

## **Response to M. Kinzer's *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism***

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Mark, your book, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* (henceforth, PMJ) is indeed like a fine wine.

It took me a second read of your book to appreciate the depth and theological richness of your understanding and the compelling case you make for your thesis. I think the vintage was so rich and concentrated that it required a few years (or a year in my case) to allow the wine to aromate and release its theological flavors and bouquet before I was able to begin to truly appreciate what escaped me with my first taste.

Conscious or unconscious hermeneutic paradigms or grids ultimately determine conclusions in advance, regarding how we read texts, in general, and Scripture, in particular.

Permit me one last analogy: I once heard a base player describe a certain level of trauma or vulnerability he underwent whenever he had to change his strings. Using that analogy: to view texts with a different hermeneutic is a vulnerable business. Many have reacted or will yet react to your book with a psychological defense against such a risky and painful process of changing theological strings, as it were, to see how they play out with the New Testament canonical witness.

So thanks for your book Mark, and thanks for helping us understand it by your paper you presented tonight! (I believe part of your problem Mark, is that you are one, two, or perhaps three, steps ahead of the rest of us at the level of your theological refinement of the core issues, so it takes the rest of us some help and time to catch up with you and begin to understand what you are saying!).

As you note, your entire thesis hangs or falls upon chap. 2 of your book, your claim, compellingly and certainly, in my mind, correctly made, is that according to the witness of the NT, there remains an obligation upon us as Jews to covenant fidelity vis-à-vis a Torah-observant lifestyle as the Jewish branch of what you term a bilateral ecclesia.

I think that your claims and interpretation of the various NT passages are sound, and nuanced with a theological sophistication that demonstrates your competence and commitment to work through and reflect upon these issues, based upon Scripture's authority, your real-time life in MJ and non-MJ Jewish community over the years, and with reference to contemporary scholarship's most insightful and *Israel-sensitive* readings of the texts under discussion.

I personally, am in agreement with your central thesis. I think logically speaking, there are only two alternatives, either, we need to find a contradiction between Luke's depiction in Acts, of a clearly Torah-observant MJ community in Jerusalem, and the Pauline Epistles *so-called* law-free gospel, which I think your exegesis addresses, and soundly refutes as pertains to Paul's teaching for MJs. Or, the second alternative, as you note: is to claim with Augustine and Jerome, that the Torah-observant lifestyle of the Apostles was only permitted to that first generation but, as Augustine states, for a post-Apostolic generation Jew to observe Jewish practice would be tantamount to desecrating one's dead parents' bones.

So, returning to PMJ, the only remaining question in my mind, is whether or not one agrees with the application of your chap. 2 thesis, vis-à-vis PMJ's other chapters related to issues like Rabbinic authority and the spiritual status of the Jewish community. My limited comments in this forum permit me to pick up only one extrapolation you make, perhaps the most controversial one of your overall thesis: namely, what the status of Yeshua's mysterious presence amongst our fellow Jewish people means for their salvation.

As Dr. Stern has precisely articulated (*Kesher*, Issue 20): "Is Yeshua's *hidden* presence with Jews a *saving* presence or not?" Dr. Stern goes on to say that if your answer is "yes" than he and, as you know many others in our movement, including myself would part company

with you at that point. If the answer is "no" then the onus turns back to you to more clearly articulate how it is not a saving presence. My strong assumption based on my reading of PMJ and even more so on your paper on "Final Destinies," I will cite in a moment, convinces me that your answer to this question would indeed be "no" but I leave that to you to answer for yourself.

Dr. Stern further notes (ibid.) "The idea of Yeshua's hidden presence in the Jewish community can easily be misunderstood or abused. The ecclesia could draw the false conclusion that if Yeshua is already present among the Jews, there is no need for evangelism or witness of any kind. Such complacency would simply be Two-Covenant Theology in disguise, and not a very clever disguise."

This would return us to a type of Two-Covenant theology as advocated by Franz Rosenzweig for example, who narrowly escaped Christian conversion, and who, after finding his connection with God in Judaism, acknowledged that Christianity believed that "No one can reach the Father save through him (Yeshua) . . . but the situation is quite different for one who does not have to reach the Father because he is already with him. And this is true for the people of Israel." In similar vein, a host of ecumenical Christians and Jews are very happy for precisely such an arrangement that alleviates them of the uncomfortable and highly politically unacceptable *offence of the cross*.

After reading your book on ecclesiology (PMJ), and having the added advantage of listening to (and now-rereading) your paper from BPS last Oct on soteriology, entitled: "Final Destinies: Qualifications for Receiving an Eschatological Inheritance," all I can say is: any concerns I had about your soteriology that relate to your claims for Yeshua's mysterious presence amongst our fellow Jewish people are alleviated. Even though, I am still unclear on what exactly you *mean* by "Yeshua's mysterious presence in the Jewish community."

In fairness to you Mark, you explain that you chose the intentionally provocative title for your book, as *post-missionary*, based on the fact that you were (*Kesher* 20, 63-64), "Speaking to Christians who have generally related to us as a missionary extension of the Evangelical church. . . . My intention was not to suggest that Messianic Jews should set aside the obligation to bear witness to Messiah Yeshua, in both word and deed. In a strictly theological sense, neither Israel nor the Christian church can cease to be 'missionary' without losing its own identity. . . . Believing that the 'fullness of God dwells bodily' in Yeshua (Col 2:9), Messianic Jews cannot divorce their witness to God from their witness to Yeshua. Therefore, our 'inner mission' to our fellow Jews must include at its heart our expressed conviction that Yeshua is the Son of God and Israel's Messiah." You go on to explain that such a witness must be more than calling Jews to "believe *in* Yeshua," but also include the witness "*of* Yeshua," namely, that we Jews return to the Lord in a way that reflects *his* Torah-observant witness.

Apropos, to your just mentioned comment, the only time I was privileged to meet the late David Flusser z"l, at a Bible study in his home, he said to me in Hebrew, "You know what is the problem with you MJs? You believe in Yeshua but you don't obey Him!" So Mark, you've only exacerbated my existential situation as a MJ who grew up as a Reform Jew in the Diaspora, and attempted, unsuccessfully to become a traditional Ba'al Tshuva at age 20, but successfully became a Yeshua-centered Ba'al Tshuva at age 21.

Although I may be part of the "Dor HaMidbar" that will have to wander through my generation until the next one, if the Lord tarries, as we say, it may *at best* be the next generation of MJs who will enter the promised land of MJ identity that bears witness to the covenant faithfulness of Israel and the God of Israel by embracing a Torah observant lifestyle here in Israel and also in the Diaspora. If our movement does shift in that direction, we can all look back in say, 30 years ש"היא and again be thankful to you Mark, and other pioneers like Dr. Stern, for your life, vision and writings, for hastening the fulfillment of such a vision.

As I noted, I am still struggling to find my way, but nonetheless am beginning to feel more comfortable with, what was for me, not a need to completely change out my old theological strings. If any insecurity remains when I think of you Mark, it is what your next book on Christology will require me to rethink and reorient on a personal level.

I at least am committed with you and those of our movement to the dictum of one of our fathers, Rabbi Tarfon who in Pirkey Avot 2:16, said:"It is not your job to finish the work, but you're not free to walk away from it."

In the meantime I want to close my remarks by honoring the memory of the late Dr. Robert Lindsey z"l, who I only met briefly but his legacy through the JSSR continues to impact my life and life-goal to study and obey the teachings and example of Yeshua our Messiah.