

Nascent Messianic Judaism and its ‘Kiruv’
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KIRUV AND KERYGMA

Nascent Messianic Judaism and its Kiruv

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1

What worked – and what didn’t – for the early movement of Jewish believers in Yeshua as they sought to survive and thrive in the early centuries? The purpose of this paper is to survey the Nascent Messianic Jewish Movement and to see what clues remain about how it went about its outreach within the Jewish world. This, hopefully, will yield possibilities for further enquiry as to what “worked” and maybe even what didn’t “work” back then. The answer to these questions might possibly shed some light on what works – and doesn’t work – today.

The title of this paper forces two modern terms on an ancient movement, not as an attempt to distort our understanding of it, but in order to acknowledge our modern assumptions and the way in which we view it from our current perspective. The term “Nascent Messianic” (NM) Judaism is used as an alternative to “Jewish Christianity” and the more contemporary “Christian Judaism”.¹ The term ‘Kiruv’ is used, because like modern Kiruv, it reflects and presupposes the in-house attempt by Jews to reach other Jews in order that they might make *teshuvah* and become more faithful Jews.

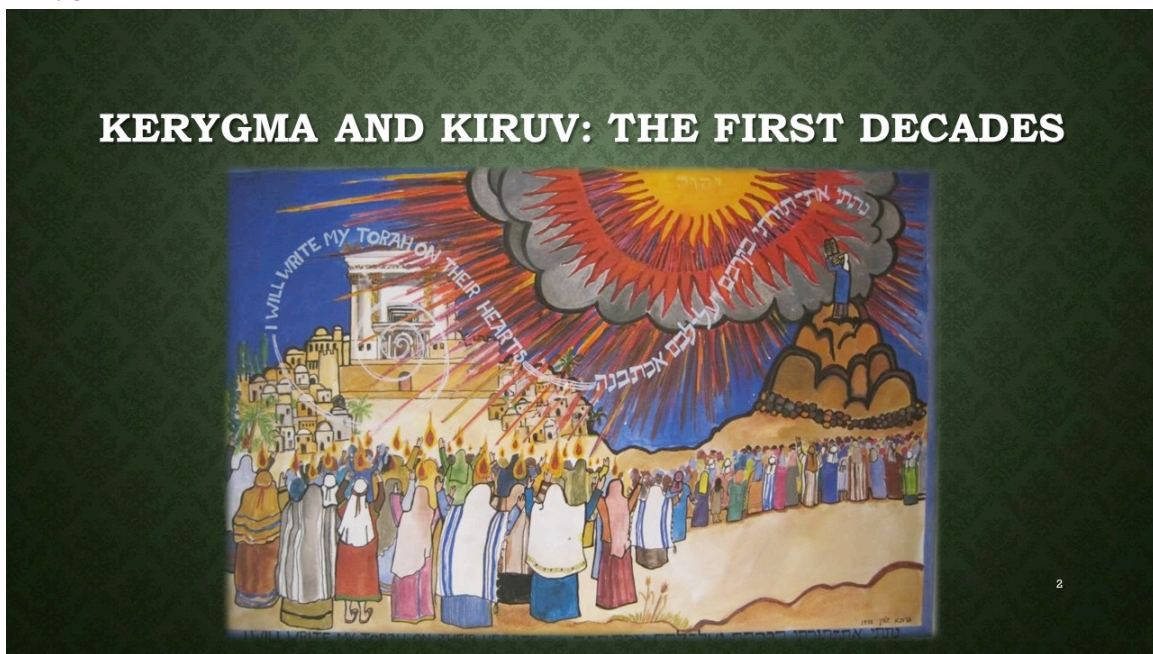
The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on how the early Nascent Messianic Jewish movement (NMJM) sought to reach its own constituency, the Jewish people. What were

¹ The term Nascent Messianic Judaism is used here because unlike the term Formative Judaism favored by Jacob Neusner NMJ was not the basis of what would emerge over a millennium later even though there were elements of continuity. Modern Messianic Judaism should thus be termed Renascent Messianic Judaism. It is well accepted that the terms “Judaism” and “Christianity” are anachronistic but still useful, with qualification, in some regards.

their approaches and were they effective? Following the trajectory of Acts, most histories of early Christianity focus simply on the early Jerusalem community, and then skip to Antioch and the 'gentile mission'.² This is not only true of more traditional approaches, but even in modern scholarship which in its sympathy to NM Judaism, has not adequately addressed the mission and expansion of NM Judaism within the Jewish world. Much has been written of the 'Mission to the Gentiles'³ and the early NMJM but little concerning those activities and social factors which led to the phenomenon of its growth and its establishment as a centuries-long religious movement.⁴

What follows is less of an in-depth analysis and more of a general survey of the various sources of information at our disposal. As such, it is a bit of a potpourri, and potentially tendentious, as I have had to be selective in the data I have presented from each field. However, it promises to be enlightening, and perhaps a 'vestibule' into research to be conducted in a more extensive and thorough manner.

Kerygma and Kiruv: The First Decades



The New Testament is the primary text for Jewish outreach in the first decades, before the outbreak of the first Jewish War. Following the command to preach the Gospel in Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49 and Acts 1:4-8 the book of Acts proceeds to portray a vibrant proclamation beginning in Jerusalem on Shavuot. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" we are told (Acts 2:4). Beginning with that event, the Jerusalem community grew rapidly (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). Luke attributes this growth to three factors: First, evidences of God's *power* through miraculous signs (Acts 2:2-13, 38, 43; 3:6-10; 5:11-14; second, the *preaching* (κῆρυγμα) and teaching

² Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, ed. James Moffatt, trans. James Moffatt, vol. 1 (New York: Harper, 1908), exemplifies this approach, in which he tellingly states "By adopting an intercourse with Gentile Christians, this Jewish Christianity did away with itself, and in the second period of his labours Peter ceased to be a 'Jewish Christian.'" p. 61.

³ E.g. Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2002), 165-78.

⁴ Despite its tremendous contribution to the field, *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), also has little to say in this regard.

(*διδασχῆ*) of the Apostles and testimony of the believers (2:14-42; 3:11-26; 4:17-20; and third, the remarkable *unity* of the believers (2:44-36; 4:32-37) which was supplemented and assured by the effectual organisation of the community which ensured that the unity of the community and its proclamation could continue (6:1-7). The community grew and prospered until it first faced fierce persecution (8:1) which Luke explains provided the occasion for those scattered to preach the word over a wider area (8:4). Following that first dispersal, the same themes persisted and the now more widespread church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria continued to grow (8:31).



The account of Acts thus highlights God's enabling *power*, the centrality of *preaching* and teaching, and the importance of *unity* in community life as the key factors in the Way's early growth. In terms of words on parchment, by far the most emphasis given by Luke was to the preaching and teaching of the Apostles. We find there Peter's *shavuot* sermon (Acts 2:14-40); a subsequent address after the healing of a lame man and the commotion that ensued (Acts 3:12-26); and a further Spirit-filled address to the priests, rulers, elders and scribes in Acts 4:8-12. This teaching and preaching is what alarmed the authorities, because they had seen its effect, and thus they attempted to put an end to it in Acts 4:18, unsuccessfully, as Acts 5:25 records: *Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people*. The series of discourses is brought to a climax by Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2-53. As Hugh Schonfield put it some 80 years ago, "under the leadership of Simon bar Yona (called Peter) the Galilean fanatics, as they were then known, carried on an energetic propaganda in the name of Jesus, proclaiming his Messiahship in the temple courts, synagogues, markets, and every place of public assembly."⁵

With all of this activity, it is not until Acts 10 that there is any hint of an actual gentile mission. Early outreach was directed within the Jewish world. Even following the expansion of the mission to the gentiles, the mission remained centered on the Jewish community. Thus Paul and Barnabas, sent from Antioch, went directly to the synagogues with John (Mark) their assistant (13:5) with remarkable success in Salamis (13:5), Perga (13:13), Antioch in Pisydia (13:14) and it is not until their success became overwhelming that significant opposition was raised (13:45) prompting the fateful decision of Paul and Barnabas to turn "to the gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

⁵ Hugh Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1936), 20.

Nevertheless, even after this strategic change, the Jewish community remained the focus in Iconium (14:1). Even after the gentile mission was firmly established by the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) Luke recorded that it remained Paul's custom to prioritize the Jewish mission (Acts 17:1-4). There he and Silas were able to reason in the synagogue for three weeks that Jesus is the Messiah before opposition made further attempts impossible and they had to flee, only to maintain the same approach in the next city they came to (17:10-12). Paul himself affirmed this priority with passion (Rom 1:16; 9:1ff; 10:1).

The success of this mission is not as prominent as it could be in the New Testament record, in part due to the position of the Pauline epistles in a place of priority, and partly due to

KERYGMA AND KIRUV: THE FIRST DECADES



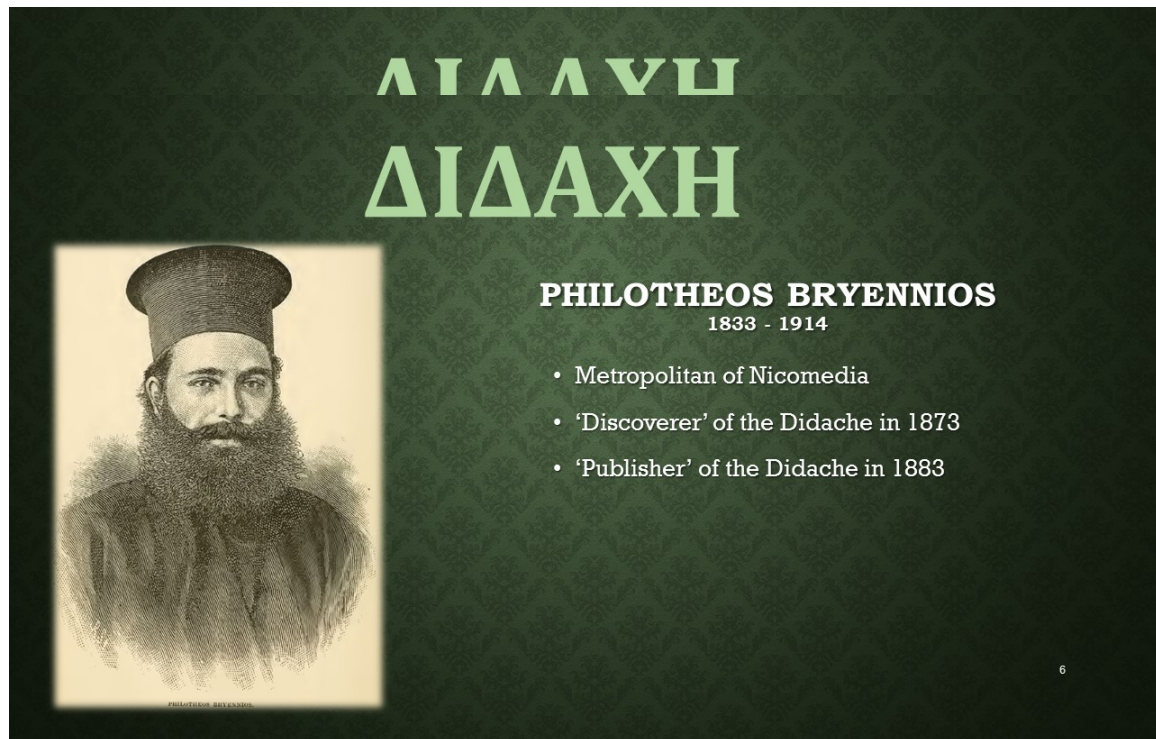
the sheer bulk of the Pauline epistles in comparison to the general epistles. It is not a major concern of the Acts of the Apostles after chapter nine. Nevertheless, in the general epistles there remain signs not of universal failure and rejection, but of substantial success and establishment in the face of adversity. This mission did not only succeed in the Asian continent, but it can even be said that “the cradle of the African Christian Church stood in the synagogue.”⁶ A measure of the growth of the NMJM, in my opinion, is seen as Peter writes of the church in Babylon, already a great Jewish center (1 Pet 5:13).⁷ Likewise James writes ‘to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion’ (1:1). Such claims regarding a widespread NM Jewish community in the New Testament are

⁶ Johannes van Oort, "Jewish Elements in the Origin of North African Christianity," in *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus*, ed. Tamila Mgaloblishvili, *Caucasus World* (Richmond: Curzon, 1998), 97-98.

⁷ Wayne Grudem argues with the majority of scholars that it is impossible that this could actually be the literal city of Babylon on the basis of historical considerations and comparisons with the Babylon of Rev 16-18, which many understand to be Rome *The First Epistle General of Peter*, ed. Leon Morris, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1998), 201. This position is not certain, as Charles Bigg confirms in an older perspective *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, ed. S.R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C.A. Briggs, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901), 197. It is mistaken to understate the significance of the Babylonian community before the first Jewish war. Josephus mentions ‘those of our nation beyond the Euphrates’ in *War* 0.2 and elsewhere. Hillel himself was of Babylonian descent, and less reputable were Anilaus and Asinaeus who set up a doomed “robber state” in the region from c. 20-25 C.E., as Josephus documents in *Ant.* 18.310-79.

highly contested, and outside of the scope of this paper, but there is extra biblical evidence to substantiate the assertion to which this paper now turns.

The Didachean “Window”



The Didache is a well-known first century teaching best described by its own incipit title, *The Teaching of the Lord Through the Twelve Apostles for the Gentiles*. It makes no claim to be written by any of the Twelve in particular, only to be a representation of their presentation of Jesus’ teachings. That said, there is little in it that can be directly attributed to Jesus, other than the *sectio evangelica* (Did. 1.2-5). It is so early that compelling arguments have been made for its priority over Matthew and Revelation which are receiving increasing recognition.⁸ The authoritative manuscript for the Didache was discovered by the Metropolitan of Nicomedia Philotheos Bryennios in Constantinople, in 1873 and its *editio princeps* published by him in 1883.

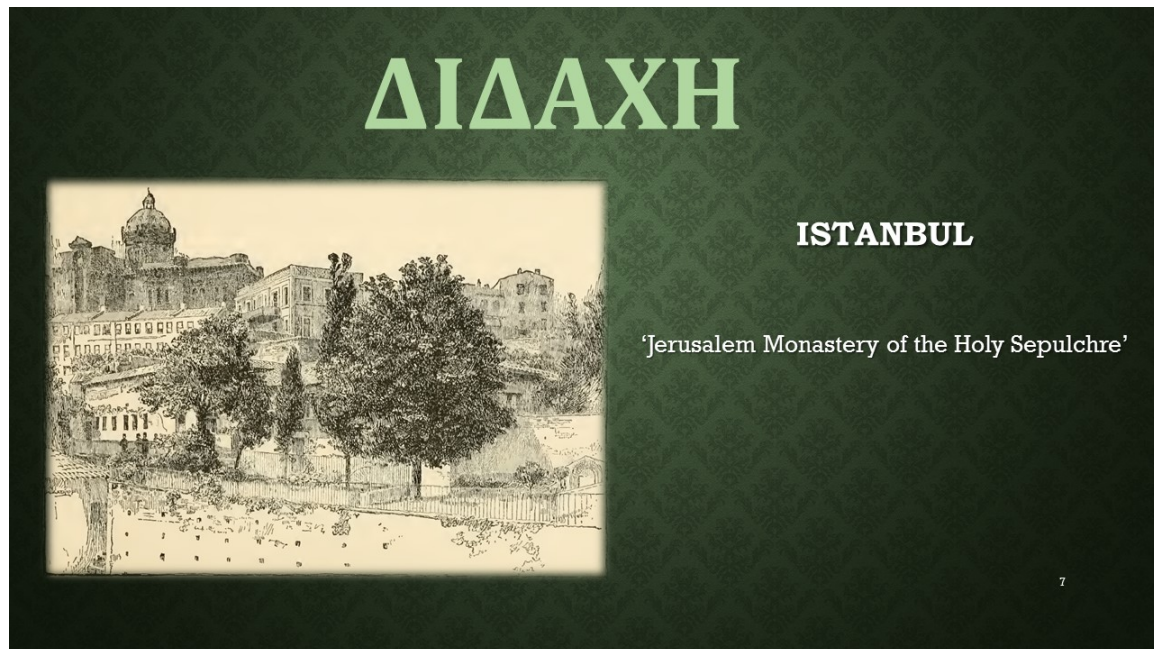
The Didache was addressed particularly from the context of the NMJM to the exploding gentile mission, as its title indicates. There is little doubt that the “Didachist” was a Jew, and most probably he lived in or very near the city of Antioch – a place known for its substantial Jewish population. Its genius is evident as it tightly holds to certain requirements which are non-negotiables. Among these are the eating of food offered to idols (Did. 6.3 cp. Acts 15:29; 1 Cor 8:1,13; Rev 2:14) and the rejection of false teachers (Did. 11.1 cp. 2 John 9-10). Wherever possible restrictions are modified, however. Because its immersion (baptism) was not a ritual immersion for purity, the Didache permitted baptism by affusion if full immersion in living water or even ‘warm’ water was not possible (Did. 7.3). This was to be done three times over the head

⁸ This argument has been championed by Allan Garrow, first in his Ph.D. dissertation and then in later papers. The fact that the arguments can be made at all points inherently to the Didache’s early date. See *The Gospel of Matthew’s Dependence on the Didache*, Jsntsup (London: T&T Clark, 2004); “The Eschatological Tradition Behind 1 Thessalonians: *Didache* 16,” *JSNT* 32, no. 2 (2009); “The Didache and Revelation,” in *The Didache: A Missing Piece of the Puzzle in Early Christianity*, ed. Jonathan Alfred Draper and Clayton N. Jefford, *Ecl* (Atlanta: SBL, 2015).

“in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.” In terms of obedience to the “way of the Teaching” the baptizand was told “do that which you are able” (6.2), and in particular since its readers were presumed gentiles and not beholden to Jewish dietary restrictions “concerning food, bear what you are able” (6.3).

While the Didache does not directly address how NM Jews propagated their faith among other Jews, the values of that community can be seen, and it is reasonable to expect that their values would not be significantly different in terms of how they expected the “Gentile Mission” to grow. The Didache thus gives an extra-canonical glimpse of the approach of the early NMJM. Firstly, there is the assertion of traditional Jewish values in the Two Ways tractate (Did. 1-5). Torah-based instruction particularly appropriate for pagan converts is dispensed. Secondly, there is a flexible approach to the imposition of halakah (Did. 6:2-3, 7.4). Gentiles were not expected to be bound by the Torah, and while the Didache’s instruction was authoritatively mandated, at the same time, obedience was not a salvation issue. In fact, the issue of “salvation” doesn’t even appear in the soteriological sense of salvation from sin. Thirdly, there is the element of community life, evident throughout the Didache, just as seen in Acts 2:42-46. The same themes of the Apostle’s teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers are pervasive in the Didache.

Thomas O’Loughlin, in a recent paper *The Missionary Strategy of the Didache*, has made the salient observation that in terms of the process of training and baptizing new adherents into the Didachean / gentile Christian community, the tasks were not specifically assigned to any particular member. The Didache speaks of teachers, apostles, and prophets, but none of these are specified. This implies that the “missionary dimension is assumed to belong to all the members of



the community.”⁹

In fact, O’Loughlin may be stretching his point. Whatever his title, the Didachean teacher of the initiate is a person of maturity, even authority, who speaks to the initiate as “child” (τέκνον, Did. 3.1-4.1). Furthermore, he requires the initiate to revere the “one who speaks the word of God to you. Honor him like the Lord” (4:1). Nevertheless, the point stands in regard to the fact that the whole community was involved in the missionary enterprise, for “whoever else is able should fast” prior to the initiate’s baptism (7:4). The growth of the community was a concern

⁹ Thomas O’Loughlin, "The Missionary Strategy of the Didache," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 28, no. 2 (2011): 81.

of the members in general. In the milieu of the Didache (and scholars often consider Matthew and James to have emerged from communities that were part of that milieu),¹⁰ evangelism occurred as an organic effect of community life. "Apostolic" mission could not be separated from the local community of believers.

With such a "strategy" based on whole-community mission, it is natural that the unity of the community was a significant concern. This observation regarding the effect of the community's life harkens back to the unity of the early believers in Acts and its own celebration of community unity. The importance of unity is a significant theme in the Didache, whose members were told "do not cause division, but reconcile those who fight" (Did. 4.3). The community was directed to pray "Remember, Lord, your church, deliver her from all evil and perfect her in your love, and gather her from the four winds, into your kingdom, which you have prepared for her" (Did. 10.5). Throughout the Didache, concerns regarding hospitality, charitable giving, and internal community relationships are given attention. The unity envisaged by the Didachist was one that embraced the entire church in the coming eschaton without any apparent distinction between the Didachist and his NM Jewish community and the gentile communities he was addressing. The day was coming "in which our Lord comes" and in light of that the community was advised to "be closely assembled seeking what is appropriate for your souls" (Did. 16.1-2). While itinerant prophets and teachers might pass through the community (Did. 11-14), theirs was not the role of evangelist. That function belonged to the community, united in their common hope.



The Curious Case of Kartli

The expansion of the Jesus movement among the Jews did not only come at the initiative of the NMJM. In the early fourth century, expansion to the Jewish communities in Georgia, between the Black and Caspian Seas is recorded in the accounts of St. Nino. In large degree this was due to the frequently close relations between Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews.

¹⁰ Arising from a conference addressing the relationship, the most significant volume is by Huub W.M. van de Sandt and Jürgen K. Zangenberg, eds., *Matthew, James, and Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings*, Symposium Series (Atlanta: SBL, 2008).

THE CURIOUS CASE OF KARTLI



ST. NINO

Tamila Mgaloblishvili and Iulion Gagoshidze record that St Nino, “co-equal of the Apostles and the Illuminatrix of Georgia” was sent on a mission to Kartli by her uncle Iovenalius, Patriarch of Jerusalem.’ Arriving in the town of Urnisi,

...she tarried a whole month staying with local Jews. Thence she proceeded to Mtskheta, the capital of the kingdom, and once there, she also established closer relations with local Jews to whom she eventually began to preach Christianity. Those who listened to her and accepted what she said were also Jews – the first followers of Christ in Georgia.’¹¹

While it is not believed that St. Nino was Jewish herself, her familial connection with Iovenalius in Jerusalem suggests that she would have been familiar with the Palestinian Jewish Christian community, or NMJM which was spread throughout the region of Syria. This is corroborated by her strategy which was to first stay with Jews, suggesting her familiarity and comfort with the Jewish people.

In fact, it is hard to be certain of the accuracy of *Moktsevai kartlisai* (*The Conversion of Kartli*)¹² from which our information comes. That makes the story all the *more* interesting for our purposes. “The first missionaries to arrive in Kartli were most probably adherents to the ancient Palestinian Christian tradition, and the archetype of the life of St Nino, the Illuminatrix of Georgia, ought to be regarded as having been evolved and recorded in the community of the Judaeo-Christian residents of Mtskheta.”¹³ So we can see – as it were – a continuation of the Pauline policy of going to the Jewish community first, and we can see that in the eyes of St. Nino, or at least in the eyes of those whose work she is credited with, the Jesus movement had its natural home among the Jewish people.

¹¹ Tamila Mgaloblishvili and Iulion Gagoshidze, "The Jewish Diaspora and Early Christianity in Georgia," in *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus*, ed. Tamila Mgaloblishvili, *Caucasus World* (Richmond: Curzon, 1998), 40.

¹² The *Moktsevai Kartlisai* is one of a number of documents discovered in St. Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai, in 1975. It is “one of the main components of the Georgian historical chronicle *Kartlis tskhovreba* (*The Annals of Georgia*).” Antony Eastmond, ""Local" Saints, Art, and Regional Identity in the Orthodox World after the Fourth Crusade," *Speculum* 78, no. 3: 707.

¹³ Mgaloblishvili and Gagoshidze, "The Jewish Diaspora and Early Christianity in Georgia," 46.

Once again, themes that emerged in the book of Acts emerge in the Georgian account. Just as in Acts 8:1 some of the community were dispersed from Jerusalem resulting in the spread of the Gospel, so it was a few years later during the Jewish Revolts, resulting in a field for the Gospel to spread to two centuries later.

...an analysis of the archaeological and written sources currently at our disposal gives us sufficient grounds to make the following conclusions: Firstly, a fairly large group of Jewish immigrants penetrated into Georgia after the Jewish Wars, Secondly, among the Jews who came to settle in Kartli in the first-second centuries there were originally also Judaeo-Christians who had broken from the Jews in the fourth century, And finally, Hellenistic Christianity was established in Kartli under King Mirian (at the end of the third decade of the fourth century), yet despite this, considerable traces of the ancient Judaeo-Christian tradition still survived, lingering both in everyday life and reflected in the written monuments of ancient Georgia.¹⁴

This meant that centuries later, the Jewish origins of Christianity in Georgia had left their discernible imprint, even on the liturgy of the Georgian church. Knowing that liturgy, Mgaloblishvili and Gagoshidze state “We know that the Judaic oral tradition – the so-called *aggada* (‘haggadah’) occupied a place of conspicuous prominence in Early Christian divine service.”¹⁵ The evidence from Kartli, then, is of a NMJM that operated as a community. Not much is known of its strategy in terms of spreading its message, and nothing is known regarding its outward proclamation, but it left significant archeological remains which have been found in the modern era. It may be that in the waning years of the Roman empire its strategy was merely to persevere and survive, a specifically community-centric approach.

The *Life of St. Nino* leaves us a fascinating account of outreach among the Jewish people by one (or ones – possibly NM Jews) who came from a society similar to their own. Their method appears to have been one of participation in Jewish life on the basis of belonging to, or at least a

JEWISH RESPONSES AND KERYGMA



R. AKIVA

10

¹⁴ Ibid., 58.

¹⁵ Ibid., 46.

comfort within, the Jewish community. It was from within the community that the preaching of Jesus began, and the first “converts” were people in that same milieu.

Some Jewish Responses and Kerygma

Oskar Skarsaune, referring later to some well-known rabbinic accounts of interactions between rabbinic and Messianic Jews, states that “The rabbinic evidence seems to indicate that the Jewish believers in Israel continued their dialogue with the rabbis, sometimes in a friendly atmosphere, though this may not have been the general rule.”¹⁶ In fact, some well-known Talmudic passages provide insight into the methods of the early Jewish believers as they spread their message, and the effectiveness of those methods. Granted, those records are generally quite hostile, but as the Talmud was particularly concerned with recording and establishing the interpretations of Pharisaic Judaism, that should be no surprise.

One of the methods of the early NMJM was teaching. In surveying the rabbinic record, it is perhaps inevitable that schools of rabbis concerned with scholarship should particularly note the scholarship of the NMJM. That there was anything at all for them to record is telling. The attractiveness of the teachings of the Messianic Jews are noted in b. 'Abod. Zar. 17b where R. Eliezer (c. 40-120 CE), arrested for apostasy, confesses:

Akiba thou hast reminded me. I was once walking in the upper-market of



Sepphoris when I came across one [of the disciples of Jesus the Nazarene] Jacob of Kefar-Sekaniah by name, who said to me: It is written in your Torah, Thou shalt not bring the hire of a harlot ... into the house of the Lord thy God. May such money be applied to the erection of a retiring place for the High Priest? To which I made no reply. Said he to me: Thus was I taught [by Jesus the Nazarene], For of the hire of a harlot hath she gathered them and unto the hire of a harlot shall they return. They came from a place of filth, let them go to a place of filth. Those words pleased me very much, and that is why I was arrested for apostasy.

Later, b. 'Abod. Zar. 27b states an objection that “No man should have any dealings with *Minim*, nor is it allowed to be healed by them even [in risking] an hour's life.” Later, the same passage

¹⁶ *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity*, 197.

warns "It is different with the teaching of the *Minim*, for it draws, and one may be drawn after them." These passages note that the Messianic Jews both practiced healing, and that their teachings were attractive and therefore to be avoided. There is no suggestion that they were not effective healers, simply that it was a terrible thing to go to them for healing, presumably because they healed in the name of Jesus. Further, whatever they taught had great influence in that not only the common people but even reputable rabbis were liable to be drawn to their instruction. The teachings of the movement were to them a great danger, which should alert us to the rabbis' fear that even some of their own number might find the teachings persuasive.

It is not only the Rabbis who speak of the scholarly enterprise of the early Jewish believing movement. The scholarly activity of the NMJM in interpreting the Scripture is evident throughout the New Testament, which contains a substantial body of interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, alluded to in Luke 24:27 and found in every epistle. Richard Bauckham notes this as one of "two forms of activity that must have been of considerable importance in the Jerusalem church" being in particular "a literary, indeed scholarly one"¹⁷ If the plethora of books analyzing the uses of the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament were not enough, Bauckham points to "the letter of Jude, which contains one of the most elaborate pieces of sustained exegetical work in the New Testament, and the speech of James in Acts 15:14-21."¹⁸ In these and other places, the reader of the New Testament will discern an established apologetic for the Messiahship of Jesus, and a sophisticated use of the hermeneutical tools acceptable in the first century.

Historians and Church writers also paid tribute to the scholarly aspect of the NMJM. As a result a number of writers record that they had their own Hebrew version of the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁹ Though smaller in number as time went on, they were able to maintain their own tradition in this regard. One doesn't have to dig too deeply to read that they not only had a distinctive body of teaching but also a small body of literature of their own.

Among those that Jerome referred to in the fourth and fifth century, there is included what 'seems to be some sort of brief commentary or expanded targum' of Isaiah.²⁰ Jerome refers to their explanations of this prophet on a number of occasions. And why Isaiah? Intuitively, it would seem natural that a prophet who is cited so often in the New Testament and speaks of the Servant would be deserving of special attention by NM Jews. The scholarly tradition of the NMJM undoubtedly had an apologetic aspect and spoke to other Jews in the languages and manners that they understood best. At this point I would venture to suggest that the Jewish people, then as now, have had a tradition of study and placed value upon scholarship. It is precisely in regard to this point that the records corroborate the importance of teaching for the NMJM, and suggest that these teachings were influential. These teaching were not only oral, but literary, leaving significant remains, some of which has been deemed worthy of canonization. It is in this vein that t. Šabb. 13.5 speaks repeatedly of the "books of the Minim". Such should be no surprise. Those generally considered to be learned were among the earliest community: Pharisees (Acts 15:5; 23:9), priests (Acts 6:7), and possibly those 'zealous for the Torah' (Acts 21:20).

Conclusion

We began with Acts, and Luke's emphasis on the *power* of God, *preaching* of the Apostles, and *unity* of the early church. To some degree, those factors have been seen in our brief survey of the New Testament record, the Didache, the *Life of St. Nino*, the Rabbinical, and the

¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Community," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvic (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 65-66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁹ E.g. Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.27.3-6. Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), pp. 83-94 has an excellent summary of the evidence.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 57ff.

patristic record. Maybe because I fancy myself a teacher, or maybe because the records we have are literary (thus recorded by the literati), it seems to me that the emphasis in these records is on the teaching of the NMJM. This teaching, however, is in the context of a community that valued its unity and had at least as an article of faith – belief in the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Sadly, the NMJM was not to survive much past the fifth century. Gerd Theissen, whose work both forged new ground and has been often criticized, has an interesting theory regarding the “failure of the Jesus movement in Palestine.” He suggests that it is because of “the success of primitive Christianity outside Palestine.”²¹ In the context of a wider Christianity that was transcending Judaism, and we can see that in the rapid development of supersessionism in the early church, he suggests that “it is impossible to reform any group and at the same time to put its identity in question.”²²

The results of this survey reaffirm the importance of reaching the Jewish world from within the Jewish world with the power of God’s Spirit, an emphasis on teaching and preaching, and a commitment to the unity and community life in the Body of Messiah Jesus. I cannot forget Gerd Theissen’s observation regarding the relationship between identity and the NMJM’s lack of long term success. It is my personal belief that this is an existential question faced by the modern Messianic Jewish Movement, and by the significant numbers of Jews in the non-MJM church. It is a logical inconsistency to expect a significant turning of Jews to Yeshua when in both spheres the inter-generational survival of Jews who believe in Yeshua is threatened to the point of inevitable assimilation and exit from the Jewish nation.

KIRUV AND KERYGMA

Nascent Messianic Judaism and its Kiruv

Lausanne Consultation for Jewish Evangelism • Arlington, TX • February 24 2016 • Daniel Nessim

12

²¹ Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 113.

²² *Ibid.*, 113-14.

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