

REVIEW

David Rudolph and Joel Willitts, Eds.

Introduction to Messianic Judaism:

Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), paperback, 335 pp.

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The Messianic Judaism movement appeared on the scene in the early 1970s, stirring much interest and controversy. Unlike most previous Jews who embraced Christianity and eventually lost their Jewish identity, the more assertive and independent minded Messianic Jews have considered it within their right to establish congregations that are intended for Jewish believers in Jesus and preserve Jewish practices. They created their own cultural and religious environments, combining evangelical theology and morality with Jewish identity, symbols, customs, and loyalties. The movement has succeeded in building a niche for itself within the larger evangelical world and throughout the years gradually gained the respect of the more inclusive elements in the Jewish community.

In the 2000s-2010s, a new generation of Messianic Jewish intellectuals has further developed the theological independence of the movement and its scholarly enterprises. *Introduction to Messianic Judaism* serves as a declaration of the movement's scholarly coming of age. Merely a few years earlier, such a literary endeavor would not have been possible. The volume gives voice to the intellectual interest and self-perceptions of the group. Messianic Jews have seen themselves as heirs of the first disciples of Jesus. They often refer to these early Jewish adherents as "Messianic Jews," which also establishes the legitimacy of modern believers as a proud Jewish presence within the body of Christ. The book represents such notions and comes to draw a connection between the contemporary and early believers.

The book is divided into two parts. The first deals with the contemporary realities of the Messianic Jewish community. Twelve Messianic scholars and leaders explore various theological, communal, missiological, and ethical challenges of the current movement. The authors include Stuart Dauermann, David Rudolph, and Mark Kinzer, leaders of Hashivenu, a new movement within Messianic Judaism that calls for greater independence from traditional Christian theology and from earlier missionary approaches that marginalized Judaism. A number of articles, including those of Kinzer, Daniel Juster, and Jennifer Rosner, explore the relations of Messianic Jews to both the Jewish and Christian worlds and the kind of dialogues in which Messianic Jews should be engaged.

The second part contains articles by mostly evangelical scholars, almost all of them not from the Messianic community, that relate to early Christianity, the New Testament, Jewish communities of believers in Jesus, and early Christian attitudes towards Judaism and Jewish Law. Messianic Jews take special interest in such matters as they are strongly connected to their historical perception of the place of Jewish believers, and of Judaism in general, within the church. The articles reflect certain common approaches to the study of early Christianity, the New Testament and Second Temple Judaism. Scholars such as Daniel Harrington, Darrell Bock, Todd Wilson, and Scott Hafemann take the view that passages in the New Testament point to the existence of vibrant Jewish Christian communities in the early generations of Christianity. They also question some long held assumptions about supersessionist or anti-Jewish sentiments in Christian sacred texts.

One can, perhaps, question if the two sections, so different in their historical foci and methodologies, really belong in one volume. However, the book as a whole is a remarkable achievement. It brings together a large number of high-level essays on two important and timely topics and provides a very useful resource to scholars, students, and interested readers both within the Messianic Jewish community and among the general public. I strongly recommend it.