Messianism and Messianic Jews

Part 2 of 2: What Christians Should Appreciate About Messianic Judaism

with

Release Date: December 2015
Okay. Now you've talked a little bit about, we’ve talked about the existence of the synagogues and the growth of Messianism. And now another dimension that's very important in thinking about being a Jewish believer is the whole, I would say double combination of persecution and anti-Semitism. And I'm going to put them side by side because on the one hand there is the reaction of many people that Messianic's are Jewish and so the anti-Semitism comes in but then there is from the Jewish side at least from a significant portion of the Jewish side that you're not really Jewish. So explain the life of a Messianic in that tension.

Urgh. That's very like - yeah you touched a very painful area for the Messianic movement. We got to defend the right of our existence as Messianic Jews on both sides. We need to defend before Christians that we are to exist as the Messianic Jews. Something different, distinct in unity with everybody else but still something distinct what is important in the divine plan and at the same time we need to prove the right of our existence as a Jewish movement to our fellow Jewish people. Usually the Orthodox Jews would say, "Well the Messianic Jews they are Jews, they are Jewish but sort of like sinful. They are wrong. They are more or less in false teaching false -"

So they're ethnically Jewish but religiously heretical?

Right. Exactly. For reformed Jews we are not Jewish. And there was an interesting discussion I had with reformed Rabbi just recently. I was told that I’m not Jewish -

Yeah. I was going to elude to this later but you've brought it up now so let's go after it. You were in a meeting in which you were I think explaining to people how to share with their Jewish neighbors and in attendance was a Rabbi, one of the Rabbi's at I think it's the largest reformed seminary in the city.

Synagogue - Temple yeah. In the nation actually.
Darrell Bock

Oh really I didn't know that. It's literally located almost across the street from where my kids went to high school and that high school was nicknamed Hebrew High. For those of you who are in Dallas that's Hillcrest and so this is not an insignificant conversation that's taking place. And so you were sharing with how to share with Jewish people about their interest in Yeshua and Jesus and that kind of thing and this Rabbi speaks up and I'll let you pick up the story from here.

Vladimir Pikman

Okay. Good. Thank you. It was actually event entitled Jews and Christians talking together. So it was like social gathering event to discuss Christians and Jews to talk together about some things and issues that we -

Darrell Bock

Share

Vladimir Pikman

- share. Yeah like for example this time it was entitled "Standing against rising anti-Semitism and how Jewish is Christianity" and yes we had a number of Jewish people in attendance and the Rabbi of this reformed temple. And I was told that I’m not Jewish because I believe in Jesus. And I -

Darrell Bock

By the Rabbi?

Vladimir Pikman

Yeah, by the Rabbi. And my response couldn't be based on the Bible because in reformed Judaism it's not necessary that what was there in the Bible centuries ago is relevant for today. So we take from the Old Testament, from the Torah what is appropriate for today usually the position. But there is something different what is important for the Jewish people these days. Particularly in the United States it's like a marker of Jewish identity the Holocaust. So what does it mean to be Jewish? More than 70 percent of the Jewish people in the United States say, "Remembering Holocaust." So I had to address this issue. So I told, "You know what makes us all Jewish is that Reformed, Orthodox, Conservative and Messianic Jews, Catholic Jews, Evangelical Jews, we all go to the same gas chamber. So what makes us all Jewish is the concentration camp and the gas chamber because when the Holocaust comes, when the trouble comes it's not what we believe in."

Darrell Bock

Everybody is included.
Vladimir Pikman "It's not what we believe in it's who we really are according to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Darrell Bock And in making that picture you're actually making a point not just about the past but you're making a point about who is vulnerable to anti-Semitism even today.

Vladimir Pikman As a Jew Berlin my life was threatened a couple of times. Nobody cares of what I believe in. If somebody hates Jewish people, I'm a Jew. They don't care about differences between us.

Darrell Bock That is an interesting response and interesting observation and it shows the delicacy I think of what it means to be Jewish because again I think some people think they don't think of Judaism or being Jewish particularly in ethnic terms sometimes they think about it exclusively in religious terms and the term is actually broader than that.

Vladimir Pikman Yeah. That's very true and let me point to something in my personal story in this regard. For me as I mentioned before being Jewish was just a matter of destiny. It was something unavoidable. I'm born a Jew. I will die a Jew and it's like struggle. If you remember Fiddler on the Roof Tevye was complaining, "If you needed a nation or needed the people -"

Darrell Bock Why us?

Vladimir Pikman Why us. Yeah why not somebody else. So it was my attitude why me. I consciously became Jewish after I believed in Jesus actually. Becoming a Messianic Jew, starting reading the bible I understood my calling, not just my destiny but also my Jewish calling in this life.

Darrell Bock And your roots in many ways.
Vladimir Pikman  My roots and for me I discovered the Christianity. Even as the Jewish sect of the first century. At least so for me it was like coming home. And being Jewish makes sense for me today. Like years ago before I came to believe in Yeshua and Jesus it was not making much sense. It was destiny after it became calling. I became more observant as a Jew after I became a believer. So I stopped eat like pork and seafood after I became a believer in Jesus. Not because I’m legalistically under the law but because I consider that as a part of my calling and my covenantal fidelity together with the Jewish people.

Darrell Bock  Now I have two topics I want to be sure and cover before we wrap up so I’m going to deal with one first. We've sort of introduced in anti-Semitism but give us your take, I'm asking you to comment on kind the Messianic experience in various parts of the world. Give your take in what is happening with regard to anti-Semitism particularly in Europe today.

Vladimir Pikman  Well it's getting bad. And as I said we moved there 20 years ago and Germany is probably the most or the safest haven for the Jewish people today because of the Holocaust, because sensitivity to the Jewish people because the political sanctions just because the politically and on all levels of society Germany tries to protect Jewish people from any kind of anti-Semitism but even in Germany over the last 20 years I experienced a dramatic change. Not even talking about other countries where the anti-Semitism was strong even earlier but the anti-Semitism is rising in Europe I would say due to a couple of different reasons. One of them is very strong Islamic influence, immigration from Middle East with people coming to the countries with their embedded hatred toward the Jewish people.

Darrell Bock  What percentage of Europe is Muslim today do you know? I know it varies from country to country but.

Vladimir Pikman  It's pretty big. I mean it's not like every second is Muslim but just if in Germany I would say probably like 7 percent. Although I’m not sure. It's just like number that I could set together thinking of like 6 percent.
Because Turkey is a country for Germany much like Mexico is for the United States in terms of the way immigration patterns happened and the way in which certain labor was undertaken by a certain segment of the population that kind of thing.

But look if to take the school that our daughters attend in Berlin every third or even possible every second in the class is a Muslim. It says something about big cities particularly. And I'm not talking now about Islam. I'm talking about the hatred to the Jewish people that this brought from the Middle East and also from the countries that are affected by this.

And it's kind of a two edged sword on the one hand because you've got more Muslims in the country but you also have these European countries developing some sensitivities towards the Muslim immigrants who are in their country and with an awareness of how they view certain issues et cetera and that ends up pushing back on the Jewish population, what's left of it in Europe.

Yes but let me also elaborate on this a little bit more. So the immigrants they're not enculturated enough to understand even in Germany the sensitivity regarding Jewish people. So they are not adjusting to the culture and the dialogue in the society. They bring their anti-Semitism immediately to all possible expressions. Also what we see in France it's -

Even more.

Yeah. Even more. But it's because they are not adjusting to the European sense of tolerance, democracy and stuff but at the same time after the Holocaust, European society was very careful with the Jewish people even general. And even regards Israel just Israel was the country for weak, oppressed and persecuted Jewish people to survive -

And there was a shadow of guilt about what had taken place.

Yes. Exactly. Today in the last 20 years I saw that completely reversed. Now the Palestinians are weak and oppressed and the Israelis are militant and strong and ugly because of that. So the society in Europe in general is getting anti-Israeli more and more.
Is that because the further away we get from the Holocaust the more we're losing the memory of it?

Absolutely. That's the key. So the memory is lost and the card of the Holocaust - just for play - is already not playing as it used to before. Now the attitude against Israel is often considered not as a apart of anti-Semitic attempt but it serves just to influence the anti-Semitism, to fuel it. To make it even stronger because in the minds of people, Jews and Israel are attached to each other. Every time there is war in Israel a war with Gaza, the anti-Semitism is coming to the new high. So the anti-Israeli sentiment brings more anti-Semitism. It's related.

And so one of the examples is after the attack in France on the French Newspaper, there also were reprisals against Jews in France and pressure on Jewish communities in France and my understanding is if you're Jewish in France - it even got to the point of people removing their - what are the thing you put on the door post that identifies you as a Jew?

Mezuzah?

Yeah the Mezuzah. Even pulling those off their doorposts so they're not identified as Jews so they might not be subject to physical attack.

Yes. It's like Jewish becoming Mezuzah indoor houses. So Mezuzah is inside not on the outside.

Interesting. Yeah.

Yeah. Every sign of a Jew in Europe brings a danger attached to that. So I'm wearing my Kepa all the time. So at first even years ago like 15 years ago I was working with my Kepa on the streets of Berlin and my life was threatened a couple of times because of that. So it took a miracle for me to stay alive and healthy but my wife convinced me or pushed me to wear a hat on top of it. So that's what I do because every evident sign of belonging to the Jewish people in Europe brings danger.

So that's where the practice of wearing the hat came from. Actually I didn't know that. That's a new story for me.
Vladimir Pikman: Well I'm wearing a hat that is more like stylish not like Jewish.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. I know. I've seen you in the equivalent in what we would call a baseball cap here and I've seen the European cap that is very stylish. So you've done it well but any way I didn't know it was part of the story. That's interesting but it shows how serious things are. This is not a theoretical anti-Semitism that we're dealing with. It is there and is real and people feel it and are impacted by it.

Vladimir Pikman: That's very true. That's very true and it's growing.

Darrell Bock: Well the last topic I want to cover before we wrap up because our time is slipping from us is helping - this has kind of been a factual podcast in many ways getting people oriented to what is Messianism and how it works and that kind of thing. And I kind of want to divide this last ten minutes into kind of two parts. One is help people who are not Messianic who are Gentile understand kind of where Messianic's are coming from on the one hand, that's what I want to do first. And then I want to talk about how do - obviously if you meet a Messianic and particularly if you're a believer you have something in common you share and there's a way to connect and even though there might seem to be differences in practice and that kind of thing there is a core unity there that one can work with but then the other hurdle that some people have is how do I share with my Jewish neighbor. Not Messianic that kind of thing. So I want to kind of take those in turn. So first let's talk about relating to the Messianic. What should the average person who is in a church appreciate about Messianic's? And this is kind of an opportunity to discuss the value of the space of being a Messianic, of being in that space.

Vladimir Pikman: Well it's a good question. It's too little time to respond to that. To say it precisely and briefly the fact that there are Jewish people who believe in Jesus as Jewish people as I said it's an important part of eschatology, end times, it's important part of ecclesiology, it's important for the church. It's very encouraging. It's evidence that Jesus is the Messiah because God never rejected his people. There is a remnant and God is the God who is faithful to his covenant. That's what we read in the book of Romans. Paul was writing God never rejected his people. He's true to the covenant he made. He's the God who keeps his promises and Paul was saying as a Jewish believer I'm like witness of it. I'm testimony. I am evidence.
And there's continuity with the past that what you believe in - you sometimes hear the phrase that a Messianic is a completed Jew. And the idea is they are participating in promises that God has always said this is the direction the program has been in. Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and that's part of what's being embraced.

Right. By the way be careful with the word uncompleted Jew talking to the Jewish people because nobody wants to be incomplete, considered incomplete.

But Jesus fulfills the calling of Israel and in Jesus Israel fulfills its calling. So looking, seeing a Jew who believes in Jesus, somebody can rejoice because he sees an evidence of Gods faithfulness, his existence, the reality of God's working in this world. And I'm not trying to say the Jewish people are more important, better than anybody else. We're not worse than others at the same time either. It's just something what God gives us an evidence of his faithfulness and of his existence. And in order to see that there are Jewish people who believe in Jesus the Jewish believers in Jesus have to make them self visible. And the Messianic movement - the Messianic Jewish movement because there are many Gentiles who would like to play Messianic. I'm not talking about these guys with full respect but in order for people to see that they need to see the Jewish believers. The Jewish believers in Jesus we need to make our self visible and the Messianic Jewish movement is a visible expression that is needed.

So you're point here because I think it's an important one. It's not so much to - it isn't that Messianic's see themselves as being so different that they need to stand out and be distinct in saying oh we're better than you are. It's the issue here is we're expressing who we are and where we have come from and where we still feel connection with. And that connection goes back to promises made all the way back in Genesis 12.

Absolutely.
And the flip side of it is if I can move the time machine in the other direction is if we think about Romans 9-11 in what Paul has to say about the continued commitment of God to his people. The fact that one day a massive Israel will be responding and that there's always a remnant that exists in the midst, which Paul is the proof of it. That all that is a way of saying as well as the statements in the New Testament about the body being made of Jew and Gentile in one body not with the idea that everyone gets homogenized but with the idea that in the midst of that diversity you actually see visibly the reconciliation that God has brought between people.

Absolutely.

All of that is at work as an explanation and to some degree a justification for why Messianic's exist and why they should be appreciated.

And it has to come from two sides so that Messianic Jews we need to appreciate the Christians and Christians need to appreciate the Messianic Jews for our unity to be visible in appreciation of each other. That's very important.

Because ultimately this is one body of Christ that we're talking about.

Absolutely and the body of Christ as we see in the Bible. It is a unity of Jews and Gentiles.

It's a unity with diversity built into it.

Exactly, absolutely. So it's unity of Jews as Jews and Gentiles as Gentiles.

And so we see just to play this out a little bit although I wish - we don't have near the time - we don't have any time to develop it and so you see discussions in the New Testament about certain people whose practices still remain aligned to Jewish practices on the one hand for Messianic's who are part of the community and then you see other explanations that say that people who choose not to live that way are also to be - you're not supposed to fight over those things in a way that gets in the way of the inherent unity that we all have with one another.
The Table Podcast  Messianism and Messianic Jews

**Vladimir Pikman**  I would say that we are not to fight about it but we are to engage each other in a healthy dialoguing and a healthy debate just because I love to debate and argue. So if we can respectfully argue.

**Darrell Bock**  That's very Jewish too.

**Vladimir Pikman**  Yeah. Exactly. So we don't need to talk just about things we agree on. We can share our disagreements and we can complement each other by disagreeing and arguing with each other.

**Darrell Bock**  And reflecting on the conversation.

**Vladimir Pikman**  Exactly. Absolutely.

**Darrell Bock**  Okay. Well that takes care of one part of the last piece that I want to cover and now in the remaining time that we have what advice would you give to people and I know you do this all the time and you talk about this topic all the time and in fact we could probably do a whole podcast on it in fact we probably should plan to do that one way or the other whether by Skype or when you're back in Dallas.

**Vladimir Pikman**  That would be great.

**Darrell Bock**  But in kind of an initial way what kind of initial suggestions would you give to the person who says, "You know I have a Jewish neighbor but I’m just not sure how to even start the conversation." What advice do you have?

**Vladimir Pikman**  Jewish People there are two words in this phrase, "Jewish" and "People". Jewish people are people. They have the same needs as everybody else. They get sick as everybody else. They have challenges in life and family problems as everybody else. They have teenage kids as everybody else. They have fear of death as everybody else. So they are people. The same felt needs as everybody else. So thinking of the Jewish people think of people.

**Darrell Bock**  So in other words don't let the Jewishness of the person you're interacting with so get in the way of the way you interact with someone that you don't interact with them fairly normally.
Vladimir Pikman Well you need both. So first you understand that they are just people. They don't have special horns somewhere. So they are people with the same needs so they need Jesus and his help and his assistance in their life the same as everybody else does and they struggle the same as their Christian neighbors in times and they rejoice the same as their Christian neighbors in times. Another word in this phrase is "Jewish" and it makes them sort of special. Special because of their relationship with Christianity. For more than a thousand of years so I would probably for at least 17 centuries if not more church was pushing was pushing to convert to Christianity and converting to Christianity meant that we need to stop being Jewish we need to abandon our people, we need to abandon the covenant that we have with God becoming Gentiles. So the new goal for Jewish people regarding Jesus was developed over the centuries and centuries.

Darrell Bock Because it inherently meant a religious move but almost meant a move of denial of identity.

Vladimir Pikman Exactly primarily. It was not about belief it was about identity exactly. And also what is special about Jewish people is the fact that Jesus is Jewish. He is the king of the Jews. He was, he is and he is coming back as the king of the Jews. Apostles are Jewish. New Testament is the best seller of a Jewish literature. It's the most publish and printed and given the way Jewish book ever. So it's not just New York Times best seller. It is the all times best seller. And so at the same time the Gospel that we preach is essentially good news for the Jews. It needs essences it was proclaimed to the Jewish people and by the Jewish people and it was promised to the Jewish people. So everything what you can bring to the Jewish people in Jesus is Jewish by its essence.
So it's sort of natural but you need to bridge this historic gap between the Jewish people and they're Messiah who became initially Gentileish so to speak for them. So just going to a Jewish person fulfill your great commission according to Romans 11:11 to provoke them to jealousy. So make them jealous but make them jealous in the Jewish way appreciating the roots of the Gospel. The roots of the New Testament and the roots of Christianity. Like in the way I'm giving the example you talk to a Jewish person and you say something this, "You know you your Messiah made me happy. Your Messiah forgave all my sin. Your Messiah gave me quality new life that will never seize. Your Messiah blessed me so abundantly. Your Messiah is the best what I have in this life. Do you know your Messiah, his name is Jesus." So provoke them to jealousy as people and communicate the Jewish nature of the Gospel bridging the gap that the church developed with the Jewish people over centuries.

**Darrell Bock**

Well there's a whole history of that conversation, there's a whole way of expectations that many Jewish people have when you even evoke the name of Jesus that is a part of that conversation. That's a topic for a completely different podcast. There is no way to do it and append it to this general overview on Messianism. So Vladi you can consider this an invitation to have you back to discuss that topic in full and take a fuller and richer look at it because I know that one of the important values of the Messianic community is this bridge that it forms that allows people to hear and share about the Messiah although it must be said and this is important to say is that many Jewish people who are drawn to Christ are often drawn to Christ because of the testimony of a Gentile believer who has opened the door for them.

**Vladimir Pikman**

Exactly, that's absolutely true. I know many, hundreds of Jewish people who became believers in Jesus because of the testimony of their Christian friends. And Christians can reach out to the Jewish people to their neighbors, friends and colleagues that no one missionary to the Jewish people can ever do.

**Darrell Bock**

It's a whole fascinating discussion all by itself so we'll definitely regather at some point in the future and discuss this. I really appreciate you coming in to talk with us about this. It's a topic that we both share a deep interest in and of course I've been involved in Messianic ministry for a long time together and so it's an important conversation. And I thank you for taking the time to come in and talk with us.
Vladimir Pikman  Thank you.

Darrell Bock  And we thank you for coming and being a part of the table and hearing our discussion. This is the table where we discuss issues of God and Culture and we look forward to seeing you again soon.