

This issue of *Kesher* is dedicated to fostering discussion about Mark S. Kinzer's new work *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*. Kinzer, an ordained rabbi of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC), serves as spiritual leader of Congregation Zera Avraham in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and as president of Messianic Jewish Theological Institute, the center for theological studies of the UMJC. He has been influential in the development of the theological conversation in the Messianic Jewish movement in recent years. He serves on the UMJC's Theology Committee and wrote *The Nature of Messianic Judaism: Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species*.

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This book was published as part of the discussion preceding the UMJC's drafting and adoption of its "Defining Messianic Judaism" document in 2002.

Postmissionary Messianic Judaism is the first work of Messianic Jewish theology to garner attention in the mainstream academic community. This is exemplified by its publication by Brazos Press, an academic press which has produced a growing number of premier works in theology, and its positive consideration by a growing number of scholars. Whereas in the past, Messianic Jewish thought has been relegated to the distant periphery of academic discussions, Kinzer's most recent work brings the subject into the center of academic theological discourse.

In the introduction to *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Kinzer describes his aim in this volume:

In a sense this book is an apologia, addressed to Christians, for a particular form of Messianic Judaism. However, it is far more than that. It is an apologia for the Jewish people as a whole and for Judaism as an ongoing religious tradition. Moreover it is an argument that the church's understanding of its own identity stands or falls on how it responds to this apologia. If the ekklesia is truly the earthly body—or part of the earthly body—of a resurrected Jew, it needs finally to come to terms with the people and tradition to which that Jew belongs. This book is intended to help the ekklesia realize and meet that need.²

Kinzer understands this *postmissionary* Messianic Judaism as helping Christians express a non-supersessionist ecclesiology. Such a Messianic Judaism is essential for linking two critical convictions of Christian communal identity:

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1. The mediation of Yeshua in all of God's creative, revelatory, reconciling, and redemptive activity.
2. The church's participation through Yeshua in Israel's covenantal privileges.³

This postmissionary Messianic Judaism will

1. Summon "Messianic Jews to live an observant Jewish life as an act of covenant fidelity rather than missionary expediency."
2. As its inner mission, embrace "the Jewish people and its religious tradition, and [discover] God and Messiah in the midst of Israel."
3. As its outer mission, serve "the (Gentile) Christian church by linking it to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thereby confirming its identity as a multinational extension of the people of Israel."⁴

Throughout the rest of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Kinzer fleshes out this proposal.

In Chapter 1, "Ecclesiology and Biblical Interpretation," Kinzer delineates the hermeneutical principles and historical factors that both inform his reading of the pertinent biblical texts and should sway the reader to accept his conclusions. He begins by outlining the importance of accepting the coherence of the scriptural witness as well as the interpretation of the community that receives the text (with an appropriate openness to the correction and sharpening of that interpretation). On a sociological level, Kinzer invites his readers to read the New Covenant as a Jewish book and thus affirm the identity of their own varied reading communities. On an ethical level, Kinzer challenges his readers to consider the ethical implications of the interpretation of scripture as a constitutive element in determining an interpretation's veracity. Finally, he delineates six historical factors which he believes have bearing on our interpretation:

1. "The loss of a visible Jewish presence in the ekklesia."
2. "The survival and flourishing of the Jewish people and Judaism."
3. "The emergence of virulent and violent anti-Judaism in the Christian tradition."
4. The Holocaust.
5. The return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.
6. The reappearance of the a visible Jewish presence in the ekklesia through "the emergence of the Messianic Jewish movement in the second half of the twentieth century"

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In Chapter 2, “The New Testament and Jewish Practice,” Kinzer discusses those New Covenant passages which address the ongoing validity of Jewish practice after the coming of Yeshua. He explores texts from the Gospels and the Epistles that relate to practices of circumcision, dietary restrictions, and Sabbath and holiday observance. Kinzer’s extensive theological and canonical reading of these texts reaches the conclusion that “we have good grounds for upholding the view that the New Testament as a whole treats Jewish practice as obligatory for Jews.”⁶

In Chapter 3, “The New Testament and the Jewish People,” Kinzer examines the key New Covenant passages that have bearing on the “spiritual status of *the Jewish people*,” in particular God’s covenant with the Jewish people.

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Again, Kinzer engages in an extensive survey of the Gospels and the Epistles to examine how each author understands the nature of God’s covenantal relationship with the Jewish people since the coming of Yeshua. He concludes that the “New Testament teaching [can] be plausibly construed in such a way that it affirms the continuing covenantal significance of the Jewish people, even as it orders its life without explicit Yeshua-faith.”

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In Chapter 4, “Bilateral Ecclesiology in Solidarity with Israel,” Kinzer explores the implications of his conclusions in chapters 2 and 3 “for our understanding of the transnational ekklesia established to embody and proclaim the faith of Yeshua.”⁹ Here he suggests that implications of the previous chapters can only be expressed in a transnational ekklesia made up of two distinct bodies—one Jewish and the other Gentile. In this model the Jewish ekklesia participates in the life of the wider Jewish community being “exemplary in observing those traditional Jewish practices that identify the Jewish people as a distinct community chosen and loved by God.”

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The Gentile ekklesia “without becoming Jewish . . . is joined to an extended multinational commonwealth of Israel and can legitimately identify with Israel’s history and destiny” through its loving corporate connection to the Jewish ekklesia.

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Throughout the chapter Kinzer tests this thesis against New Testament teaching and along the way finds commonalities in his approach in the exegesis of the influential twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth.

In Chapter 5, “The Christian No to Israel: Christian Supersessionism and Jewish Practice,” Kinzer charts the rise of a predominantly Gentile ekklesia and its expression of supersessionist convictions through the prohibition of Jewish practice for followers of Yeshua. Kinzer argues that these restrictions led to the “crumbling of the ecclesiological bridge, i.e., the Jewish

ekklesia,” which “damaged the church in a profound way” by rupturing its relationship with the Jewish people as a whole.¹² However, he is clear to point out that the church’s history of prohibition and persecution of Jewish followers of Yeshua should not lead us to give into “the temptation to see church history in purely negative terms” as “the Gentile ekklesia preserved the essential message entrusted to it.”¹³

In Chapter 6, “Jewish Tradition and the Christological Test,” Kinzer explores how we are to understand the Jewish no to Yeshua in light of the church’s no to the Jewish people through prohibition of Jewish practice for Jewish followers of Yeshua. He contends that in the Jewish no to Yeshua, there is a paradoxical yes to God through their commitment to God’s covenant. He argues vigorously that “the apparent Jewish no to Yeshua is no obstacle to our accepting the legitimacy and value of Jewish religious tradition, just as the actual Christian no to Judaism and the Jewish people has not negated the riches of Christian tradition.”¹⁴

In Chapter 7, “Jewish Tradition and the Biblical Test,” Kinzer posits that Torah necessitates a living oral tradition and “an institutional framework in which that tradition can be developed and practically applied.”¹⁵ Kinzer points to Num 11, Exod 24, and Deut 16:18-18:22 as providing the basis for this argument. In the next section of the chapter Kinzer argues for the compatibility of later rabbinic tradition with the teaching of the New Testament. Based on this argument, he concludes by asserting the importance of Jewish religious tradition after Yeshua in establishing Messianic Jewish practice today.

In Chapter 8, “From Missionary to Postmissionary Messianic Judaism,” Kinzer evaluates the development of the modern Messianic Jewish movement against the outline of postmissionary Messianic Judaism he has developed in the previous chapters. He examines each major figure and group within Messianic Judaism against five major ecclesiological criteria which he argues defines postmissionary Messianic Judaism:

The ecclesiological vision presented in this book calls into question the traditional Christian missionary posture toward the Jewish people. Our ecclesiology can be summarized in five basic principles:

1. the perpetual validity of God’s covenant with the Jewish people;

2. the perpetual validity of the Jewish way of life rooted in the Torah as the enduring sign and instrument of that covenant;

3. the validity of Jewish religious tradition as the historical embodiment of the Jewish way of life rooted in the Torah;

4. the bilateral constitution of the ekklesia, consisting of distinct but united Jewish and Gentile expressions of Yeshua-faith;

5. the ecumenical imperative of the ekklesia, which entails bringing the redeemed nations of the world into solidarity with the people of Israel in anticipation of Israel's—and the world's—final redemption. In short, we have argued for a *bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel that affirms Israel's covenant, Torah, and religious tradition*. According to this pattern, the Jewish ekklesia serves the wider Jewish community by constituting its eschatological firstfruits, sanctifying the whole and revealing the eschatological meaning of Jewish identity and destiny. It also serves the wider Jewish community by linking the redeemed of the nations to Israel's corporate life and spiritual heritage, thereby enabling Israel to fulfill its mission as a light to the nations.

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Against the backdrop of these criteria, Kinzer finds in the early Hebrew Christian and later Messianic Jewish movements a missionary orientation and ultimately the seeds for their transformation through their affirmation, in various ways, of many of these five criteria. He characterizes the UMJC's 2002 statement "Defining Messianic Judaism" as a sign that the first stage of a new postmissionary phase of Messianic Judaism may have begun.¹⁷

In Chapter 9, "Healing the Schism," Kinzer concludes his work by offering "practical recommendations for how Christians can facilitate the healing of the schism" between the ekklesia and the Jewish people.¹⁸ His recommendations are threefold: First, churches should revitalize efforts to increase respect for Judaism. Second, Jewish covenantal identity should be viewed as incumbent on Yeshua believers in the churches. Third, the Gentile ekklesia should expand efforts at dialogue with the Messianic Jewish movement.

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In *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, Kinzer shifts the rubric through which Messianic Jews engage in theology from that of soteriology to ecclesiology. Because of its historic moorings in the discourse of Protestant theology, Messianic Judaism has primarily approached the theological task from the horizon of soteriology. Kinzer highlights that soteriology is informed by ecclesiology. Thus, he intimates that the undergirding ecclesiology of Messianic Judaism has been that of Christendom. Adherents to the ecclesiology of Christendom concern themselves with who is saved or not saved or, more correctly, who is inside and outside the church. The classical expression of Christendom's soteriology and ecclesiology has been the conviction that there is no salvation outside of one's participation in the life of the church. Throughout its history, Messianic Judaism has produced theological works which have focused primarily on the relationship of the "saved" to the "lost" (whether Jewish or not). Kinzer offers us another paradigm by suggesting that ecclesiology is the more appropriate horizon from which to begin the theological task. Ecclesiology changes the departing point for theological discourse from a discussion of the "saved" and the "lost" to the relationship of Jew and Gentile. By shifting the discussion to ecclesiology, Kinzer pushes Messianic Judaism to locate itself as a bridge between the Gentile ekklesia and the rest of the Jewish people.

In an effort to further the conversation about Kinzer's work and the challenge it offers both to Messianic Jewish theology and to the theology of the Gentile ekklesia and the Jewish people, we have invited prominent thinkers and leaders from both inside and outside the Messianic Jewish movement to offer their responses to *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*.

The contributors to this issue from within the Messianic Jewish movement are David Stern, Daniel C. Juster, and Mitch Glaser. Anyone who is familiar with these individuals will recognize their importance to the ongoing development of Messianic Jewish thought and community life. Stern authored the groundbreaking *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*¹⁹ and *Jewish New Testament Commentary*²⁰ as well as served as the editor and translator of *The Complete Jewish Bible*.

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Juster has written several volumes including *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology*.

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In addition he has been influential in the development of the congregational wing of the movement, first in helping to establish the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations in 1979 and then in founding *Tikkun Ministries*.

Glaser has served throughout the Messianic Jewish movement, most recently as president of Chosen People Ministries. He is also a scholar of the history of the Messianic Jewish movement particularly in pre-war Europe and is deeply committed to nurturing scholarship and leadership in the Messianic Jewish community through spearheading the founding of the Charles Feinberg Center, a leadership training institute established by Chosen People in cooperation with Talbot

Seminary.

Offering responses from the Christian world are R. Kendall Soulen, Douglas Harink, and Peter Hocken. These three respondents have been important theological dialogue partners for the Messianic Jewish community in recent years. Soulen serves as professor of systematic theology at Wesley Theological Seminary, a graduate professional school of the United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. He authored the important work *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* ²³ an

d recently served as editor of

Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations

a collection of articles and essays by Michael Wyschogrod (see the review of this work by Russell Resnik in this volume).

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Harink serves as associate professor of theology at the King's University College in Alberta, Canada. He authored

Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity,

a work which has generated significant theological discussion in the UMJC recently.

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Harink has been a leader in nurturing the academic study of theology through prior service as president of both the Canadian Theological Society and the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association. Hocken has been a Roman Catholic dialogue partner with many in the Messianic Jewish community. Soulen, Harink, and Hocken thus represent a broad spectrum of Christian theological scholarship from Mainline Protestantism to Evangelical Protestantism to Roman Catholicism.

The hope of the editorial board is that the responses offered by Stern, Juster, Glaser, Soulen, Harink and Hocken, in addition to Kinzer's rejoinder, will help stimulate significant and constructive conversation about *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* both inside and outside of the Messianic Jewish community.

Notes:

1. Mark S. Kinzer, *The Nature of Messianic Judaism: Judaism as Genus, Messianic as Species* (West Hartford, CT: Hashivenu Archives, 2000).
2. Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 25.
3. Ibid., 12.
4. Ibid., 13-15.
5. Ibid., 42-45.

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6. Ibid., 95.
7. Ibid., 98; author's emphasis.
8. Ibid., 149.
9. Ibid., 151.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 152.
12. Ibid., 211.

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 233.
15. Ibid., 24.
16. Ibid., 264.

17. Ibid., 299-302.
18. Ibid., 25.
19. David H. Stern, *Messianic Jewish Manifesto* (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988).

20. David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992).

21. David H. Stern, trans., *The Complete Jewish Bible* (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988).

22. Daniel C. Juster, *Jewish Roots: A Foundation of Biblical Theology* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1995).

23. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

24. Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 2004).

25. Douglas Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Brazos Press, 2003).

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