianic Jewish perspectives.

Discussions and research are conducted on an ongoing regular basis in the different theological institutes: the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute founded by the Hashivenu initiative, the Messianic Jewish Studies Program at Kings University, the Israel College of the Bible (One for Israel), the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University (in Partnership with Chosen People ministries), the Tyndale Biblical Institute with Arnold Fruchtenbaum, the Messianic Life Institute (an online school established by Tikun, lead for a season by Dr. Michael Brown), the Gateway center for Israel (formerly Messianic Jewish Biblical Institute), the St. Petersburg (FL-USA) Seminary with Netzer David International Yeshiva, the Torah Resource Institute (with Tim Hegg and Ariel Berkowitz), the New School for Jewish Studies (with Carl Kinbar, Paul L. Saal and Tony Eaton) and more.

Another venue for discussion are journals. Among the Messianic Jewish journals for community intern discussion are to name: *Kesher - A Journal of Messianic Judaism* (Messianic Jewish Theological Institute), *Mishkan* (Caspari Center), *Zot Habrit* (MJAI), *Messiah Journal* (FFOZ), *Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies* (Charles L. Feinberg Center - Biola University - New 2015 - 1st volume), *Havurah* (Jews for Jesus), *Messianic Times* and *Israel Today* (newspapers), *Restore!* (Hebraic Christian Global Community), *Teachings from Zion* (Netivya).

But discussion of Messianic Jewish positions is also taking place in broader contexts. Two journals in the field of Jewish-Christian relations, the *Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) Bulletin* and *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* carry potentially relevant articles by Messianic Jewish scholars. Other contributions to the discussion are found in journals in the field of Jewish studies, in various different Christian journals, in journals on religion and theology and even in an anthropological journal.

Many ministries send out periodic teaching newsletters, produce radio and TV broadcasts, internet sites, or offer nowadays Zoom study and discussion sessions. A public, video recorded, live debate on the oral Torah between the Messianic Jew Dr. Eitan Bar and the orthodox Rabbi Chaim Sheitrit was hailed by One for Israel, to which Dr. Eitan Bar belongs, as a historic event. And some sit down and write and publish books.

⁹⁷ <http://helsinkiconsultation.squarespace.com/helsinki-consultation/>, accessed 15.2.2021.

3 PUBLISHED POSITIONS ON TORAH AND COMPREHENSIVE STUDIES

Many congregations and ministries, especially in Israel, have not only brief statements of faith on their websites, but also several articles, podcasts or videos, which explain their understanding, relation and practice of Torah.⁹⁸ Moreover, the literary inclined pioneering leaders produced books explaining their reasonings and convictions, helping along seekers and providing their followers with resources and tools.⁹⁹ Beyond these individual monographies of Messianic Jewish practitioners and of course the published conference papers on the topic, there are some publications, which try to give an overview over the diversity of positions. As a comprehensive work, Richard Harvey's doctoral dissertation *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology - A Constructive Approach*¹⁰⁰ laid the groundwork for further work and was widely read and discussed within the movement. Directly relevant for our topic are his typology¹⁰¹ and the sections "Torah in Theory" and "Torah in Practice" of his dissertation. Richard Harvey describes well eight different theological positions, each of them named after influential leaders propagating the respective position. Three he groups under the heading "Torah-negative" and five under the heading "Torah-positive", which is a bit misleading, as it does not take into account the broad range and diversity of usage of the term Torah.¹⁰² He also introduces the "abandon, adapt, adopt, accept" scale in regard to traditional rabbinic Torah observance.¹⁰³ Hanna Ruck's dissertation *Messianische Juden: Geschichte und Theologie der Bewegung in Israel*¹⁰⁴ contains some contemporary Israeli voices of Messianic Jewish leaders on the topic of Torah, but does not give a comprehensive picture of the different positions and understandings on Torah in the worldwide Messianic Jewish Movement today. A helpful discussion of the diversity of relations to Torah found in North America in our time offers Elliot Klayman in "The Diversity of Ideas and Torah Praxes Today Within the Messianic Jewish Movement".¹⁰⁵ To mention is also Richard A. Robinson, who introduces the more useful categories of *restorationists*, meaning that its adherents aim to restore a first-century form of observance, also called by some "biblical Judaism", and *traditionalists*, who appreciate and adhere to rabbinic traditions developed throughout the Jewish history of the

⁹⁸ As examples may serve the congregation Jerusalem Assembly - Beit Geula in Jerusalem under the leadership of Meno Kalisher (<https://www.yeshua.co.il>), or the "One for Israel" outreach ministry connected to the ICB (<https://www.oneforisrael.org/bible-based-teaching-from-israel/>), or "Jews for Jesus" (<https://jewsforjesus.org>), or Chaim Goldmann's "Repairing the Breach" (<http://www.repairingthebreach.global/>), or "Bereans online" with Rick Spurlock (<http://www.bereansonline.org>). See the bibliography for the full bibliographic references.

⁹⁹ An incomplete list of such published pioneers are: David Stern, Dan Juster, David Rudolph, Michael Rudolph with Dan Juster, Stuart Dauermann, Michael Brown, Seth Postell & Eitan Bar & Erez Soref, Eitan Bar & Golan Brosch, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Dominiquae Biermann, Arye Powlison, Russell Resnik, John Fisher, Barney Kasdan, David Friedman (I had tried to get in touch with him for an interview, until seeing the news recently that he just passed away from Corona), Mark Kinzer, Jennifer Rosner & Josh Lessard, Ariel Ben-Lyman HaNaviy, Ariel & D'vorah Berkovitz. For the full bibliographic references see the bibliography.

¹⁰⁰ University of Wales 2007.

¹⁰¹ "A Typology of Messianic Jewish Theology", p. 11-23 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 57 (2008).

¹⁰² Richard Harvey seems to use the term Torah here with the meaning of Torah observance according to the mainstream orthodox Jewish rabbinical interpretations.

¹⁰³ See *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*, "Torah in Theory", section 4.4. Conclusion.

¹⁰⁴ Reihe: Neukirchener Theologie, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Published in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 73 (2015), p. 14-30.

past 2000 years.¹⁰⁶ The leading Messianic Jewish theologian Mark Kinzer belongs to the latter, such that the traditionalists are also called "Kinzerians" after him. But this distinction too is problematic, as Joshua Brumbach argues,¹⁰⁷ because a "biblical Judaism" without an ongoing tradition of the meaning and application of the biblical commandments is not conceivable. Even the biblical text and the literal meaning of its words would not be known without tradition.

Benjamin J. Snyder as a Gentile outsider tries to create an overview over the Modern Messianic Jewish Movement using the data provided by Richard Harvey in the chapters "Torah in Theory" and "Torah in Practice" of *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology*. His tables on the positions to Torah (abandon, adapt, adopt, accept), Shabbat, Kashrut and Passover observances give a quite comprehensive picture at one glance.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ See "Jewish Believers and Their 'Roots': Continuity or Discontinuity?", p. 167-185 (esp. p. 167f.) in *Chosen to Follow: Jewish Believers through History and Today* by Knut H. Hoyland & Jakob W. Nielsen (eds), Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem 2012.

¹⁰⁷ See Joshua Brumbach: "Helpful Points to Consider: The Role of Torah and Jewish Tradition in the Messianic Jewish Community.", p. 51-64 in *The Borough Park Papers: Symposium III: How Jewish Should the Messianic Jewish Community Be? October 22-24, 2012*, Messianic Jewish Publishers, Clarksville-MD 2013.

¹⁰⁸ "From Jerusalem to Jerusalem: Essential Contours of the Modern Messianic Movement", p. 83-108 in *The Asbury Journal* 71/1 (2016). The tables are on pages 92-95.

4 TERMINOLOGY - THE DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF TORAH

"Torah" in the Jewish world is a term loaded with associations. Just as there is a saying that Shabbat preserves the Jewish people, it might also be said that Torah is credited with the survival of the people of Israel as a distinguished nation for 2000 years in the diaspora. Thus, it is part of the distinguished Jewish inheritance and tradition and by that linked to Jewish identity. From a theological point of view though it easily has a negative charge for Messianic Jews as it is claimed by religious non-Messianic Jews as the main reason for rejecting Messianic beliefs and for rejecting a Messianic Jew as a Jew.

In the history of Christian theology, the term "Torah" was in general not used, except for more recent times. Instead, the term "law" as opposed to "grace" was used and identified with the 5 books of Moses, which have retained historical importance, but have lost their importance as practical living instruction except for those portions explicitly restated and reinforced by Yeshua in the Gospels. The study, teaching and transmission of the 5 books of Moses was welcomed as long as the focus would be to point to Yeshua and prove and strengthen his claims as the promised Messiah, but living by the "law" was associated with rejecting Yeshua and being under a curse.

For the Messianic Jewish Movement finding a healthy approach to Torah is vital. But due to the historical, theological and emotional background it is a challenging task. Torah is used with so many different meanings, and many of them are subject to hearty disputes. Therefore, in order to enable fruitful discussion, a distinction of these different meanings seems necessary. I will try to offer a separate term for each one of them and will use these terms throughout the following chapters.

The **broadest meaning** of Torah would render it as "**instruction/teaching**", similar to the plural Hebrew term הוראות from the same root, or as "doctrine", which in the Hebrew linguistic usage would then usually be qualified by another noun as a compound term, like for example תורת היחסות. In the context of theological discussions Torah in this broad meaning is generally used to mean the "**instructions of G-d**".

Everyone within the Messianic Jewish movement would affirm belief in Torah in this broad meaning. What exactly is part of the "instruction of G-d" is subject to debate. Also, what of the instructions is valid in our time and ought to be applied today is a matter of dispute.

In regard to a covenant with G-d, Torah can be understood to signify G-d's **terms of the covenant**.

The **Torah of Moses** is usually understood in this way to mean the terms of the covenant relationship established at Mount Sinai.

Again, all Messianic Jews would agree to be in a covenant with G-d. Debated is whether it is a new, or renewed covenant, or several covenants side by side or overlapping each other.

Torah of Messiah, a term used in Galatians 6:2 and possibly in a derivation in 1 Corinthians 9:21, would be a term to denote the new covenant terms and the question is how the Torah of Moses and the Torah of Messiah relate to each other.

The promised new or renewed covenant in Jer 31 includes the **writing of the Torah in the heart**.

What this Torah is understood to be and what the implications of it being written in the heart are is to be further discussed.

The **five books of Moses**, which in a traditionally Jewish setting are being read week by week from professionally handwritten Torah scrolls, are another meaning of the term Torah. In rabbinic Judaism they are also called more specifically the **written Torah**. Several Messianic Jewish congregations, especially in the diaspora, own Torah scrolls and read portions of them in their weekly services. At times the term (written) Torah is expanded to mean all of the Hebrew Bible, the **Tanach**. In Messianic circles it might also refer to all of the **biblical scriptures**, including the "New Testament".

Within the Messianic Jewish Movement, the biblical scriptures are being studied carefully and interpreted usually under consideration of other relevant scriptural passages. Beyond that, for the large majority of adherents there is no binding extra-biblical interpretive tradition.

In regard to historical criticism of the Bible, which is taught in some Christian and non-orthodox Jewish theological institutions, Messianic Jews generally share the approach of fundamental Christians and orthodox Jews and trust the wording of the five books of Moses as being divinely inspired and authoritative. The same can be said for all of the canonical scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, and also of the canonical scriptures of the "New Testament". Frequently, attempts are being made to recover an Hebrew or Aramaic mindset behind the Greek "New Testament" scriptures and to correct conceived misunderstandings in common gentile Christian interpretations.

In comparison to mainstream orthodox Jews, many Messianic Jews are more familiar with the prophetic books of the Tanach in their entirety, and not just with the Haftarah Portions, which are read in a traditionally Jewish Shabbat service after the weekly Torah portion from the five books of Moses. Many Messianic Jewish songs are based on passages from the Psalms and from the prophetic books of the Tanach.

Within Rabbinic Judaism¹⁰⁹ the Torah of Moses is comprised by the written Torah and by the **oral Torah**, whose authority and legitimization is deduced from a couple of passages of the written Torah and established by majority acceptance. It is the **oral tradition of the Prushim**, the only stream of 2nd temple period Judaism, which survived in Jewish history and became the mainstream for the people of Israel. This oral tradition was codified and written down in stages and is called today **Sifrut Chazal**. It contains Midrashim, Megilat Taanit, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, halachic works and other writings of leading Jewish Sages throughout the ages.

In usual Hebrew language, Torah does not equal law. Laws are one aspect or component of Torah, and depending on the perspective and approach, it might be the most important aspect of Torah, or not. The **commandments of the Torah**, the מצוות, we may call **laws**,¹¹⁰ because they are given as divine constitution and terms of the covenant between G-d and men or G-d and Israel, and the book containing them we might call the book of law. But everyone would agree that a Torah scroll is much more than a dry law book.

What does someone implicitly say by translating Torah with law and oral Torah with oral law? The person may primarily think about the commandments contained in the Torah. Semantically however, the term Torah is relational and expresses the teaching and

¹⁰⁹ Rabbinic Judaism is used commonly in distinction from Messianic Judaism or 2nd temple period Judaism and refers to the reshaped Judaism after the loss of the second temple based on the decisions of the Great Assembly at Yavne and the subsequently following codifications of the oral Torah.

¹¹⁰ Traditionally, the 613 מצוות are distinguished into three different groups: מצוות, חוקים and משפטים, commandments, statutes and judgments, which together comprise the law.

instruction, whereas law commonly signifies a static, impersonal, given authority standing on its own.

The rulings governing the practical implementation of the Torah commandments in daily life are usually called **Halacha**.

Orthodox Jewish Halacha is based on the oral Torah. Within the halachic system the oral Torah is in principle subordinate to the written Torah, but the interpretation of the written Torah is bound to the oral Torah. Some of the oral Torah is said to be oral tradition going back to Mount Sinai. It is governed by a backwards hierarchy of the generations, such that under normal circumstances a later generation cannot disagree with previous generations, who were time wise closer to the revelation of Mount Sinai. It is believed that every generation loses knowledge of G-d and holiness, such that there is a decline from generation to generation. Halacha is to be distinguished from Minhagim, customs developed over time, which may vary from community to community.

The oral Torah with its resulting Halacha contains elements aimed at keeping followers of Yeshua out of the Jewish communities and keeping the faithful Jews as far as possible away from considering belief in Yeshua.

Messianic Jews usually share with other Jewish religious communities an awareness of a double responsibility towards Torah. "**Keeping Torah**" means on one hand to study, teach and transmit it to the next generation to preserve the witness of the revelation of G-d in universal and national history. I will call it to **preserve the knowledge of Torah**.

Presumably, all Messianic Jews would feel a responsibility to preserve the knowledge of the biblical scriptures and to pass on what they understand to be the teachings and instructions relevant for their time and for the generations to come. The Israeli Bible-society, Bible translation projects and Messianic Jewish study centers, printing and publishing houses are evidence of it. There is also some interest in research about lost and rediscovered non-canonical writings, especially from the 2nd temple period and the first centuries of the emerging community of followers of Yeshua. Few would study and teach the rabbinic oral Torah or parts of it, but the Sifrut Chazal serve as reference works and embody the national religious and cultural heritage and would be kept available in libraries.

On the other hand, "**Keeping Torah**" means to put its instructions into practice to live according to the will of G-d. I will call it to **live Torah observant**.

Rabbinic Judaism counts 613 commandments contained in the written Torah in the five books of Moses, and in addition 7 positive rabbinic commandments and further rabbinic decrees, which became part of the orthodox Jewish Halacha. However, the majority of the 613 commandments of the written Torah cannot be performed under present conditions lacking a Sanhedrin, a functional temple, operating priesthood and Levitical service. The orthodox Jewish Halacha aims to preserve something of those commandments, which cannot be observed, through rabbinic decrees. Some Messianic Jews basically ascribe to orthodox Jewish Halacha, whereas others aim for Torah observance of the 613 commandments according to their own understanding and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Again others stress not to be bound by the covenant of Sinai any longer after Yeshua fulfilled it, kept its terms perfectly and inaugurated a new covenant. Thus, some messianic Jews, who

would vehemently oppose a Torah observant lifestyle within orthodox rabbinic parameters, would still say that the Torah of Messiah is to be observed.

These two responsibilities - to study to preserve and to observe - are interrelated.

For Messianic Jews their responsibility towards Torah is linked to their identity as Jews and disciples of Yeshua.

Another term showing up frequently in the biblical scriptures instead of Torah is "word" or "**words**" in the connection of "**keeping My/His/G-d's/Yeshua's words.**" These "words" constitute the content of the instructions, commandments, teachings and could be understood synonymous to Torah.¹¹¹

Relevant within the Messianic Jewish context is further the understanding expressed at the beginning of the Gospel of John of Yeshua being the Word of G-d, which became flesh.

The pre-existence of the Word before the creation of the world corresponds to the interpretation of Prov 8:22 found in the Sifrut Chazal of the pre-existence of the Torah as a kind of blue-print for the creation of the world.¹¹² The same sources also state the pre-existence of the name of Messiah derived from Ps 72:17.¹¹³ This again connects to Jn 17:11f. Further, Pesiqta Rabbati says about the Messiah: "You find that at the beginning of the creation of the world King Messiah was born [and] that he emerged in the thought [of God] even before the world was created..."¹¹⁴ Similarly it is expressed already in 1 Enoch 48:2-6.¹¹⁵

Thus, **Yeshua** might be understood as the **living Torah**, or as the **human embodiment of Torah**, the expression and fulfillment of the will of G-d.¹¹⁶ Yeshua is also portrait in the sermon on the mount

¹¹¹ Boris Balter & Lisa Loden in "Paradox of Torah and Jewish Presence in the Church", a paper presented at the Helsinki Consultation 2012 mention Philo: "Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.E. - 50 C.E.) identified Logos, the Word, with Torah." P. 8, footnote 4.

¹¹² Cf. Ariel Segal HaLevi: "לפני בריאת העולם", <http://tora.us.fm/tnk1/klli/mdrjim/prehistory.html>, accessed 14.10.2021.

מדרש משלי ח' כ"ב, תלמוד בבלי פסחים נ"ד, בראשית רבה א' ד.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Pesiqta Rabbati 152a, Greater Chapter, by M. Friedmann (ed), p. 152b.

¹¹⁵ 1 Enoch 48:2-6 (Charles): "In that hour was this Son of man invoked before the Lord of spirits, and his name in the presence of the Ancient of days. Before the sun and the signs were created, before the stars of heaven were formed, his name was invoked in the presence of the Lord of spirits. A support shall he be for the righteous and the holy to lean upon, without falling; and he shall be the light of nations. He shall be the hope of those whose hearts are troubled. All, who dwell on earth, shall fall down and worship before him; shall bless and glorify him, and sing praises to the name of the Lord of spirits. Therefore the Elect and the Concealed One existed in his presence, before the world was created, and forever. In his presence [he existed], and has revealed to the saints and to the righteous the wisdom of the Lord of spirits; for he has preserved the lot of the righteous, because they have hated and rejected this world of iniquity, and have detested all its works and ways, in the name of the Lord of spirits."

¹¹⁶ The UMJC "Statement on the Identity of Yeshua" from November 12, 2003 states that Yeshua is "the incarnation of the Divine Word through Whom the world was made, and of the Divine Glory through Whom God revealed Himself to Israel and acted in their midst. He is the living Torah, expressing perfectly in His example and teaching the Divine purpose for human life." (cited by David Rudolph in his introduction to *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* by David Rudolph & Yoel Willitts (eds), Zondervan, Grand Rapids-MI 2013, p. 16 footnote 13). See also the paper presented at the Helsinki Consultation 2012 by Boris Balter & Lisa Loden "Paradox of Torah and Jewish Presence in Church", which presents such a Christocentric approach to Torah. They quote W.D. Davies "Torah in the Messianic Age", Philadelphia, Society of Biblical Literature 1952, p. 93: "Although Paul regards the words of Jesus as the basis of a kind of Christian halakah (the entire collection of Jewish law), it is Christ Himself in His person, not only or chiefly in His words, who constitutes the New Torah; and so too in the Fourth Gospel the New Torah is not only

(Mt 5-7) as the giver and interpreter of the Torah, and some draw a parallel between the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai to Moshe, and Yeshua's Torah teaching on the mountain.

Kabalistic thought on some level equates the voice of G-d and the Wisdom of G-d with G-d,¹¹⁷ just like it is done with the word (Greek: *logos*) in the first verses of the Gospel of John.¹¹⁸ Moreover, just as the Zohar says that the nation of Israel, Torah and G-d are one,¹¹⁹ so Yeshua says and prays in John 17 that He and the Father and His disciples are one.¹²⁰

4.1 DISTINCTION BETWEEN JEWISH TRADITION AND TORAH

The term Torah carries the notion of a religious duty, whereas Jewish tradition might be seen as a national cultural inheritance without an obligatory religious charge.

In Rabbinic Judaism the distinction between *Minhag* and *Halacha* designates the former as culture¹²¹ and the latter as religious obligatory duty. But not all of Jewish tradition is of practical nature and can be classified as *Minhag* or *Halacha* respectively. Jewish tradition also contains Jewish history, Jewish thought, stories, *Midrashim*, intellectual skills, educational skills, survival skills etc.. This all can be included in the realm of oral Torah in the sense of oral instruction passed from generation to generation. Whether the term "Jewish tradition" or "Torah" is used may depend on the understanding of the Jewish identity as a national or/and religious identity. A national Jewish

epitomized in the commandment of agape which finds its norm in the love of Christ for His own and in the love of God for Christ, but is realized also in the Person of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, i.e. the personalized Torah who is set over against Moses ... those in the Early Church ... saw their Torah in Jesus Himself, as well as in His words ...," quoted according to Boris Balter & Lisa Loden, *ibid*, p. 8, footnote 4. Cf. also the paper of Vladimir Pikman "Living Torah" presented at the Helsinki Consultation 2013.

¹¹⁷ The Spirit of G-d, the Voice of G-d, the Wisdom of G-d – these are seen as emanations of G-d, which are part of the compound unity of the divine *Sefirot*. See also the article "Jesus and the mysteries of Kabbalah" published by Jews for Jesus (<https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v18-n02/jesus-and-the-mysteries-of-kabbalah>, accessed 14.7.21), which points at Metatron: "Metatron is also spoken of as 'the voice of God' in a reference of *Midrash Tehillim* to the passage penned by King David: 'The voice of the Lord was over the waters' (Psalm 29:3). Keeping in mind that Metatron is held by kabbalists to be the embodiment of the *Shekhinah*, note the following observation by Chabad founder Rabbi Zalman: '[It] has been stated in the *Zohar* and *Etz Chayim*, that the *Shechinah*... is called the "word of God"... as in the case of human beings, by way of example, speech reveals to the hearers the speaker's secret and hidden thought.'"

¹¹⁸ Jn 1:1-4 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with G-d, and the Word was G-d. He was with G-d in the beginning. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing made had being. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind." (CJB)

Jn 1:14 "The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his *Sh'khinah*, the *Sh'khinah* of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." (CJB)

¹¹⁹ Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburg of Kfar Chabad writes on his website Gal Einai in the article on "True Monotheism", section "The Jewish Three that are One" (<https://www.inner.org/monothei/mono3.htm>, accessed 14.7.21): "The *Zohar* states: 'Israel, the Torah and the Holy One Blessed Be He are One.' [...] The Torah is the wisdom and spirit of God, of which is said: 'He and His wisdom are One.' [...] We are further taught in the *Zohar* that the Torah serves to link the level of the created consciousness of Israel to God. The Torah is thus an "intermediate" between the essential "two," the Father and the son [the people of Israel] (as explained in Kabbalah and *Chassidut*, the son is born from the "drop" of the wisdom of the Father)."

¹²⁰ John 17:20-23 "I pray not only for these, but also for those who will trust in me because of their word, that they may all be one. Just as you, Father, are united with me and I with you, I pray that they may be united with us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory which you have given to me, I have given to them; so that they may be one, just as we are one -- I united with them and you with me, so that they may be completely one, and the world thus realize that you sent me, and that you have loved them just as you have loved me." (CJB) See also the whole chapter of John 17.

¹²¹ Within the halachic system there is also a duty to perpetuate *Minhagim*, if they are in line with *Halacha*.

identity, which is conceived as detached from a religious identity focusses on a combination of physical descent and culture and includes Jewish tradition as culture. On the other hand, a national Jewish identity, which is conceived as established with the covenant and giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, feeds on the Torah, which is passed down the generations forming the culture, and all physical descendants are obligated to it. The orthodox Jewish position anchors all oral Torah in a command of the written Torah to follow the leaders of the generation. Those Messianic Jews, who oppose the notion of the oral Torah made obligatory through the written Torah, may use Torah only for the written Torah or the canonical scriptures and refer to all of the oral Torah as Jewish tradition, rendering it historically and culturally interesting and of value, but in no way obligatory.

5 FIELD STUDY

5.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD

The Messianic Jewish Movement is a movement of pioneers now in its second, third, fourth or even fifth generation, paving the ground for more to follow. Its existence changes the status quo of its environment, while the movement grows and matures with the creation of its own institutions.

The Messianic Jewish Movement as a whole and the Jewish believers in Yeshua as individuals exist in a contested space between three hostile bodies: a potentially anti-Semitic Church, for whom Jewish identity has no value, the mainstream Jewish communities and the present jurisdiction of the state of Israel, which deny the possibility to believe in Yeshua and remain faithful to the national covenant of Israel with the G-d of Israel, and the members of post-holocaust Jewish-Christian dialogue based on the proposition that one respects the other as is and the boundaries are uphold, i.e. Yeshua is for Gentiles and not for Jews and Torah is for Jews and not for Gentiles. The levels of opposition and persecution to be endured differ from place to place and from person to person.

At the same time, they are loved, admired, looked at with curiosity and supported and sought out as teachers and agents of reconciliation ushering in the end times. Great expectations to change history are placed in this movement by Bible-believing Christians. The sincere genuine faith of the law-abiding faithful citizens serving in elite units in the army is appreciated by many in the secular Israeli society. Loyalty to Israel and the Jewish people and support of Jewish causes is valued in Jewish communities abroad. And the token Messianic Jew, who is willing to forgive the Christians and build lasting friendships with them and also invests in deep friendships with Palestinian Arabic Christians gives hope to those seeking peace and reconciliation. As of today, whereas support in form of prayer and donations by Bible-believing Christians is appreciated, most Messianic Jewish congregations, networks and institutions as well as the individual Messianic Jews are not dependent on it.

5.2 PREVIOUS FIELD STUDIES

Field study through surveys or interviews is a common tool in social sciences, and there have been done anthropological, ethnographical and psychological field studies about Messianic Jews, including extensive surveys of congregations and congregational members,¹²² but in this study I am not primarily interested in descriptions of congregations or the psychology of congregational members, but in theologically reflected leadership positions and positions of multipliers. To understand the background of these positions the social science aspects play an important role and are considered

¹²² A few examples among others are: Keri Zelson Warshawsky: *Returning To Their Own Borders - A Social anthropological Study of Contemporary Messianic Jewish Identity in Israel*, PhD dissertation 2008, available through messianicstudies.com; John Christopher Dulin: *Messianic Judaism as a mode of fundamentalist authenticity: grammar of authenticity through ethnography of a contested identity*, Dissertation at University of California - San Diego 2010; William Matthew Anderson: *American Messianic Jewish Identity Development - A grounded theory study*, PhD Dissertation in Counseling Psychology, Kansas City-MO 2017; Jonathan Allen: *A Profile of Jewish Believers in the UK Church*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene-OR 2018; Jennifer Kaplan: *The Ethiopian Messianic Jewish Movement of Israel: an evaluative study for growth and sustainability*, PhD dissertation, 2015, Proquest no. 3742194; A. Barron & B. Jamison: "A Profile of North American Messianic Jews", p. 37-73 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 73 (2015); Kai Kjær-Hansen & Bodil F. Skjøtt: *Facts and Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel*, Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem 1999, and the forthcoming new edition of this study conducted by Caspari Center; Mitch Glaser, "How Many Jewish Believers in Yeshua are there in the World Today?", Paper presented at Messianic Leaders Roundtable November 12-14, 2018 Phoenix-ZA, published on academia.com. For more studies see <https://www.messianicstudies.com/theses.html>.

as factors, but the main focus is on collecting and understanding the relations to Torah and the theological positions in regard to it.

I am aware of three field studies in the theological field, which have been conducted in recent years and include the topic of Torah.¹²³ Starting with Richard Harvey's dissertation,¹²⁴ whose work is used by those after him, Richard as an insider is personally familiar with proponents of all different strands within Messianic Judaism and with all the other kinds of Jewish Believers in Yeshua beyond the narrow definition of Messianic Judaism, and communicated with many of them for his dissertation to correctly present their positions. Hanna Rucks, not a Messianic Jew herself, interviewed for her dissertation¹²⁵ Messianic Jewish leaders in Israel in order to present their theological positions, and Jennifer Nyström,¹²⁶ also an outsider to the field, conducted her empirical Bible-reading interviews on Rom 11 with Messianic Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Both, Hanna Rucks and Jennifer Nyström paved the way for theological field study among Messianic Jews through qualitative research interviews, and I have greatly benefitted from their methodological reflections and insights.¹²⁷

5.3 INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

As my aim is not statistics, but in depth understanding, I opted for a limited number of qualitative research interviews, for which I had prepared a sheet with interview questions.

5.3.1 Position of the researcher

Hanna Rucks points out that the interviewer does not have to be neutral, - which would be an unrealistic assumption anyways. Rather, one should be aware that answers might differ depending on the purpose of the interview and the identity of the interviewer.¹²⁸

Tamir Erez described well the different implications of the tensions of the field, which a researcher of Messianic Jews in Israel has to face.¹²⁹ It is essential to establish trust, and, if possible, a common interest. Through its existence in a contested space, a notion of unwanted exposure easily arises and vulnerabilities and privacy need to be protected. Tamir Erez moreover recounts how his research

¹²³ In the theological field an interesting field study surveying leaders was done by Elizabeth Ames on *Messianic Jewish Liturgical Practices* for her Senior Honors Thesis at Liberty University 2014. It is valuable for this study for its methodology and reflections and for the underlying issues of identity. But it only marginally deals with the topic of Torah as part of liturgical Torah services. It would be interesting to examine how the different understandings and relations to Torah play out in congregational liturgies.

¹²⁴ *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology – A Constructive Approach*, University of Wales 2007, published in the series 'Studies in Messianic Jewish theology' by Paternoster Press 2009.

¹²⁵ *Messianische Juden: Geschichte und Theologie der Bewegung in Israel*, Technische Universität Dortmund 2013, published in the series 'Neukirchener Theologie' by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2014.

¹²⁶ During my work on this thesis she was still working on her dissertation titled *Reading Romans, Constructing Paul(s) – A Conversation between Messianic Jews in Jerusalem and Paul within Judaism Scholars* at Lund University and kindly let me read her manuscript. It is just now published in its 1st edition by Media-Tryck, Lund University 2021.

¹²⁷ Elliot Klayman's article "The Diversity of Ideas and Torah Praxes Today Within the Messianic Jewish Movement", p. 14-30 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 73 (2015) is not a formal field study. Rather, he relies on other field studies and on his personal familiarity with the field, which allows him to give overviews without conducting a formal field study.

¹²⁸ Hanna Rucks: *Messianische Juden: Geschichte und Theologie der Bewegung in Israel*, p. 45ff.

¹²⁹ Tamir Erez: "Mission not accomplished - Negotiating power relations and vulnerability among Messianic Jews in Israel", p. 40-58 in *Ethnographic encounters in Israel* by Fran Markowitz (ed.), Indiana University Press 2013.

objects were more than willing to be welcoming and share their "truth" with true seekers, but would regard it a waste of time and potentially harmful to accommodate someone, who is only interested in intellectual research while being critical of their foundational beliefs. For them, the researcher, once let in, becomes an object to be won over. Tamir Erez's research terminated by him being asked to leave.

Hanna Rucks suggests that the same faith-background and epistemological interest and the role of a Co-expert might be helpful, and also to present the interview context to the "experts" before the interview, in order to trigger a connection and build trust by putting one's own cards on the table. Connecting, while at the same time maintaining a personal distance is a tricky thing. This, Jennifer Nyström experienced as well. She describes a scene of finding herself in a for her uncomfortable position of being asked to actively participate in a prayer meeting.¹³⁰

Applying these insights to my personal situation I found that on one hand, it was not difficult to build trust through telling some about myself and my own story. I could freely use the same insider-language, could display my familiarity with common people and places as well as with the struggles and questions, challenges and problems in the different areas, socially, theologically, historically, etc.. Also, after trust had been established, I could happily present the context of my research in a Jewish non-messianic University setting as an asset of common interest, i.e. to faithfully present the case of Messianic Judaism to the Jewish world. On the other hand, I was concerned that the demand for transparency of the researcher for reasons of trust and uprightness could create a problem because of my own biography and the irritation it would evoke in potential interview partners. With several of the leaders and potential interview partners I am personally acquainted, and the shared history could aggravate the irritation. This meant that I would have to carefully choose whom to contact and how, by customizing each approach and weighing every word.

I am living an orthodox, Haredi lifestyle, and my physical appearance is orthodox. In some of the zoom interviews the background of a typical ultra-orthodox living room with its books and with Haredi (Lithuanian) family pictures on the wall clearly influenced the answers of the interview partners to my questions. With my clothing I made at times intentional choices to look more neutral religious or modern orthodox, and less typical Haredi, as I experienced that being dressed typically Haredi caused some estrangement.

5.3.2 Choice of interview candidates

I opted to primarily approach leaders who have not published extensively on the topic, while in a few cases for deeper understanding of their positions I wanted to communicate with those who have published on questions not directly answered in their publications. I wanted to capture the full diversity of positions in regard to Torah and aimed for at least one representative for each characteristic approach, while trying to include people of different characters, backgrounds and subcultures. Further, I wanted to capture examples of Israeli voices as well as international ones from the diaspora, and representatives of different language groups: Hebrew speaking, English, Hispanic, Russian and Amharic. Moreover, I was looking for people involved in different functions and ministries: congregational leaders, scholars, worship artists, leaders of different kinds of outreach ministries, outspoken apologetics, people dedicated to discipleship and training for ministry of the next generation, publishers, apostolic leaders and hidden believers living in mainstream Jewish communities. Last, I was looking for Jewish leaders ascribing to different

¹³⁰ Jennifer Nyström: *Reading Romans, Constructing Paul(s)- A Conversation between Messianic Jews in Jerusalem and Paul within Judaism Scholars*, Dissertation, 1st edition, Media-Tryck, Lund University 2021, p. 144.

denominational affiliations: Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Catholics, Pentecostals, and representatives of the different Messianic Jewish congregational and ministry networks.

At the start I contacted a couple of personal acquaintances and asked those who responded positively for further recommendations of people to interview and possibly act as "door openers" and help to establish contact. Then I was introduced to David Serner, who was working on the new, not yet published Caspari Center study on the Messianic congregations in Israel, and who kindly updated me on the Israeli Messianic Jewish congregations and ministries and pointed out the most suitable candidates for each set of similar congregations according to his knowledge. Asking about those training the next generation he gave me some names of people I did not know previously. Internationally, Dr. Michael Brown sent me a whole list of people he would recommend as interview candidates.

While doing the interviews my list of further potential interview candidates grew more and more. Given that this is an exemplary study limited to the scope of an MA thesis and not a comprehensive PhD, once having reached my upper limit for interviews I could process for this thesis, I simply stopped contacting further candidates. Those people on my list, which I did not contact, would each of them fill the gaps and add further particular insights for the whole picture.

Gender did not play an active role in my search for variety. The majority of the potential interview candidates were married, and it might be assumed that the marriage partners support each other and discuss their relation to Torah with each other and share a mutual practical approach. As it turned out, most of the people on my list were men, some were women.

In regard to their Jewishness, I opted to include only people who are clearly regarded as Jews according to orthodox halachic standards.

5.3.3 Process of approaching people

5.3.3.1 Awareness of problematic

The first step in the process of approaching the potential interview candidates is awareness of likely obstacles. I identified two main obstacles: 1) people are very busy with their own agendas and 2) the issue of trust.

Ideally, I can deal with the first obstacle by making my research request relevant for their own agenda. Therefore, understanding their own agenda was part of my aims for the initial research on the candidates before my first attempt of contact.

To deal with the second obstacle, it is necessary to specify the issue of trust a bit further by spelling out the adverse thoughts and possibly negative previous experiences, which need to be overcome. The potential candidates might display unwillingness because of concerns of a possible unfavorable presentation due to a lack of understanding and appreciation on the side of the researcher. Further, they might be afraid of unwanted exposure, which could negatively affect them and their work. Or they might want to avoid the topic of Torah due to tensions and hurts sustained in the community because of disagreements around that topic. They might be unwilling to engage in disputes, be questioned, challenged or criticized. Moreover, they might be unwilling to give account of their own position in a scholarly research setting, because their own position might not be "solid" or well reflected and thought through, and they might be aware of some unsolved problems within their own position. My initial communication needs to aim to put the candidates at ease on all these accounts.

5.3.3.2 Preparation

For each new candidate I started with initial research on the candidate and his or her background, his or her ministry and whether and what he or she published on the topic. This included the search for contact information and choosing the most promising channel for initial contact. In one case I was apparently not able to find up to date contact information until now.

5.3.3.3 Initial communication

The initial communication had to be tailor-made for each candidate based on the initial research or my personal acquaintance, in order to overcome the two obstacles discussed above. I am summing up here the main points that guided the carefully chosen words of the initial communications:

- shortly introducing myself and the research project with its aims,
- trying to connect, expressing personal interest in their ministry, respect and appreciation,
- asking for a virtual or in person meeting to interview them about their understanding and relation to Torah,
- where needed, offering careful handling of sensitive information, anonymity and confidentiality as well as the option to review summarized material, quotes etc.,
- expressing happiness to answer further questions about myself or the research project.

The question sheet with the interview questions I attached either already to the initial communication, or I sent it later on in preparation for the interview.

Some people responded promptly to my initial communication and happily agreed to be interviewed. Others took some time to respond and asked further questions. Some did not respond to my initial communication and I looked for specific people who could act as "door-openers" for these candidates. Three people, with whom my initial communication attempt did not bear fruit, I could pursue further through "door-openers". One of my potential candidates, who did not respond to my initial communication, declined my request brought to them through a "door-opener". All the other people I contacted responded positively and an interview could be scheduled.

5.4 INCIDENTS

Two field work incidents occurred in the process of approaching people, which directly affected the research.

The challenges of my own biography and current life situation lead to a break of the trust-relationship with my first "door-opener". It seems that the direct confrontation with elements of my Haredi lifestyle caused some kind of religious "shock" for him, as he had never had close contact with these elements. Though he says to love the ultra-orthodox Jews, he clearly was overwhelmed by some of my questions and challenges, and lacked the ability to connect and interact in a fruitful way. Instead of the initial support, he voiced pressure to abandon my ways and retreated from his agreement to participate in my research and answer my interview questions.

Soon after that, two "anti-missionary" organizations launched a media warfare against the Messianic Jewish community in Israel, triggered by a case of a family living as ultra-orthodox Jews and trusted members of an ultra-orthodox community, who were exposed as believers in Yeshua and were said to have deceived the community with false claims of identity for missionary purposes. The media warfare was followed by a search for more "under-cover missionaries" living as orthodox or ultra-orthodox Jews and regular members of their respective communities. It was broken into the email account of First Fruits of Zion and my initial communications with them were intercepted and replied to with a virus. As they contained my contact details and I had to expect to be monitored, I cut short my research and avoided further contact with my anonymous contacts in order not to get them in trouble. Harassment and threats of physical violence followed against the quiet orthodox-style Torah

observant Messianic Jews of First Fruits of Zion, whereas regarding the outspoken One for Israel, the "anti-missionary" organizations are trying to shut down the discussion by legal threats and law suits. Intimidation, harassment and persecution is a sign of fear and hatred, but not of strength, love and truth. It is a shame that orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jewish organizations act this way towards fellow Jews. It shows in my perception a lack of resources to engage in meaningful encounters with these in their eyes "apostate" Jews, who, as much as I can say, seek truth and righteousness and a living relationship with the G-d of Israel.

5.5 DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW SETTINGS

The interviews lasted between 1-3 hours, usually in one sitting, framed frequently by informal conversation before and after. They took place at ministry locations, people's homes, virtually on zoom, by phone, or even in writing, according to the interview partners' preferences and possibilities. All of these venues had their own potential for interruptions, of which dropping phone and internet connections and other technical difficulties were the most annoying, whereas the interruptions in the personal meetings at people's homes and ministry locations were hardly disturbing. In all interview settings the atmosphere and tone were pleasant, focused and respectful. The discussion, where not too time pressured, was in general lively, enjoyable, interesting and creative. A few interviews were limited by the busy time schedule of the interview partner to a one-hour window, which required a fast pace and allowed only for minimal added questions for clarification. In two interviews we did not follow the prepared questions on the question sheet. In the rest of the interviews, in which we followed the question sheet, all complimented me at the end on the thoughtful, thorough and comprehensive questions, which covered for them all relevant aspects. Some enjoyed preaching to me while answering the questions, others told stories. Many showed awareness of other positions than their own, while stating their own positions and reasons why, without attacking others. Some concluded with a prayer of blessing for me and my research, some invited me to services and to continue to be in touch.

5.6 REFLECTIONS ABOUT CONDUCT OF INTERVIEWS

In several instances I would have wanted to add several more follow up questions and enter into discussion of the answers, and it was nice and beneficial where time allowed it. Drawing from the pool of different positions I would bring up the challenges raised by those arguing for a different position and see how the interview partners would deal with those challenges. I tried to find the right balance of how active to be as a discussion partner in each instance. In my role as researcher I tried to be an attentive listener just wanting to understand, but of course there are my own ideas and positions, and at times I let some of them flow into the discussion in form of a question or suggestion and enjoyed when it led to an insightful discussion and brainstorming together.

There are a few mistakes I noticed while doing the interviews, but I wasn't always able to correct them in time. At times, I interrupted the flow of speech of the interview partner too quickly with added questions or comments, such that some of the intended answers were lost. In a few interviews, I noticed a mistake in the other direction of letting it flow too freely. Where I did not take charge of the interview from the beginning by structuring it clearly and giving an overview over the groups of questions, the free flow became confused and a loss of focus was expressed by the interview partners. Another mistake was that I did not always ask at the beginning how much time we have, which in a few instances resulted in rushing through the last questions with a rather abrupt end. Also, some technical mistakes and disturbances occurred during the interviews: an interrupted recording, a misunderstanding of the time difference when scheduling the interview, internet

connection problems, and personal life disturbances causing the interruption of an interview in process.

5.7 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON RELATION TO TORAH

Various factors influence the current approach and relation to Torah of my interview partners. The positions are not static, but evolving. It is helpful to roughly know the starting point and the main reasons for change. I am first asking for the first associations, feelings and memories connected with the term Torah. The emotional charge governs the usage of the term and reveals the nature of the relation to it. I proceed then to ask about the own usage and definition of the term Torah to clear up terminological issues. This is followed by inquiring about the importance Torah plays in one's primary life settings. The personal Torah background prior to coming to faith in Yeshua sheds more light on the starting point, while the change produced by faith in Yeshua describes the momentum. After these personal background questions, the interview turns to the different theological aspects of the relation to Torah. In order to be able to access the "Kulturtransfer & Verflechtungsgeschichte" a question about the formative influences on the current Torah position concludes the theological section. The identity related aspects of Torah are captured in the next block of questions, which includes a question about the interaction with the Jewish world and with the Christian world respectively giving insights into the social setting and calling of the interview partner. The last sequence of questions concerns the positioning towards halachic endeavors.

5.7.1 Question sheet

Interview questions on relation to Torah

- What are your associations with the word Torah? What do you first think about? What do you feel? What do you remember?
- How would you define Torah? In which context and meaning do you yourself use the term Torah?
- What importance does it play in your/your family/your congregational life? Please describe.
- What importance did Torah play in your life before coming to faith in Yeshua? How (if so) did faith in Yeshua change your understanding of Torah?

- Do you feel a responsibility as a Jew to keep the Torah of Moshe? Please explain why yes or why not.
- How do you relate to the oral Torah?
- How do you relate to the written Torah? How do you relate to scripture in general?
- In your understanding, what is the Torah of Messiah?¹³¹ How do the Torah of Moshe and the Torah of Messiah relate to each other?
- What formed your understanding and position to the four above questions? Please tell about teachers, bible verses, revelation, experiences etc.

- In your understanding, is there a difference between Jew and Gentile in regard to Torah?

- How would you describe your interaction with the Jewish world?
- How would you describe your interaction with the Christian world?

- Which role does Torah play for your identity as a Jew?
- Which role does Torah play for your identity as a follower of Yeshua?

- How do you view the attempts of formulating a Messianic Jewish Halacha?
- What importance has Jewish tradition for you? How do you relate to the rabbinic claim of halachic authority?
- According to your understanding, what should be the basis for halachic decisions?
- Should there be one Halacha for all of the Jewish people?

Please add anything relevant for your relation to Torah, which I forgot to ask.

¹³¹ cf. Galatians 6:2 and maybe also 1 Corinthians 9:21.

5.8 INTERVIEW NARRATIVES¹³²

Based on the audio recordings of the interviews, I have compiled narratives, which more or less follow the order of the questions on the question sheet. They allow the reader to apprehend each one's relation to Torah and his/her theological positioning to it embedded in the relevant background information, such that each one's context and formative influences can be taken into consideration. In the narratives a lot of the original wordings and expressions were retained. Explicit scripture references made in the interview appear in the main text of the narratives. Where obvious scriptural content was paraphrased without naming the reference I have added footnotes with the references for the reader.

5.8.1 David Neuhaus (Israel - Hebrew Catholics, Helsinki consultation)¹³³

For David Neuhaus, a Jesuit priest and scholar living in Jerusalem, Torah is associated with religious Jewish identity and engrained in the national history of Israel, and with Yeshua - the living Torah. He does not focus on rabbinic halachic Torah observance except for solidarity and communion with the Jewish people. He enjoys studying the Talmud, but the foundational relevant Torah for him is the written Torah (Tanach and NT), which he studies daily with attention to traditional Jewish commentaries as well as commentaries of the Christian Church fathers, reading the biblical texts first in Hebrew, then in Greek and Latin. In his approach to the biblical scriptures he takes them as they are, engaging in biblical criticism but not stopping at that, but he finds an awareness of the historical setting helpful to appreciate the full meaning. Devotional scripture readings of pre-selected passages take place during their fixed daily communal prayers.

As a Catholic priest and member of a monastic order (Jesuit) he is committed to Church "Halacha", which governs his daily life. He sees himself under no obligation to (rabbinic) Torah observance, but respects it in the lives of his Jewish friends and goes along with it. Thus, in solidarity with the Jewish people, he voluntarily observes some Jewish traditions, which have a spiritual impact on him, but are in no way legally binding like the Church "Halacha". He does not keep kosher, but fasts on Yom Kippur; and he went to Synagogue to say Kaddish for his father.

Not living according to rabbinic Halacha, he did not break with the Jewish tradition he was raised in, because he "didn't grow up with Halacha". Even though he received a basic traditional Jewish education at school during his childhood in South Africa, religious practice was marginal in the home with the main focus being on Jewish culture and history. He was brought up in a secular home with a strong sense of Jewish identity. As an adolescent he made Aliya alone. He lived as a secular Jew. Even though he had attended synagogue in South Africa with his family, the Synagogue prayers were without meaning to him. Then, at age 15, in Israel, he encountered an old nun and was immediately drawn in by her genuine love and joy and deeply connected to the beauty of the Orthodox-Christian

¹³² Time and space did not allow for me to include all interviews, which I conducted. Three additional, very interesting interview narratives will hopefully be included in an expanded version of this thesis: Dr. Michael Brown (USA – Jewish Apologetics, School of Fire), Archbishop Dominique Biermann (International - Apostolic ministry), Victor (Israel – Publishing society).

¹³³ Interview conducted on 23.3.21, with additional insights from three papers presented by David Neuhaus at the Helsinki consultation. Helsinki consultation 2012: "Torah and Jewish believers in Yeshua (JBY)", Helsinki Consultation 2013: "Fulfilling the Torah - Living Torah in the Church", Helsinki Consultation 2014: "Authority, Freedom, and Tradition in the life of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua". See also David's book recommendation: Emma O'Donnell Polyakov: *The Nun in the Synagogue: Judeocentric Catholicism in Israel*, Penn State University Press 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/j.ctv1j2cx0f>. Cf. also Richard Harvey's corresponding papers "Response to David Neuhaus' 'Torah and Jewish Believers in Yeshua'" and "Fulfilling the Torah in Jesus Christ - in Dialog with David Neuhaus" at the Helsinki Consultation 2012 and 2013 in response to David Neuhaus' papers. This interview narrative was approved by David Neuhaus on 07.03.2022.

and Catholic liturgy. Having come to faith, he moved from the Russian Orthodox to the Greek Catholic and then to the Roman Catholic Church, into which he was baptized after having waited ten years to give himself and his family time. Considering himself to be a Catholic "Shomer Torah uMitzvot" Jew, he studied at the Dvar Yerushalaim Yeshiva for a few months.¹³⁴ After having come to faith, he now appreciated the religious expressions and connected spiritually to the synagogue prayers. During and despite his learning at the orthodox Yeshiva, Yeshua stayed at his place in his heart and the strong attraction to the Catholic Church remained. He found his place in the Catholic Church, provisionally after *Nostra Aetate* of the 2nd Vatican Council renounced anti-Semitic practices and allowed for Jewish expressions in the Church. He experienced no break with his family or his firmly established Jewish identity and continues to identify as a secular non-observant Jew. His primary religious identity is that of a Jesuit priest in the Roman Catholic Church. For a long time, he served as the episcopal vicar of the Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Jerusalem. He regularly attends Kabbalat Shabbat services at two different Synagogues (reform and liberal Jerusalem rite), where people know who he is and accept him as such, and is a regular guest at the Pessach seders of his Jewish friends. He is a biblical Scholar, who "studies Torah like a Jew", which earned him for several years a research position at the Shalom Hartman Institute.

In the interview he shared a lot of practical examples and stories, but no systematic theological argument. His approach to Torah and mitzvot is anthropological; the theological aspects, he says, are not part of who he is. He sees his calling as a Jew to make Catholics aware of the Jewish heritage of the Catholic Church, to – so to speak – "Judaize " the Church.¹³⁵ Teaching Torah in the Church is his profession. He does not distinguish between Jew and Gentile in the Church. In his functions in the Christian Church he seeks to correct anti-Judaic teachings and promote a "renewed understanding of 'law' as divine teaching, an expression of divine will for the human subject, a moment of blessing, revelation and reconciliation."¹³⁶

Nevertheless, he does try a theological approach in the Helsinki consultation papers of 2012-2014. He suggests two possible vocations of Jewish believers in Yeshua (JBY): 1) greater Torah observance in solidarity with non-Yeshua believing Israel and as witness to G-d's faithfulness, 2) greater Torah teaching to connect the Gentile Church to its Jewish roots and help it comprehend Yeshua's way of life and fulfillment of Torah. He himself would be placed in the second category. He asks the crucial questions of religious identity and the connection to Torah. Is JBY's Jewish identity an integral part of who they are as a religious people? "In recognizing that Yeshua was born and died as a Torah observant Jew, who explicitly insisted that he did not come to abolish the Torah, what is the permanent value and relevance of Torah observance for JBY?" And further, "is a Scripture based, religious and spiritual Jewish identity conceivable without any form of Torah observance?"¹³⁷ He gives the answer that literal Torah observance is not a condition for salvation, but faith in Yeshua and living according to his example and teaching, adjoint to him in his death and resurrection is. The function of Torah was to keep the Jewish people together until the coming of Yeshua, and then it was fulfilled. But was it also done away with? The believer in Yeshua is free from the yoke of the Torah, but Torah is still relevant as a way of life. To understand this better, he focuses in on what Yeshua's fulfillment of Torah means as it says Yeshua did not come to abolish, but to fulfill the

¹³⁴ An orthodox Yeshiva for Baalei Tshuva, founded by R. Baruch Horovitz in Jerusalem.

¹³⁵ The aspect of JBY in the Church to "jewdify" the Church is explored by Boris Balter & Lisa Loden in their paper "Paradox of Torah and Jewish presence in Church" presented at the Helsinki consultation 2012.

¹³⁶ David Neuhaus, "Torah and Jewish Believers in Yeshua (JBY)", Helsinki consultation 2012, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

Torah.¹³⁸ David understands it to signify the incarnated word and will of G-d, expressed in solely doing the will of the Father. Therefore, for him Torah observance is central at the set table of the Eucharist, which is governed by clear NT instructions and Church "Halacha". When he administers communion to his congregation and they are partaking of Yeshua, he operates in the priestly duty and the sacrificial aspects of Torah, which rabbinic Judaism found other ways to do without. The question whether Torah was also done with can be answered by exploring the eschatological time frame: What does the "until" mean in the passage saying that no jota will pass away from the Torah until all is accomplished?¹³⁹ In the new covenant described in Jer 31, when G-d writes the Torah on the hearts of men, according to David's understanding a perfect conformity to Yeshua is envisioned, which means a life lived according to the word and will of G-d from within, for which external generalized and fixed regulations are no longer needed. But until we reach that stage, Torah is still relevant as a way of life, preventing anarchy in light of people struggling to be "faithful".

5.8.2 Michael Rudolph (USA - Tikkun, UMJC)¹⁴⁰

Michael Rudolph, originally a lawyer by profession, is an experienced Messianic Jewish Rabbi and part of the Tikkun Ministry network. He is based in the USA. He and his congregation are members of the UMJC. His first association with the word "Torah" are the first five books of the Bible and the Torah scrolls at Synagogue. On a second thought he associates Torah with mitzvot and thinks of Maimonides' 613 mitzvot. In his understanding, Torah means the teaching of G-d, which also includes the rest of the Tanach with the implied commandments contained in it, as well as the implied commandments in the NT. They need not to be written in the form of imperatives, as long as it is clear that they are meant as general rules for behavior. He uses the term Torah in every possible way, synonymous with "will of G-d", for anything, which can be deduced from scripture as the will of G-d, not only specific commandments. For example, when in the book of Zachariah a penalty of no rain is related for those nations, who are not going up to Jerusalem to celebrate Succoth, it can be inferred that G-d wants all nations to come up to Jerusalem for the feast. Torah thus signifies for him the "Teaching of G-d" with the main focus on what He wants us to do.

Torah is very present in his daily life, as in his personal relationship with G-d he is always thinking: What does G-d want from me, what does G-d want me to do? His wife is likewise sensitive to the will of G-d, but is probably not thinking in terms of Torah. He at times teaches Torah in family settings, but they have no Torah discussion routine. Their Jewish children have a "good firm proper understanding of Torah", whereas their non-Jewish children of his wife's prior marriage have no concept of Torah. Their congregation is Torah oriented and culturally conservative Jewish. They have Torah scrolls at the congregation, and Torah reading is part of their service, with the traditional cultural elements of carrying the Torah around the room and at the end of the reading raising it for people to see before it is put back into the ark. In their teaching at the congregation they are Torah oriented in regard to our obligations to G-d and men.

Michael received a conservative Jewish education in his childhood in the USA, attended Hebrew School until his Bar Mitzvah, but was not interested to learn and didn't want to return to synagogue after his Bar Mitzva. Before coming to faith in Yeshua he was an atheist/agnostic. Torah played no part in his life and he had very little knowledge of Torah. His Jewish identity was not of importance to him. Due to a Holy Spirit experience when someone was speaking to him about Yeshua, he

¹³⁸ Mt 5:17.

¹³⁹ Mt 5:18, cf. Lk 16:17.

¹⁴⁰ Several informal talks with author, followed by an interview conducted on 10.3.21, supplemented by a short biography found online at <https://www.ohevysrael.org/rabbi-mike-rudolph>, accessed 14.7.21. This interview narrative was approved by Michael Rudolph on 17.11.2021.

realized that G-d is real. Reading the New Testament, during a second supernatural Holy Spirit experience, he immediately accepted that the words of the NT about Yeshua are true and Yeshua is the Messiah. Through his faith in Yeshua he started to understand the importance and relevance of being a Jew, though his first thought after coming to faith in Yeshua was that now he was a Christian and not a Jew any longer. Then, seeing that Yeshua was a Jew and the whole Bible is a Jewish book and talks about Jews, he understood his place as a Jew. He discovered that there are Messianic Jews and this brought him back into Judaism.

He feels a responsibility as a Jew to keep the Torah of Moshe, but in a way, which is appropriate for who he is and appropriate in the situations he is in today, a long time after Moshe. The appropriate application for today is not always literally, as for example in the case of the commanded temple sacrifices.

He doesn't recognize the oral Torah as necessarily from G-d. The Mishna for him is not the word of G-d, and the Talmud (Mishna and Gemara) is not authoritative in his life. In his eyes, the oral Torah is based on an assumption, i.e. that there were commandments given to Moshe which were passed down orally from generation to generation. He recognizes that a lot of Jewish culture (i.e. the way to behave as a Jew) is extracted from the Talmud telling the Jews how to live according to the biblical commandments. Halachic details were added to the scriptures and became the traditional way of doing things. No one can know over the years, he reasons, which part of the Mishna actually came from Moshe. For him, it is a matter of faith for those who believe it. Michael knows that G-d can embed His will in extra-biblical writings and he would not say that something in Mishna or Talmud is necessarily *not* from G-d, but he does not consider it as authoritative in a way that he would assume that it is coming from G-d. Rather, if something looks g-dly and important and doesn't contradict scripture, he might ask G-d in prayer whether he should consider it as coming from G-d.

The value of the scriptures is for him to deduce the teaching, figure out G-d's will and do it. He is completely confident that the Bible as a whole is inspired, while he allows for the possibility that something small accidentally got changed. But G-d knows this too and makes sure that His message gets through to him. For all of the Tanach and the NT he has the same level of confidence.

For him, there is no difference between the Torah of Messiah and the Torah of Moshe. G-d's will is always adaptive. G-d's will in itself does not change, only in the way it is applied there are changes. When reading the Torah of Moshe, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is needed as to what to keep literally and what not, what to do about the commandments and how they should be adapted to ones' personal life today. The same is true when reading the NT. To the question whether there is something of the Torah of Moshe which got changed with the coming of Yeshua, his answer is: No, not at all. Not even the application changed much, because the temple was there at the time of Yeshua. Michael conceives Torah as being eternal, but the statutes have to be interpreted differently in different times.

Michael arrived at his positions through the conviction of the Holy Spirit and peace after asking about it in prayer. He got exposed to many different ideas from all kinds of different sources, but always goes through the same sifting process. He is affiliated with the Tikkun network because of having arrived at similar positions.

Asked whether there is a difference between Jew and Gentile in regard to Torah, he replied that Torah is G-d's teaching and as such the same for every human being in the world, but the application might not be the same. Some commandments are universal, others are given specifically for Jews,

not for Gentiles. In specific cases he supports conversion to become Jewish and was instrumental as a Messianic Jewish elder in converting his own wife and daughter-in-law.

In his mind, he is in continuous interaction with the Jewish world, because he considers his congregation and other Messianic Jewish congregations he is involved in Jewish space. He keeps track of what is happening in the Jewish world just like people of other branches of Judaism would. The separation between the branches exists due to different behaviors. He has no bad feelings about the other branches and seeks more communication with them than the other way around.

He has no interaction with the Christian world in a formal way, but is doing what he can to help the Christian Church and Christian people to understand their biblical Jewish roots as far as they are interested. He is concerned that Christianity has thrown out its Jewishness, which is needed and intended in order for Gentile believers to relate to Jews.

Michael believes that the commission of the Jewish people to be a kingdom of priests extends till today. He envisions that the universal body of believers (Ecclesia) should be led by Jews,¹⁴¹ and all Jews should believe in Yeshua. The Jewish people shall be looked at as living in a special relationship. The great commission (Mt 28) is not only evangelism. Israel's destiny is to convey G-d's Word in word and deed to all of society. Thus, he aims to prepare the young generation not just to be servants and good witnesses, but to assume g-dly leadership roles in every area, to proactively teach and exemplify G-d's righteousness while making known their Messianic Jewish (or Messianic Gentile) identities wherever they go and whatever they do.

Torah plays a vital part for his Jewish identity. Part of the commandments given to Moshe make the Jews identifiable as a separate people. The separate identity again is vital for fulfilling the obligation to be a kingdom of priests. Therefore, it is important to try and apply the commandments which call Jews to identity as Jews (e.g. Tzitzit).

The essential Torah as a follower of Yeshua he expresses as follows: As a follower of Yeshua one is supposed to be lifting up Yeshua to other people and teaching about Yeshua and showing them why they should consider Yeshua as the Messiah. That is Torah for him and all believers in Yeshua.

Michael is not among those trying to formulate Halacha. He has only been active in formulating Halacha in one or two instances. He does not want to be rule oriented, except for the obvious from the biblical commandments (e.g. people in this community should not commit adultery, should not murder, should keep Shabbat, etc.). As a helpful tool for everyone trying to keep the biblical commandments, he published a compilation of what he believes to be the commandments, inviting people to consider and agree or disagree and to add to it. Halacha would be for a community to come to a conviction and write a statute by which the community then abides. A community may express itself saying that it believes that G-d wants them to relate to something of G-d in a certain way, but should always be open for G-d to speak into it and allow for changes. Halacha through its definitions typically goes beyond the words of scripture, like defining what exactly is forbidden on Shabbat beyond the generic refraining from ordinary work. He finds it not helpful for a proper life with G-d to be constrained to that level of Halacha. Halacha might otherwise replace the prayerful asking of the Holy Spirit for the appropriate interpretation and application for a specific situation. Where scripture doesn't give enough of information, the Holy Spirit speaking to individuals becomes

¹⁴¹ Cf. David J. Rudolph "'To the Jew First': Paul's Vision for the Priority of Israel in the Life of the Church", p. 11-25 in *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 37 (2020).

very important, alongside with consultation with other g-dly and experienced leaders of communities.

When he lives in a community as a member, he accepts the authority of its leaders. If he lived in a rabbinic community, he would consider rabbinic Halacha to be an authority over him. But as he is not living in a rabbinic community, he does not consider it an authority over him. Rabbinic authority for him does not extend over all of Israel, but only to their own local communities. On the other hand, tradition, in his view, is very important to maintain communities, so that its members can rely on each other, cooperate and live together. Accordingly, Jewish tradition is important, but not important to a degree that he would agree with *all* of Jewish tradition. Of those traditions he doesn't agree with, to some he would comply with for reasons of practicality, to others he wouldn't. Still, every Jew should know about all of the traditions, for as long as there are some Jews that abide by certain Jewish traditions, it is important for all Jews to know about it, in order to relate to each other as Jews.

He does not agree with writing down halachic rules for everyone to follow and therefore has only one basis for halachic decisions: All rulings written down are applicable until changed. If a community feels the need to build a fence around the Torah by a halachic ruling, they have to be sure that G-d wants it and that it is flexible enough to be changed when circumstances change.

It seems that Michael Rudolph is basically aiming to form and further develop a new branch of Judaism, aka Messianic Judaism, with a Jew-Gentile distinction and a Karaite-like approach to the traditional oral law.

5.8.3 Vladimir Pikman (Germany - Beit Sar Shalom Ministry)¹⁴²

Vladimir Pikman is a dynamic Messianic Jewish Rabbi and the founder and leader of the Messianic Jewish Beit Sar Shalom ministry network based in Germany. He is affiliated also with Chosen People Ministries.

Vladimir was brought up in the Ukraine being the 3rd generation of Jewish atheists, which nevertheless kept a very strong Jewish identity with everyone in his family being Jewish. Though he was a Soviet patriot, he experienced anti-Semitism as a child. He didn't see much significance in the Jewish traditions and didn't want to create more trouble by believing in G-d. When the Soviet Union collapsed there was suddenly freedom to learn about the holocaust, study Hebrew and go to synagogue for fellowship with other Jewish people. "There was no G-d, but there were the Jewish people", Vladimir says. He felt proud to be Jewish, became a Zionist and moved to Israel. While touching the Western wall, he instantly believed in G-d! Then he received an answer from G-d to go back to the Ukraine, where he was given a NT. A very good and respected Jewish friend told him that he needed to believe in Yeshua. Subsequently, after much interaction and personal study through the Bible, Vladimir got convinced that Yeshua is the Messiah and convicted that he is a sinner needing salvation.

¹⁴² Personal acquaintance, interview conducted on 23.3.21, testimony online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hLrNW_v844, accessed 14.7.21. See also Vladimir Pikman's papers: "Jesus and the Torah", presented at Helsinki Consultation 2012; "Living Torah", presented at Helsinki Consultation 2013; "Great Diversity: Authority, Freedom, and Tradition in the life of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua", presented at Helsinki Consultation 2014; "Jewish People: Destiny or Calling?", presented at Helsinki Consultation 2015. This interview narrative was approved by Vladimir Pikman on 17.11.2021.

For him, Torah is the core of Jewish life, the way G-d wants the Jewish people to proceed. It is sacred to him and he feels very attached to it. It is impossible to separate the Jewish people from Torah.

Torah means for him the five books of Moses and the physical Torah scroll. The five books of Moses have prescriptive and descriptive content. They tell G-d's will and who G-d is in his relationship to the world and to the Jewish people. Vladimir uses the term Torah when he talks about G-d's way of life for the Jewish people, or when he talks to Jews about the divine principles and how G-d started to reveal Himself.

He does not consider the oral Torah, rabbinic commentaries or sayings of sages to be on the same level as the written Torah. He has respect for the rabbinic explanations and sayings of the sages (Mishna etc.), but does not consider the oral Torah to be an absolutely authoritative instruction inspired by G-d. The oral Torah is part of G-d's story with the Jewish people, in which He used it to guide the Jewish people. It is hard to imagine keeping the written Torah today without the oral Torah and the Torah should be applied to contemporary circumstances. The oral Torah looked how to apply the Torah, many centuries after the giving of the Torah at Sinai. But now we are again almost two millennia later and the oral Torah needs again an oral Torah to apply it to the circumstances of today. Oral Torah can be generated even today. It should not contradict the written Torah. It is not necessarily a direct revelation from G-d, but our pious attempt to do G-d's will in the circumstances we live in. For Vladimir, the concept of halachic authority of the Gdolei haDor also includes Messianic Jewish leaders, to whom authority is given by G-d to issue rulings for this generation in the given circumstances.

The written Torah gives him, his family and congregation guidance for their lives and the direction in which to walk. It explains and demonstrates who G-d is, what He does and what He expects humanity to do. It is not the entire building, but the foundation to build on.

Prior to coming to faith in Yeshua, Torah for Vladimir was something typically Jewish, important for Jewish life, but its wholeness and practical life importance it got for him only after he came to faith in Yeshua. In Yeshua, Torah makes sense to him much more than before, just like his Jewishness. After coming to faith in Yeshua he became consciously Jewish. Prior it was a matter of destiny, but then being part of the Jewish people got filled with a sense of calling and purpose for life. He first attended a Messianic Synagogue which was very similar to an evangelical church. Then he met more observant Jewish believers and became more observant. After another visit to Israel, which strengthened his Jewish identity, he started to wear a Kippa and became more observant in his personal life mainly for the sake of his testimony as a Jew in this world. Then he studied theology, which led to interaction with different Jewish and Christian movements.

He believes that the written Torah (five books of Moses) were spoken by G-d and recorded accurately. Maybe the manuscripts were back then in some ways different, but G-d knows what He does and preserves for us what He wants to preserve in the way He wants it to be. Thus, Vladimir believes in original inspiration and G-d's provision in the maintenance of the manuscripts to the effect that all of the biblical scriptures are inspired and intended by G-d as they are. There are mistakes and views and opinions of people included, but G-d wants everything to be there for a purpose. After G-d Himself, of all written instruction, the Bible has the highest authority. Other books need to relate to the scripture and should not contradict scripture.

He feels a responsibility as a Jew to keep the Torah of Moshe, though there is a variety of interpretations within the Jewish world today about what it means to keep the Torah. He describes himself as conservative, neither orthodox nor liberal: G-d modifies the application of Torah in

different generations to our circumstances. The Torah needs to be kept in the circumstances of today. Yeshua, the Messiah, is the giver of the Torah, the crown and fullness of the Torah, the Torah incarnate. Yeshua *is* the word of G-d, the Torah that dwelled among us (Jn 1). Yeshua has the fullness of revelation. He is the way.

The Torah of Moshe is foundational. Yeshua in the sermon on the mount built on it and elevated the standards of Torah even higher than the Torah of Moshe, internalizes the commandments, emphasizing them, like the prophets did before, as a matter of the hearts, motives and thoughts and not just external observance. Thus, regarding the identity as follower of Yeshua, Torah is the foundation for the divine revelation, upon which Yeshua built.

The revelations in the Torah were given to the people of Israel. Gentiles are not obligated to keep it as it was never directly given to them, but they can, if they want to. Pessach for example Jews have to keep, sojourners not. But if sojourners want to, they may keep it under the same conditions as Israelites, circumcised etc. Gentiles though should not be playing "Jewish" without Jewish people. They may study the Bible and learn about the different commandments, but if they want to keep Jewish commandments, i.e. calendar, dietary laws etc., they need to do it with Jewish people. At the same time, there are multiple universal principles in the Torah that are important and should be even binding for all people. These principles are usually explicitly seen as universal.

The Jewish world is his world and he is part of it. Belief in Yeshua creates some tension with many established Jewish communities, but he considers himself as part of the Jewish plurality of expressions.

His interaction with the Christian world is sometimes uneasy, but it is part of his spiritual family in Yeshua, the Ecclesia. Facing challenges through replacement theology in the Church, anti-Semitism and negative bias against Jewish people, in his interaction he is distinctively and explicitly Jewish.

Every messianic Jewish leader, and every Messianic Jewish congregation formulates Messianic Jewish Halacha, but there are many challenges ahead in order to arrive at the same page and be unified. True to the saying "two Jews - three opinions", there are many different opinions and the plurality of Jews very much impacts the Messianic Jewish congregations. There is a very broad variety of congregational practice. Some congregations are very hard to distinguish from Jewish Orthodoxy, others are very hard to distinguish from a protestant Church. But Yeshua, the Holy Spirit and belonging to the Jewish people unites all.

Rabbinic authority for Vladimir is below that of Moshe, the prophet Isaiah or the Apostle Paul as well as other biblical authors in their writings. However, he looks at it with respect, because G-d used the rabbis to guide His people, but he does not take it as halachic authority. He does not believe that the Messianic Jews are in a position enabled by G-d to create a halachic authority for the entire nation, but neither, when looking at the Israelis, are the rabbis today able to create a Halacha for everybody. The relatively unified Halacha in the middle ages was rather a historically imposed exception. Messianic Jewish halachic authority is limited to congregations of Jewish followers of Yeshua. One day, in the Messianic age, when Yeshua comes back, there will be one Halacha for all of the Jewish people, the Halacha of the Messiah, which is based on the Halacha of Moshe and beyond, and we will follow.

According to Vladimir, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit should be the first basis for halachic decisions. Other criteria are that it has to be in accordance with the Bible, has to lead towards G-d's holiness, has to correspond to the will of G-d and to what G-d does in this world, has to be practicable and supported by several g-dly people. Every rabbi or teacher makes his halachic choices

in certain practical issues. His congregation or disciples have to decide whether to follow him. A rabbi or teacher has a huge responsibility and needs to be careful and accountable before G-d, Vladimir adds, mentioning the warning in James 3:1 not to become a teacher lightly.

5.8.4 Eli Birnbaum (Israel - Jews for Jesus)¹⁴³

Eli Birnbaum is the present national leader of "Jews for Jesus" in Israel. He also serves as a pastor. He is very aware of the typical Israeli discourses, different positions and applications on the topic. In his answers to the interview questions he presents his position while expressing respect for other positions.

For Eli, the Torah (five books of Moses) is G-d's story with the people of Israel, how He redeemed the people and made them His own nation after Him. He first thinks about the glorious moment of the revelation at Sinai, where G-d made Himself known to the whole nation with G-d's presence dwelling at the tabernacle amongst the people. It is a place of communion between G-d and His people, where He gave His will and wisdom to the people; and it points to the larger redemption story, which unfolds in the following books of the Hebrew Bible and in the NT.

He uses the term Torah according to the biblical definition of Torah as G-d's will and G-d's ways, which in biblical times and also today is always connected to redemption and salvation. In conversations, he usually has to explain his usage of the term. The 613 commandments, which are in the Torah, are a small part of it. They consist of moral laws, ritual laws and redemption or atonement laws, the latter of which no Jew today keeps. But there is a way to fulfill these through Yeshua being the atonement. The ritual laws are given for holiness and purity in order that G-d's presence can be in the midst of the people. Yeshua fulfilled them and enables the presence of G-d within the believer. They are "nice" and people may do them, if they like, but only Yeshua can ensure G-d's presence in our lives. The ritual laws can't achieve it and never could. They only show us that we can't attain G-d's standard of holiness and purity and need help. The sacrifices could remedy some, but had to be repeated again and again and didn't change our hearts. The moral laws we need to learn how to apply today. The oral Torah tries to do that. Believers in Yeshua are required to do so too and may look what the rabbis say and consult the NT about it. They may not always agree about how something applies today. One may study Leviticus to gain insights into how G-d wants us to live our lives. But in general, the five books of Moses are not a book of laws. They are part of G-d's story with His people, which leads to the prophet greater than Moshe, Messiah Yeshua.

To remember G-d's redemptive story with Israel, Eli keeps the Jewish holidays with his family according to the written Torah, and also according to Jewish custom. His observance is not strictly halachically though, but more similar to a reform or conservative approach. He keeps biblically kosher, i.e. no pork or sea food. Shabbat observance is for him a personal matter. He celebrates Kabbalat Shabbat with his family, rests and spends time with his family and with G-d, but again not according to strict halachic observance of avoiding electric switches, driving, handling money, etc.. He would encourage halachic Shabbat observance as a great spiritual discipline, but it is not practical in his life circumstances. He circumcised his sons and will prepare them for Torah reading at their Bar Mitzvah. At his congregation, he teaches on the five books of Moses, including Leviticus. But he is not following the annually reading cycle through the Chumash.

Eli is a second-generation believer, born and raised in an American Messianic Jewish family. He grew up in Israel. At home there was a certain level of observance, but quite light. He describes an

¹⁴³ Interview conducted on 7.4. 2021. This interview narrative was approved by Eli Birnbaum on 6.3.2022.

atmosphere of "we love Torah, we love Jewish things, but we don't do anything", which resulted for him in a lack of a framework for understanding his Jewishness. This changed when he became confident in Yeshua realizing that Yeshua is the object and story lesson of the Torah. Everything in Torah for him is connected to the Gospel, to salvation and to the NT.

He feels no theological responsibility as a Jew to keep the Torah (613 commandments). He believes that belief in Yeshua gives complete freedom how to live out the faith. Keeping the commandments is not relevant for salvation nor for the believer's walk with G-d. But personally, he thinks it is a beautiful part of our nation and he feels a responsibility to preserve the customs and pass them on to the next generation. He observes the commandments and customs he enjoys or values as spiritual discipline, and which bring him closer to Yeshua. Explaining his theological position, he refers to Paul. When Paul says "Torah is cancelled for us in Yeshua"¹⁴⁴ the question is whether he is talking to Jews or not. Eli believes that Paul in this passage is talking to all followers of Yeshua, including Jews. Nobody today keeps the atonement commandments of the Torah. Rabbinic Judaism says there is another way to do it. But Eli is rather just honest about it and relies on Yeshua's atonement as the other way. All laws could be kept, he ventures, but are not kept in Judaism today, because they are saying now we do 'this', meaning a rabbinic ruling or tradition of what is being done instead. But the Torah is already fulfilled and lived out through Messiah Yeshua. Believers in Yeshua stand before G-d as Torah observant people because of Yeshua, on his merit.

Eli points out that *no* Jew relates equally to all of the oral Torah. For him, there is nothing authoritative in his life except for the biblical scriptures. He subscribes to the evangelical Christian "sola scriptura"¹⁴⁵ approach. He doesn't believe that the oral Torah necessarily came from Moshe, but it may be used to learn things from. The Bible gives directions. The oral Torah tries to define these directions, but reports all the time arguments and disagreements as it documents the conversations. It is part of our heritage and history and contains honest attempts to understand what G-d wants, Eli sums up his assessment. Some of it is good, some less. He at times consults the oral Torah to study things, especially in relation to the Gospels, and compares Yeshua's treatment of a topic with the rabbinic discussion. It helps him to understand the first- and second century C.E. context. While reading rabbinic sources he uses his own discernment informed by his evangelical Christian biblical and systematic theological position. He reads it with less adherence or respect than he would have towards a Christian evangelical commentary.

Eli regards all biblical scriptures as inspired by G-d, given to us for teaching, wisdom and understanding.¹⁴⁶ With reference to Lk 24:27¹⁴⁷ he holds that all scripture points towards Yeshua. All scripture helps to live out our lives in worship to G-d. Albeit, the 613 laws don't produce this effect as they do not bring us closer to G-d, but Yeshua does. The believer in Yeshua does not have to do anything in order to achieve his standing before G-d. The only requirement is faith in Yeshua. Faith in Yeshua may or may not cause one to observe those 613 laws.

For Eli, the Torah of Moshe and the Torah of Messiah are the same. He paraphrases Yeshua's words in Jn 5:46f. saying: if you would study Moshe you would see me. The Torah was given to us to see Yeshua. That is its purpose. What makes us stand pure before G-d is the Torah of Yeshua, who

¹⁴⁴ Eli's free rendering of Eph 2:15, cf. also Col 2:14,20 and Heb 8:13.

¹⁴⁵ "Sola scriptura", translated as "only scripture", is authoritative for the guidance of the believer, is a position taken by the protestant reformers to refute all other traditional church doctrines and hierarchies, and proclaim the priesthood of all believers. It is similar to the Karaite position in the Jewish world.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17.

¹⁴⁷ "Then, starting with Moshe and all the prophets, he explained to them the things that can be found throughout the *Tanakh* concerning himself." CJB

fulfilled the Torah of Moshe. The believer's righteousness depends on Yeshua's Torah, and the walk of the believer is not fueled by observance of some law, but always by faith through the power of the Gospel (Gal 2). The law of G-d exists in all of the Bible, and we will always fall short in achieving it. Yeshua taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) that observing the Torah of Moshe is not good enough. The believer, however, has a clear conscience and the Holy Spirit to guide him. If people who promote Torah observance put Yeshua at the center, he can stand by them, otherwise not.

Eli's first formative influence was his father, whom he describes as an incredible Bible teacher. He was further inspired by Israeli pastors and leaders when growing up. His study of the Gospels of Luke and Mark formed his theological understanding. He is currently enrolled in a MA of theology at Western Seminary (USA). Moreover, Timothy Keller of New York has been an inspiration to understand how all scripture points to Yeshua. Another significant influence was Jhan Moskowitz¹⁴⁸ of "Jews for Jesus".

He is not sure about a difference between Jew and Gentile in regard to Torah. Maybe there is a Jewish responsibility to transmit the traditions and make sure that the Torah survives. He is positive though about an End-time function for the Jewish people. G-d has a plan for Israel. He will fulfill the prophecies for Israel and will restore Israel for all to see. G-d brought us back to the land, and Yeshua will return to Israel and show himself as Lord and Messiah to the people of Israel. Everything else he is not certain about. G-d's promises are regardless of our observance. It is G-d's restoration because of G-d's faithfulness.

Eli is part of and exists within the Jewish world and feels comfortable in it, and the same is true for the Christian world. He never feels a stranger in both worlds, usually feels very accepted and didn't experience too much opposition personally. Opposition comes usually from specific organizations with an agenda. His mission for interaction is to relentlessly pursue G-d's plan of salvation for the Jewish people in sharing the Gospel with Jews. As a secondary mission he wants for Jews and Christians to see the Jewishness of Yeshua. As part of his job he participates in different Christian forums.

Torah is relevant for his identity as a Jew through the holidays and looking at the narratives of G-d redeeming us. He is happy to keep an observance, which is connected to the Gospels and in which he finds meaning. Torah plays a part in his identity as a Jew, because doing what he does is part of his life. This is different than the merely cultural Jewish identity of secular Jews. His identity as a Jew and his identity as a follower of Yeshua converge. He can't distinguish between them. Torah is more relevant for his identity personally and in his family, and less in the community setting. Jewish tradition, likewise, is important for him on the personal and family level, but not on the community level.

He does not see a need for a Messianic Jewish Halacha, where a group of people makes rules about right and wrong. There is one Rabbi, one Master, one Father.¹⁴⁹ That should be enough. It should not be given too much power to teachers. We shouldn't tie things around peoples' necks...¹⁵⁰ A useful approach would be to give several options how to live something out, but each believer needs to pray about it and make his own decision. Everyone needs to understand scriptures on his own. A community should be self-led, not by someone above them. On a national level, we all need to struggle with it together. If the community leaders come together to decide on a practice for their

¹⁴⁸ See <https://www.jewsforjesus.co.za/our-stories/jhan-moskowitz>, accessed 26.9.2021.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Mt 23:8-10.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Mt 23:4.

community, that's the way it should be. But on the national level this is problematic because the Messianic leaders do not agree on their theology. There are things to die for, things to divide for, things to decide for. Halacha belongs to the latter. Within Messianic Judaism there are too many things to divide for so that there is no forum to even deal with things to decide for. We need different opinions and need to be able to interact. But we can't take our unity to those levels to decide. There would be just arguments... May the people trying to develop a Messianic Jewish Halacha be successful, but he is not interested to get involved. He could enjoy the intellectual practice of doing it, but doesn't think it to be helpful.

He personally goes by "sola scriptura" as his only authority, and relativizes the rabbinic claim of authority. He sees rabbinic Judaism as a rather honest attempt to live out Jewish life in the diaspora. People from the outside attribute more authoritative claim to the rabbis than they actually claim. Religious Jews generally are choosing their rabbis they agree with. In his perception, the decisions of the leaders of a generation are valid only for that generation and not beyond, - they are not an authority. As a pastor, he is not an authority either, but the scripture is. He encourages his people to use scripture to test him.

The basis for halachic decisions should be to work things out first personally, then within the family, then in the community. The practice has to conform to scripture and should, - with the help of the Holy Spirit, point to Yeshua, his teachings and to the scriptures.

There will not be one Halacha for all of the Jewish people until Messiah comes. When he comes, everyone will know him and no teaching and no Halacha are needed.

5.8.5 Yoel Ben David (Israel, UK, USA)¹⁵¹

Yoel Ben David is an ordained priest of the Anglican Church, a preacher, a "Jews for Jesus" missionary, and - like David Neuhaus - he appreciates liturgy. He passed through the Syriac Church of the East and worked for a time in the Lutheran Church, and he is a scholar.

As a spiritual seeker he turned Jewish orthodox Chassidic. Then he had a vision of Yeshua, and through Bible study with a messianic believer he came to faith in Yeshua.

Torah for Yoel are the five books of Moses. He taught through the Chumash in the annual circle of Parshiot four times, which was a lot of fun, he says. He loves the stories that bring out Yeshua. They allow for great conversations. More than any other book of the Bible the Torah allows for local Israelis to read a book in their language, as it is easy for modern Hebrew speakers to understand. Moreover, it is less mystical. The characters of the patriarchs are very real, with their flaws, so people can relate to them easily. Yoel is aware of many different meanings of Torah: from Jewish tradition to what their Rabbi said when he spoke to him last time, or the five books of Moses plus the oral Torah.

The Torah might come up in family conversations. His family heard his teachings on the Torah. When discipling someone he uses "like a good protestant" the Our Father prayer¹⁵², the Apostles' Creed¹⁵³ and the ten commandments, and talks about them in their context in the Torah.

¹⁵¹ Personal acquaintance, interview conducted on 24.3.2021, Bio/ Testimony published at <https://jewsforjesus.org/our-stories/a-hasidic-couple-encounters-their-messiah>, accessed 19.8.2021. This interview narrative was approved by Yoel Ben David on 6.3.2022.

¹⁵² Mt 6:9-13.

¹⁵³ A trinitarian confession of faith shorter than the Nicene Creed and widely in use in the western churches since the 8th century CE.

Before coming to faith in Yeshua, Yoel lived with his wife as orthodox Jews, Baalei Tshuva, in Jerusalem. They had then a very different way of reading the Torah and a different feeling about it. It was a mystical book. They were not relating to it as a narrative. The characters were flawless, moral heroes to be emulated. When something appears as flaws, it meant that they were just not understanding enough. Sought for explanations would show their righteousness. They were getting the Mitzvot explained in their mystical form, saying that something spiritual mystical would happen while doing them. The study of Torah would be to read a few verses and then a page of Rashi and a paragraph of Ramban.

For the first years after coming to faith in Yeshua Yoel was very concerned that the Torah would not be pushed aside. He tried as a Messianic Jew to correct the Christian negligence of the Torah. But when he studied for his BA at the ICB he saw the Torah in light of the letter to the Galatians. He, as a believer in Yeshua, is part of the New covenant (Jer 31), which is different than the one made with Moshe. The purpose of the Torah is to lead to the conviction of falling short of G-d's expectations. It points towards G-d's righteousness and what is good, and allows the reader to see it and experience G-d's grace. The Torah is a nurse maid or teacher leading to the Gospel.¹⁵⁴ It helps towards sanctification, but not necessarily by keeping in our times certain rules dictated in the Torah, e.g. kashrut: The kashrut rules appear in Leviticus after the incident with Nadav and Abihu. The people needed to understand what is holy and what is profane. It had the purpose of separating the people of Israel from the other nations around. Thus, the list of rules is not necessarily meant to eternally demonstrate to the nations the difference between righteousness and unrighteousness, but to help the people of Israel specifically at that time to differentiate themselves and demonstrate a different way of living. The rules of Leviticus and numbers are not necessarily meant for all people at all times to keep. Christians and followers of the G-d of Israel can express their love for G-d and walk with Him by responding to the cultures they are living in and challenge the cultures with a more righteous and caring way of living. That would be a way of fulfilling the Torah.

Yoel reads the scriptures as a universal message, where the Jewish people are the main characters. But they are not just for Jewish people. Historically, the Jewish people have been given a message. G-d has used them more than the Jewish people have engaged G-d. Often they have been an example of what not to do, - which is true for the church too. There is a calling, but few have taken it up, and, in many ways, we have turned our backs on it, as recorded in the Tanach and in Jewish history, - especially in regard to Yeshua. Yoel sees the Torah as ultimately fulfilled in Yeshua and feels a responsibility as a Jew to keep it, mainly in form of reading, learning und pushing towards the Gospel.

Yoel doesn't see the oral law in the way it is defined in Pirkei Avot, because he doesn't believe that there *was* an oral guide given at Mount Sinai, which was passed down through the generations. The Tanach does not mention or demonstrate such an oral guide. Rather, there were many generations, e.g. the generation of Josiah, where people had forgotten even the existence of the written Torah! He finds it very unlikely that during that time an oral law was being passed down. In his eyes, the oral Torah is a collection of traditions, probably verbally created through repeated teaching in the community during the 2nd temple period, which was then collected by Jehuda HaNasi and expanded in the following centuries in the Gmara. Regarding the authority of the judges (leaders of the generation) to make rulings for the generation, he remarks that the keys of the Kingdom were passed down to the apostles to issue rulings.¹⁵⁵ The laws and rules have to adapt and reflect the

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Gal 3:24 and Rom 10:4.

¹⁵⁵ Mt 16:19, Mt 18:18-20.

culture they are in. "My sons have defeated me" in the talmudic account of the oven of Achnai shows how the rabbinic tradition and the oral law completely overwrite the written Torah, of which Hillel was afraid it could do. It claims an authority unto itself, which it was never given and cuts the connection of trying to hear from G-d directly. In the Middle Ages then there is a claim of rabbinic authority to make Halacha, which compares to that of the pope. "Do not turn left or right from the commandments" Rashi interprets to mean to believe your teacher even if he tells you left is right and right is left. Today, Yoel has a personal reaction against "religion", where a group of people acts as an authority over others telling them what to do. This reaction against a religious attitude started after he became a believer in Yeshua. A religious attitude can be encountered in Messianic Jewish, in Christian and in Jewish circles alike, when they forget that the good things they have are given by grace and not deserved or earned, - which is the essence of the Gospel. The oral law as a tradition, like the Church fathers and the writings of Martin Luther, is an important tool for him, which sometimes shows him things he is missing.

Yoel relates to scripture like most evangelicals in that he believes in verbal plenary divine inspiration in the originals. He is not a literalist though, but looks at the bible as literature (like protestants) being aware of the different genres of poems, wisdom literature, apocalyptic literature, etc.. He is not picking and choosing verses from different places, but tries to understand everything in its context, as the different kinds of literature have different intentions. All of scripture is for him at the same level of inspiration and authority and useful to learn and grow. Reading scripture and talking with G-d about it may change his day.

In the context of Galatians, Yoel understands the Torah of Messiah to be the teaching of Messiah, the Gospel, which points to the Torah of Moshe and to the ultimate salvation story of Yeshua's death and resurrection on the cross during Passover. Yeshua is the sacrifice, the Mishkan, the G-d who conquers the devil, Egypt. He conquers our sin, brings us out, gives us freedom, and thus brings all of the storylines of the Chumash into one person being the ultimate destination of the Torah. The Torah of Moshe tried to communicate to the Jewish people how G-d wants them to live, and that they are going to find themselves falling short. One has to go to the Mishkan again and again to say sorry and fall upon the grace of G-d until realizing that the only place to find goodness and holiness is in the Mishkan in the presence of G-d. The exodus from Egypt is a salvation story relying on G-d's grace, and thus the Torah is a Gospel teaching people to rely on Him.

Yoel does not discount the Torah of Moshe, but rather than trying to keep the rules, he tries to live out that story today with his family and the people he ministers to. Cultures change. Every culture has elements which agree with scripture and those which completely go against it. The secular culture for example has an aspiration of justice, but their view of justice doesn't come close to the fulfillment of justice in scripture, as justice requires judgment. Paul is aware of people's cultures (1 Cor 9:21). The task is to apply the narrative of Torah, the Gospel, to the cultural situation and bring it to the people, so they can relate and understand.

Over the years occurred a shift in his identity from being totally focused on his Jewish identity to being totally focused on his identity as a Christian. Instrumental for this shift was Oscar Skarsaune's *In the Shadow of the Temple*,¹⁵⁶ to which he got introduced in course on "Jewish elements in pre-Byzantine Christianity" with Ray Pritz at the ICB. It became clear to him that his primary identity has to be with people who walk with G-d, causing him to hear out the Church fathers and worry less

¹⁵⁶ *In the Shadow of the Temple - Jewish influences on Early Christianity*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove-IL 2008.

about anti-Semitism. Timothy Keller of New York City with his book *Center Church*¹⁵⁷ was formative for his missiology. Further, he was influenced by reformed theology and in particular by N.T. Wright, an Anglican bishop challenging the old reformed way of seeing justification.

Historically there was a difference between Jew and Gentile in regard to Torah, but today Jews and Gentiles should be reading the Torah in the same way, bringing them through conviction to confession and grace. Taking Shabbat as an example, both need to accept the importance of rest and what rest means, i.e. your relationship with G-d and trusting G-d to provide. Understanding Shabbat just as something one has to do is forgetting the relational purpose of Shabbat.

His main interaction with the Jewish world is the hippie community, the secular, left-wing Israeli bohemians, which engage with Torah and Judaism in a very New-age, pseudo-Kabalistic kind of way.

Living in Israel he does not have much interaction with the classic Christian world, except for working for a Christian organization and being an Anglican priest. As such, his interaction with the Christian world is mainly through social media and through reading Christian writings, and through his love of liturgy, such that his main interaction is in his devotional life. He interacts significantly also with the siddur, which, where it uses scripture, he finds important for forming liturgy for his community today. He also uses parts of the Pessach Hagada in his Passover celebration, as much as his teenage children have patience.

The role of Torah for the identity as a Jew in a postmodern world is central as story, as scripture. The calendars - the Jewish as well as the Christian - take us through the salvation story, just like liturgy, which - when internalizing it - is a reliving of the salvation story. He lives both calendars parallel. The stories allow him to reconnect with his relationship with G-d.

Halacha Yoel defines as how one should live his life and how he should walk before G-d. The attempts to formulate Messianic Jewish Halacha are great, but a different Halacha is needed for every neighborhood, as culture isn't monolithic anymore. Every area has a different kind of Jewish people. Even among the orthodox they are far from being all the same. Thus, Halacha needs to be developed for each community. The basis for halachic decisions should be how the Gospel relates to a given culture, asking what is the way that one is able to live that fits in, but challenges the culture.

5.8.6 Yoel Goldberg (Israel - Netivah Youth Ministry)¹⁵⁸

Yoel Goldberg is a second-generation believer, who grew up mainly in Israel, in a Messianic Jewish family from the USA. After combat military service in the Israeli army he studied at a Bible school in England. Then there were no programs in Israel, as there are today, for young Messianic Jews who want to grow in their faith. He got married, returned to Israel and worked as a graphic designer, until he eventually answered an inner call to work full time with Israeli 2nd+ generation Messianic Jewish youth.

Yoel grew up with anti-Torah sentiments at home, which were associated with the yoke of the Torah, laws, commandments, rules of what is permitted and what is forbidden and coercion. But then he developed his own approach to Torah as instruction for life and way of life, not threatening, but helping us to understand how to live. For him, Torah has the task of a nurse maid.¹⁵⁹ It is important to read and understand the Torah, because it explains to us the character of G-d. We shall be pure and clean, because G-d is pure and clean. In his understanding, Torah is the Tanach and the

¹⁵⁷ *Center Church - Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids-MI 2012.

¹⁵⁸ Interview conducted on 12.4.2021.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Gal 3:24.

NT. Yeshua's teaching is part of the Torah. He would say of himself that he keeps the Torah, but not in the way most would define it. The general concept of Shomer Torah u'Mitzvot is different than his approach. He observes the Torah according to his understanding of the inner value. Thus, his Shabbat observance is in his eyes according to the intentions of the author, but not as rabbinic Halacha would define it. His wife bakes Challot, the family gathers, which may involve driving on Shabbat, they sing songs of praise to G-d/Yeshua with a guitar, and say a free prayer with scripture reading over wine and bread. The wording of the Kiddush in the siddur is ok for him, but it is a rabbinic writing and not directly the word of G-d and he doesn't connect to that tradition. But the blessing over wine and bread is older and even Yeshua blessed wine and bread. It follows a festive meal and family time. Shabbat mornings he attends the service at his Messianic Jewish congregation, which is comprised of prayer, bible study and praise and worship songs. They eat at home with no restrictions on cooking and lighting fire and then engage in family activities, hikes etc., maybe meeting with other people, and returning home. The guiding principle is that Shabbat is for us, not we for the Shabbat.¹⁶⁰ G-d has given us freedom, Yoel believes, to keep Shabbat in a way that honors Him. We should rest from our daily work, but it is hard for him to perceive Shabbat as something blocking or stopping us. We should not worry about our livelihood, and instead focus on other things on Shabbat. G-d didn't give us the commandments to make our life difficult. He doesn't need our complicated observance with all the different prohibitions as prove of our love and obedience to Him. G-d doesn't need that we prove to Him our love. Yeshua's yoke is easy and his burden light. (Mt 11:30)

He is understanding more and more the importance of giving the word of G-d the first place in his life. He aims to let the fruit of the Holy Spirit¹⁶¹ act in his life. Personally, he is very anti-religious, because religiosity comes with a lot of criticism of others, with temptations and hypocrisy of actions out of tradition or commitment, which the heart is not fully in it. He made a conscious decision to believe at around the age of 16-17. Then, a process of internalization started. Now, as a parent, he thinks what to transmit to his children, but eventually all of his children need to decide for themselves, just like he did, whether they want to do these things.

Messianic Jewish youth has a lot of identity issues. They identify as Jews and are part of the people of Israel, but are not recognized by the people of Israel as part of it and are exposed to constant pressure of others saying what they are and what they aren't. The internal dilemma creates a need to prove all the time that they do belong. In his generation, most Messianic Jewish parents were not yet fully established immigrants. As a result, the majority of the Messianic Jewish youth decided not to take up the fight of the identity, dropped their messianic component and became secular Israelis, while very few became religious Jews. The guidance of youth leaders who would not all the time stress the identity issue, but understand deeply who we are as Messianic Jews was lacking.

Yoel's Jewish identity is primarily expressed in his belief in Yeshua. The more he understands the ways of G-d through the Messiah of Israel, Yeshua, the stronger becomes his Jewish identity. This creates a dilemma and paradox, because the Messianic identity, from the perspective of the larger Jewish world, separates him from Judaism. In his eyes, Yeshua is the most Jewish embodiment and expression he can think of. Yeshua is the fullness (שלמות) of the Torah, of the prophecies, of the creation, and that is to be Jewish. But Judaism today has taken the direction to distance itself from Yeshua.

As regards culture and society, Yoel fasts on Yom Kippur together with the nation in responsibility for the nation. Doing so he follows the example of the prophets and the first disciples of Yeshua, who identified with the people even though the people rejected them. Our place is as part of our

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Mk 2:27.

¹⁶¹ See Gal 5:22f.

people, Yoel says. The tradition connects the nation. To celebrate Pessach and not eat Chamez is important not only for his spiritual walk, but also while living as part of the Jewish people. As a Jew it is important for him to identify with the people as part of the people. He personally feels a responsibility as a Jew to keep and teach Torah. However, in his perspective, any Gentile believer in Yeshua, being grafted in (Rom 11:11-24), should find himself in a place similar to his and celebrate all of the biblical feasts - though it is written they do not need to eat Matze for the whole week of Pessach. He as a Jew has the responsibility to be an example to them, to teach and to guide them in biblical Judaism.

What is the primary identity? Is it to be Jewish, or Messianic, or a follower of Yeshua? Yoel is very clear about it that his primary identity is in Yeshua. From there everything else follows. The question of keeping Torah is secondary, whether being a Jew or Gentile is secondary, how successful one is in life is even more secondary. In accordance with Paul in Philippians 3, everything is nothing in relation to what he has in Messiah Yeshua. He considers everything else waste, even though he cares very much about the Jewish people and doesn't despise or annul his Jewishness, but the identity in Yeshua is so much more important. The Jewish identity shall never be stronger than the Messianic identity.

The oral Torah is not an authority for him. In his view it may be read as a historical document, but has no spiritual authority, as it is interpreting things which the scriptures do not say explicitly, in ways which the scriptures do not mention. He is very careful not to use the oral Torah or the literature of the sages for the sake of an argument. It is a double-edged sword, just like the Koran, in his eyes. Therefore, he does not include the oral Torah into his culture, but nevertheless at times uses traditional elements for the sake of identification.

The purpose of the written Torah, as already said above, is for Yoel to be a nurse maid, to educate us, so that we may see, know and understand, who and what G-d is – i.e. holy, pure, who requires of us holiness and purity, modesty and faithfulness. Some laws are not relevant for us today, but the general idea and principle of it is still relevant. The heart of the Torah is more important in his eyes than the letter of the Torah, though as a result he might be selective in what he does and doesn't. He does not eat pork at home as an expression of belonging to the people of Israel. But outside of Israel, if it was especially prepared for him to honor him, he does eat it in order not to offend, as Yeshua said that not what enters the mouth and then leaves the body makes impure, but what comes out of the mouth.¹⁶² He believes that it is not a sin to eat pork, but something, which distinguishes between Jews and Gentiles - not eating pork and fasting on Yom Kippur.

Yoel believes that the biblical scriptures in general are word by word inspired by the Holy Spirit, all on the same level, without errors. The scriptures were preserved over the centuries and carry divine authority until today. He researches and tries to understand the cultural and historical background, the background within the Tanach, and the theological background, the literary style and language and then decides how to interpret the passages and how it is applicable to his live. He admits that he sometimes doesn't know how to interpret something correctly in its context, but he believes that the Holy Spirit will guide him to arrive at decisions, which are right in his conscience before G-d. Though one has to be careful, he adds, for the conscience can also mislead.

The Torah of Messiah he understands to be the outlook and understanding of someone who loves G-d, desires to do His will, loves his fellow-man, cares for the needy, obeys Yeshua's teaching and the Spirit of the things which Yeshua teaches with his words and deeds, in addition to what the Tanach teaches us about how to relate and conduct ourselves. The Torah of Moshe is for him the Torah of

¹⁶² Mt 15:11,18; cf. Mk 7:15.

Messiah, as Yeshua interprets and implements the Torah of Moshe in the very best way. Sometimes, Yoel adds, we don't really understand why something is said in a certain way, e.g. והיו כטוטפות בין עיניך. We are a bit confused and do things differently. Thus, in Judaism we are extra careful and strict and forbid for example chicken with milk. But the question is whether these stricter and stricter rulings out of fear to err are really the Torah. The believers need to ask for understanding and guidance in prayer. Yoel doesn't believe that our rabbis are guided by the Holy Spirit to determine and decide. A fresh believer in Yeshua is more equipped than someone, who doesn't act according to the Torah of Messiah. Our good and loving G-d delights to see us happy doing his will, rather than suffering to do it. Torah is given so that the believer can understand what G-d wants from man. Love and fear of G-d, taking care of the needy, forgiving as G-d forgave him, that's Yeshua's Torah for the believer who wants to follow him. The halachic Torah is only the paint, but the wall is built by the rocks of Torah, which Yeshua highlighted and reinforced.

The main formational influences for Yoel were the letters of Paul, John and the other disciples of Yeshua, and NT scripture reading in general. Over time his scripture reading led him to more and more understanding of the character of G-d, and how that relates to his life.

Yoel says that he has very little interaction with rabbinic halachic Judaism. He is not intimidated by here and there little persecutions. Many Messianic Jews are threatened by it in their Jewish identity and their perception about the word of G-d. There is an anti-reaction amongst Messianic Jews against the religious, but Yoel sees them as his brothers. It hurts him and he is grieved for them as he sees how many of them are lost. He is sad to see our people like this, so blind for the truth, and talks with religious people a lot. He enjoys talking with them but usually reaches a dead end in the conversations regarding the messiahship of Yeshua. "The religious love us as people living a life of faith, because we have shared values and terms: atonement, forgiveness, holiness, modesty", he says. "We speak the same language, but our perception is very different." In the eyes of Haredi Jews his Torah observance is heresy. But in the eyes of the secular Jewish society his Torah observance speaks to them and they connect to his Jewish identity. They discern true faith and action according to one's conscience, no coercion, no unreasonable religiosity, not relying on other people or the supporting society, which threatens the individuality and is hated by secular Jews. People coming to faith in Yeshua from secular backgrounds are saying that they found their Jewish identity. The Messianic Torah enables them to connect to their Jewish identity, to the Tanach and to being in a covenant with G-d. Yoel prefers not to behave like a specific group of Jews in order to eventually witness to them, but rather to be open from the beginning and not foul anybody, and to be willing to hear that they say that he is not of them. The army service, being willing to lay down his life for the Jewish people, is for him the most Jewish thing to do.

For his interaction with the Christian world it is likewise true that they speak the same language but have a very different perception. He perceives a shallowness in the Christian world, which lacks an understanding of the Messianic Jewish identity and believes that the Messianic faith is different from the Jewish faith and therefore separated from each other. His task as a Messianic Jew is to explain to the Christians our and their Jewish identity for them to connect to it. Every year he travels to Germany to conduct a conference there. He does a Pessach Seder with Christians and speaks about Jewish identity, which is strange to them, even though they should understand their Jewish identity through their faith in Yeshua. 2000 years intentional separation of the Church from Judaism and 2000 years of Jewish identity separated from the Messiah created two antagonistic corners. Although, in Yoel's assessment, in the last years the true Christian believers have been coming closer to their Jewish identity; and also in the Jewish world there is a growing understanding, that their best friends in the Christian world are the true believers in Yeshua.

Asked about the practical Halacha in Netivah's activities where Messianic Jews with diverse Torah practices come together, Yoel states that very few Messianic Jews keep kashrut with separate dishes and consider it an important issue. In their activities they do not serve any food, which is not kosher. When they play (electrical) musical instruments on Shabbat, they respect those who will not participate, and, if a big group is bothered by it, they will not play. In general, they will accommodate themselves to people with stricter observance, while not intending to change the views of those that believe in one way or another. Their guideline is respect and giving freedom for everyone to live their faith life. There are those who will not come to their conferences, because of the openness, which would disturb their conception, but 99% feel comfortable with them. Among the older youth there are discussions about Torah observance. The ministry is teaching not to go against one's conscience, and not to offend a brother by going against his conscience.¹⁶³

Asked about the attempts of formulating a messianic Jewish Halacha, Yoel states that a Haredi person, who comes to faith in Yeshua, should not lose his religious practices which form his identity and are part of his connection to G-d. A Messianic Jewish Halacha, which eliminates the anti-Yeshua elements and adapts it to Yeshua's teaching might be helpful for him, if Yeshua is at the center of his culture. Halacha is a tradition of laws, which developed over the generations: A good idea becomes a decision, becomes the only thing, becomes a rule, becomes a law, becomes Torah from Sinai. The Siddur for example started as a help for people who did not know how to pray. Then it became unified for all. But with which right and authority does someone decide for all? It is possible to pray those prayers, but one does not have to. They are not the only prayers that need to be prayed. The same process happened in the Catholic Church. Tradition became Torah. But Yoel looks for the inner intent of the commandments. Thus, regarding the commandment of Tzitzit and the tradition to wear a Talit during prayer he asks whether there isn't something else, which will teach us to keep the laws of G-d. The New covenant (Jer 31) is characterized by the Torah being written on the heart, which means for him that in the new covenant the Holy Spirit reminds the believer in every moment of life of the love of G-d. There are some existing general agreements among Messianic Jews like "no smoking", but they are not necessarily right. It is not beneficial, from his perspective, to write a Messianic Jewish Halacha for all Messianic Jews. The agreements should come from a shared understanding of the scriptures. The Holy Spirit is the believers' leading conscience. Otherwise, we would develop a religiosity and measure and judge, receive or reject one another according to it. The activity of the Holy Spirit in a believers' life should be the criterium. The congregation and the congregational leaders have the responsibility and authority to guide, correct and admonish deviant or sinning people according to the scriptures and according to the Spirit of the scriptures, but the freedom gained through Yeshua should not be taken. If people want to create for themselves a framework and it helps them, they may do so. But it should not be compulsive. Some people want detailed instructions, others only rough guidelines. People are not perfect and will make mistakes. The Torah of Messiah doesn't focus on compulsive rules, but bears witness to the character attributes of G-d. Yoel's understanding is expressed in the example of what is right and wrong at home, i.e. what Abba loves and doesn't love. The goal for living in the family home is *not* to live in fear to break rules, but to love the author of the rules, to understand them and to act in their spirit. A child who grew up in a home with a lot of strict rules and then comes to another home where there is freedom and love, is initially uncomfortable, confused and insecure. Eventually, the child will know not to destroy the home in which love reigns. That is its Torah.

¹⁶³ See 1 Cor 8:10 and its context and Rom 14.

5.8.7 Seth Postell (Israel - Academic Dean ICB, congregational leader)¹⁶⁴

Seth Postell is from a reform Jewish, not very religious background. He invested the past 21 years in full-time Torah study as his academic career. He is the academic dean of the Israel College of the Bible (ICB) as well as the leader of a Messianic Jewish congregation in the Petach Tikva area.

When hearing the word Torah, he thinks not just of the laws, but about divine instruction and about the whole Chumash as one single book, with some aspects of it written after Moshe, linking it into the history of the former prophets. His feelings towards it are joy, love and excitement. His associations with it are the new covenant and the Messiah, hope, G-d's grace and favor, G-d's promises, his own sinfulness, the Jewish people's tendencies to disobey, G-d's goodness and G-d's attributes of mercy (Ex 34:6-7).

Seth uses the term Torah as instruction, defined according to the context. Instruction takes place in all different forms, also in poetry, wisdom literature and prophetic oracles. He would define the Chumash as a narrative, as story book with laws, but not as a law book.

Being passionate about the Torah he published the book "Reading Moses, seeing Jesus" together with colleagues of the ICB, recognizing that the Torah as a book is very misunderstood by the Jewish people, but also by Christians. In his family and congregation, he teaches Torah as a narrative pointing towards Yeshua. Yeshua makes no sense apart from Moshe. Moshe is needed as the context to understand the NT, the prophets and the writings of the Tanach. Torah plays a key role as the foundational document. He tries to meditate on it day and night, and teach it in every context of his life. Torah also serves as an instruction guide for hermeneutics. Who has learned how to read the Torah knows how to read the rest of the Bible.

At home in talks around the table Seth teaches his children for example to see textual patterns of "מעשה אבות סימן לבנים" intended by the authors. He teaches them to live in a narrative and make sense of their lives as a narrative. One cannot understand the faith without the story. Everything Seth does is shaped by the Torah.

Seth teaches that the Torah is authoritative scripture for all believers in Yeshua, including the laws. But as believers in Yeshua they are no longer under the covenant of Sinai. Moshe anticipated the giving of the new covenant with the circumcision of the heart. The new covenant has a new priesthood with Yeshua as the High Priest, from the tribe of Judah. The Mosaic covenant is the Old Covenant. The believer in Yeshua has not only a different High Priest and a perfect sacrifice, he also has no longer impurity, and food cannot make him unclean. He is no longer under the Torah's legislation as covenant. In his understanding, the old covenant and the new covenant are completely different and can't correspond together. But the laws are still authoritative scripture and he meditates on them to understand G-d's wisdom, holiness and love. He learns about his own sin, appreciates the final sacrifice of Yeshua, understands the beauty of the feasts and how they relate to Yeshua as the lamb of G-d and as the Shabbat, and to the giving of the Spirit at Shavuot. The calendar dates are still the same and continue to be a shadow that points to something Yeshua did. As an example for how to relate to the laws, Seth cites Paul, who uses the law not to muzzle an ox while treading out the grain and applies it to pastors, understanding it as G-d's wisdom.¹⁶⁵ Regarding

¹⁶⁴ Interview conducted on 18.4.2021, with material from the book *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus: How the Torah fulfills its goal in Yeshua* by Seth Postell, Eitan Bar, Erez Soref, One for Israel 2015 flowing into the interview; Bio/Testimony of Seth Postell published online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Au0IYXOAxw>, accessed 18.4.2021. This interview narrative was approved by Seth Postell on 18.11.2021.

¹⁶⁵ 1 Tm 5:18; 1 Cor 9:9f.

a literal observance of the laws he gives Kashrut as an example. Kashrut is part of the laws of purity and impurity, which are relevant for being able to enter the temple. But if Yeshua's sacrifice removed sin as well as impurity (Hebrews 9), nothing can make the believer impure. Thus, kashrut becomes a choice. The guiding rule is that one should not go against one's conscience nor make another believer stumble.¹⁶⁶ Instead of strict rules the new covenant gives the believer a passion to be holy.

Before coming to faith in Yeshua he was a reformed Jew and did not think much about Torah. After coming to faith he started to think about the book of the Torah and what to do about it now, and then his relationship to the book radically changed.

He feels an acute responsibility as a Jew to keep the Torah, as a story with a message valid for all generations. The goal of the Torah for him is the new covenant. Keeping means for him to listen to Moses' eternal testimony about Yeshua and the new covenant (Dt 30). In his view, it is crucial for Jewish believers, but also for Gentiles, to love the laws and meditate on the Torah as eternal instruction day and night.

The oral Torah serves him as prove that the Torah is not a law book. If the Torah was a law book, why would there be so many volumes of explanations for unclear Torah passages needed? But if the Torah is a narrative, all that is needed is the NT. According to Proverbs "where there is an abundance of words there is sin" the oral Torah with its approach to Torah as a law book turns the Torah into something it was not meant to be. If so much rabbinic debate and discussion is needed, apparently Moses, i.e. G-d was/is a bad communicator. But being a Jew, Seth also identifies with the tradition. It is part of the history of the Jewish people. He thinks of himself as part of the Jewish community. There are traditions which he observes and loves to observe, like lighting the candles, Kabbalat Shabbat, Kiddush. Jewish traditions also are evident in the NT, for example at the Last Supper.¹⁶⁷ Some traditions aid his faith, others are against the NT. He appreciates the beautiful things and wisdom of the oral Torah, but it is in no way for him authoritative or binding. In the question of the definition of Jewish identity for example, he disagrees with the Halacha of maternal descent. The notion of the oral law as something given at Mount Sinai he regards as historically inaccurate. The NT mentions traditions, but no notion of an oral law. In the 2nd temple period there was a diversity of Judaisms with various oral traditions. By which ones should one go by? Even the calendar was not unified. The Pharisees were a minority. Seth believes that the notion of a binding oral law from Mount Sinai was invented afterwards to justify pharisaic Judaism as the authentic Judaism. Pharisaic Judaism was probably best suited to survive the exile. Surely, there were traditions.

Seth relates to the written Torah and scripture in general according to 2 Tm 3:16-17, considering all scriptures (Tanach and NT) G-d breathed, all with the same level of inspiration and authority. In his research he deals with biblical criticism and appreciates the scholarly observations, while usually disagreeing with their conclusions. Reading scripture is a cross-denominational, cross-faith community project, he explains. His goal is to understand authorial intent. Whoever can help him see the text better is useful. Regarding textual criticism he is aware that not always the MT preserves the best text. Nevertheless, his focus is on the final form of the text as the inspired word of G-d.

The Torah of Messiah in Seth's understanding is the instruction of Messiah found in the Gospels. The Gospel of Matthew is structured after the Chumash. It explains Yeshua's yoke. Messiah's Torah

¹⁶⁶ 1 Cor 8:10.

¹⁶⁷ Mt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-25; Lk 22:7-38; 1 Cor 11:23-25.

clearly embraces Jew and Gentile as one new man, whereas Moshe divided the Jewish people from the nations, setting boundaries, which were crucial for certain periods of history.

Seth doesn't see the Torah as the Sinai covenant, but as all leading up to the Torah of Messiah. The purpose of the Torah is to lead to Messiah and to the new covenant. The passage of Dt. 30 "who will go up to the heavens" etc. he reads as an allusion to Moshe going up Mount Sinai, which implies the recognition of a prophet like Moshe who will bring a Torah which is essentially within the person and nobody is needed to go up and come back down. Thus, the Torah is about the Sinai covenant, but about other covenants too. The story line is, in his understanding, essentially messianic. The Torah of Messiah continues the Torah of Moshe, of which everything, every Yod and tittle, remains. If something would be removed, its messianic witness would be destroyed. Seth paraphrases Jn 5:46f with Yeshua saying: if you believed Moshe you would believe me, because Moshe testified about me.

The most important formative influence for Seth was the book of John H. Sailhamer: *The Pentateuch as Narrative*,¹⁶⁸ and in addition Israeli Jewish scholars with a literary approach to the Bible: Meir Sternberg, Robert Alter, Jonathan Grossman, Yair Zakovitch – which all of them were insightful for him about how to read a narrative.

In regard to Torah he sees a distinction between Jews and Gentiles on some levels. In regard to salvation there is no distinction. But Jewish identity is important, otherwise the Bible would turn irrelevant. The distinction between Israel and the nations still exists, and Messianic Jews serve as prove that G-d has not forsaken Israel. Even in Israel's unbelief G-d has used the nation of Israel to preserve the Hebrew Bible. It is a blessing to the Gentiles, not a threat. Therefore, Seth finds it important that his children identify as Jewish believers in Yeshua, as glory to G-d, and as a constant reminder to the church that G-d has not forsaken the Jewish people; and as a constant reminder to the Jewish people that Yeshua is for Jews.

The Jewish world is his world. He lives in Israel as a regular Israeli, all his neighbors are Jewish. He loves and believes in the Jewish people. His children speak Hebrew. He served in the army ready to lay down his life for this people to exist, including the right of the rabbis to choose to hate him, or the right of the rabbis to keep the oral law. Israel is the one place where Jews can be Jews and not fear, and he believes that it is an important place in the plan of G-d. He has mainly secular Israeli friends, but made also a couple of religious friends during his army time, and he interacts with people of the religious community at Bar Ilan University. With people of the Haredi community he has practically no interaction, as he is not seeking out persecution.

With the Christian world he enjoys a wonderful educational interaction, as he always wants to give Christians an understanding of the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and help them to understand Israel in the plan of G-d and realize that Yeshua is Jewish and the NT a Jewish book. He wants to make them feel at home, so that Gentile believers never feel they are second class citizens, but can rejoice over the miracle of the new covenant, which makes them one with him. They are family, just like the Jewish world.

Asked about the importance of Torah for his Jewish identity as well as for his identity as a follower of Yeshua, he remarked that the whole Bible, including the NT, is written by Jewish people. He feels at home in the Torah as he does in Matthew, or even in Luke. The scriptures encourage his Jewish identity. He didn't know what it meant to be Jewish until meeting Yeshua. He and his family love the

¹⁶⁸ H. Sailhamer: *The Pentateuch as Narrative - A Biblical Theological Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids-MI 1995.

holidays and Shabbat as a testimony to the redemption and the lamb (Pessach) or the rest in Messiah (Shabbat). The Torah informs how he lives. His love for the Torah comes probably a lot from his heritage, he presumes. His faith in Yeshua and his Jewish identity are combined.

Halacha he defines with reference to the letter of Ephesians as how we walk out our faith, i.e. the application of scripture. Every Messianic congregation implicitly creates a Halacha, being aware of it or not. The Messianic congregations tend to follow the lead of their elders. But an authoritative Halacha (like Mishna or Talmud) would be very divisive, and that would be bad. The notion of a spiritual leader in the Messianic community is very different from a spiritual leader in the rabbinic community. The rabbi takes a place close to G-d in terms of his role in the community. People absolutely depend on the rabbi to make decisions about all sorts of things in life, and his word is G-d's word to them. Whereas in his Messianic community, they believe in the priesthood of all believers, and the leaders are being held accountable to the authority of scripture. His interpretation should not become Halacha, because he might make mistakes. But as the leaders try to help their people how to apply the word of G-d to their lives, Halacha is nevertheless being created. He is in favor of statements of faith for congregations, because a local congregation is led by leaders, and there ought to be submission to the leaders. But the leaders have to be held accountable according to scripture, and the congregation has an obligation to correct them.

Seth does not acknowledge the rabbinic claim of halachic authority, because it is built on the notion of oral law. Jewish traditions are important, but not more important than scripture. Many traditions he loves, and some, like Lag b'Omer, he hates. Thus, he picks and chooses from tradition.

Scripture should be the basis for halachic decisions, i.e. a thorough knowledge of the word of G-d, and collective wisdom of people who love G-d and know His word well. When scripture is not clear, wise people should be consulted who know the word of G-d well, pray about it and seek wisdom. The leading of the Spirit is not according to feelings, but according to scripture. The Spirit has a role in leading and involves feelings, but always in accordance with scripture. In cases of doubt one should go according to the weaker brother (Rom 14).

It would be boring if everyone would be doing exactly the same, as prescribed. There was diversity in the early NT Church in Jerusalem, being comprised of Hebrew speaking and Hellenized Jews. The only way to arrive at one unified Halacha would be a perfectly wise leader who never makes mistakes and is always right about everything he says about scripture, like the pope; and Seth doesn't have a pope. He assumes that even with the arrival of Messiah there will be diversity in the Kingdom, as the book of revelation describes believers from "every tribe, tongue and nation".¹⁶⁹ The distinctions show the multifaceted beauty of G-d. It is up to Yeshua to answer in the messianic Kingdom, whether there is to be one Halacha. Possibly, we may not need to consult Halacha, because we will be so radically changed, our faith will be internalized and we do not need to ask these kinds of questions.

5.8.8 Jeremiah Michael (Israel - First Fruits of Zion, Bram Center)¹⁷⁰

Jeremiah represents the Bram Center in Jerusalem of First Fruits of Zion (FFoZ). He, like all of the Jewish staff members at FFoZ, is a second-generation Messianic Jew, originally from the USA.¹⁷¹ He

¹⁶⁹ Rv 7:9.

¹⁷⁰ Interview conducted on 26.4.2021, ministry website of First Fruits of Zion at <https://ffoz.org/>, also the First Fruits of Zion (Boaz Michael) publication *Messiah Journal* 124 (2016) – *First Fruits of Israel*, which discusses a number of issues in relation to Torah in depth. The interview narrative was reviewed by Jeremiah Michael in March 2022, and some additions and changes were requested due to changes in the ministry. The present version of the interview narrative was approved by him on 11.3.2022.

lives rabbinically Torah observant and attends, like everyone at the Bram Center, a mainstream orthodox Jewish synagogue in his neighborhood for prayer.¹⁷²

FFoZ has a very positive approach to Torah, Jeremiah explains. Based on verses from the Torah and Yeshua's relation to Torah, Torah is the will of G-d and how Jews and Gentiles, each in their unique roles, should live their lives. Shabbat, Kashrut etc. were given to Israel by G-d's grace to show the right way to walk in.

Jeremiah's first associations with the word Torah are joy, love, grace and mercy. He thinks of Jn 1:16f of having received grace over grace, whereas he understands the first grace to be the Torah and the second grace to be Yeshua. They, the Torah and Yeshua, are not opposed to each other, but one on top of the other. He uses the term Torah with a very broad meaning. He is not just thinking about the Chumash, but also about Halacha and Minhagim, - which for him comprises the Jewish religious culture formed by Halacha and Minhagim. Also, the inner desire and search for G-d is Torah for him. He defines Torah as understood by Chazal to comprise the oral Torah and the written Torah, the oral Torah being the interpretation of the Torah received at Sinai. He sees himself much closer to the orthodox Jewish understanding than to protestant Christian perceptions.

He lives an observant orthodox-style Jewish life. The keeping of the commandments, i.e. Kashrut, holidays and Shabbat, family purity etc. is of supreme importance to him. His spiritual well-spring is derived from Torah observance. He experiences a tremendous blessing in it. During mealtimes he teaches his children blessings, says Divrei Torah and conducts a little Torah study framed by prayer. These things are not a side issue, but central to their lives. Personally, he takes daily time for Torah study from Gmara, Midrash, Halacha, Rashi or alike. He does not have a set schedule. Mostly, he is studying Chazal, but also Parshat haShavua with his children, without too much commentary so as to encourage their own thinking and creativity. Initially, he walked on Shabbats to the Messianic Jewish Netivyah congregation in the center of Jerusalem, but it was too long of a walk and not feasible with the children. Now,¹⁷³ he attends a large regular orthodox neighborhood synagogue. He comes to synagogue to pray and does not have much interaction. Most likely the people in his synagogue would not know about his belief in Yeshua. During the week he has fellowship with other believers in Yeshua in group studies or activities of FfoZ. Many times, he spends Friday evenings with Yeshua believing friends, such that he does not feel isolated as a believer in Yeshua. The same is true for the other people involved with FfoZ in Israel. The overseas staff of ca. 30 people in the USA all attend Messianic Jewish congregations or some of them churches.

Jeremiah reflects on the impact belief in Yeshua has on the relation to Torah. He and the others at FfoZ find it bizarre to see Jewish people coming to faith in Yeshua and abandoning Torah or adopting a completely Christian perspective on it. He struggles to understand this response and is unable to relate to it at the core. The different redefinitions of Torah seem for him to go against the simple meaning of what Torah is.

He feels a definite responsibility to keep the Torah of Moshe and takes the Bible literally. G-d gave the Torah to Israel with its mitzvot contained in it, to do them. Blessings are promised for doing things the way the Torah says. It is the connection to the covenant.

¹⁷¹ At present, March 2022, FfoZ has a total of about 40 staff members, comprised of Jews and Gentiles.

¹⁷² This was true at the time of the interview. In the meantime, Jeremiah has stopped attending synagogue and prays at home. There were also changes made in the composition of the staff in Jerusalem. Thus, as of March 2022, not everyone attends orthodox synagogues.

¹⁷³ True for the time of the interview.

Paul in Galatians¹⁷⁴ expresses the principle that every new covenant does not invalidate the previous one. There has to be some kind of continuation as G-d says that the Torah is eternal, forever. Though sometimes "eternal" in the Tanach might not mean literally eternal, but for a very long time, and will eventually come to an end. Yeshua says until heaven and earth will pass away, no Yod or tittle of the Torah will pass away.¹⁷⁵ When heaven and earth do pass away, there will be some alterations. Chazal too speaks about a shift of Torah at the time of Mashiach. But we are not there yet. Thus, Jeremiah ascribes to the concept of the covenants building on each other as progressive revelation. G-d reveals progressively more of himself throughout time, whereas each expansion cannot nullify or override the previous revelation, such that everything revealed stays in place.

Asked about his relation to the oral Torah Jeremiah starts with the question of what the oral Torah is. Either the oral Torah includes everything, Halacha, Haggadah, and all there is, or it denotes a very narrow understanding of Halacha. According to the latter opposition view of Rambam and R. Saadia HaGaon, which Jeremiah adopts, Moshe received at Sinai the ability and permission to interpret the Torah. The methods of interpretation he passed on to the next generations. From here Halacha is created. There were some issues though in the succession of Halacha. Haggadah, he does not treat as something which has to be accepted, in accordance with R. Saadia HaGaon, Rambam, Ramban and others. The anti-Yeshua passages are part of the Haggadic material, which he is able to put aside and not regard as essential authoritative oral Torah. Until today, Jeremiah says, he has not seen a robust halachic argument, based on halachic sources with halachic reasoning, which would rule out an identification of Yeshua as the Messiah. There are social Minhagim and pressures against it. If there would be no halachic right to identify someone as the Messiah, no one could identify anyone as the Messiah, not the Lubavitcher Rebbe, nor King David, nor the biblical Daniel. But discussions of Chazal make such suggestions of potential Messiahs; and in present time not even Rav Kanievsky would halachically be allowed to identify someone as the Messiah, who hasn't yet fulfilled all that the Messiah is supposed to fulfill. Jeremiah assumes the principle of R. Shmuel ben Chofni (9th cent. C.E.), according to which Moshe received a pure Halacha at Sinai, but through the *ירידת הדורות*, the decline of the generations, it gets more and more corrupted. The job of the poskim and people with enlightenment is to use the rational faculties along with the tradition to try to reconstruct the original Halacha. Jeremiah believes very strongly that Yeshua is part of G-d's plan for the world. Even if there were oral halachic rulings against him, it could be an example of the corruption through *ירידת הדורות*. So, using the rational faculties and not being able to find any valid halachic reasoning against it, he would say that these would be mistakes in ruling. The existence of such potential mistakes doesn't invalidate the entire system of Halacha. There is for sure a cultural obsession against Yeshua. However, he wouldn't say that the entire halachic system is based on being anti-Yeshua. Rather, he believes it is based on actual revelation to the Jewish people (Dt 17).

With Jeremiah's narrow halachic approach to the oral Torah and his option for rational corrections of possibly corrupt halachic traditions, the issue of personal trust in the personally handed down oral tradition from father to son and from rabbi to student is circumvented. If adopting a broader approach to the oral Torah including everything, the anti-Yeshua culture and the trust in the previous generation would be part of the oral Torah. Going against the traditional anti-Yeshua sentiment would then mean breaking the line of trust.

Jeremiah's attitude towards the written Torah and scripture in general is just reading and studying it through a Jewish lens. He does not connect to biblical criticism and document hypothesis, but trusts the text as it is today and believes that G-d wanted it that way for the Jewish people. He relates to it

¹⁷⁴ Gal 3:15-22.

¹⁷⁵ Mt 5:18, Lk 16:17.

as G-d's will. He did not really study the issues involved in the transmission of the Tanach. Regarding the NT, it was transmitted initially orally. Things might have been said a bit differently, such that he asks for certain sayings what might have been a more fitting context. For him, there is a hierarchy of authority of scripture. Torah is the foundation. Whatever flows with the Torah is kosher. The Gospels have to meet the requirements of the Torah, not the other way around. His focus is on Torah as a law book. In regard to the NT he sees the Gospels not as interpreting the Torah, but as passing on the story of Yeshua's life and his teachings, which as Torah teachings show on a deep level what it means to observe the Torah. Reading the NT in this way, it is for Jeremiah fully kosher too. Regarding the letters of Paul, Jeremiah believes Paul to be a genius interpreting the Torah in an incredible deep way. But as a genius his thoughts are not always so clear. But, Jeremiah asserts, Paul is very clear about the Jew-Gentile distinction in regard to Torah observance. The apostle goes against Gentile circumcision and immersion as a mechanical means to be able to enter the עולם הבא, the coming world, without keeping Torah and without the faith issue. In other words, doing a quick conversion while continuing to live as a pagan Gentile does not get someone into Heaven. This is the position of FfoZ in understanding the criticism of Paul and his position to Torah observance. What makes someone a Jew is keeping Torah. The doers of Torah are justified before G-d (Rom 2:13).¹⁷⁶ Jeremiah distinguishes when Paul, according to his understanding, is talking to Jews and when he is talking to Gentiles. Thus, a Gentile should rather say that he sees great value in keeping Shabbat, but not because it gets him into heaven.

On the question of what the Torah of Messiah is and how it relates to the Torah of Moshe, Jeremiah first takes recourse to Chazal. There is a precedence in Chazal citing opinions that there will be a new Torah of Messiah. He has no idea what the Torah of Messiah is. Coming through in the teachings of Yeshua is an inclusion of Gentiles and their change of status, but he does not know what the totality of the Torah of Messiah is. As we are not yet in the reign of Messiah, he cannot say what it will be. In thinking more about it, he suggests that maybe the notion of ביטול, the emptying of the own desire in order to do the will of the father, could be the Torah of Messiah. This means a complete transformation of the way we are as humans, having the Torah written on the heart. It would be a completely experiential matter to the effect that the external Torah will be embodied through us. Maybe, just as G-d incarnated in Yeshua, the Torah will be incarnated into everybody, with Yeshua being the first fruit. People will not be keeping Torah, but will be "living Torahs". Maybe that is the Torah of Messiah.

Jeremiah's strongest formative influence was growing up in a g-dly, wholesome home. His parents instilled a love for Torah, for Yeshua and for study. Further, he was formed by the community and by the different Messianic Jewish pioneers. He hasn't had a distinct revelation experience, but had always very positive experiences of Torah living.

According to Jeremiah's and FfoZ's position, Jews have an absolute obligation to keep Torah. For Gentiles many things are obligatory too, but others are optional, i.e. circumcision, Shabbat, Kashrut, as they are a sign between G-d and the Jews. Keeping Shabbat is a blessing – but as it is a sign, Gentiles should not keep it fully according to Halacha. There should be a distinction. The Noachide laws are binding on everyone. A question discussed in his circles is whether believing Gentiles could be categorized moreover as Ger Toshav. Then, more commandments would be binding for them. Also, Paul demands of the Gentiles not to commit sexual immoralities. Does that make all the sexually relevant Torah commandments, including family purity, binding for believing Gentiles? Does

¹⁷⁶ "For it is not merely the hearers of Torah whom God considers righteous; rather, it is the doers of what Torah says who will be made righteous in God's sight." CJB

the statement not to eat anything strangled imply all improperly slaughtered animals, which shouldn't be eaten? This could be inferred from a statement in the Tosefta, according to which an improper cut causes the animal to suffocate from his own blood. But keeping strictly kosher, including when eating outside of the own home, does not seem appropriate for Gentiles. The FfoZ position on it is that Jews need to keep strictly kosher and Gentiles need to keep only the minimal biblical rules for food and should not break table fellowship over food.

Jeremiahs interaction with the Jewish world he describes as very positive. He studies at Bar Ilan University and has a lot of religious friends. He recounts how when he visited Israel 10 years ago he walked into the first Yeshiva and joined for a day. He also reports very positive interactions at Shul. Contributing his insights, he wants to correct a very misguided negative approach and understanding of Gentiles, which persists within the Jewish community. Gentiles, he asserts, can be just as righteous as Jewish people can be. Moreover, he aims to change the religious Jewish perception of Christians to the effect that not all Christians are deceptive, evil-intending missionaries, but very many of them are very g-dly people, who sincerely want Jews to continue to keep Torah. He observed that many Jews have an over-simplified perception thinking that all Christians are Catholics, and that all Catholics want Jews to bow down to Yeshua, believing that if they don't bow down to Yeshua, they are going to hell for eternity. Jeremiah himself has an introverted personality and shared his faith in Yeshua with very few friends. Although, he is always honest and open about who they are, personally as well as as an organization. Generally, the honesty is being appreciated. Thus, he is not pro-active in sharing the faith. Everything is in the context of relationship. There are some hostile organizations to FfoZ, whose accusations are based on pure slander and lies, but FfoZ is usually not their prime target.¹⁷⁷

His interaction with the Christian world is likewise very positive. He has lots of Christian contacts and runs a Torah portion study group with Christians. In the USA, he became friends with members of the local Baptist church. Rarely he encounters the negative notion of Christians saying of him to be a stiff-necked Jew blinded by his tradition and therefore can't accept Christianity. Sometimes, Christians have very silly, innocent beliefs about Jewish things like for example that something is kosher because a Rabbi blessed the restaurant. Frequent is a Christian perception that Jews are burdened and in constant fear of sin, such that many Christians can't conceive the fulfillment and enjoyment of an orthodox Jewish life-style. FfoZ is teaching Christians to be able to connect to Torah and help them understand the Jewish side of things, stressing G-d's continued role within the Jewish community and in Torah, G-d's continued relation with the Jewish people outside of the Messiah, an open relationship with G-d for Jewish people and the possibility of salvation (going to heaven) without an explicit relationship to Yeshua.

Jewish identity for Jeremiah is the Torah. It is not just a biological lineage, but inseparable from Torah observance.

As a follower of Yeshua he feels a responsibility to make a Tikun for the bad name Yeshua has been given. Keeping the Torah is part of it. Thus, he aims to bring Yeshua back into the Jewish fold, taking a stand as a disciple that Yeshua didn't abolish the Torah nor intend to turn people away from it.

¹⁷⁷ Very shortly after this interview took place, FfoZ did become a prime target of Yad l'Achim, who were then specifically looking for believers in Yeshua living as part of the orthodox Jewish community like orthodox Jews. It was triggered by an individual case of deception, which was widely condemned by the Messianic Jewish community. Thus, Jeremiah stresses that they are open about who they are as believers in Yeshua, abhor any kind of dishonesty and do not adopt particular dress codes of specific ultra- orthodox streams in order to blend in.

Jeremiah has no understanding for attempts to formulate a Messianic Jewish Halacha. What need is there for a new Halacha, he asks. Maybe something is needed regarding the inclusion of Gentiles. Only Messiah can really bring Jews and Gentiles together. He prays the Birkat HaMinim, as part of the role of Messiah is to destroy the enemies of Israel, and he interprets Yeshua's command to love one's enemies and pray for those who persecute to mean internal Jewish fighting. Complicated mechanics are at work in the formulation of Halacha, Jeremiah adds. It cannot easily be changed or made up. How can people make up Messianic Jewish Halacha without some kind of handed down tradition to rely upon? But there is the reality of a local halachic authority. Although, topics relevant to followers of Yeshua should not be made into Halacha, but dealt with as Minhagim. Halacha would have to have bearing on the entire Jewish community. His definition of Halacha are the by the majority accepted rules of the application of the 613 commandments, which are binding upon the entire Jewish community. Anything linked to NT commandments would not be a question of Halacha according to this definition, but might be an own local halacha (lower case) of a community of followers of Yeshua.

Jeremiah accepts rabbinic halachic authority. The basis of halachic decisions is part of the handed down tradition. A deep understanding is needed of how the halachic system works. Deep fear of G-d is foundational as well as the Torah and the Siddur. Halachic decisions have to be made in the context of tradition. Asked about whether the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is a basis, Jeremiah responds that he believes that the Holy Spirit as a still small voice guiding people is also at work amongst the Poskim when they sift through different opinions to find a solution to a problem.

Definitely there is and should be one Halacha for all of Israel, according to Jeremiah, but Halacha is not to be confused with Nusach or Minhag, with differences for example in Ashkenazi, Sefardi or Yemenite tradition about how things are done. Within the halachic framework every community has their own communal expression of that Halacha. The Reform and conservative Jewish movements in his eyes are not Judaism, but merely a group of Jews, who do some Jewish things. They play a role for isolated Jews to give them a Jewish cultural experience. But in his conception, there is no room for alternative sets of Halacha. People, who are not keeping Halacha are not necessarily bad people. They may have a relationship with G-d and have spiritual experiences, but Halacha cannot just be made up.

5.8.9 Anonymous "Shoshana" (Israel - MJRC congregation on coast)¹⁷⁸

Shoshana¹⁷⁹ is a scholar involved in teaching and formulating halachic standards. She teaches at several academic institutions. Her husband is the congregational rabbi of a small Messianic Jewish Chavura in their area. Shoshana too is an ordained Messianic Jewish rabbi alongside her husband, although she does not desire to be a pulpit rabbi, but rather works in the area of Halacha and education. In their congregation she does what she is asked to do, and joins into congregational discussions.

Shoshana grew up in a moral conservative family without any religious beliefs, but with the awareness of her being a gift from G-d. She always loved G-d, but knew very little, as there was no religious structure at home. However, her home was not anti-religious either. There was a Bible in the house and G-d was somewhere there in the background, even though He was not part of daily life. As a teenager, when she went to church with a friend, she was impressed by the love of the Tanach evident through the Bible knowledge of the Sunday school teacher, and she believed the

¹⁷⁸ Interview conducted on 13.4.2021. For the MJRC and its *Standards of Observance* see <http://ourrabbis.org/main/halakhah-mainmenu-26/introduction-mainmenu-27>, accessed 9.9.2021.

¹⁷⁹ Name changed to protect her identity.

teacher telling her about Yeshua. Thus, she had from the beginning very positive associations with the Tanach. When learning about the Apostolic writings (NT) she would go back to the Tanach to understand it. For many years she and her husband stayed in the Baptist Church. But then they caused some problems, because from reading the scriptures they didn't accept that the teachings of the Torah should not be valid any more after Yeshua. Torah always applied to her, but she did not really understand what that meant until moving to Israel almost 34 years ago. Only then Shoshana was exposed to Jewish religious life and learning.

Shoshana defines Torah as the five books of Moses. But it is more than that. For her, it is the covenant. The prophets and the writings of the Tanach take the Torah and bring it into life. They contribute to further understanding and insights into its application in the biblical time period. Thus, Torah can be found in all of the Tanach. Torah is not a law code and not meant to be a list of laws, but a relationship. Torah at the time of the calling of Avraham and again at the giving of the Torah to Israel brought hope into the world. The other nations did not have a relationship with their gods and did not know what their gods wanted or how to please them. Later, during the 2nd temple period, the Torah became studied more for prescriptive law, not just for wisdom and teaching as it was before.

Shoshana lives fairly observant according to rabbinic Halacha, but is lacking community. There is no Jewish orthodox rabbinic community, that will accept them. They were brought before a Beit Din of the Rabanut, which declared a חרם, a ban, on them. Therefore, they are now members in a conservative congregation, besides leading their small Messianic Jewish Chavura at home. They are keeping rabbinic tradition as long as nothing clashes with NT teaching. But because of the conservative context they are not as strict as in the past. If they did not drive to synagogue on Shabbat, they would not go to synagogue. Joining an orthodox synagogue, building relationships and not telling about the חרם, would in their eyes be deception. In Israel, there are not enough Yeshua believers, who accept rabbinic tradition and live in walking distance from each other to form a rabbinically observant Messianic Jewish community.

Every week, Shoshana's husband writes and publishes something on the Torah portion. Both study Torah and other things to inform them to understand Torah. At their Chavura congregation they read the Torah portion and teach on it. It is basically an orthodox Jewish service except for a time of praise and worship with modern songs and guitar instead of Psukei d'simra.

They keep strictly kosher, according to conservative standards and beyond, because there is nothing wrong with the rabbinic rulings on it. The conservative community handles mistakes differently than the orthodox, but they accept the conservative Takanot and rulings, because they are now part of that community. But the rules have to be taken in proportion. Eating something not kosher means according to rabbinic interpretation to be unclean until evening. But Lashon haRa gets you outside of the camp (example of Miriam). Sometimes one law takes precedence over another. In some situations, not eating something especially prepared to one's honor by ignorant people would be an insult, and they eat and afterwards look for the right moment to explain. Also, honoring the parents may require at times being less strict about Kashrut.

As Jews they believe that the Torah of Moshe is still valid. When they hit the scriptures that speak of the Torah being done away with or replaced (letter of Hebrews)¹⁸⁰, they read it as being in the process, but actually happening only some day in the future, in the עולם הבא, when living in the physical presence of G-d all the time. The first Jewish believers in Yeshua seem to have kept the

¹⁸⁰ See Heb 8:13.

Mosaic Torah. Shoshana sees no contradiction between the NT and the Torah. There are things in the Torah, which cannot be obeyed now without the temple. In these areas she accepts the rabbinic interpretation of what can be and what can't. She sees no problem with the replacement of sacrifices with prayer, taking it from the concrete Avodah into an abstract. The authority of the written Torah will vanish eventually, because it was given for a purpose showing what sin is¹⁸¹ and who G-d is, but the living Torah in Yeshua is eternal. She finds it important to understand the canonical narrative of the Torah (teaching of G-d): The creation of the world by G-d is not forever, but for consummation, for us to someday be with Him in eternity. With the entry of sin there is a parallel story line of salvation. Both story lines come together in Yeshua and continue together with his active involvement. With the coming of Yeshua the eschatological period was started, but we are not there yet. We are in the "already, but not yet".¹⁸² We are told to be seated in heavenly places,¹⁸³ but we live here on this earth. Thus, we work on two realms. Shoshana sees no conflict between the written Torah and the living Torah. Yeshua lives the white part of the Torah, the space around the letters, the intent behind it. Just like the book of Ruth shows Torah in action, i.e. living Chesed, so Yeshua's life does.

Torah was given to a community, to Israel as a whole, Shoshana adds. Therefore, communal relationships are essential. Accordingly, some of the rabbinic interpretations are not law for her. As example may serve the commandment to honor the Shabbat and keep it holy, for which the tradition of what is permissible develops by precedents. Likewise, the written Torah does not specify the details of divorce. As the world changes, the way the rules are interpreted has to change with it. But this cannot be done by an individual.

For Shoshana, the oral Torah is valid and authoritative, but not on the same level as the Chumash and the other biblical scriptures. She points out the distinction between D'oraita and D'rabbanan: D'oraita always takes precedence over D'rabbanan. The anti-Yeshua passages she puts aside and respects the rabbis and the authority they were given to interpret the Torah. Paul says G-d blinded the Jews,¹⁸⁴ and they are blinded in certain areas. Where something clashes with the NT, she feels that G-d blinded them. She might not know all, but has been enlightened in that area. Jews have carried the Torah and the Tanach, Christianity has carried the NT. Both are needed to understand G-d and the scriptures. In a way she sees it similar to the clashes between Mitnagdim and Chasidim, which over time balanced each other out and learned to respect and appreciate each other. She believes that over time there won't be a conflict. She has a lot of hope that someday G-d will take the blinders off, in accordance with Paul's utterance that all of Israel shall be saved (Rom 11:26, Isaiah 45:17). When that happens, there will be a change of emphasis, maybe a relaxation in the perception of other people who do not do everything exactly the same way, towards relationships of loving kindness. A lot of the Jewish orthodox bias against Yeshua comes from historical interactions between Jews and Christians. However, in recent times, the Catholic Church is looking back and is willing to make corrections and change. It is easier for Shoshana not to accept the traditional teachings of the Catholic and Orthodox churches, which have been blinded towards Israel and towards the Tanach through all kinds of historical events. For the Rabbinic writings she has very high respect. The Midrashim give her insights into the world view and thought processes and help her to understand the NT, especially Paul, who himself produces midrash.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Rom 3:20 "For in his sight no one alive will be considered righteous on the ground of legalistic observance of *Torah* commands, because what *Torah* really does is show people how sinful they are." CJB

¹⁸² Cf. 1 Jn 3:2, also Heb 2:8f.

¹⁸³ Eph 2:6.

¹⁸⁴ Rom 11:25.

When looking at rabbinic halachic rulings, she is looking historically, always considering its original communal context, starting with Mishna, Tosefta, Jerusalem Talmud, then the Babylonian environment of Zoroastrianism, which influenced the way the stories were written in the Babylonian Talmud. Given these influences, she differentiates between Halacha and Agada. She is looking at the historical settings of the people writing the responsa. The question of whether they are applicable now is to be answered sometimes with yes, sometimes with no. The codes created to make handling the information of the Talmud easier, became the way of life, followed by the Shulchan Aruch and the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch. The rulings became multiplied over the years. In the MJRC Halachic Committee, of which she is part, they look at the halachic development over the years and how they can understand it through current sociological or scientific information. They ask: Does the rabbinic ruling conflict with the five books of Moses, with the Tanach, or with the NT? If there is no conflict, they adopt the ruling. If there is a conflict in the community of the rabbis throughout history, as there is in many cases today, then there is no agreement on the rulings that have come down. Moreover, the different interpretations of Halacha create different Minhagim, which in some instances gain the authority of Halacha. Also, there are disagreements on the permissibility of new inventions. A lot of research flows into the work of the Halachic Committee. The committee sees itself in continuity of the leaders of each generation.

Asked about her relation to the written Torah and scripture in general, she believes that the scripture is inspired, but this does not mean that it has not been edited through time. There are scribal mistakes through copying, but she believes that it came to a final form where G-d said "this far and no more". The Torah was passed down orally for a long time. She doesn't think that Moshe himself penned all five books, but they do come from the authority of Moshe. Saying "five books of Moses" is therefore accurate. The other books of the Tanach and the NT are for her on the same level of authority, but the Torah takes the pride of place. Each one expands the Torah a little bit more, like inspired commentary, added at different times, first the Torah, then the writings and the prophets and finally the NT. They do not tell us where the original relationship is, which is the covenantal relationship. Within the NT all is on the same level of authority for her, but practically probably the Gospels have more weight. In her reading, she places it in the earliest order: first the four Gospels, then acts, then the general letters of the early apostles (Peter, James, John), then Paul's letters and finally revelation. If reading it in this historical order, one reads Paul through the general letters of the apostles. She holds that the letter to the Galatians is generally very misunderstood.

Asked about the Torah of Messiah in relation to the Torah of Moshe, Shoshana answered: The teachings of Messiah include his whole way of life, taking things from not just a literal plain to the moral or abstract plain, from the letters to the white space around it, to the intent going beyond the letter of the law, in contrast to the five books of Moses as a way of life, schoolmaster, teaching.¹⁸⁵

Her positions and understandings got formed through sitting and talking with people who were willing to challenge her thinking without getting upset and to present different questions and discuss the matters in depth. This continues to happen until today, mainly by back – and forth email discussions. Moreover, she did a lot of reading and studying by herself, including for her academic work, which also involved talking with believers as well as non-believers. She appreciates in particular the ideas of non-believers in Yeshua on Torah, Tanach and NT, because they ask questions she would never ask, just like each form of biblical criticism asks different questions.

¹⁸⁵ Regarding her understanding about the passages in Gal 6:2 and 1 Cor 9:21, her answer in writing did not reach me in time.

Regarding a distinction between Jew and Gentile, Shoshana says that certain parts of the Torah are given to Israel alone. A Gentile may choose to participate, if the Jewish community allows it. Shabbat for example is given at creation, but a part of its observance is given as a sign for Israel and pertaining only to Israel, and the same with circumcision, which is a sign of the covenant. Likewise, Tzitzit, Tefillin and the holidays are given to Israel specifically. Other things were given to Jews and it doesn't mean that Gentiles cannot do them. But she deems it problematic if Gentiles see themselves as Jews by doing them, especially if non-Jewish believers in Yeshua, because of their being grafted in, believe they were made Jews. There are in the Tanach things specifically for those "dwelling among you" (Ger Toshav). For Pessach for instance even the strangers have to get rid of Chametz. Gentiles may build a way of life out of the Torah, but the commandments meant to build the relationship between G-d and Israel are for Israel only. She doesn't encourage conversion for believers in Yeshua. Jews and Gentiles are created as such by G-d and are needed both for the Kingdom of G-d. But there are precedents in the Tanach where G-d overrides his previously established principles, and so there are specific incidences, where conversion is appropriate.

She perceives herself to be very active in her interaction with the Jewish world and does not mind sharing her faith in Yeshua, but the synagogue is not the place to preach it. She might witness though from the Tanach in the synagogue context.

Her interaction with the Christian world she describes as very good. She knows who she is and is content in her own skin. She can visit a church and enjoy it, though it is not her own tradition. She loves praise and worship. They do not celebrate Christmas on their own, but she can join a Christmas celebration. It is part of her extended family. She teaches Christians in her classes and aims while teaching to present to them a different way of looking at things.

Torah is a very central part of her identity as a Jew. Everything in Judaism (and Christianity too) emanates out of Torah as covenant, the covenant G-d made with Israel and by extension with mankind. They see themselves primarily as Jews, Jews who believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, - standing in Judaism hand in hand with Christianity. They live as Jews through Yeshua Messiah, are renewed in Yeshua, but are not renewed Jews. For them, there is no conflict between their Jewish identity and being a follower of Yeshua. The commitment to follow Yeshua strengthens Shoshana's commitment to Torah. It becomes clearer and fuller of life. Yeshua brings life according to Torah to perfection.

In her view, Messianic Jewish Halacha is needed in order to relate to Judaism. Every form of Judaism has to respond to Halacha. Although, she expects that Messianic Jews will respond to Messianic Jewish Halacha the way Jews have responded to Halacha in general: There are those who accept and follow it, those who allegorize everything, like in reform Judaism, etc.. When making Halacha she does not think and expect that everybody is going to follow it. Neither can everyone fit into this idea of community, or study to the necessary depth to begin to understand the halachic process. In the Halachic Committee they discuss the halachic matters, submit it to the council for discussion, again discuss it in the committee, again submit it to the council and so on. They work in the format of Takanot.

Rabbinic Halacha is authoritative for her, but not on the same level as scripture. The oral Torah has authority, because the wider Jewish community has given it that authority by accepting it. Because she is part of the wider Jewish community, she has to deal with it and at least has to be able to state a good reason why she is not accepting something.

The basis for halachic decisions for her are the Torah, the Tanach, all the rabbinic Halacha, and then the NT. She always looks what the Torah says, what the Rabbis have said and what Yeshua says. She first deals with the Jewish tradition to get the broad picture and direction to walk in and then looks at the NT, whether there are any direct conflicts. As a believer in Yeshua, her whole life, everything she does, is lived in relationship with G-d guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a living part of the G-dhead, which is with us on a daily basis. The Holy Spirit enlightens the things she puts in. Any noticeable guidance of the Holy Spirit will be brought up, discussed and checked in light of the scriptures, probably first with her husband, then in the Halachic Committee and in the full Messianic Jewish Rabbinical Council.

One Halacha for the Jewish people seems to Shoshana practically impossible. Maybe it would be good if there was one basic Halacha and a lot of different Minhagim in different communities, because depending on the living circumstances, the basic Halacha cannot always be done and interpreted the same way. But practically, we might destroy ourselves from within if we tried to do that, for who would be qualified to make that Halacha? There are too many arguments and outside influences like politics. A big portion of the Halacha is in fact the same, but there would be too much infighting about which Halacha is going to be decided, because it would be very difficult to separate Minhag from Halacha. So much of Minhag has the authority of Halacha. Ideologically though, it would be great to have one Halacha.

One needs to be careful that religious life does not degrade to just a way of life of the community instead of a living relationship with G-d. She is longing for the religious Jewish community life to be full of the Holy Spirit as Yeshua's representative and has a vision seeing fires spreading out everywhere, when all of the religious investments of prayer, study and sanctified lives become energized. She perceives great spiritual power in Jews meeting in synagogues and using all the same form, where individuals are carried by the sum of the community. Regarding the Birkat HaMinim, she has done historical research on it. Because she doesn't see herself as a heretic, she has no problem with it. At another place of the daily prayers she stumbles. She has a problem with the statement for building the temple and the reinstatement of sacrifices. She doesn't have a problem with it in itself, but does not really want to ask for it on a daily basis, because she doesn't feel ready for that to happen.

5.8.10 Barry (& Batya) Segal (Israel - worship artist, Vision for Israel, Joseph storehouse)¹⁸⁶

Barry and Batya Segal are well known worship artists and founders of "Vision for Israel" and the humanitarian outreach organization "Joseph storehouse". They produce TV shows, used to held large international gatherings in Jerusalem celebrating Sukkot with Christians and more recently started to regularly hold congregational online gatherings with international attendance.

Barry's first reactions to the term Torah come with the words: The laws of G-d, the moral principles of living, Jewish tradition, stability for society through the 10 commandments. He feels that it is impossible to fulfill all of the laws of Torah. However, Yeshua said: "Do not think that I have come to

¹⁸⁶ Interview conducted with Barry Segal on 27.4.2021. For Barry & Batya's worship music see <https://www.barryandbatyasegal.com/>, for "Vision for Israel" see <https://www.visionforisrael.com/en>. TV productions are found on Youtube under the name "Roots and Reflections with Barry Segal". The "Moriah Gathering" was born as an international monthly online fellowship during Corona, see <https://www.visionforisrael.com/en/events>.

abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”¹⁸⁷ Through Yeshua, he asserts, we can walk this journey.

Asked about his own definition and usage of the term Torah, he refers to standard dictionary meanings: In Judaism, Torah is the law of G-d as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, known as the Pentateuch, with 613 commandments. He likes the Wikipedia entry, which well expresses the essence of Torah: The word Torah in Hebrew is derived from the root ירה which means ‘to guide’ or ‘to teach’ (Lev. 10:11). The meaning of the word is therefore ‘teaching’, ‘doctrine’ and ‘instruction’.

Barry's wife Batya reads and studies the Parashat haShavua nearly every week. The insights she receives from G-d from the reading of the Torah have become a regular source of inspiration to them. She tries to instill these precious nuggets both to their congregational online gatherings these days and also to their family. In terms of practical Torah observance, they keep at home a biblically kosher kitchen, but also have a separate set of strictly rabbinically kosher dishes etc. for orthodox visitors.

Barry, according to his own words, was a very typical Jewish boy growing up in a traditional conservative Jewish home in the USA. They were attending synagogue on holidays. His grandfather was the president of the synagogue. He was impressed by the traditional elements, e.g. wearing the Tallit etc., which led him to ask questions. After his Bar Mitzva he became a Rock n'roll Hippie. Barry says that compared to the time before he came to faith, his faith in Yeshua made him into being a better Jew. It increased his desire to learn more about his Jewish roots.

His wife Batya comes from a very orthodox (dati leumi) Jewish home of Sephardic Yemenite background. She was born in Jerusalem, attended religious orthodox school and then switched to public High school. Batya's father used to have Batya sit with him as he chanted and prayed through the scriptures in the mornings and evenings. This chanting of scriptures inspired her later songs. After coming to faith, she has a greater appreciation for it, and the scriptures became alive to her.

Regarding his responsibility as a Jew to keep the Torah of Moshe, Barry relies on the law of liberty¹⁸⁸ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As a believer in Yeshua and in the power of the Holy Spirit, he senses that his walk in obedience to G-d's word as revealed to him is his obligation to G-d. The little moral compass or rudder inside of his spirit is meant for him to listen to what G-d is saying every moment of the day. This is walking in the light of G-d's word and the Torah. James 1:22 says, “Be doers of the Word and not hearers only.” Barry is usually very busy doing what he feels he should be doing. He continues to explain in regard to the perfect law of liberty: It also says in James, that the idea of *perfect law* relates to that of absolute soundness, wholeness, completeness, finished and reaching its end, wanting nothing. It is God's final word and it is complete, embodying the full revelation of Yeshua the Messiah.

¹⁸⁷ Mt 5:17 (NIV translation).

¹⁸⁸ See Jas 1:25, 2:12, cf. Jn 8:36.

Jas 1:25 "But if a person looks closely into the perfect *Torah*, which gives freedom, and continues, becoming not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work it requires, then he will be blessed in what he does." CJB
Jas 2:12 "Keep speaking and acting like people who will be judged by a *Torah* which gives freedom." CJB
Cf. Jaque B. Doukhan "The Law of Liberty: A Jewish-Christian Reflection on the Law", Paper presented at Helsinki consultation 2012.

For the most part he is not observing the ceremonial commandments. Barry leads his family in the ways of G-d through spending time in reading the Bible, prayer and worship and giving to the needy. All his children and grandchildren are strong believers. Moreover, as part of their ministry they are teaching people of all nations about the Feasts of the Lord, i.e. the biblical feasts. In their ministry called "Vision for Israel" they assist the needy within the Israeli society. It is driven by the Messianic vision for Israel: The blind may see and the deaf hear.

Barry does not relate to the oral Torah, i.e. the writings of the rabbis. Many things were passed on orally and were then written down, but they are not necessarily stating what G-d is saying, he explains his position. It comes in no way near to the divine words of the written Torah or of the Tanach, including the New Testament, which are the final authority. The interpretations of men have many times become like a separating wall hindering direct communication with G-d, just like in the Catholic Church. He rather communicates directly with Yeshua, the great Rabbi and High Priest, instead of turning to human intermediators. When he has time to read some of these writings, there are things he respects, and other things he would not adhere to or grant the level of respect. When praying in the morning, he goes directly to the throne of G-d, which became possible only when coming to faith in Yeshua. But he has respect towards people who pray in any way they do.

His relation to the written Torah and to Scripture in general is fused with respect and admiration. The memories of his Bar Mitzvah are still fresh in Barry's mind. It was a big event in his family. He had studied for a few months how to read and sing his Torah portion from the Torah scroll. He was a good singer and sang from the Torah in front of 1000 people. The people loved it. It was a life-changing day for him. From the money he received he bought his first electric guitar and amplifier. He recalls the significance and respect he had for seeing the scrolls opened and the privilege to chant from the original Hebrew scriptures. It was probably one of the more significant times in his life, he says. The respect he had then, as an unbeliever, to some extent remained with him. But the relationship and respect he has today towards the written scriptures comprised of Torah, prophets and writings is even greater. When he sees someone, or an experienced trained cantor or rabbi, whether Orthodox or Messianic reading the Torah, he has great admiration for that element of time, especially as it is read from the scrolls. It was no different for Yeshua in his day. Barry believes 100% in the truth of the entire scriptures. All are for him on the same level of authority and inspiration. This also includes the NT.

Asked about the Torah of Messiah and its relation to the Torah of Moshe, Barry puts it short and simple. The Torah of Messiah is more strict than the Torah of Moshe, but in the new covenant there is a place of mercy and forgiveness, where the Torah of Moshe would call for judgment.

For Barry, there was one major formative influences. He was disciplined by and working with the Christian Zionist Bible teacher Derek Prince, who became his spiritual father. Barry moved with him to Israel as a young, new believer and lived with him. Lance Lamberts was part of his life too. Both, Derek Prince and Lance Lamberts, were at Barry and Batya's orthodox wedding. Barry and Batya are both Levites. Music and worship is in their genetic code. Their favorite Bible verse is 2 Chr 5:11-14. Their song "Hodu L'A-donai ki tov, ki l'olam chasdo"¹⁸⁹ could be said to be their signature song. It is being passed down now to the grandchildren as a song expressing their faith and way of life.

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXkO24MiWZw>, accessed 17.9.2021.

In regard to the Torah, as far as the basic laws and precepts mentioned, Barry sees no difference between Jew and Gentile. It works for all, but not without the grace and mercy of G-d and the leading of the Holy Spirit 24/7. Although we are all human beings, he does recognize that there are differences between Jews and Gentiles (see Acts 15), but not that one is superior over the other. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. He admits that he has not thought about the topic a lot.

Their interaction with the Jewish world is generally quite good. His organization works with all levels of society amongst the poor and needy, Holocaust survivors, victims of terror attacks, hospitals, first responders, and in most geographical places in Israel. When people see the love they share and the provision to go with it, they see their faith in action, and hopefully G-d's love for them, the Jewish people and Israel. There are those who know where Barry and Batya stand with their belief in Yeshua as the Messiah and at times resist them or try to make problems and it becomes an annoyance. But overall, G-d has been faithful to them and the work of Vision for Israel. They seek to show God's love and their genuine concern for the hearts of the people who are suffering, Jews and Arabs, and stay the course in their calling (Job 29). Their staff are mixed, with believers and unbelievers. Some ask their rabbis whether it is permissible to receive aid from them. Most rabbis say yes. They share their faith when being asked. For reaching people with the message of faith, Barry focusses mainly on his television program where he is very open as a believer, and on social media. Batya experienced harassment from the "anti-missionary" organization Yad l'Achim, but today that organization is busy going after other people.

Their interaction with the Christian world is multifaceted. 'Christian world' can mean such a varying type of Christians in today's world, whether only by tradition, evangelical, charismatic or progressive with a leftist world view. Not all who are called Christians today have an active faith led by the Holy Spirit. He differentiates between religion as a tradition or label and an active faith and belief in G-d. Since 1971, he has met nearly every type of Christian one can imagine. With Christians who love Israel, his interaction is great. With Christians who subscribe to 'Replacement Theology', it is likely to be not so good. Barry recalls a rare instance when some friends tried to book them to sing and speak at a traditional Christian church, probably Catholic. The church did not want them to come because they were Jewish and from Israel. Though Barry's faith, he affirms, does not rest on man's opinions, but on what G-d thinks and His word says. They traveled as a couple all over the world, and beforehand with the late Bible teacher Derek Prince, whom Barry appreciated as a great Christian example with his love for scripture and his love for the Jewish people and Israel. In general, they are experiencing more opposition in the Christian world than in the Jewish world.

Torah is part of his Jewish heritage. However, as a believer in Yeshua, his identity is not found in Rabbinical Judaism, but in Biblical Judaism. Biblical Judaism is what Yeshua lived, Barry states. Thus, it is just natural for him to identify with it.

The attempts of formulating a Messianic Jewish Halacha are not his area of expertise. Barry suggests talking to Joseph Shulam or Elhanan ben Avraham from the Netivya congregation in Jerusalem, whom he knows well. As already stated above, personally he is walking with the Holy Spirit guidance. He is not involved in trying to formulate a Messianic Jewish Halacha, but is open towards it. If there would be something interesting, which looks biblically sound and good, he might try it.

He rejects the rabbinic claim of halachic authority. Although he respects some of the teachings he has heard or insights from rabbis, he does not place his salvation experience based on what they say. Rabbis can give their opinions, but they do not have the final word.

The importance of Jewish tradition culminates for Barry in the biblical feasts. Since he believes the biblical feasts are important to Jews, he feels the "Feasts of the Lord" mentioned in the Torah are significant for Gentile believers in Yeshua as well.

The basis for halachic decisions should be the scriptures where relevant today. According to him, it should not be based on "rabbinics".

Barry does not believe that there should be one Halacha for all of the Jewish people, because the ultimate Halacha is found in the lawgiver Himself. People are too limited to come up with agreed absolutes, and that is why Yeshivot and even Messianic Jews are debating all the time. Anyways, the ultra-orthodox want it their way, the orthodox another and the reform a different way of understanding. We are living in a finite world.

5.9 JEWISH IDENTITY AND POSITIVE APPROACH TO TORAH

All informants expressed a strong sense of Jewish identity and feel at home in the Jewish world, though for some being Jewish became meaningful only after their spiritual awakening through faith in Yeshua. Some started out without any meaningful relation to Torah or even with an anti-Torah attitude. But all of my interview partners have come to a positive approach to Torah, according to their own usage of the term. Further, for all first-generation Messianic Jewish believers, their view, understanding and relation to Torah changed significantly through their faith in Yeshua.

5.10 ASSOCIATIONS AND USAGE OF THE TERM TORAH

Evaluating the interview data, first we need to understand what the term Torah is referring to for the different interview partners. The scope of the intended meaning given to the term Torah is for Vladimir Pikman, Yoel Ben David, Seth Postell, Barry Segal and Eli Birnbaum in reference to the five books of Moses. For Michael Rudolph and Yoel Goldberg it is referring to all of the Tanach plus the NT. For Shoshana it includes the written and oral Torah and also the NT. Daniel has a narrower definition of the oral Torah, but uses the general term Torah very broadly meaning the written Torah plus the oral Torah plus Minhagim, i.e. Jewish culture, and David Neuhaus means generic all of Jewish religious tradition.

For Daniel and for Michael Rudolph, their focus is mainly on the commandments and the Torah is for them a law book. Seth Postell on the other hand ventures to produce evidence that the Torah is not a law book, but has to be understood as a narrative. Yoel Ben David and Eli Birnbaum join him in the narrative approach, and also Shoshana looks at Torah within the whole canonical narrative of the Bible. Shoshana stresses Torah as covenant relationship, and regards the terms of the covenant at Sinai as still valid. In opposition to it, Seth Postell understands the Torah explicitly *not* as the Sinai covenant. For him, the New covenant has replaced the covenant of Sinai, but the Torah remains valid as authoritative scripture to understand G-d's wisdom, holiness and love. David Neuhaus lives and acts out his Torah observance in the Eucharist, but recognizes that the new covenant of Jer 31 is not fully reached for people struggling to be "faithful", and therefore Torah is still relevant as a way of life preventing anarchy. Daniel and Shoshana, Vladimir Pikman and Michael Rudolph all hold that Jews should keep the commandments of the Torah of Moshe. At the same time, they say that Jews should be distinguished from Gentiles, and Gentiles should not play "Jewish" without the Jewish people. Therefore, Michael highlights Torah commandments to be kept specifically by Jews to distinguish them as Jews called to be priests and leaders among the nations. In contrast to it, David Neuhaus and Eli Birnbaum see no obligation as Jews to keep Torah commandments and make hardly a distinction between Jew and Gentile. But still, they do things as Jews because they like it and see value in it (Eli) or to share in Jewish culture and identify with the rest of the Jewish people (David).

Yoel Ben David similarly thinks Jews and Gentiles today should read the Torah in the same way, bringing them through conviction to confession and grace. Only historically there was a difference. He tries to live out the story of the Torah of Moshe appropriate to each different cultural setting. Yoel Goldberg with his anti-religious sentiments tries to keep the Torah of Moshe according to its inner values. Barry, being a worshipper, is the only one of these interview partners, who stresses the aspect of awe and respect towards the Torah. Barry could maybe fall into the category of ¹⁹⁰ "עוסק" "במצווה פטור ממצוות אחרות" as he just keeps himself busy with the things he senses by the Holy Spirit that G-d wants him to do. Yeshua, the living Torah is mentioned by David Neuhaus as a primary association. In response to other interview questions this notion of Yeshua as the living Torah is brought up also by Shoshana and by Daniel. Presumably, it is also on Vladimir Pikman's mind as he presented a paper "Living Torah" at the Helsinki consultation 2013.

5.11 COMMON GROUND

To be able to understand better and evaluate the above differences in relation to Torah, we need to first establish the common basis of those points on which there is agreement by all.

All study the written Torah and regard it along with the rest of the Tanakh and the writings of the New Testament in their present form as divinely inspired and authoritatively binding. Many refer to the passage in 2 Tim 3:16: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living."

For all, the written Torah and the Tanakh point to Yeshua. Several NT scripture references serve to support this point, which is also backed by the personal reading experiences of the interview partners. The main scripture references referred to are Lk 24:27, Jn 5:46, Gal 3: 24f and Rom 10:4. For Daniel though, who reads the Torah as a law book and the Tanach through the lens of Chazal, this seems to be a side issue, which is not constantly present.

All agree that Yeshua did not abolish the Torah, but fulfilled it. The central NT scripture from the Sermon on the Mount Mt 5:16-17 is in everyone's awareness. The CJB translation renders it "Don't think that I have come to abolish the *Torah* or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a *yud* or a stroke will pass from the *Torah* — not until everything that must happen has happened." Cf. also Lk 16:17.

As Jews all interview partners feel in some way a responsibility towards the Torah, be it in teaching Gentiles G-d's story of salvation of mankind starting with the Torah, or taking care to preserve the testimony of the Torah, or to help the Church to relate to the Torah in a proper way, or to preserve their Jewish identity, which was shaped through Torah-centered Jewish culture, or to continue in covenant faithfulness as part of the Jewish nation, to whom the Torah commandments were given.

All would affirm that the written Torah establishes for men the standards of G-d. But everyone interviewed agrees that eternal salvation does not depend on how much one tries to meet the standards of G-d, for no one is perfect. Rather, it is an act of divine grace, made possible through the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua.^{191, 192} There are several clear NT scriptures about entry into the Kingdom

¹⁹⁰ Who is engaged in a Mitzvah is exempt from other Mitzvot.

¹⁹¹ Whether faith in Yeshua and acceptance of his atoning sacrifice for one's personal sins has to be explicitly expressed during a person's life time, or whether there is a possibility for an unrecognized mediation for Jews, who put their faith and trust in the G-d of Israel, is already a matter of dispute.

of Heaven/ eternal salvation and the keeping of commandments saying that no one can earn his way into heaven through perfect keeping of the commandments. Gal 2:16 in the CJB translation reads: "... we have come to realize that a person is not declared righteous by God on the ground of his legalistic observance of Torah commands, but through the Messiah Yeshua's trusting faithfulness. Therefore, we too have put our trust in Messiah Yeshua and become faithful to him, in order that we might be declared righteous on the ground of the Messiah's trusting faithfulness and not on the ground of our legalistic observance of Torah commands. For on the ground of legalistic observance of Torah commands, no one will be declared righteous." Other scripture references are Gal 3:11, Acts 13:39, Eph 2:8 and Rom 1:16f. Daniel though also mentions Rom 2:13, which indicates that the doers of Torah are justified before G-d. But again, it would need a perfect performance of all Torah commandments to be fully righteous, and here comes in Yeshua's perfect performance and the grace extended to those who believe in him relying on his perfect righteousness instead of their own.

Regarding the keeping of commandments all affirm that those commandments reiterated in the NT are definitely to be kept.

All interview partners are biblical Zionists and proclaim G-d's faithfulness towards His promises for Israel. See Rom 11: 25-32 with reference to Isaiah 59:20,21; 27:9 (see Septuagint) and Jer. 31:33,34. They expect the eventual coming to faith in Yeshua of all of Israel and the physical return of Yeshua as Messiah-King of Israel. Thus, the nation of Israel has an end-time function. In practical terms this means that the nation Israel shall live in the land of Israel.

5.12 ANTI-REACTIONS

Given the non- threatening, non-polemic setting of the interviews, some of the anti-reactions, which are more present in published materials did not manifest. In the absence of polemic reactions, the distinguishing lines were nevertheless clearly drawn and the arguments for the own positions formulated with the antagonistic positions in mind. Thus, the interview partners, especially those based in Israel, were very aware of orthodox Jewish positions. Their anti-reactions expressed themselves in anti-legalistic and anti-rabbinic statements. Though not all interview partners held these anti-legalistic and anti-rabbinic positions. Daniel and Shoshana very much flow with many of the orthodox Jewish conceptions, others are somewhere in between.

In response to the legalistic pressure from the orthodox Jewish side, which says: "you must keep the Torah (instructions according to Chazal) to be a good Jew; you must keep the Torah to be pleasing to G-d; all Jews must keep Shabbat so that Messiah might come; Torah is G-d's eternal will for Israel, His covenant people" several informants displayed an anti-legalistic attitude by saying: "no one keeps the law; keeping the law is not the purpose of Torah; we are living under the new covenant."

Rejecting the rabbinic claim of halachic authority, anti-rabbinic sentiments are voiced. Whereas the rabbinic system says that in religious matters the sages replaced prophets, priests and kings and effectively take the position as judges, the "sola scriptura" approach combined with reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit places the responsibility into the hands of every believer and into the self-governance of local Messianic Jewish communities.

¹⁹² Jennifer Nyström's informants clearly express themselves along the same lines. In the words of her reader Avraham: "God does not save you because of works." Jennifer Nyström: *Reading Romans, Constructing Paul(s)- A Conversation between Messianic Jews in Jerusalem and Paul within Judaism Scholars*, Dissertation, 1st edition, Media-Tryck, Lund University 2021, p. 181.

Another anti-reaction can be noticed in the other direction towards a disconnected, Torah despising, Gentile Church. Anti-Torah sentiments in church settings and the neglect of Torah study are problematized by several of the Messianic Jewish representatives, who try to remedy the situation.

Another kind of anti-reaction is found in regard to different lenses for reading the Pauline letters. Both aspects (pro-Torah and anti-law) are present in his letters. The interviewed Messianic Jewish leaders are generally aware of other interpretations of the same passages opposed to their own and react to them while distinguishing themselves from it and explaining and defending their own reading.

5.13 PSYCHOLOGICAL PREFERENCES

Moreover, psychological preferences of the interviewees play a part in forming their positions and their practical life styles. Faith and spirituality are expressed to varying degrees intellectually, emotionally and physically. Some emphasize the physical doing of things, others the intellectual understanding and penetration of the Word of G-d, and again others foster the emotional connection through worship, awe and adoration.

Some focus more on their own spiritual discipline and growth, whereas others focus more on witnessing and raising up the next generation. Questions of relevance within the broader Jewish community, the Jewish identity of the children and intermarriage guide those with a Messianic Jewish long-term vision. Looking what is happening in the second generation serves somehow as a test.

The psychological preferences also include whether someone has an affinity for liturgy or would rather live out his faith free-style. Adherence to a liturgy may provide a "balanced diet", stability and a sanctified routine with condensed spiritual content and activity ("Schwarzbrot"). Fixed times may help to refocus on a regular basis. The sanctified routines may result in habitual consistent character formation.

Free-style expressions of faith may help to live fully in the present moment. They aim to be authentic, from the heart, seeking G-d from where the person is. They give room to passions and feelings and work themselves around the spontaneous leading of the Holy Spirit with divine appointments and super-natural divine interventions. But one has to be careful not to be driven by the "flesh" and deteriorate due to lack of discipline and imbalance. This is especially true when looking not just at the individual believer, but at the community.

Some people are more community oriented. Others live quite independent as individuals and may need to be reminded that they are part of a community.

Some people are natural explorers, and visionaries. Others are in their nature loyal, committed, faithful and diligent followers.

5.14 THEOLOGICALLY DISPUTED ISSUES

Disputed is what exactly the fulfillment of Torah through Yeshua means. There is agreement that he perfectly kept the commandments required of him and was thus without sin. There also seems to be agreement that a state in which the Torah is written on people's hearts and all know G-d is the goal. All further concur that this state is not yet fully reached. But the new covenant established and inaugurated by Yeshua opened the doors for people to be transformed accordingly.

The question is whether the new covenant in Yeshua replaced the old covenant of Mount Sinai, or whether it was simply added on top of the existing covenant of Sinai. If we say that the 613 commandments of the covenant of Sinai display G-d's heart and His wisdom, it does not matter

whether their adherence is a legal requirement of our covenant relationship with G-d or not, because the faithful believer will seek to please G-d's heart and act according to His wisdom. But some argue that the particulars of the 613 commandments displayed G-d's heart and His wisdom in that time and circumstance, whereas now, as the time and circumstances have changed the particulars too have to be adapted. The revelatory aspect of the Torah is eternal, but the particulars of the instructions might not be meant to be valid forever. The reign of Messiah might constitute a different era, a different **דור**, with a different Torah given by the Messiah. A prophet promoting a different Torah would be considered a false prophet, but when the Torah is written on people's hearts and all know G-d, the Messiah recognized by all might give new instructions acceptable to all. Whereas some focus entirely on their personal salvation experience and the reality of the reign of Messiah in their personal life, others look more at their struggling community and unredeemed world affairs. Accordingly, some perceive the reign of Messiah to have started already, while others still wait for it to fully manifest. If the new covenant was added on top of the covenant of Mount Sinai, the complete set of commandments given to Moshe is still obligatory for JBY to keep. But if the new covenant replaced the covenant of Mount Sinai and the believer perceives himself as living already in the Messianic era under the new covenant, he might say that he relies only on the Torah written on his heart, which is checked and purified through continuous study of the biblical scriptures, and on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This question affects in particular the ritual commandments. Should the ritual commandments still be kept after Yeshua's death and resurrection and the destruction of the temple? Eli argues that only through Yeshua one can ensure the presence of G-d in the believer's life. Thus, the new covenant comes with different criteria to come into the presence of G-d. G-d's standards of holiness and purity remain the same, but instead of relying on his own purity, the believer can rely on Yeshua's purity and enter on his Savior's merit. Again, all interviewed leaders would consent that by itself it is not forbidden to keep the ritual commandments. Some would make provisions for it in their communities and encourage their people to keep the ritual commandments. Others would make it hard for their followers to keep commandments, which they as leaders are not keeping.

Another point in the debate about keeping commandments from the Torah of Moshe is whether the commandments causing a distinction and segregation from the nations should continue to be kept. All would agree that historically the distinction was necessary. Further, as all affirm the continued validity of G-d's promises for Israel, Israel as a nation shall continue to exist and await the fulfillment of its destiny, and with reference to Rom 11:26 all of Israel shall be saved. Those who stress that the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles is torn down since Yeshua's death and resurrection and there is to be neither Jew nor Gentile as distinct entities in the ecclesia, rely on G-d's supernatural preservation of Israel as a nation. Wearing Tzitzit, observing Shabbat and holidays in a halachic manner and keeping strictly kosher becomes then either irrelevant, superfluous and disturbing the unity, or it is not seen as a tool to distinguish Israel from the nation, but as something recommended for all believers in Yeshua to do, Jew and Gentile alike. Those who advocate a bi-lateral ecclesiology see a continued importance to keep these commandments and uphold through it the distinction of Israel from the other nations. All would agree though that fellowship between Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Yeshua should be enabled.

The theological arguments whether and under what conditions rabbinical Halacha should be followed depend partly on the answers to the previous points of dispute. One crucial independent argument is that of trust or mistrust. No one expressed blind, complete trust in the rabbinic traditions. This of course is understandable in light of the negative statements and repugnant sentiments about Yeshua in rabbinic tradition. Whereas many do not trust the pharisaic system at all and do not believe in an oral Torah constituting halachic authority, some trust G-d in guiding the

Jewish people through the pharisaic system and rely on it as there is no other tradition alive about how to keep the commandments. Again, each position is argumentatively linked to scripture passages, which may be applied to the matter. On one hand there is the authority given to the elders of the people to judge and decide on arising not-yet-clarified issues (Devarim 17:8-13). The passage in Mt 23:2f. about the Torah-teachers and Prushim sitting in the seat of Moshe¹⁹³ can be read as a reinforcement of Devarim 17:8-13, even though Yeshua goes on to heavily criticize those sitting on the seat of Moshe and disapproves of their actions. On the other hand, being that the seat of Moshe is the physical location from which the written Torah was being read at 2nd temple period synagogues, those opposing the notion of an oral Torah and completely mistrusting the pharisaic system may read it like Seth Postell and others to refer to the words of the written Torah, which are read by them to all and are to be obeyed. Whereas some who do not believe in an oral Torah being passed down from Sinai are rather neutral about the rabbinic traditions, others see them in light of Yeshua's criticism of the Torah-teachers and Prushim in Mt 23 as men-made rules and hindering traditions.

Not only the practical Halacha, i.e. what each one does and teaches in his/her family and community, but also the theological reasoning behind it differ considerably. It is even possible that two JBYs do exactly the same, but for apparently completely different reasons. One might do it to keep Torah commandments because of a theological covenant obligation, the other might do it to maintain certain cultural traditions because of being part of the Jewish people.

¹⁹³ "The *Torah*-teachers and the *P'rushim*," he [Yeshua] said, 'sit in the seat of Moshe. So whatever they tell you, take care to do it. But don't do what they do, because they talk but don't act!'" CJB

5.15 MESSIANIC JEWISH HALACHA¹⁹⁴

5.15.1 Clarifying the meaning & overview over positions

Halacha is used by some interview partners as a term referring to traditional rabbinic Halacha, others use it more freely. Halacha, from the Hebrew root הלך, may be understood as how to "walk out" the faith, or how to practically keep the divine commandments. It may be defined as what people do or should do to be in line with the Torah. As such it may refer to the walk of faith as an individual, as a community, as a network of communities, and as a nation or worldwide movement.

David Neuhaus uses the term to refer to the authoritative rules governing his daily life as a Jesuit priest, whereas Daniel sees it as the details derived by methods given to Moshe at Mount Sinai of how the 613 commandments are to be performed. Michael Rudolph does not want there to be a Halacha deciding details beyond what the biblical scriptures say. Every believer should figure out by himself through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit how to apply the commandments to his life. At most there may be statements of faith susceptible to change. He published a compendium of biblical commandments¹⁹⁵ as a tool for individuals and communal leaders to help them figure out their own walk. Eli Birnbaum has an anti-authoritarian community model with the biblical scriptures as the only authority and does likewise not see a need for a Messianic Jewish Halacha. Seth Postell similarly believes that the individual should check everything in the light of the scriptures and the leaders should not lord over their congregation with a lot of extra-biblical rules. But he recognizes that the leaders, wanting or not, do produce Halacha as they lead their congregations and advocates for congregational statements of faith. Vladimir Pikman does not shy away from formulating Messianic Jewish Halacha for his community, but is very aware of the challenge to arrive at the same page and be unified as a movement. This awareness is even stronger for Eli, who deems decisions on a national level for the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel impossible. Yoel Ben David does not

¹⁹⁴ This section deals with the interview data alone. In an expanded version of this thesis I would like to include discussion papers on Halacha from within the Messianic Jewish movement. Issue 5 of *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* from 1997 is entirely dedicated to the topic of Halacha. Further see Stuart Dauermann: "Jewish Believers in Yeshua and Halachic Torah Observance: Whether, What, and How?", p. 187-204 in *Chosen to Follow: Jewish Believers through History and Today* by Knut H. Hoyland & Jakob W. Nielsen (eds), Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, Jerusalem 2012; John Fischer: "The Place of Rabbinic Tradition in a Messianic Jewish Lifestyle.", p. 145-170 in *The Enduring Paradox: Exploratory Essays in Messianic Judaism* by John Fischer (ed), Messianic Jewish Publishers, Clarksville-MD 2000; Vered Hillel: "To do or not to do", p. 5-13 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 73 (2015); Antoine Levy: "Halacha and Salvation", p. 50-64 in *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 79 (2018); John Kimball McKee: "How are we to live as modern Messianics?", p. 375-386 in J.K. McKee: *Confronting critical issues - An analysis of Subjects that Affects the Growth and Stability of the Emerging Messianic Movement*, TNN Press, Richardson-TX 2013; MJRC: *Standards of Observance*, http://ourrabbis.org/main/documents/MJRC_Standards_Aug2014.pdf, published in August 2014 (accessed 19.8.2021) 2014; Gershon Nerel: "Torah and Halacha Among Modern Assemblies of Jewish Yeshua-Believers", p. 152-165 in *How Jewish Is Christianity? 2 Views on the Messianic Movement*, ed. Luis Goldberg, Zondervan, Grand Rapids-MI 2003; Neuhaus, David M.: "Authority, Freedom, and Tradition in the life of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua", Paper presented at Helsinki Consultation 2014; Svetlana Panich: "What Do We Need to Obey? Thinking on the Tradition from inside the Post-Traditionalist Culture", Paper presented at Helsinki Consultation 2014; Vladimir Pikman: "Great Diversity: Authority, Freedom, and Tradition in the life of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua", Paper presented at Helsinki Consultation 2014; Russell Resnik: "Halakhic Responsibility.", p. 39-46 in *Voices of Messianic Judaism: Confronting Critical Issues Facing a Maturing Movement* by Dan Cohn-Sherbok (ed), Lederer Books, Baltimore-MD 2001; Tzvi Sadan: "Halakhic Authority in the Life of the Messianic Community", p. 81-97 in *Kesher: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 24 (2010).

¹⁹⁵ Michael Rudolph with Daniel C. Juster: *The Law of Messiah: Torah from a New Covenant Perspective*, 2 vols., Tikkun International, Montgomery Village-MD 2019.

have this problem as he believes that the Halacha needs to be different for every single subculture, flowing with the culture while challenging it according to the biblical standards. His conception of Halacha does not claim universal validity. Yoel Goldberg describes his ministry's practical Halacha for dealing with the diversity of convictions and practices within the movement. Teaching not to go against one's conscience, and not to offend a brother by going against his conscience is an approach based on scriptures (1 Cor 8 and Rom 14) which could serve as a meta-Halacha for the whole Messianic Jewish movement. A binding, authoritative Halacha beyond that does not fit well with his anti-religious sentiments. But he is not against developing a Torah inspired culture and would even support the development of a Messianic Jewish Halacha for people coming from a Haredi background. For Barry Segal too, Halacha at most is a matter of choice, according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The ultimate Halacha is the law-giver himself and all is dependent on the personal relationship with G-d. Shoshana is the only one of my interview partners, who is actively involved in trying to formulate a Messianic Jewish Halacha with a validity beyond her own community. She believes that it is essential for Messianic Judaism to engage as a Judaism with the Jewish halachic traditions and create Messianic Jewish Halacha. At the same time, she is aware that not all Messianic Jews will abide by this Halacha. Like Michael Rudolph and Eli Birnbaum, Daniel too does not see a need for a Messianic Jewish Halacha, but for completely different reasons. He accepts the orthodox Jewish Halacha as the only valid Halacha for all of Israel. Within that halachic system Yeshua related issues should be looked at and dealt with as community specific Minhagim. However, he makes sure to add that he does not judge believers as persons and in their relationship with G-d based on whether they keep orthodox Jewish Halacha or not.

5.15.2 The importance of accepted authority for halachic rulings

Rabbinic Halacha is conceived by orthodox Judaism as a set of binding rules incumbent upon every Jew, as it traces its legitimacy back to the Torah from Sinai. In the moment the link to the Torah from Sinai is questioned, rabbinic Halacha remains important Jewish tradition, which formed the Jewish culture, but loses its divine authorization. Interestingly, Eli claims that the sages themselves never intended to claim such a far-reaching authority, and Yoel Ben David explains how this authority was established retroactively. Thus, Shoshana holds that the oral Torah, and with-it rabbinic Halacha, is authoritative because the Jewish people have accepted it as such.

All agree that when Messiah comes (again) he will be the supreme authority recognized by all of Israel. Some interviewees defer the question of Halacha to that time. In complex matters of dispute, it is common for Jews to say: "Messiah will rule and clarify all things." Accordingly, Vladimir expects the Halacha of Messiah for all of Israel. But Eli believes contrarily that when Yeshua returns no Halacha will be needed, and until then there won't be a unified Halacha for all of Israel. Seth points out the multitude of people described in the book of Revelation from every tribe, tongue and nation and concludes that even with the arrival of Messiah there will be diversity in the Kingdom. He presumes that Halacha is possibly no longer needed then, but it is up to Yeshua to decide whether there should be one unified Halacha.

As the rule of Messiah on earth is not yet there, who can step into those shoes and issue rulings accepted by all and binding upon all? Rabbinic Halacha knows the principle of Mara d'Atra. A locally recognized leader of a community can issue halachic rulings for that community in consideration of all the particular circumstances known to him. Vladimir and Yoel Ben David deliberately operate as such Mara d'Atra. Their rulings have as much authoritative force as is given to them by their followers. Albeit, in principle all congregational leaders, intentionally or not, make practical decisions about how things are done and dealt with in their congregation.

The principle of communal leadership authority can be extended to Congregational/Ministry networks and Alliances. The Halachic Committee of the MJRC operates as such, but also other networks and Alliances carry statements of faith and alike. These rulings and statements of faith are intended to be applicable at any location, but are considered binding only for those who subscribe to them as members of the particular network or alliance.

Although, the work of the Halachic Committee of the MJRC and their *Standards of Observance*¹⁹⁶ aim for relevance beyond their own network for the whole Messianic Jewish Movement. As the first Messianic Jewish body to operate a Beit Din and issue halachic rulings they see themselves as leaders of the generation enabled to decide on matters for this generation.¹⁹⁷ But they are, at least at present, quite far away from being an established respected global leadership body of the entire movement.

5.15.3 Minimal definition of Halacha

For further discussion and dialog, it seems fruitful to first use a minimal definition of Halacha, which is relevant for everybody. Everyone somehow makes decisions on practical and theological relevant matters of scriptural interpretation. Building upon the agreement of the authority of the biblical scriptures, we may ask which scriptures are applied how and enforced, and which not. We may ask this for the personal, the communal and the national level. What is acceptable in the Messianic Jewish community at large and what not? Is there a minimal set of positive commandments, which is expected to be kept?¹⁹⁸

5.15.4 Processes of forming Halacha

What are the processes forming this real-life practical Halacha? The different interview partners described some of their own processes. Most elaborated was the description of the work process of the Halachic Committee of the MJRC by Shoshana. Some factors playing into the process are shared by all. As a foundational factor there is the written Torah (with varying scope including either only the five books of Moshe, or all of the Tanach, or all of the biblical scriptures), and as a guiding participant in the process all acknowledge the Holy Spirit. Other factors influencing the process besides the interpretation of scriptures are conscious and sub-conscious traditions (including interpretative traditions), teaching on the topics, wisdom of communal leaders and learning from communal experience, prophetic aspects, creative ideas and the reflection upon traditions.

Relevant for the formation of communal and national/international Messianic Jewish Halacha is further the leadership structure and the way of operation of the leadership. Do they issue recommendations, or make binding decisions? Do they require unanimity or work with majority decisions?

A conscious, deliberate elaboration of Messianic Jewish Halacha according to the above minimal definition would require a calming down of anti-reactions and would need to take the whole spectrum of psychological preferences into consideration. Accommodating those seeking a set routine and guidance through tradition while allowing enough freedom for free-style expressions

¹⁹⁶ http://ourrabbis.org/main/documents/MJRC_Standards_Aug2014.pdf, published in August 2014, accessed 19.8.2021.

¹⁹⁷ The CTOMC, the Coalition of Torah Observant Messianic Congregations is a community of Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua, which according to its website (<https://www.ctomc.ca/index.php>) also operates a Beit Din and discusses halachic issues. However, it seems to be rather small and inactive and only offers support to like-minded people.

¹⁹⁸ Offhand such a minimal set would include faith in Yeshua and in the biblical scriptures, personal Bible study, prayer, belonging to a congregation, willingness to forgive, personal integrity, willingness to confess faith in Yeshua when needed, love, care and intercession for the Jewish people and the land of Israel and identification as a fellow Jew.

and unique guidance of the Holy Spirit for specific situations would be the goal. Also, some individual callings may necessitate more leniencies than what community-oriented norms would call for. An example for such provisions in rabbinical Halacha would be the work of life-saving professionals on Shabbat. For this, some kind of hierarchy of the commandments would be needed. In the example from rabbinic Halacha it would be the understanding that the commandment of saving life overrides Shabbat. But before deciding on practical implementations of commandments, it needs to be clear to all which biblical commandments are to be kept. Michael Rudolph's and Daniel Juster's compendium of commandments¹⁹⁹ is a first effort to compile such a list for discussion within the movement. It will certainly be easy to find in that compendium those commandments, whose validity is undisputed by all and whose practical implementation and enforcement could be decided on. Then there are those who are of high importance to some and are being neglected or considered as obsolete by others. Here, for the time being, the practical Halacha applied by Yoel Goldberg in his Netivah Youth ministry could be applied for the whole movement, i.e. not to go against one's conscience, and not to offend a brother by going against his conscience (1 Cor 8 and Rom 14).

5.15.5 Available sources

For the progressing formation of Messianic Jewish Halacha, the available sources besides the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which all would agree that it needs to be tested in light of scripture, are:

- The written Torah - 5 books of Moses, Tanach
- The oral Torah - rabbinic traditions - Mishna, Talmud, Halachic codices
- The Torah of Messiah - Yeshua's teachings in the Gospels
- Accounts of early practice: other NT and early church sources²⁰⁰
- Church traditions
- Contemporary Jewish practices
- Contemporary church practices
- Messianic Jewish (JBY) practice wherever it existed throughout history

¹⁹⁹ Michael Rudolph with Daniel C. Juster: *The Law of Messiah: Torah from a New Covenant Perspective*, 2 vols., Tikkun International, Montgomery Village-MD 2019.

²⁰⁰ Ray Pritz once speculated in one of his classes I attended about a library in Pella, the location to which the early Jerusalem community of Jewish followers of Yeshua fled. The discovery of such a library would be for Messianic Judaism a treasure comparable to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls for scholars of 2nd temple period Judaism.

6 CONCLUSION

Someone looking at the Messianic Jewish Movement as a whole is likely to get confused about its relation to Torah. There is no unified position, the whole spectrum of possible positions including its mutually exclusive extremes to both sides exist within the movement. Because of its link to the core identity as a Jew in Yeshua, discussions about the topic are passionate and the disagreements imply practical existential issues of the believer's spiritual life.

Good leadership will look to establish a solid, common ground while setting the tone for discussion. This is the main idea behind trying to create a theological frame holding together the discourse of the different positions on Torah within the Messianic Jewish Movement. Sparked was it by David Rudolph's forward to Joshua Lessard's and Jennifer Rosner's recent publication.²⁰¹

6.1 SETTING AN EXAMPLE FOR DISCUSSION

In the potentially heated discussions about Torah, halachic tradition and Spirit, Jennifer Rosner and Joshua Lessard set an example of how to do it in their joint book *At the Foot of the Mountain: Two Views on Torah and the Spirit*.²⁰² Josh and Jen are brother and sister in law, and their discussions read like a continuation of family table discussions. They belong to two different camps of the Messianic Jewish Movement. Jennifer represents the UMJC and Joshua the IAMCS. The IAMCS recently published *The Non-Torah: Exposing the Mythology of Divine Oral Torah*,²⁰³ whereas Jennifer's position is close to that of Mark Kinzer and the MJRC. Their discussion is an exercise trying to understand and appreciate each other. It starts with listening to one another and it becomes evident that hearing the other correctly is not so easy because of almost automatic assumptions and anti-reactions. Joshua counters Jennifer's quest for halachic Torah observance by saying that Torah is not the central issue, but belief in Yeshua and the testimony "following in the footsteps of Messiah's sacrificial love by way of the outpoured Spirit". Arguing his point, he refers to Pauline scripture and asserts: "Paul contrasts life according to the Spirit with life under Torah in several places and maintains that life in the Spirit is superior."²⁰⁴ But for Jennifer, life according to the Spirit is not contrary to life under Torah, but the former enables the latter.²⁰⁵ She raises the point of some of the "old nature" still present in a "reborn" believer. I want to use this point and add some further thoughts, which may be worth to consider for further discussions and which were not highlighted in the interviews.

6.2 ADDITIONAL POINTS TO CONSIDER FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Not only is the Spirit needed to be able to live according to the Torah. The Torah is needed to test the Spirit and to be able to live according to the Spirit. Even though many Messianic Jewish believers experienced dramatic transformations when coming to faith in Yeshua, their transformed "reborn" nature is usually not yet extended into all layers of their body, mind and soul. Some residue of the "old nature" is still waiting for transformation, and as the believer grows and matures in faith, there

²⁰¹ *At the Foot of the Mountain: Two Views on Torah and the Spirit*, Resource Publications, Wipf and Stock, Eugene-OR 2021.

²⁰² Resource Publications, Wipf and Stock, Eugene-OR 2021.

²⁰³ Self-published 2019.

²⁰⁴ Email correspondence from October 29, 2018.

²⁰⁵ Cf. also "'You Will Be My Witnesses': Toward a Messianic Jewish Pneumatology", Paper presented at Helsinki Consultation 2013.

continues to be a gradual dying to the self, and a gradual filling with the Spirit in newly redeemed areas of the believer's life. The Torah helps to die to the self and make room for the Spirit.

Some of the anti-reactions against rabbinic Halacha display a lack of understanding of Halacha. The halachic rules are not as fixed as they seem at first sight, especially not in cases of conflict. The more knowledgeable one is in the overall halachic system, the more fluid it becomes in its application. The correct halachic priorities need to be discerned in each instance. This is the main challenge. Ignorance results in rigid applications. For example, insulting another person is halachically forbidden just as eating non-kosher food. Saving a life is halachically required just as keeping the Shabbat is. If the Holy Spirit clearly leads in a way, which seems to contradict a specific halachic rule, it might just be that it does so in order to comply with another halachic rule of higher priority in the given circumstance.

Yoel Goldberg's beautiful analogy of a home in which love rules²⁰⁶ makes a point against fear-based rigid rules. Looking at Yeshua's answer to the question about the greatest commandment (Mt 22:34-40)²⁰⁷ all of the Torah and of the prophets are dependent on loving G-d and loving fellow men. This concurs with the story of Hillel answering to an impatient prospective convert about the Torah while the latter stands on one foot: "That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study."²⁰⁸ The detailed Torah commandments are a commentary about how to love G-d and fellow men according to knowledge and divine wisdom. Without knowledge and wisdom, a loving intention coupled with ignorance might cause harm instead of the intended blessing.

Another point to consider for those seeking a Spirit-led free-style expression of their faith life is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor 14:40: "But let all things be done in a proper and orderly way." (CJB) When looking only at the individual believer, it is possible to live spontaneously, without routine and established practical guidelines, even though habits are important to form character. However, a community in order to function in a proper and orderly way needs Torah in an agreed upon halachic expression, to provide a framework, in which the individual gifts of the Spirit²⁰⁹ can flourish. This might be a halachic expression according to the above minimal definition.

Thinking not just about the immediate community, but about the next generation, about the communal education of children, it is worthwhile to consider the function of Torah for the education of children. Installing into them concepts and routines, which pass on to them the responsibility for the transmission of Torah from generation to generation is something, which got practiced throughout Jewish history.

It is to remark that not all of Torah is intellectual knowledge. Part of the oral Torah, - still passed on orally and many times non-verbally, is the lived example of love, practical wisdom and reverence, especially in the realm of the education of the next generation. Thus, traditional rabbinical training includes the concept of "shimush", where such non-codified Torah inherited from generation to generation is passed on.

²⁰⁶ See above 5.8.6 Interview Narrative – Yoel Goldberg.

²⁰⁷ "Rabbi, which of the mitzvot in the Torah is the most important?" He told him, "'You are to love ADONAI your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.' This is the greatest and most important mitzvah. And a second is similar to it, 'You are to love your neighbor as yourself.' All of the Torah and the Prophets are dependent on these two mitzvot." CJB Cf. Mk 12:28-34.

²⁰⁸ Translation from *The William Davidson Talmud*, available at Sefaria.org. תלמוד בבלי שבת ל"א, א.

²⁰⁹ See 1 Cor 14.

Last, the problem of the application of Torah without a temple was raised by some, particularly by those wanting to reconnect to 2nd temple period Torah observance. Yeshua as portrait in the NT writings was conscious of problems with the Jerusalem temple services at the time and foresaw the coming destruction. The full implications of Yeshua's body as the temple for Messianic Jewish Torah observance are worth exploring. This includes the concept of the Ecclesia being the body of Yeshua, while waiting for the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, and eventually a rebuilt permanent physical dwelling place for the presence of G-d.

6.3 THEOLOGICAL FRAME

A theological frame, in which all the different positions might find their place and purpose and complement each other is in use by some widely connected leaders.²¹⁰ To describe such a possible theological frame, I will use three connected biblical images: Israel as well as the Ecclesia are "work in progress" as the "Messiah is building his temple". The Messianic Jewish Movement is "repairing the breach" and "restoring the foundations of old".²¹¹ As a lot of restoring and repairing needs to be done, it is quite messy and nothing is perfect yet by itself. Different people work in different areas, have different tasks and callings, and the full picture is hardly recognizable when looking only at one task or one area of work. Both, the eventual communal physical temple and the individual Messianic Jewish believers are "work in progress". Not everything is sanctified yet. (I was able to witness some of the "work in progress" even during the interviews, when initial answers to some of my questions changed and were refined in our conversation.) Being realistic, individuals do have limitations, and usually strength and capacity is not available for everything at once. If Yeshua's body is the temple and the Ecclesia is Yeshua's body, the different body parts have different functions just as there are different functions in the temple.

Continuing with the temple metaphor, there are cornerstone scriptures, of which those with undisputed interpretations form a solid, common ground. Those with disputed interpretations should eventually fall into the category of possible and complementary interpretations according to the principle of the 70 faces of Torah.²¹² Thus, different interpretations are permissible as long as they do not cause harm to the integrity of the community.²¹³ The criteria should be that they are biblically solid, fruitful, display and produce the fruits of the Spirit,²¹⁴ are consistent with the prophetic perspective of the movement, and allow for the appreciation of each individual Messianic Jewish believer and his/her contributions and walk with G - d. One explicitly new commandment was given by Yeshua to his followers. It may be understood as the central commandment of the new covenant instituted by Yeshua²¹⁵ and is binding upon all of his followers. In Jn 13:34f Yeshua says: "'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to

²¹⁰ Dr. Michael Brown, whose interview narrative is to be included in an expanded version of this thesis, voiced such kind of view on the diversity of positions.

²¹¹ See Is 58:12.

²¹² מדרש במדבר רבה נשא יג:טו

²¹³ Cf. Joshua Yuter: "70 Faces of Torah and Eilu Va'Eilu Divrei Elokim Hayyim – The Limits of Pluralism" at <https://joshuyuter.com/2018/09/14/special-features/sacred-slogans/70-faces-of-torah-eilu-vaeilu-divrei-elokim-hayyim-the-limits-of-pluralism/>, accessed 11.10.2021. I have adapted this principle to the Messianic Jewish global community.

²¹⁴ See Gal 5:22f.

²¹⁵ Mt 26:28/ Lk 22:20.

Mt 26:28: "For this is my blood, which ratifies the New Covenant, my blood shed on behalf of many, so that they may have their sins forgiven." CJB

Lk 22:20: "He did the same with the cup after the meal, saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant, ratified by my blood, which is being poured out for you.'" CJB

love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'" (ESV -English Standard Version). This commandment holds together the theological frame and must set the tone for all further discussions. Then, the temple can be built under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the lives of the Messianic Jewish believers may be a pleasing offering. Orchestrated by the Holy Spirit they may each one play their notes on their different instruments, sitting at different locations and together produce a beautiful symphony to G-d.

6.4 A THEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO TORAH – THOUGHTS ON A THEOLOGY OF TORAH²¹⁶

In this study, Torah is approached from a practical theological point of view as opposed to a legalistic, halachic approach. For Jewish theology, Torah in all of its meanings is the given and transmitted piece of information. What Torah is as an independent entity standing on its own might be a question as impossible to answer as the question about the essential attributes of G-d. But we might ask what Torah is for a person relating to it. What is it for the interview partners and how do they relate to it? Is it the condensed essence of life containing everything, or is it a foundation and starting point? Is it a measurement for truth? Or just a piece of outdated history, no longer needed, but nice to remember and beneficial to learn lessons from? Is it a covenantal law book or "user's manual" of the Creator for living on earth? These are just some of the potential answers. As exemplified in this theological field study, the answers to the question flow out of the person's relation to Torah and out of the revelation gained in his or her interaction with it. Of course, some of the interview partners, namely Daniel, Vladimir, Shoshana and partly Michael endorse a legalistic, halachic approach, but first and foremost, Torah is for them about the connection to G-d as Jews. For a believing Jew, Torah is the product and vehicle of communication between G-d and men. It expresses the nature and the terms of G-d's relationship with men. It documents the progressive revelation of the expressed will of G-d.

Summing up the results from the field study, we might say that the Messianic Jewish Movement's relation to Torah is relational. Not just relating to Jewish tradition and relating to clal Israel, but through the Torah relating to G-d, and through the relationship with G-d relating to His Torah.²¹⁷ This relation is characterized by love, not out of an inherited obligation to love, but springing from an experiential relationship starting with the love extended by G-d through His creation, His promises, His covenants, His Torah and, - unique to Messianic Judaism -, through Yeshua as the living Torah. Receiving His love causes a response of wanting to love in return. This again produces a desire to keep His commandments. In Jn 14:15 Yeshua points out this path. He teaches his disciples saying: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (ESV – English Standard Version)

As something not only inherited from the evangelical charismatic cradle of the modern movement, there is a strong emphasis on seeking G-d and seeking the heart of G-d in prayerful Bible study. A quest for righteousness and truth and for the path to life has brought the Messianic Jews to faith in Yeshua despite the strong mainstream Jewish bias against Yeshua. Seeking and hearing the voice of G-d for a specific day and situation through Bible study maintains - like daily manna - their strong relationship to G-d and to His Torah. It is fitting therefore to attempt to formulate Messianic Jewish theology as empirical hermeneutical theology.²¹⁸ This is in particular true for a Messianic Jewish

²¹⁶ In an expanded version of this thesis, I intend to start this section with a discussion about how a Messianic Jewish theology of Torah can be located within Jewish theology.

²¹⁷ Cf. also Carl Kinbar "Israel, Torah, and the Knowledge of God: Engaging the Jewish Conversation", p. 1-28 in *Keshet: A Journal of Messianic Judaism* 24 (2010).

²¹⁸ Cf. Steven Kepnes: "Introduction to Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology", p. 1-19 in *Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology* by Steven Kepnes (ed), Cambridge 2020.

theology of Torah.²¹⁹ Jennifer Nyström proposes that "Messianic Jewish identity is negotiated through processes of identity-as-reading and identity-through-reading."²²⁰ The biblical scriptures are read through the interpretative lens of Yeshua as the living Torah, with whom Messianic Jews have a living, personal relationship.

From different Messianic Jews we have learned about the following relational values of what Torah is:

- Instruction
- Torah as expression of G-d's will
- Torah as covenant terms, or covenant gift, or covenant document
- Torah as a bond between men and G-d
- Torah as the history of the development of G-d's relationship with men
- Torah as a pointer to Yeshua and eternal salvation
- Torah as a mean for sanctification
- Torah as a lifestyle/ culture shaper

²¹⁹ See David Novak's definition of theology as the intellectual reflection on the meaning of what G-d says to men about themselves: "Thus the Hebrew 'the word of the L-rd' (dvar a'donai) is sometimes translated as logos tou theou, namely, 'G-d's word.' As such, it might be said that Jewish reflection on the meaning of 'G-d's word' is what best denotes Jewish theology as a legitimate, indeed fruitful, Jewish intellectual enterprise." Ibid.

²²⁰ See Jennifer Nyström: *Reading Romans, Constructing Paul(s): A Conversation between Messianic Jews in Jerusalem and Paul within Judaism Scholars*, Dissertation, 1st edition, Media-Tryck, Lund University 2021, p. 20.

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²²¹ Entries marked with * I was not able to see in full due to limited library access.

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