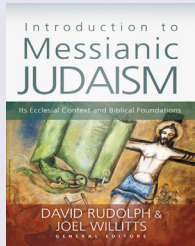


Jewish Christianity today and reading the New Testament with a fresh post-supersessionist perspective

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Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its ecclesial context and biblical foundation

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Review Title:

Jewish Christianity today and reading the New Testament with a fresh post-supersessionist perspective

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For many centuries, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity has been strained. The few converts on both sides were usually forced to fully assimilate. Jews who converted became part of a predominantly 'Gentile' Christian church and often lost their Jewish identity in no time. It is therefore welcome to see the development of Messianic Judaism or a distinctly Jewish Christianity. This also testifies to the fact that, in recent decades, Jews from all over the world have come to realise Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah while endeavouring to keep their distinctly Jewish identity.

The present volume offers a fine survey of the tenets, practices, promises and challenges of Messianic Judaism, which is understood as:

... a movement of Jewish congregations and congregation-like groupings committed to Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah that embrace the covenantal responsibility of Jewish life and identity rooted in the Torah, expressed in tradition, renewed and applied in the context of the New Covenant. (p. 11, following the definition of the *Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations* [UMJC])

In the 'Introduction' (pp. 11–18), D. Rudolph notes that, for some Jewish Christians:

The realisation that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel, the one foretold by the prophets of Israel, is often followed by a second life-transforming realisation: that the God of Israel calls Jews who follow the Jewish Messiah to remain Jews and become better Jews in keeping with his eternal purposes. (p. 11)

Rudolph argues that Messianic Judaism is the bridge between the Jewish people and the church, and as such, it helps the church to better understand its origin and identity (p. 14). In addition, there is an ecclesiological reason why the church should concern itself with Messianic Judaism: The church is intended to be a body of Jews and Gentiles. He also outlines how Gentile Christians should come alongside the Messianic Jewish community and assist them. Rudolph also rightly emphasises the Jewishness of Jesus compared to the widespread tendency to think that the Son of God left behind his humanity:

To love Jesus is to love him in the fullness of his divinity and humanity, and being a Jew is fundamental to his humanity. As Paul said, 'Remember Yeshua the Messiah, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel' (2 Tm 2:8). (p. 16)

Part one is devoted to the Messianic Jewish community and contains the following essays written by recognised leaders in the Messianic Jewish community:

- D. Rudolph: 'Messianic Judaism in antiquity and in the modern era' (pp. 21–36).
- D. Rudolph and E. Klayman: 'Messianic Jewish synagogues' (pp. 37–50).
- S.N. Klayman: 'Messianic Jewish worship and prayer' (pp. 51–60).
- C. Kinbar: 'Messianic Jews and Scripture' (pp. 61–71; this essay could have described Messianic Jewish hermeneutics in more detail, in particular how they deal with the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament and the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament which has been disputed for centuries between Jews and Christians).
- C. Kinbar: 'Messianic Jews and Jewish tradition' (pp. 72–81).
- R. Resnik: 'Messianic Jewish ethics' (pp. 82–89).
- S. Dauermann: 'Messianic Jewish outreach' (pp. 90–97; this essay could have been longer and more nuanced in view of the various proposals of a soteriological *Sonderweg* for Jews and the strong stances taken by some churches against mission to Jews and its highly problematic history).
- R. Wolf: 'Messianic Judaism and women' (pp. 98–106).
- A. Cohen: 'Messianic Jews in the land of Israel' (pp. 107–115).
- M. Glaser: 'Messianic Jewish national organizations' (pp. 116–125).
- M.S. Kinzer: 'Messianic Jews and the Jewish world' (pp. 126–135).

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- D.C. Juster, 'Messianic Jews and the Gentile Christian world' (pp. 136–144).
- J.M. Rosner, 'Messianic Jews and Jewish-Christian dialogue' (pp. 145–155).

The *second part*, 'The Church and Messianic Judaism', offers essays '... on biblical and theological issues central to the identity and legitimacy of Messianic Judaism' (p. 11):

- D.J. Harrington: 'Matthew's Christian-Jewish community' (pp. 159–167).
- D. Bock: 'The restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts' (pp. 168–177).
- R. Bauckham: 'James and the Jerusalem council decision' (pp. 178–186).
- C. Keener: 'Interdependence and mutual blessing in the Church' (pp. 187–195; a study of Romans).
- W.S. Campbell: 'The Relationship between Israel and the Church' (pp. 196–205; addressing mainly Romans 11).
- S.J. Hafemann: 'The redemption of Israel for the sake of the Gentiles' (pp. 206–213).
- A. Runesson: 'Paul's rule in all the *Ekklesiai*' (pp. 214–223).
- J.K. Hardin: 'Equality in the Church' (pp. 224–233; Gl 3:28 & Eph 2:14–18 '... these passages demonstrate full equality between both groups, yet without destroying the ethnic distinctions between them', p. 233).
- T.A. Wilson: 'The supersession and superfluity of the law? Another look at Galatians' (pp. 235–242, 'Paul emphasises in Galatians not so much the supersession or superfluity of the law with the coming of Christ and the advent of the Spirit, but the suspension of the law's curse', p. 242).
- J. Willitts: 'The bride of Messiah and the Israel-ness of the new heavens and new earth' (pp. 245–254; a study of Revelation and Isaiah: 'John does not supersede Israel's historical role when he describes the coming of the new heavens and new earth. ... in the eternal state, Israel remains at the very centre of God's work within the history of the world. Eternal life is not ethnicity-less or Israel-less', p. 253).
- J. Dickson: 'Mission-commitment in Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament' (pp. 255–263; a summary of his substantial monograph *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The Shape, Extent and Background of Early Christian Mission*, WUNT II.159; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; see my review in *EJT* 15, 2006, pp. 125–134).
- M. Bockmuehl: 'The Son of David and the Gospel' (pp. 264–272, Bockmuehl concludes: 'The Son of God was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary as the Son of David – and it is none other than this elect, crucified, and exalted Son of David according to the flesh who is the Son of God with power by the resurrection of the dead', p. 271).
- D. Harink: 'Jewish priority, election, and the Gospel' (pp. 273–281).
- R.K. Soulen: 'The standard canonical narrative and the problem of supersessionism' (pp. 282–291).

The essays of part two indicate an emerging post-supersessionist approach to the New Testament (p. 317) which is characterised by at least four assumptions: 'God's covenant relationship with the Jewish people (Israel) is present and future. Israel has a distinctive role and priority in God's redemptive activity through Messiah Jesus. By God's design and calling, there is a continuing distinction between Jew and Gentile in the church today. For Jews, distinction takes shape fundamentally through Torah observance as an expression of covenant faithfulness to the God of Israel and the Messiah Jesus' (p. 317).

The instructive volume closes with a summary of the chapters (pp. 295–313) and a conclusion (pp. 315–319) by Willitts. Each chapter closes with suggestions for further reading. The volume offers a wealth of easily accessible information, provides in its first part a fine introduction to Messianic Judaism and indicates how the New Testament can and should be interpreted with a fresh post-supersessionist perspective.