

Messianic Judaism from the 6th to early-20th Century AD: Textual Evidence

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Scholars have written extensively on the first five hundred years of Jewish Christianity.¹ The centuries that follow—the 6th to the 20th centuries—have received much less attention. The presence of a believing Jewish community has for the most part passed unnoticed in much of the literature on Church history. While the New Testament clearly places the birth of Christianity in a Jewish context and in the synagogue of the 1st century, the events that led to the separation of Jews and Gentiles pushed Jewish believers into the shadows of the Church and the rabbinic world for centuries.

Christian and Jewish literature of the last two millennia, including that of the Church Fathers, Rabbinic literature, medieval Jewish writings, and the works of the great Reformers, provide glimpses of a continued Messianic Jewish presence throughout the known world.² This chapter will (1) examine briefly some of the evidence that confirms its uninterrupted existence and (2) look at events that have led to the re-emergence of the Messianic Jewish movement since the Reformation. Testimonies from the 6th to the 12th centuries are sparse, but significant evidence from later centuries has been preserved.³

From its earliest days, Jewish Christianity has found itself caught between two thriving religious groups—the Church and the rabbinic world. Jewish Christians were regarded with

¹ Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus: the Early Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007); *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Surrey: IVP, 2008); R. Travers Herford. *Christianity in Talmud & Midrash* (New York: Ktav, 1903); Hugh J. Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2009. Edited and Reprinted); Peter Schafer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2009); Bernhard Pick, *Jesus in the Talmud: His Personality, His Disciples and His Sayings* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); James Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 251* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); George R. S. Mead, *The Disciples and Followers of Jesus in the Talmud* (New York: Kessinger, 2005); Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the end of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2010. Reprint); Daniel C. Juster, *One People, Many Tribes: a primer on Church History from a Messianic Jewish perspective* (Clarence, NY: Kairos Publishing, 1999).

² See David H. Stern *Messianic Judaism: A Modern Movement With an Ancient Past: (A Revision of Messianic Jewish Manifesto)*. BelAir, CA: Messianic Jewish Resources International. 2007. Reprint; Hugh J. Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity: From the First to the Twentieth Century* (London, England: Duckworth, 2009).

³ The names of prominent Jewish believers between the 6th and 20th centuries are too numerous to list in this chapter. For additional testimonies, see Aaron Judah Klingerman, *Feasts and Fasts of Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Emmanuel Neighborhood House, 1931); Louis Meyer and David A. Rausch, *Eminent Hebrew Christians of the 19th Century: Brief Biographical Sketches* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1983); Jacob Gartenhaus, *Famous Hebrew Christians* (Chattanooga, TN: International Board of Jewish Missions, Inc., 1979); Harold A. Severer, *A Rabbi's Vision: a Century of Proclaiming Messiah—a History of Chosen People Ministries, Inc.* (Charlotte, NC: Chosen People Ministries, 1994); Kai Kjaer-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); *Mishkan* 37 (2002); Mitchell L. Glaser, “A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe 1900-1950” (unpublished dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998); “Biographies of Most Famous Jews Known to Have Believed in Messiah,” *Israel in Prophecy*, <http://www.israel-pro.org/wiki/pmwiki.php/Resources/Biographies> (accessed April 25, 2012); Jonathan D. Sarna, “From Necessity to Virtue: the Hebrew-Christianity of Gideon R. Lederer,” *Iliff Review* 37/1 (Winter 1980): 27-33; John Xeres, *An Address to the Jews, by John Xeres: Containing his Reasons for Leaving the Jewish, and Embracing the Christian Religion* (NP: Gale ECCO: 2010).

contempt by many of the Church fathers and quickly became the target of persecution by Jews and non-Jews alike. By the end of the 4th century, the axe had fallen on Jewish Christianity. The Nazarenes, the most orthodox of the Jewish Christian sects, were marginalized and eventually excommunicated. At the Council of Nicea in 325 AD their fate was determined, and by the end of the 4th century, they were officially declared heretics, not because of their orthodox theology but because of their unwillingness to separate themselves completely from Jewish tradition and practice.

At first, Jewish leaders recommended that Jews treat Jewish believers in the following ways: ostracize them socially, humiliate them publically, refrain from commercial negotiations with them, refrain from selling to them or buying from them,⁴ and refrain from teaching their sons a craft.⁵ Rabbinic Jews were forbidden to eat with Jewish believers and they were prohibited from seeking healing at their hands.⁶ Although the rabbis did not have the centralized authority to declare a complete ban against Jewish Christians, they believed that in the end, the pronouncements they made—to distance themselves from them—would become a fixed tradition in every Jewish community. Confident that their laws would be written and promoted in synagogues, they believed that “the exclusion of the Christians [Jewish believers] from the synagogue would inevitably follow.”⁷

In the Diaspora, Jewish Christians began to assimilate into Gentile communities either by choice or by force. Their voice was reduced to a whisper and their Jewish traditions became almost unrecognizable. In some communities, however, the Hebrew roots of Christianity remained evident. For example, the Syrian Church in Edessa intentionally preserved Jewish elements in its liturgy.⁸ “The first Christian converts to the Church of Edessa included the earliest Jewish-Christians. Therefore, its liturgy is strongly influenced by the world-view of the Bible.”⁹ Believers from this community read from the Torah and the Prophets during church services and followed the Jewish liturgical calendar. The community observed Sunday worship as a Sabbath and celebrated Easter on the calendar date of the Jewish Passover. The Eucharist liturgy of the Syrian church found its origin in Jewish liturgy. Some of the prayers were strikingly similar to the *birkat-ha-mazon*—the Jewish thanksgiving prayer recited after meals. In support of Jewish believers, the Syriac Church of Edessa omitted the polemical statements against the Jewish Sabbath included in other Syriac authoritative documents of this period.

From the mid-2nd to the 7th century, cruel restrictions against Jews intensified. Historical and Church documents speak of pogroms in Jewish communities, the burning of synagogues by Christians, and the formulation of edicts against Jews. In spite of this, there is evidence that certain Gentile believers refused to sever ties with the Jewish community and continued to fellowship with them. Consequently, the Church felt compelled to decree that

⁴ Tosefta Hullin 2:20-21.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Philip S. Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism” in *Jews and Christians: the parting of the ways—A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. J.D.G. Dunn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 11.

⁸ Schonfield, *The History of Christianity*, 65.

⁹ Chorbishop Seely Beggiani, “A Commentary on the Holy Mysteries; The Holy Mystery of Offering (*Qorbono*),” Eparchy of Saint Maron, <http://www.stmaron.org/divliturgy.html> (accessed November 19, 2011).

if any bishop, presbyter or deacon, or any one of the list of the clergy keeps fast or festival with the Jews, or receives from them any of the gifts of their feasts, as unleavened bread, or any such things, let him be deposed. If he be a layman, let him be excommunicated.... If any person, whether clerical or one of the faithful, shall take food with the Jews, he is to abstain from our communion, that he may learn to amend.¹⁰

The centuries that followed did not provide much relief for the Jews—believers and unbelievers alike—as persecution intensified. With the rise of Islam, many Jews converted through intermarriage or successfully integrated into the daily life of their Muslim communities while paying lip service to Islam as necessary.¹¹ From the 12th to the 14th century AD, Crusaders attempting to repossess the Holy Land killed untold numbers of Jews who would not convert. Conversion to Christianity became a greater threat than the growth of Islam.¹² During the 13th century, Pope Nicholas III issued a special edict that forced Jews to sit under the preaching of the gospel in the synagogues several times a year. All Jews above twelve years of age were required to be in attendance to listen to the homilies of the monks. Some Gentile Christians were given the task of ensuring that the attendees did not wear ear plugs and did not fall asleep during the sermons.¹³

During the 14th century, persecution against the Jews of Spain reached a pinnacle when a Franciscan priest named Ferrán Martínez campaigned to have the Jews expelled from the country. Unsuccessful in his attempt to receive a decree from King Enrique II, Martínez “ordered priests in his diocese to destroy all synagogues in their area. Then, early on the morning of June 4, 1391, he and his followers attacked the Jews of Seville.... They murdered hundreds of Jews in their homes and countless more in the streets. Many Jewish women and children were captured and sold into slavery. A few Jews fled the country, but many converted to Christianity to escape death.”¹⁴ These are known as *conversos*. Martínez meted out the same treatment to the Jews of Cordoba, Toledo, Valencia, and other Spanish cities, and he continued to pressure them to convert to Christianity. Jews were subjected to the preaching of Christians who pointed out the

¹⁰ In *The Apostolic Canons of the Church*, “Holocaust Resources for Catholic Educators – Church Teachings on Jews, Judaism and the Holocaust,” <http://cathandhol.com/inside/contentlist.asp?gid=14>, (accessed May 6, 2012); quoted in Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity*, 75.

¹¹ Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500-1750* (New Haven, NJ: Yale, 2001), 5.

¹² On Jewish conversion in Europe between the 13th and 19th centuries, see Brian Pullan. “The Conversion of the Jews: The Style of Italy” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 70 (1988): 53-70; Joseph Shatzmiller, “Converts and Judaizers in the Early Fourteenth Century” *HTR* 74 (1981): 63-77; Robert Stacey, “The Conversion of the Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England,” *Speculum* 67/2 (1992): 263-83; Deborah Hertz, “Seductive Conversion in Berlin, 1770-1809,” In *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman, 48-82 (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1987); Deborah Hertz, “Women at the Edge of Judaism: Female Converts in Germany, 1600-1750,” in *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation and Accommodation*, ed. Menachem Mor, 87-109 (Lanham, Md. 1992); Paola Tartakoff, “Jewish Women and Apostasy in the Medieval Crown of Aragon, c. 1300-1391,” *Jewish History* 24 (2012): 7-32; Christopher M. Clark, *The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia 1728-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Ari Joskowicz, “The Priest, the Woman, and the Jewish Family: Gender and Conversion Fears in 1840s France,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101/3 (Summer 2011): 439-57.

¹³ Ray Pritz, “...And the Children Struggled” in *Mishkan* 50-51 (2007): 78.

¹⁴ Phyllis Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred: The History of Antisemitism* (Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves, 2012), 104-5.

error of their ways. Under this pressure, “large numbers of Spanish Jews did become Christians—most sources estimate the number to be more than 100,000.”¹⁵

By the mid-15th century, Christian resentment began to grow against the converted Jews of Spain who were, by then, enjoying the same rights and privileges as Christians. The *conversos* had risen in social status and were holding important positions in the world of politics and finance. Unable to bear the rise of the *conversos* in society and prompted by a new unpopular tax, a mob turned against the tax collectors—many of them *conversos*—and against the rest of the converted Jews. This targeted persecution was unwarranted since “most *conversos* were sincere in their commitment to Christianity. By the mid-1400s, many came from families that had been Christian for two generations or more. They no longer had ties to Judaism.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, the persecution increased, and because the Jewish Christians were connected to Judaism through their blood line, they experienced segregation with the rest of the Jewish community. Those who perpetrated violent attacks against the *conversos* considered them unworthy and false Christians.

When King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile came to the throne, they targeted the *conversos*, accusing them of practicing a form of Judaism. Anyone who lit candles on Friday evening, missed mass regularly and had a disdain for pork was accused of Judaizing and was convicted of heresy, a conviction that merited life in prison or public death by burning.¹⁷ In 1492 AD, the king and queen ordered the Spanish Inquisition. In an attempt to maintain Catholic orthodoxy in their kingdoms, Ferdinand and Isabella forced Jews to convert to Catholicism or face death.¹⁸ Those who chose to convert went through an exorcism of Jewish demonic spirits¹⁹ and were required to make the following conversion pronouncement formulated by the Church centuries earlier:

I renounce all customs, rites, legalisms, unleavened breads and sacrifice of lambs of the Hebrew, and all the other feasts of the Hebrew, sacrifices, prayers, aspersions, purifications, sanctifications, and propitiations, and fasts, and new moons, and Sabbaths, and superstitions, and hymns and chants and observance and synagogues, and the food and drink of the Hebrew; in one word, I renounce absolutely everything Jewish, every law, rite and custom, and above all I renounce Antichrist, whom all the Jews await in the figure and form of Christ; and I join myself to the true Christ and God. . . . I believe in, receive, venerate and embrace the adorable Cross of Christ, and the holy images; and thus, with my whole heart, and soul, and with a true faith I come to the Christian faith. But if it be with deceit and hypocrisy, and not with a sincere and perfect faith and a genuine love of Christ, but with a pretence to be a Christian that I come, and if afterwards I shall wish to deny and return to Jewish superstition, or shall be found eating with Jews, or feasting with them, or secretly conversing and condemning the Christian religion instead of openly confusing them and condemning their vain faith, then let the trembling

¹⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁶ Ibid., 106.

¹⁷ Ibid., 106-7.

¹⁸ For information on the baptism of Jews, see Marina Caffiero, *Forced Baptism: Histories of Jews, Christians, and Converts in Papal Rome*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California, 2012).

¹⁹ Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 106.

of Cain and the leprosy of Gehazi cleave to me, as well as the legal punishments to which I acknowledge myself liable. And may I be anathema in the world to come, and may my soul be set down with Satan and the devils.²⁰ I renounce the whole worship of the Hebrew, circumcision, all its legalisms, unleavened bread, Passover, the sacrificing of lambs, the feasts of Weeks, Jubilees, Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles, and all the other Hebrew feasts, their sacrifices, prayers, aspersions, purifications, expiations, fasts, Sabbaths, new moons, foods and drinks. And I absolutely renounce every custom and institution of the Jewish laws.²¹

Although many chose to convert—some sincerely and others for the sake of survival—the new Jewish Christians were eventually ordered to leave the kingdom in 1492 with the rest of the Spanish Jews. They found themselves wandering towards unfriendly territories that had previously expelled their Jews. Jews had been banished from “France in 1182, 1306 and 1360; England in 1290; Germany in 1348; Hungary in 1349 and 1360; and Lithuania in 1445.”²² Some *conversos* settled in Italy, Poland, North Africa and Constantinople. Others found themselves on very special expeditions. A *converso* by the name of Luis de Torres was singled out by Queen Isabella and commissioned to cross the Atlantic on Christopher Columbus’s flotilla!²³ In his travel diary, he reveals that his conversion was primarily for the sake of convenience. In his heart, he longed for a Jewish community where he could live with brothers of the same tradition. He writes that his knowledge of Hebrew provided an open door for him to discover the new world.²⁴ In de Torres’ words,

The fateful day, the day of our expulsion from Spain, was [the ninth of Av] on the Jewish calendar in the year 5252/1492. That day ... three hundred thousand people, half the amount that were redeemed from Egyptian slavery, descended to the Mediterranean shore, searching for passage to a new land, to a land where they could openly practice Judaism. I was among them. However, I was not a refugee; I had been commissioned to join Christopher Columbus’s voyage of discovery. I agreed to accompany him because I hoped that if we found Jewish brethren, I would be able to live my life in peace and in freedom.... Columbus thought that when we would reach China and the Far East, he would locate the exiled Jews

²⁰ From *A Profession of Faith* from the Church of Constantinople in the year 325 AD under The Emperor Constantine; James Parks, *The Conflict Of The Church and The Synagogue – A Study in the Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 394-98, quoted in Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity*, 73.

²¹ Paul Halsall, *Internet Medieval Source Book*, “From a profession of faith of uncertain Eastern origin attached to the *Clementine Recognitions*,” <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/jewish-oaths.asp> (accessed May 6, 2012); see Parks, *The Conflict Of The Church and The Synagogue*, 394-98; Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity*, 75.

²² Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred*, 109.

²³ Meyer Kayserling and Charles Gross, *Christopher Columbus and the Participation of Jews in the Spanish and Portuguese Discoveries* (New York: Longman, Green: 1894), 90, digitized 2006, http://books.google.com/books/about/Christopher_Columbus_and_the_participati.html?id=5727Qu_Z9RwC (accessed May 6, 2012).

²⁴ According to Kayserling, Luis de Torres was the 1st Jew to settle in Cuba; Kayserling and Gross, *Christopher Columbus*, 95, http://books.google.com/books/about/Christopher_Columbus_and_the_participati.html?id=5727Qu_Z9RwC (accessed May 6, 2012).

from the Ten Lost Tribes, and he wanted me [with a knowledge of Hebrew] to be able to communicate with them.²⁵

In spite of persecution, forced conversions, forced baptisms and the assimilation of converted Jews into Gentile Christianity, some Jewish individuals followed their convictions and trusted in Jesus/Yeshua as the Messiah while preserving their Jewish identity. In 1263 in Barcelona, a Jewish convert named Pablo Christiani (his Christian name) who had entered the Dominican order engaged in a disputation with a Jewish scholar by the name of Ramban (aka Nahmanides; Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman) on topics related to the Messiah.²⁶ Due to his earlier Jewish training, Christiani was well-versed in rabbinic tradition and felt he could debate Ramban successfully. “Christiani chose to use the Talmud to prove Christianity. In fact he treated the Talmud with respect. He brought midrashic texts that seem to prove that the Messiah had already come.... It put Ramban in a difficult position: if he accepted the texts used by Christiani, he had to admit that the Messiah had come; if he rejected the texts, it was like denying the authority of rabbinic tradition.”²⁷ Ramban refuted Christiani and accused him of misunderstanding the Talmud. Ramban then challenged the Christian doctrine of the incarnation and concluded his refutation with a discourse on the significance of Jewish literature (the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash).²⁸ The debate ended without a victory for Christianity. Following the unsuccessful disputation with Ramban, Christiani continued to pursue evangelistic efforts in his hometown in southern France, but his message, for the most part, fell on deaf ears.

Following the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, a large number of Jewish converts to Christianity wrote conversion autobiographies. The majority spoke of dramatic life transformations and inner illumination. They wrote of their study of Hebrew, their traditional Jewish childhood and youth, their Bar Mitzvah, their aspirations towards the rabbinate, their public display of Jewish knowledge, their full participation in the Jewish life of their families, their *yeshiva* education, their university careers as teachers of rabbinic literature and cognate subjects, and finally, the abandonment of their father’s religion.²⁹ Many left everything behind when they went through the process of conversion. They were willing to be baptized and to renounce anything Jewish from their past lives.

A Jewish convert by the name of Frederich Albrecht Christiani wrote about his Jewish upbringing, his early education in Jewish laws and customs, his high proficiency in Hebrew language (the Bible, rabbinic commentaries and the Talmud), and his parents’ expectations that he would arise as a prominent scholar of rabbinics.³⁰ Other German converts of the post-Reformation era include Paul Christian (Malachi ben Samuel) who contrasted his circumcision with his Christian baptism—a circumcision of the heart; Christian Gerson (16th -17th cent.) who,

²⁵ “The Diary of Luis de Torres,” *Los Angeles Jewish Times*, December 24, 1999, quoted in Goldstein, *A Convenient Hatred*, 110-11.

²⁶ Pritz, “... And the Children Struggled,” 82-83. The topics covered during the disputation were as follows: (1) the Messiah had come; (2) the Messiah had to be both God and man; and (3) the Messiah suffered and died to save mankind.

²⁷ Pritz, “... And the Children Struggled,” 83.

²⁸ Pritz, “... And the Children Struggled,” 83-84.

²⁹ Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 96-100.

³⁰ Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 95; “Converts and their Narratives in Early Modern Germany: The Case of Friedrich Albrecht Christiani.” *Leo Baech Institute Yearbook* 40 (1995): 65-83.

while reading the New Testament over and over secretly, realized that the Christian scriptures relied heavily on the Hebrew Bible; Ludwig Compiègne de Veil (Daniel Weil, 17th cent.) who studied Hebrew up to the age of sixteen before delving into the study of the Talmud; Johann Christoph Gottfried (17th century) who reacted to being called a ‘bad youth who would probably end up being baptized’ by turning towards an appealing Christianity; John Xeres (18th cent.) whose father had resolved that he would be a rabbi; Joseph Samuel Frey (Joseph Levi, 18th -19th cent.) who could read proficiently any text from the Torah in Hebrew by the age of six; Ernst Augusti who was a teacher and rabbi in the Jewish community; Friedrich Albrecht Augusti (Joshua ben Abraham Hirschel, 18th cent.) who had previously performed ritual slaughters; Dietrich Schwab who wrote of his guilt as a Jew and celebrated his enlightenment as a Christian; Carl Anton who boasted sitting at the feet of a famous rabbi; and several anonymous authors (17th cent.) who ran from the poverty of the rabbinate and ran towards the Christianity that had been perverted through colloquial expressions of disdain during their Jewish upbringing.³¹

In most cases, the convert’s journey from Judaism to Christianity began with doubts about Judaism while still being immersed in the Jewish community. This period of doubt was frequently followed by secret encounters with Christians and clandestine reading of the New Testament. For many, secrecy was of the utmost importance. Such concealing of the truth was often accompanied with deep distress, intense isolation, anxiety and fear of losing family and lifelong friends. For Paul Christian, it was several years before he would reveal his deepest secret and proclaim his faith openly in the Messiah Yeshua. Joseph Guggenheim kept his faith secret from his wife for years before he began to persuade her to join him into the Christian fold. Over time, Jewish converts began to integrate their knowledge of Judaism and Hebrew into their study of the Bible. Many of them started teaching Hebrew to Christians, and revived within many of the converts was this deep instinct to dig into the roots of their newfound faith.

Jewish conversion came through various means. Many times, conversion took place independently from any human interaction, simply as a response to the work of the Holy Spirit. Autobiographies of Jewish converts reveal that, on many occasions, Christian missionaries and pastors succeeded in distributing New Testaments and sharing the gospel with members of the Jewish community. For example, a German Jewish youth named Abraham Jacobs became interested in Christianity when a Lutheran pastor came to his home to study Hebrew with his father and gave Abraham a New Testament. Every night, Abraham read the New Testament secretly in his room when everyone was in bed, and on occasions, he would visit the home of the pastor in order to discuss his precious discoveries. Unfortunately, someone who knew his secret revealed it to his father who, one night, burst into his room while he was reading the New Testament. His father grabbed the book and hit Abraham several times on the head. After Abraham informed his father that he desired to convert to Christianity, his father immediately threw him out of the house in his nightgown.³² Many Jewish converts became sincere followers of Yeshua, following in the footsteps of the apostle Paul, and sought to bring the gospel message to their Jewish brothers. In addition, some wished to demonstrate to Christians that God had not abandoned his people, nor had he replaced them with Gentiles. He still had an important role for them in the salvation history of the whole world.

³¹ Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 98.

³² Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 102.

Jewish converts to Christianity were sometimes met with suspicion by members of the Church. Some concealed their Jewish features with Gentile garb when lingering among Christians, aware of their potential rejection by Gentiles (e.g., Simon Abeles of Prague). Others were prevented from participating in Christian activities when the cities where they wished to join the church informed them that no Jews were allowed to remain in the town (e.g., Claus Andreas of Osteroda [Daniel Jacob Bon], Samuel Joseph Frey).³³ The conversion exorcisms required for Jewish converts often marked them and created barriers that prevented a smooth transition from one community to another.

For Jewish converts, the transition to Christian life was sometimes excruciating. For many, it meant renouncing everything Jewish, relocating, eating forbidden foods, forsaking the use of *tefillin*, breaking Sabbath to participate in Christian activities, experiencing threats from members of the Jewish community, taking a new name (a Christian name) and rejecting the family name, identifying with symbols that were once *anathema*, facing rejection by family and friends, taking a new identity, and living with a lingering inner tug-of-war before finding complete peace with the Messiah. For the family, it often meant profound disruptions, emotional upheaval, the severing of marriage vows, and issues of custody. It is, therefore, understandable that many Jewish converts kept their newfound faith a secret from their spouse and children. The cost of conversion was high.

In the 18th century, the Messianic Jewish movement experienced an awakening that is still being felt to this day. Multitudes of rabbis came to faith in Yeshua and began preaching the gospel in their communities. Also at that time, certain Gentiles began to examine the Hebrew roots of their Christian faith and started to advocate for Jewish believers in Jesus/Yeshua who identified with their ethnic Jewish identity in their religious practices. One such example is an Irish theologian by the name of John Toland (1670-1722) who, through a close examination of the apocryphal *Gospel of Barnabas*, concluded that the Nazarenes mentioned in Church documents were indeed Jewish Christians who continued to exist long after the 1st century. In his work entitled *Nazarenus* (1718), Toland writes,

From the history of the Nazarenes, and more particularly from the evident words of Scripture, I infer in this discourse a distinction of two sorts of Christians, those from among the Jews and those from among the Gentiles. Not only that in fact there was such a distinction (which nobody denies) but likewise that of right it ought to have been so (which everybody denies) and that it was so designed in the original plan of Christianity. I mean that the Jews, though associating with the converted Gentiles, and acknowledging them for brethren, were still to observe their own Law throughout all generations; and that the Gentiles, who became so far Jews as to acknowledge one God, were not however to observe the Jewish Law; but that both of them were to be forever after united into one body or fellowship. From this doctrine it follows that Jesus did not take away or cancel the Jewish Law in any sense whatsoever, sacrifices only excepted; but neither does this affect any of the Gentile Christians now in the world who have nothing at all to do with that Law.³⁴

³³ Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 103.

³⁴ John Toland and Bernard de la Monnoye, *Nazarenus, or, Jewish, gentile, and Mahometan Christianity: containing the history of the ancient Gospel of Barnabas, and the modern Gospel of the Mohametans ... also the*

Well-versed in Church history and in the literature of the Church Fathers, Toland confronted the Church leaders of his day and received much criticism for his position on the existence of a true Messianic Jewish community.

Another 19th century Gentile who sympathized with the cause of Jewish believers was Arno C. Gaebelein, a former Methodist Episcopal pastor who had immigrated from Germany to America in 1879.³⁵ His expertise in Semitic languages, Jewish customs and literature was so distinguished that many Jews thought he was Jewish. Some even accused him of concealing his Jewish identity. It took persuasion to convince them that he was a Gentile.³⁶ Gaebelein began publishing *Tiqvat Yisrael—The Hope of Israel Monthly* in 1893, in which he wrote articles in Yiddish in an attempt to reach the Jewish community with the message of the gospel.³⁷ The English version, *Our Hope*, was first published in 1894 and aimed at introducing Christians to the place of the Jews in biblical prophecy.³⁸ Gaebelein and the chief editor of *Our Hope*, Dr. Ernst F. Stroeter, traveled extensively throughout Europe and America, preaching a strong message that ‘salvation is of the Jews,’ alleviating the suffering of Jews through social services (e.g., distribution of food, clothing, relief funds) and advocating for a homeland for the Jewish people (Zionism). In the first edition of *Our Hope* (1894), Gaebelein writes: “The Jews are now a nation, and the time may soon be here, sooner than we think, when the world shall behold the Jewish state.”³⁹

After several years of serving the Jewish Christian community, Gaebelein changed his theological position on the place of the Jews in salvation history and stopped supporting the Messianic movement. Although he first preached that Jewish believers in the Messiah did not have to forsake their Jewishness, after some time, he changed his views, stopped supporting Zionism, and “expected Jews who converted to Christianity to join ordinary Protestant churches.”⁴⁰ Gaebelein attributed this change of position to a dispensational hermeneutic, holding to the view that Jews who converted to Christianity were no longer under the law but under grace, and should no longer practice any form of Judaism.⁴¹

During the same century, a prominent Jewish believer by the name of Joseph Samuel Frey dared venture outside of his deeply entrenched tradition. Born and raised in an observant Orthodox family, Frey was trained in Jewish thought and rabbinic literature, and was taught to despise all aspects of Christianity. Befriended by a minister during his twenties, he began to read the New Testament, became a believer, and gave his life in service to Yeshua. In 1809, Frey

original plan of Christianity explained in the history of the Nazarens, Appendix I, 8 (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press: 2010), quoted in David A. Rausch, *Messianic Judaism: Its History, Theology, and Polity*, vol. 14 of *Texts and Studies in Religion* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1982), 53.

³⁵ See David A. Rausch, “Our Hope: Protofundamentalism’s Attitude Toward Zionism, 1894-1897,” *Jewish Social Studies* 40:3/4 (Summer/Fall 1978): 239-50.

³⁶ Rausch, *Messianic Judaism*, 55.

³⁷ Rausch, “Our Hope,” 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Arno C. Gaebelein, “Jewish Societies for the Colonization of Palestine,” *Our Hope* 1 (July 1894), 13.

⁴⁰ Yaaqov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Mission to Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill, NC: University Press of North Carolina, 2000), 19.

⁴¹ Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 20.

became the leader of the London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews, and a decade later, he moved to America to continue his outreach to the Jews.⁴² Between his European and American speaking engagements, Frey “traveled more than 50,000 miles and spoke 5,147 times to Christians and Jews”⁴³ before becoming the pastor of a Presbyterian congregation in New York.

The 19th century witnessed further growth in the Messianic movement. “Christians with Jewish backgrounds became unashamed of their Jewish heritage and boldly proclaimed it.” Jewish believers formed alliances,⁴⁴ started organizations for Jewish missions, sought to build bridges between Gentile and Jewish believers, and engaged in evangelism. These efforts were met with various modes of opposition from Christians and Jews. The Church was apathetic towards Jewish missions while the Jewish community showed great hostility. Nonetheless, the efforts continued and the movement took shape primarily in Europe and, subsequently, in America.

In 1862, Leopold Cohn was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in a small town in east Hungary. He was taught at a young age to avoid Gentiles at all cost since they were considered idolatrous, prostrating themselves before crosses and images of deity. By the age of eighteen, Cohn was proficient in Hebrew literature and Talmudic law, and he was ordained a rabbi. As people came to him with questions, Cohn began to investigate Scripture and the Talmud more deeply and discovered, to his surprise, that the Messiah should have come 2000 years before his day! Inquisitive by nature, Cohn decided to investigate further this newfound mystery, and moved to America in 1892, “determined to find the Messiah at any cost.”⁴⁵ His first Shabbat in New York City, Cohen walked by a church where he saw a sign with Hebrew letters saying, “Meetings for Jews.” In his words,

I stopped, became curious and desired to enter. At my first step toward the door, however, I saw a cross at the top of the building. I was puzzled, and began to reason thus, ‘If this is a Christian Church, what does that Hebrew writing mean? And what connections have they with the Jews? How can a Jew enter a building on which there is a cross, that object which the so-called Christians in my country worship? And how are the Jew and Christian, between whom there is such great hatred in my country, here united?’⁴⁶

At that very moment, a member of the Jewish community walked by and incited him to walk away quickly from that dangerous place. Cohn writes,

Glancing back until convinced of his disappearance, I ran hastily into the church, notwithstanding the cross at the top. But alas! What a scene! The preacher on the platform, as well as the audience, all bareheaded! What a sin, especially for a rabbi to be

⁴² See Robert Michael Smith, “The London Jews’ Society and Patterns of Jewish Conversion in England – 1801-1859. *Jewish Social Studies* 43:3/4 (Summer/Fall 1981): 275-90.

⁴³ Rausch, *Messianic Judaism*, 24.

⁴⁴ E.g., London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, Hebrew Christian Alliance.

⁴⁵ Leopold Cohn, *To An Ancient People: the Autobiography of Dr. Leopold Cohn* (New York: Chosen People Ministry, 1996), 10.

⁴⁶ Cohn, *To An Ancient People*, 11.

bareheaded. I turned quickly and went out, but the janitor, noticing all this, after an interview, gave me the address of the preacher.⁴⁷

Unbeknownst to him, God had answered his prayer, and he was soon going to find the Messiah. To make a long story short, Cohn, now a Jewish believer in Jesus/Yeshua, became a missionary to the Jews of New York. Experiencing severe persecution from his own community, Cohn fled to Edinburg, Scotland, where he was baptized and reunited with his skeptical wife. A year later, he returned to New York to continue his mission to the Jews and eventually established the American Board of Missions to the Jews, now known as Chosen People Ministries.⁴⁸

Born in Yugoslavia in the 19th century, Rabbi Asher Levi was taught to say formal prayers and wear phylacteries as prescribed by the Orthodox tradition. Dissatisfied with his ministry, Rabbi Levi suffered much as a result of the emptiness of life. Seeking the support of a friend, he shared his heart with a Jewish man who turned out to be a Messianic believer. Together they studied Isaiah 53, Isaiah 7 and 9, and Rabbi's Levi's eyes were opened as he read: "and his name shall be called Immanuel." Rabbi Levi said: "I feel that I am still a Jew and shall always be a Jew. I have not renounced our inheritance of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Like Paul, I can say after my acceptance of Christ as my Saviour: 'Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.'" (2 Cor 11:22) Thus I repeat with pride the word of Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also the Greek."⁴⁹

Also in the 19th century, Rabbi Charles Freshman from Hicklosh, Hungary, who, before coming to faith in the Messiah moved to Canada with his wife and five children, became the rabbi of a Jewish congregation in Quebec. On the day before Passover, as Rabbi Freshman was working on his sermon, he read Isaiah 53, "and suddenly, [he] became fully convinced that Jesus is the expected Messiah. Without the least hesitation, he wrote out his resignation and sent it to the president of the congregation."⁵⁰

Rabbi Rudolf Hermann (Chaim) Gurland, from Vilna, Lithuania, Rabbi Chil Slostowski from Poland, Rabbi Isaac Lichtenstein from Hungary, Rabbi George Benedict from Germany, Rabbi Jacobs from Russia, Rabbi Ephraim Ben Joseph Eliakim from Tiberias, and Rabbi Dr. Tirschtiegel from Germany also all became followers of Jesus/Yeshua after encountering him as Messiah. The testimony of many more Jewish converts are now available as published and unpublished manuscripts and/or online.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Cohn, *To An Ancient People*, 11.

⁴⁸ For a detailed account of Leopold Cohn's life and ministry, see Severner, *A Rabbi's Vision*, 1-103.

⁴⁹ Good News for Israel, *Rabbis who found the Messiah: Testimonies of 13 Jewish Rabbis* (St Louis Park, MN: GNFI, 2004), 14.

⁵⁰ Good News for Israel, *Rabbis who found the Messiah*, 31.

⁵¹ Carlebach lists the following primary sources in her Bibliography in *Divided Souls* (290-302): John Alexander, *God's Covenant Displayed with a Proemial Discourse of the Reasons of his Conversion* (London: 1689); Berger, David Berger, ed. and trans., *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the high Middle Ages. A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon vetus* (Philadelphia: 1979); Francis Durand de Breval, *Le Juif Baptisé. Sermon Presché Dans l'Église Française de la Savoye* (London: 1671); John Clare *The Converted Jew, or Certain Dialogues Between Michaeas, a Learned Jew and Others: Touching Divers Points of Religion, Controverted between Catholics and Protestants*

Along with this awakening in the Orthodox communities in Europe and America came the beginnings of Zionism.⁵² During the 19th century, convinced that an outreach to the Jews in the Holy Land was necessary in order for the Lord to return, the Anglican and Lutheran denominations established missions to the Jews in Palestine. They encouraged Jews to return to Palestine and to establish a place for the remnant of the children of Israel. Christian Zionism began to evolve and outreaches to the Jews in the land began to flourish while Jews were returning to ancient Canaan in preparation for a homeland.

In his history of Jewish Christianity, Hugh Schonfield writes,

During the past century and a half there has been manifested a progressive re-orientation, a Zionism of faith. Not only those who are Israelites by race have turned their hearts towards Jerusalem. The attempts of the several denominations to model their government and order on what they believe to be the lines laid down in the primitive Church, the renewal of foreign missionary activity, phenomenal manifestations like [sic] [of] the revival of prophecy and speaking with tongues, second Adventism, the intensified quest for the historical Jesus, the acceptance of their Messiah by thousands of Jews, all these and many more are signs to the discerning that the wheel has turned full circle, and that the message of salvation that went forth from Zion is returning to Zion again, parallel with the dispersion and restoration of the Jewish people. If it is permissible to coin a new word, this trend may best be described as the Rejudaissance of Christianity.⁵³

During the 20th century, the Messianic movement dug deeper root in North America. Rabbi Max Wertheimer, born and raised in an Orthodox family pursued a classical education at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in the late 1800's. After losing his wife to a serious illness, Rabbi

(N.p.: 1630); Joseph Samuel Frey, *The Converted Jew; or Memoirs of the life of J. S. C. F. Frey, who was born a Jew but is now a minister of the Gospel in London, to which are added An address to the Christians in behalf of the descendants of Abraham, and a Concise history of the dispersion, sufferings, and present state of the Jews* (Boston: 1815, 1816); Abraham Jacobs, *An address to the Jews* (Dublin: 1716); *The Life of Abraham Jacobs* (London: 1769); Theodore John, *An Account of the Conversion of Theodore John, a late teacher among the Jews ... which he delivered before he was baptized in the presence of the Lutheran congregation, 31 October 1692*, trans. From high Dutch into English (London: 1693); J. C. Lebrecht, *An Authentic Narrative of the Life and Conversion of J. C. Lebrecht, a Jew, who died in the faith of the Son of God, Nov. 13, 1776, at Königsberg in Prussia*. N.p., n.d. Excerpted in Leo W. Schwartz, ed., *Memoirs of my People*, 139-42 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945); Joseph Jean Françoise Elie Levi [formerly Borach Levi]. *Recueil important, sur la question de savoir: si un Juif marié dans sa religion, peut se remarier après son baptême lorsque sa femme juive refuse de la suivre & d'habiter avec lui* (Amsterdam/Paris, 1759. 2nd ed., Amsterdam, 1761); Moses Marcus, *The Principal motives and circumstances that induced M. Marcus to leave the Jewish and embrace the Christian faith with a short account of his sufferings thereupon. Written by himself* (London: 1724); *The Ceremonies of the Present Jews. The Thirteen articles of their faith and an account of the several sects of the Jews* (London: 1728); Shalome ben Shalomoh, *A true narrative of God's gracious dealings with the soul of ... A Jew. With an account of his Conversion as delivered to the Church of Christ ... being taken from his mouth*. 2nd ed. (London: 1700); John Xeres, *An Address to the Jews ... containing his reasons for leaving the Jewish and embracing the Christian Religion* (London: 1710).

⁵² For an in depth study of Jewish mission in Europe during the first half of the 20th century, see Mitchell L. Glaser, "A Survey of Missions to the Jews in Continental Europe 1900 – 1950" (unpublished dissertation, Fuller theological Seminary, 1998).

⁵³ Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity*, 8.

Wertheimer sought to find comfort in traditional Judaism, but he could not find relief from his grief. Venturing outside of the tradition, he began reading the New Testament, comparing its content with that of the Old Testament, and stumbled across Isaiah 53, Isaiah 50:6 (“I gave my back to the smiters”), Psalm 110:1 (“The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.”), and Isaiah 9 (“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ...”). Finally, the rabbi was finding peace for his soul, and much more. He became a believer in Jesus/Yeshua as Messiah and began to lead others to the Messiah through regular Bible study.

Along with the awakening in Orthodox communities and the rise of Zionism came the development of Messianic organizations and missions to the Jews. Struggling to establish a solid foundation, the Messianic movement faced cynicism, antagonism, and internal controversies on issues related to the observance of Jewish tradition, inter-marriage with Gentiles, and the conversion of Gentiles to Judaism. Yet by 1915, forty-five American missionary societies for evangelism to the Jews had been founded. The purpose of several of these organizations was not only to reach the Jews with the gospel, but also to meet their medical, educational and social needs.⁵⁴ Also in 1915, the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America was created to evangelize the Jews. In 1925, the International Hebrew Christian Alliance was established with Hugh Schonfield at the helm. In an attempt to support the Messianic movement of his day and to answer the question, “Why should Hebrew Christians unite?” Rev. A.R. Kuldell of St-Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran church in Allegheny, Pennsylvania explained as follows, during the first meeting of the Hebrew-Christian conference:⁵⁵

We cannot afford to forget the rock from which we are hewn. We have indeed given up our people’s unbelief, but we cannot give up on our people. We have joined the Church of the First Born composed of individuals called out of all nations to be a people unto His Name, but we have not and dare not give up our nationality. Our nation [the Jewish people] stands unique in God’s plan of the ages They were the seed sowers at the beginning and they shall be the sheaf-gatherers at the end of this dispensation (Zech 8:13; Is 66:19).⁵⁶

By this time, Rabbis and Jews from communities around the world were coming to faith in Jesus, and the leadership of the Messianic Jewish movement acknowledged the growing need for unifying the body. Schonfield writes,

The change in the condition of Jewish Christianity which has taken place within the last century, and particularly within the last decade (1925-1935), is little short of miraculous. One by one the positions lost in the age-old triumph of the Gentile Church have been regained. A revived Jewish Christian independent religious communion is within measurable distance of achievement. The wheel has turned full circle.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 23.

⁵⁵ “Minutes of the First Hebrew-Christian Conference in the United States. Held at Mountain Lake Park, MD, July 28-30, 1903,” http://www.archive.org/stream/MN41741ucmf_0/MN41741ucmf_0_djvu.txt (accessed May 6, 2012).

⁵⁶ “Minutes of the First Hebrew-Christian Conference in the United States. Held at Mountain Lake Park, MD, July 28-30, 1903,” http://www.archive.org/stream/MN41741ucmf_0/MN41741ucmf_0_djvu.txt (accessed May 6, 2012).

⁵⁷ Hugh J. Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity* (Oxford: Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., 1936), 245, quoted in Rausch, *Messianic Judaism*, 41.

Soon after Schonfield made this declaration, battle lines between Hebrew Christians—Jews who did not follow Jewish practices—and Jewish Christians—Jews who held on to Jewish tradition—were drawn, tensions mounted and Schonfield became a casualty of the clash that existed between the two camps.

By the mid-20th century, Messianic Judaism in America was establishing roots in a number of areas.⁵⁸ The post-WWII years witnessed a surge of young Jewish men and women coming to faith in Jesus/Yeshua, and consequently, the Young Hebrew Christian Alliance was formed. Messianic organizations were born (e.g., Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations [UMJC], International Messianic Jewish Alliance [IMJA], Association of Messianic Congregations [AMC], Messianic Jewish Association of America [MJAA]) and multitudes of outreach ministries to the Jews were established. The movement witnessed the emergence of Messianic Jewish artists (e.g., Lamb, Marty Goetz, Barry & Batya Segal, Jonathan Settel, Joel Chernoff, Paul Wilbur, Ted Pierce) and academic programs in Jewish Studies and Messianic Judaism (e.g., Moody Bible Institute [already in place], Charles L. Feinberg Center [Talbot School of Theology], King's University, Criswell College, , Israel School of the Bible [Netanya, Israel], Denver Seminary). During the last few decades, Messianic congregations have multiplied in the USA, in Israel and around the world.⁵⁹ Most Messianic Jewish congregations outside of Israel include Gentiles who avidly support the theology and practices of Messianic Judaism.

In conclusion, textual evidence strongly supports the uninterrupted presence of Jewish believers in Jesus/Yeshua from the 1st to the 21st century. Although ostracized by their own and for the most part, rejected by the Christian Church, the faithful remnant served faithfully as pastors, teachers, apostles, evangelists, theologians and tent makers in their respective communities during the last two millennia.

⁵⁸ The events that occurred in the development of the Messianic Jewish movement during the 20th century are beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁵⁹ Messianic Jewish congregations with 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation Jewish believers have multiplied in Israel from a handful 3 decades ago to approximately 150 congregations in 2012.