

Response to Mark S. Kinzer's
*Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism:
 Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*
 by Charles Van Engen

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My brothers and sisters in Yeshua, I consider it a deep privilege to be invited to respond to Mark Kinzer's masterful work, Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People (G.R.: Brazos Press, 2005). For the sake of clarity, I will take a few moments to summarize my understanding of Kinzer's thought as presented in the book.

Kinzer's thesis is clearly, forcefully and convincingly presented. As I have understood him, Kinzer advocates a re-reading of the Bible, a rethinking of the Gospel, a re-examination of history, and especially a re-conceptualization of the ekklesia, calling for a "postmissionary form of Messianic Judaism" in which "the church's own identity—and not just the identity of Messianic Jews—is at stake...." Kinzer begins by recognizing that "All Messianic Jews believe that Yeshua of Nazareth is Israel's Messiah, and that faith in Yeshua establishes rather than undermines their Jewish identity" (pg 13). "

Kinzer wants to move the discussion forward. He suggests, that a postmissionary form of Messianic Judaism should focus "on the specific and unique relationship between Yeshua (and his ekklesia), the Jewish people, and the Jewish way of life" (pg13).

I employ (Kinzer writes) the term postmissionary to capture at least three aspects of the type of Messianic Judaism that is needed for the emergence of an integrated, faithful, non-supersessionist ecclesiology. First, postmissionary Messianic Judaism summons Messianic Jews to live an observant Jewish life as an act of covenant fidelity rather than missionary expediency...Second, postmissionary Messianic Judaism embraces the Jewish people and its religious tradition, and discovers God and Messiah in the midst of Israel....Third, postmissionary Messianic Judaism serves 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....

Whereas postmissionary Messianic Jews seek to represent the Jewish people to the church, Messianic Jews with a missionary focus make their primary concern representing the church's

concerns and beliefs to the Jewish community. A missionary-oriented Messianic Judaism has been a significant obstacle in the relationship between the church and the Jewish people. Postmissionary Messianic Judaism can serve as the missing link that binds the church and the Jewish people, so that the Christian church becomes the multinational extension of the Jewish people and its messianically renewed covenantal relationship with God....

In summary, the form of Messianic Judaism required for an integrated, faithful, non-supersessionist ecclesiology is postmissionary in three senses: (1) it treats Jewish observance as a matter of covenant fidelity rather than missionary expediency; (2) it is at home in the Jewish world, and its inner mission consist of bearing witness to Yeshua's continued presence among his people; (3) its outer mission consists of linking the church of the nations to Israel, so that the (Gentile) church can become a multinational extension of the Israel and its messianically renewed covenantal relationship with God....

Postmissionary Messianic Judaism is the missing piece that completes the puzzle. With such a piece in place, the Christian church can affirm Yeshua's universal mediation in a non-supersessionist manner, since its postmissionary Messianic Jewish partner enables it to recognize Yeshua's mysterious presence throughout Jewish history. Israel's covenant endures, the church draws nourishment from its Jewish root, yet Yeshua remains the Messiah and Lord for both Jews and Gentiles. The Christian (Gentile? cve) church can now affirm its own identity as an extension of Israel in a non-supersessionist manner, since its connection to the Jewish heritage has become a concrete sociological reality rather than a spiritual abstraction. Postmissionary Messianic Judaism bears witness to the enduring importance of the Jewish people and its way of life for the identity of the Christian church, and likewise bears witness to the enduring importance of Yeshua's mediation for the identity of the Jewish people. (pp 13-16)

In other words, Kinzer is calling for a "bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel that affirms Israel's covenant, Torah, and religious tradition (pp 265, 299, 300, 302)" and simultaneously demonstrates to the Gentile followers of Yeshua that in their essence they have been in-grafted into Israel, they are a "multinational extension of Israel whose Messiah is Yeshua" (pg 16).

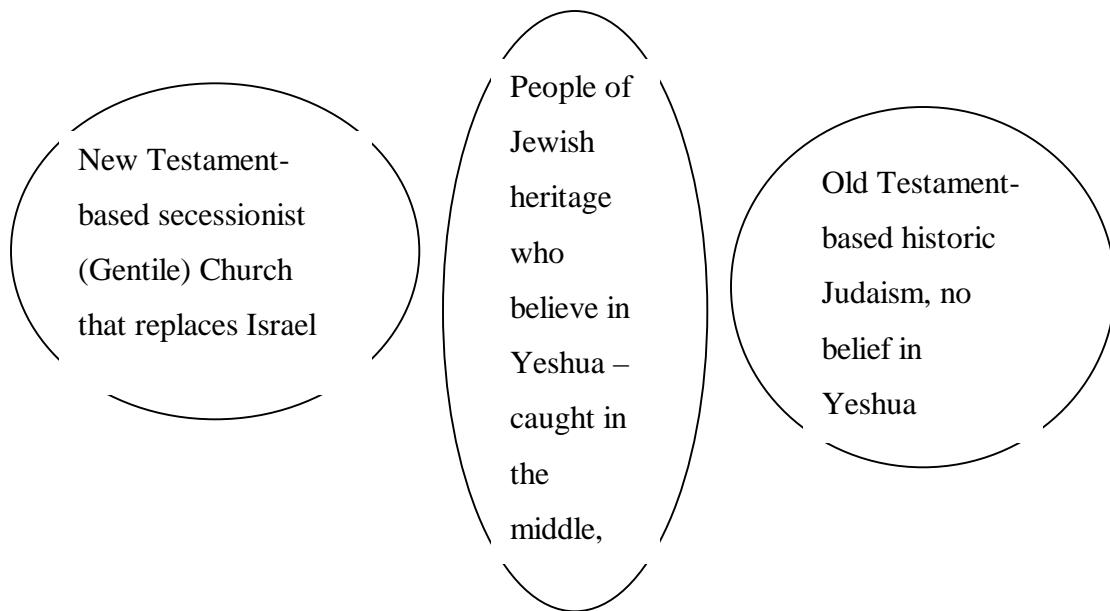
Drawing from this new ecclesiological paradigm, Kinzer offers what he calls, "five basic principles"

- the perpetual validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people;

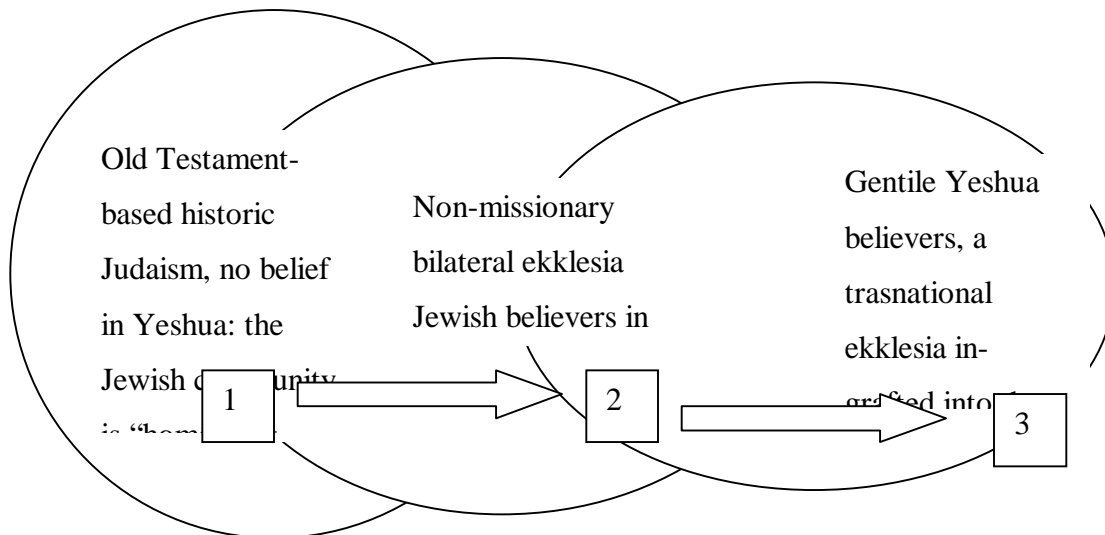
- the perpetual validity of the Jewish way of life rooted in the Torah, as the enduring sign and instrument of that covenant;
- the validity of Jewish religious tradition as the historical embodiment of the Jewish way of life rooted in the Torah;
- the bilateral constitution of the ekklesia, consisting of distinct but united Jewish and Gentile expressions of Yeshua-faith;
- 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 the *bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel that affirms Israel's covenant, Torah, and religious tradition*. According to this pattern, (Kinzer writes) 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 (the Gentiles) to Israel's corporate life and spiritual heritage, thereby enabling Israel to fulfill its (outer? cve) mission as a light to the nations (pg. 264).

Many of you who know me, know that I often think in terms of Venn diagrams, circles and lines. If I understand Kinzer appropriately, I think I would diagram his thesis in the following way: First, throughout the book, in his biblical exegesis and historical analysis Kinzer shows his unhappiness with what he would call the “missionary posture” (pg 263. One of Kinzer's sources is quoted as calling the older traditional “missionary paradigm” a “regime of assimilation” (pp 271 and 196) and another calling it “proselytizing” (pg 297). This older traditional “missionary paradigm” essentially treated the Jewish people as if they were Gentiles, or worse, it called them to renounce all Jewish heritage in order to be Christian. In other words, in missiological language, this older traditional “missionary paradigm” seemed to be more counter-cultural, discontinuous and unaccepting of Jewish faith, culture, heritage, and faithfulness to the covenant and the Torah than it was to radically pre-Christian and non-Christian Gentile cultures which it addressed around the world. For the sake of discussion, we might draw this discontinuous older “tragic schism” (pg 263) as predicated on a dualistic, two-kinds-of-people model, with Jewish followers of Yeshua caught in the middle, as follows:



We might, for the sake of discussion, draw the new “bilateral postmissionary perspective as follows:



In the language of the study of “new religious movements,” the non-missionary bilateral ecclesiology, then, would consider today’s Gentile Christian churches as new religious

movements derived out of Judaism and Jewish followers of Yeshua, rather than movements derived from Greek and Latin Gentile Christianity of the First Century. This re-conceptualization is huge, I think!

Another way to say this, in the language of contextualization, it seems that Kinzer is calling us all to reexamine the relationship of faith in Yeshua to Older Testament-based covenant faithfulness, Torah observance, and Jewish religious tradition observance as a living out of the Gospel at the level a deep-level Jewish meanings. This is contrasted with the earlier “missionary dualism” that seems to have sought to contextualize a Gentile-type Christianity with surface-level meanings and forms acceptable to folks from a Jewish heritage, unacceptably splitting Jewish culture from Jewish faith (see pp 11 and 289). In contrast, a bilateral non-missionary ecclesiology, Kinzer suggests, would, at its deep-level meanings “enable the Jewish people to appreciate Yeshua-faith as an indigenous Jewish reality, extending the reign of Israel’s God among the nations.” (pg 303)

I agree whole-heartedly with Kinzer’s thesis, if I have understood him aright. In fact, as I read Post-missionary Messianic Judaism, I found myself resonating with it, and thinking that I had heard something similar a few years ago. So I consulted with my mentor in Missiology, Johannes Verkuyl. And I discovered that Verkuyl, writing in 1978, had suggested something similar to a bilateral paradigm of ecclesiology. Verkuyl included a major chapter on, “The Communication of the Gospel to the Church and the Jewish People” in his magnum opus, Contemporary Missiology, published thirty years ago. And there Verkuyl offered his reading of Romans 9-11 in relation to this topic.

Paul did not write (Romans 9-11) to arm either defenders or opponents of predestination. Rather they came from the pen of a Jew who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and was puzzled why his fellow Jews did not also believe. He is struggling for Israel to be converted and is pleading for their hardened hearts to be melted. He is inquiring what his and our posture should be toward these people and what hope to entertain for this ancient, God-chosen people....

When Paul the Jew mentions that new people which lives by the grace of Jesus the Messiah, does that imply that he is separating himself from his own people, or that God – and Paul, too

– has written them off? In the strongest language possible Paul refutes this. God has absolutely not rejected his people (11:1). He has not withdrawn his gracious and inexhaustible promises from them; whenever they wish, his people may lay claim to them....

Perhaps I can illustrate what Paul meant. To hurl a stone a great distance one has to rear back as far as he can in order to achieve the distance. In like manner, God has temporarily withdrawn his hand from Israel in order to propel the gospel farther into the region of the Gentiles. As one shooting an arrow must stretch back the bowstring, so too God has pulled back his bowstring to give the arrow of his gospel greater distance. But this does not mean God has relinquished his claim on his own people. Rather, the people of God now has a twofold form: the Old Testament people of Israel and the New Testament people gathered from all nations.

While individual branches have been trimmed off from the tree to make room for grafting new branches on, the old tree itself has not died (11:21-24). We, the Gentile Christians, have been grafted into the main stock of Israel. This is a truth which so many (Gentile) Christians consistently forget, and it has led them into believing that Israel is no longer to be seen as an integral part of God's people since the New Testament community developed. What is more, many Gentile Christians misunderstand another point. They believe that if any Jew is saved at all nowadays, he is grafted onto the main trunk of Gentile Christians. Actually, it is the reverse; we, the Gentiles, are the engrafted ones. (Johannes Verkuyl Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction. G.R.: Eerdmans, 1978, 121-122.)

Personally, I agree wholeheartedly with Kinzer's approach – and he has been so thorough there is little to add. Because I agree with Kinzer at most points, in the last portion of this response I would like to simply ruminate on some questions regarding the implications of this paradigm of ecclesiology “Where to from here?” And this portion of my response could become terribly long and pedantic, so I will simply outline some observations and pose some questions.

First, in traditional ecclesiology we have normally worked with the four classical words concerning the essence of the church: “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” Could it be that Kinzer's perspective challenges us to re-define those four words? Might we say the following:

ONE: is a bilateral unity-in-diversity where we recognize that there are two distinct groups of followers of Yeshua (Jewish believers and Gentile believers) but that (only) in

Yeshua a new oneness-in-diversity occurs (the new humanity of Ephesians 2 and the “there is neither Jew nor Greek of Gal. 3:28) without destroying the unique and different ways that each group follows Yeshua. Unity, is unity in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel, the Promised one of the Older Testament, and the Creator of all humanity. (See Kinzer, pp 164, 170)

HOLY: Holiness is constituted by proximity through faith to Yeshua the Messia, but the way Jewish believers believe, the way they come to Yeshua-as their-Messiah is qualitatively different from the way Gentiles come to Yeshua-as-their Saviour. Yeshua is Lord of both. But the two believe in a different way: they are “two great wings” of ekklesia (Kinzer pg. 174).

CATHOLIC: That the universality of all believers in Yeshua is given concrete reality when and as new Gentile and Jewish believers join Messianic believers in following Yeshua – and thus “catholicity” is essentially a “multinational extension of Israel whose Messiah is Yeshua.”

APOSTOLIC: That the apostolicity of the believers in Yeshua involves faithful obedience to the teachings of the Jewish apostles about a Jewish Messiah, “a bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel that affirms Israel’s covenant, Torah, and religious tradition.” (302)

What would be the implications for developing a full-blown ecclesiology in this direction? And, following the framework I constructed in God’s Missionary People, what “new words” are necessary biblically and theologically to describe the essence of this new ecclesiological paradigm? And how would it transform our understanding for all followers of Yeshua (Jew and Gentile alike) as to the essential nature of the Church’s call to embody Kerygma, Koinonia, Diakonia, Marturia and Leitourgia? Further, such a bilateral ecclesiology would, I believe, radically redefine the ministries of the people of God (both Jew and Gentile) embodied in the concepts of Prophet, Priest, King, Healer, Liberator and Sage. Stuart Dauerman has already shown us the surprising new forms and directions that the priesthood could take if one followed through on a bilateral ecclesiological approach to the subject. Such implications intrigue me, and I believe all followers of Yeshua, Jew and Gentile alike may be able to find a way to heal the schism (Kinzer, pg 305) through the special mediation of those Messianic believers in Yeshua

who learn to embody in their life together a bilateral ecclesiology that, in solidarity with Israel, affirms in word and lives out in action Israel's covenant, Torah, and religious tradition." These folks have so much to teach us all.

Secondly, let me pose some questions that came to mind as I read this outstanding, stimulating, creative, challenging work.

1. Given the bilateral ecclesiological paradigm, what is the theological need for Yeshua for those Jews who are truly keepers of the covenant, Torah, Jewish religious tradition? (e.g, see reference to Friedman, pg 296-299, Kinzers' comments 299). Some years ago, the Reformed Church in America, my denomination, affirmed a "two-covenant" perspective about the Jewish people that concluded that Jewish people do not need to know or believe in Yeshua, since they base their faith on Older Testament covenant and Torah. How does the bilateral ecclesiological paradigm help us recognize the need for faith in Yeshua in the way that Paul and the Newer Testament followers of Yeshua clearly affirmed?
2. What is the "scandal of the cross", the transformative element in Yeshua-belief as related to covenant-Torah-Jewish religious tradition keepers? Are there any discontinuous elements, or is belief in Yeshua completely culture/faith affirming for them? (e.g, see pp 300 and 304)
3. How do we re-conceptualize Gentile Yeshua believing communities so they may recover their true, essential Jewish character?
4. How do we re-conceptualize the *missio-Dei* with regard to those who do not yet believe in or have a relationship with Yeshua (both Jew and Gentile) in the light of a bilateral ecclesiology. In other words, I understand Kinzer to be using "missionary" in a specific context as mentioned above. But I believe this brings Kinzer to affirm even more strongly a particular view of God's mission *missio Dei*. How might we re-conceptualize and affirm that?
5. How do we reexamine and re-conceptualize the Doctrine of Election to recognize the covenantal Torah-keeping believers in Yeshua as the elect remnant to which Yeshua-followers (Jew and Gentile) are invited to be

included?

6. How does the meaning and content of “belief-in-Yeshua” (what is “faith”) differ for the Jewish keeper of covenant, Torah and Jewish religious tradition-keeping believer-in-Yeshua, compared with the content of “faith” of the Gentile believer in Yeshua? (e.g., see pp 306-307).

Finally, I would like to suggest that there are some passages that are not treated in the book and which I think might be worth pursuing in doing a new exegesis that would draw from a bilateral post-missionary ecclesiology. For want of space and time I will simply mention some that come to mind:

Luke 9: 28-36 – Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration, with Moses and Elijah. Luke 9 is Luke’s first major mission chapter (apart from Jesus’ mission defined in Luke 4), and the Transfiguration is right in the middle of the chapter between the sending at the beginning of Luke 9 and at the beginning of Luke 10. I think the “bilateral ecclesiology” paradigm might help us to see why Luke placed it there.

John 3: Jesus conversation with Nicodemus: based on a bilateral ecclesiology, what does Jesus mean when he tells Nicodemus he must be “born again?”

Romans 4:16-17 – Paul affirms that those who believe in Yeshua therefore (by definition) have Abraham as their father. How do we understand the link between belief in Yeshua and becoming (Jews and Gentiles alike) children of Abraham?

I Peter 2 – It seems to me that the ecclesiology of I Peter 2 is telling us that believers in Yeshua are in-grafted into, and become a part of, the ancient people of God of the Older Testament, they are re-created to be Jewish. Can I Peter 2 be read from a supersessionist perspective? (e.g., see pg 12)

Acts 12-15 as compared with Acts 21. It seems to me that the question in Acts 12-15 was, do Gentiles need to obey all the Torah (live essential as Jews) in order to be followers of Yeshua? Kinzer helps us a great deal to re-read that story. Can we, then, compare that with Acts 21, where, I believe, Paul is giving an acted-out answer to a new question: do Jews need to leave behind their obedience to covenant and Torah and their observance of Jewish religious tradition in order to be followers of Yeshua? In both cases, the answer is NO – but the implications of the two answers differ quite markedly. Would a “postmissionary, bilateral ecclesiology” give us new eyes with which to

compare and contrast these two passages?

My brothers and sisters, followers of Yeshua, thank you so very much for the joy you have given me in having an opportunity to listen, reflect, and interact with Mark Kinzer's magnificent work! Paraphrasing Paul's words in Ephesians 3:17-19, it is my prayer that of us together, Jewish and Gentile communities of followers of Yeshua, may allow Yeshua, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to dwell in our hearts through faith (so that), rooted and grounded in the love of Yeshua, we may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Yeshua that surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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