

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Israeli Confused About The Jewish Messiah



One summer while visiting Jerusalem, my wife and I noticed someone wearing a shirt with the Hebrew words [יהודי משיחי] in bright letters. These words are pronounced [Yehudi Meshichi] and mean “messianic Jew” or a Jewish believer in Christianity.

I approached this young man and discovered that he was raised a secular Israeli and had recently accepted “Yeshua-Jesus” as his savior and messiah.

When he noticed my reaction, he asked me, “*What’s wrong with believing in the Jewish messiah?*” Some missionaries pose this question to elicit a response that there is nothing wrong with their belief. However, the question is misleading and begs to be clarified.

I showed this young man that the Torah teaches that the messiah will be a human being from the tribe of Judah and a descendant of King David and his son Solomon. As clearly described in Ezekiel 37:24-28, the messiah’s arrival will herald the return of the Jews to Israel, the rebuilding of the Temple, the establishment of everlasting peace, and universal belief in one God.

Ezekiel’s description sums up the biblical view of the Jewish messiah, and only after someone accomplishes all of these criteria will we know definitively that he is the messiah.

If somebody's understanding of the “Jewish messiah” is confused and inconsistent with the Torah’s view, then whomever they believe in is not the Jewish messiah.

The Apostle Paul played a significant role in distorting the Jewish concept of the messiah. As Paul spread his message to non-Jews living in the Roman empire, he altered it to make it more appealing. He revealed his strategy when he proclaimed, “*To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews... and to those not having the law, I became like one not having the law*” (1 Corinthians 9:21).

Consequently, Paul abolished the eternal covenant of circumcision and commandments, and in the book of Romans, he introduced the idea that Jesus was a divine resurrected God.

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Roman citizens found Paul's approach appealing since the Romans were already familiar with Greek and Roman myths that portrayed gods as being born to virgins, taking on a physical form, being part of a trinity, dying for our sins, and being resurrected. These non-Jewish beliefs, eventually decreed into law by the Roman Emperor Constantine, sealed the fate of the Christian view of the messiah as something different from what God originally intended the messiah to be.

To validate their fundamentally different beliefs, Christians misquote biblical and rabbinic sources. Consistently, these "proof-texts" do not stand up to the scrutiny and thoughtful reexamination.

Furthermore, the New Testament itself disqualifies Jesus from being the Jewish messiah who, as mentioned earlier, must be a member of the tribe of Judah, as it says, "*The scepter [ruling authority] shall not depart from Judah*" (Genesis 49:10).

This week's Torah portion Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1–4:20), states that membership in a specific tribe is an inheritance passed on to sons exclusively "*from their fathers*" (Numbers 1:2).

Since the New Testament claims that Jesus did not have a physical father, he could not simultaneously be from the tribe of Judah or the messiah. This theological dilemma has missionaries scrambling for rationalizations that are easily refuted.

More significantly, I told my new acquaintance that "Messianic Jews" do not believe Jesus is just the messiah; they believe he is God. All denominations of Judaism recognize this as an idolatrous belief and the reason Jews historically rejected Jesus even when threatened with death.

The idolatry issue is so damaging to the messianic argument that missionaries are instructed to avoid mentioning that they believe Jesus is God on initial contact. They only speak about him as the messiah.

My words made an impression on this Israeli, and we agreed to continue our conversation via Zoom. For many months we discussed the bible, the unity of God, and how we can pray directly to God for forgiveness.

As I respectfully and meticulously refuted his proof-texts, he recognized his mistake and eventually returned to Judaism with a newfound appreciation of Judaism and the spiritual path it provides.

Shabbat Shalom.

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