

## A Survey and Analysis of Jewish Believers Attending Churches

by Dr. Michael Schiffman

In discussions regarding Jewish believers who worship primarily in churches, many ideas are put forth as to the factors underlying these choices. Some fault the Messianic Jewish Congregations for not having the depth or fullness of programs to appeal to these believers. Others blame the Jewish missions for steering Jewish believers to churches and bypassing the Messianic Congregations. Yet others still, blame those Jewish believers themselves for "selling out" to the comfort of well established churches with all the programs and activities rather than helping establish the foundation for a strong Messianic Jewish movement for the future. The purpose of this survey is to develop a profile of the types of Jewish believers who attend Gentile oriented churches instead of more Jewishly oriented Congregations. The goal is to better understand what factors really contribute to their present congregational domiciles. The answers generated should be helpful to Messianic Congregations in finding out what needs they are not meeting and may be able to meet, and to focus on reaching those Jewish people who would best benefit from a Messianic Congregational experience and promote a better understanding the needs of Jewish Believers outside the Messianic Congregational movement so that their needs can also be met.

This survey was conducted through telephone interviews with 70 Jewish believers from all geographic locations of the U.S.A., 68 of whom attend Churches and not Messianic congregations as their main place of worship. The sampling is not large, but should be sufficient to give a general portrait of Jewish Believers in Churches. In order to pinpoint Jewish believers involved in churches, I contacted Jews for Jesus, and requested their assistance in the study by allowing me access to their data base on Jewish believers. This enabled me to reach specifically those Jewish believers who identified themselves as Jewish and as primarily church attenders. It would be logistically impossible to poll Jewish believers in churches who no longer identify themselves as Jews, because I would have no way of identifying them as Jewish.

This survey was made possible in large part through the generosity of Jews For Jesus, who allowed me to utilize their data base for my research and provided all that was necessary to carry out this study.

### **Jewish Background:**

|                        |            |
|------------------------|------------|
| <b>Traditional</b>     | <b>54%</b> |
| <b>Secular</b>         | <b>36%</b> |
| <b>Jewish Believer</b> | <b>4%</b>  |
| <b>Christian</b>       | <b>7%</b>  |

The above figures reflect the type of Jewish upbringing of the respondents.

Most indicated a traditional upbringing, which, for the purpose of this survey refers to any kind of Jewish religious upbringing, whether Orthodox or Reform. Most of the respondents who indicated a traditional background mentioned it was Reform Judaism. More than half had some kind of religious upbringing. Those who were from either mixed marriages or are second generation believers indicated Jewish Believer or Christian backgrounds.

**Age:**

|             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| <b>20's</b> | <b>20%</b> |
| <b>30's</b> | <b>34%</b> |
| <b>40's</b> | <b>39%</b> |
| <b>50's</b> | <b>5%</b>  |
| <b>60+</b>  | <b>2%</b>  |

**Agency of Salvation:**

|                             |            |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| <b>Friends</b>              | <b>32%</b> |
| <b>Church Outreach</b>      | <b>18%</b> |
| <b>Mission Outreach</b>     | <b>11%</b> |
| <b>Messianic Cong.</b>      | <b>2%</b>  |
| <b>Spouse/Family</b>        | <b>16%</b> |
| <b>Spiritual Experience</b> | <b>9%</b>  |
| <b>Self Study</b>           | <b>13%</b> |

**Year Became a believer:**

|                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| <b>pre 1960</b> | <b>5%</b>  |
| <b>60-64</b>    | <b>2%</b>  |
| <b>65-69</b>    | <b>4%</b>  |
| <b>70-74</b>    | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>75-79</b>    | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>80-84</b>    | <b>18%</b> |
| <b>85-89</b>    | <b>29%</b> |
| <b>90-92</b>    | <b>18%</b> |

Most of the people polled were in their 20's - 40's and became believers in the last twenty years. The principle factors which influenced them to become believers were friends, family, church and mission outreach. The strongest influence apparently was friendship evangelism. A later question indicated that fellowship is one of the most important factors in determining where they would attend services. This could indicate a link between how a person came to Yeshua and where they later fellowship.

### Terms of Self Description:

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Hebrew Christian | 5%  |
| Jewish Christian | 27% |
| Messianic Jew    | 27% |
| Completed Jew    | 13% |
| Jewish Believer  | 20% |
| Believer         | 9%  |
| Jews for Jesus   | 7%  |
| Jew              | 2%  |
| Christian        | 30% |
| No term          | 2%  |

Most Jewish believers in Churches seem to favor a term of self description that identifies them as Jewish as well as being a believer. This indicates the importance of Jewish identity to Jewish believers' in churches. The term *Jew* by itself is not sufficient for most Jewish believers in Churches perhaps because their identities are also tied to the Messiah. It is also interesting that the single most common term of self-designation was Christian, indicating that Jewish identity is not important for some.

### Jewishness is Mainly:

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Religion         | 7%  |
| Culture          | 27% |
| Ethnic Identity  | 55% |
| All of the Above | 23% |

The majority of Jewish believers polled considered Jewishness an ethnic identity (who you are), an secondly a cultural identity (how you express yourself). Jewishness appears to be regarded as something not rejected when turning to the Messiah. Some have argued that Jewishness is cast aside by Jewish believers in Churches, but this is not indicated by their responses. It is still retained, but is apparently expressed differently. It may be this belief that Jewishness is an ethnic Identity that contributes to their participation in churches because it could be perceived that their ethnic identity is inherent, and therefore, not in jeopardy by church membership.

### Ways Jewish Believers Maintain Jewish Heritage

|                             |            |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| <b>Celebrate Holidays</b>   | <b>48%</b> |
| <b>Maintain Family Ties</b> | <b>7%</b>  |
| <b>Synagogue Attendance</b> | <b>11%</b> |
| <b>Fellowship w/JB's</b>    | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>Support Israel</b>       | <b>4%</b>  |
| <b>Keep Kosher</b>          | <b>2%</b>  |
| <b>None</b>                 | <b>21%</b> |

This question sought to ascertain in what ways Jewish believers polled maintain their Jewishness. Most maintain their ties through celebration of Jewish holidays and fellowship with other Jewish believers. The most celebrated holy days indicated were Chanukah & Passover 16% each.. 2% High Holy Days. Chanukah may be celebrated in its proximity to Christmas, and Passover because of its Messianic import. It is interesting that only 2% celebrate the High Holy Days, in contrast to the Messianic Jewish congregational members, who celebrate those days at 100%.

### Marital Status:

|                                    |            |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Single (never been married)</b> | <b>32%</b> |
| <b>Single (Divorced)</b>           | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>Single (widowed)</b>            | <b>0%</b>  |
| <b>Married to Gentile</b>          | <b>48%</b> |
| <b>Married to Unsaved Jew</b>      | <b>0%</b>  |
| <b>Married to Jewish Believer</b>  | <b>7%</b>  |

### Children:

|                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| <b>Under 12</b> | <b>32%</b> |
| <b>12-18</b>    | <b>18%</b> |
| <b>18-25</b>    | <b>18%</b> |
| <b>None</b>     | <b>45%</b> |

The marital factor is also significant. 93% of the Jewish believers in Churches are either married to Gentile spouses or are single. This may indicate that Jewishness is not a prime concern in their lives, or they might have married Jewish believers or would be worshiping in places where they would meet potential believing Jewish spouses. In several cases, their marriages to Gentile spouses were given as the reason Jewish believers were in churches and not Messianic congregations.

The issue of children is a mixed one. Most people with children talked about the need to pass on their heritage to their children, but expressed frustration about how to accomplish this. Some seemed unsure as to what exactly it was they were

trying to pass on or how it was they were supposed to be passing it. The Messianic congregations present themselves as a means to pass on Jewish heritage to our children, so this issue is different for this particular group of Jewish believers. This is an area that both the Messianic congregations and Jewish missions might seek to be resources to Jewish believers in traditional churches. This kind of support may eventually lead to these Jewish believers participating in Messianic congregations, but even if it didn't, it would at least support fellow Jewish believers in their desire to hold on to their heritage, and to preserve it in their children.

### **Present Place of Worship**

|                                |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Denominational Church</b>   | <b>64%</b> |
| <b>Charismatic/Pentecostal</b> | <b>23%</b> |
| <b>Messianic Congregation</b>  | <b>6%</b>  |
| <b>Synagogue</b>               | <b>2%</b>  |
| <b>Mission</b>                 | <b>4%</b>  |
| <b>None</b>                    | <b>6%</b>  |

### **Frequency of Worship:**

|                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| <b>Weekly</b>      | <b>66%</b> |
| <b>2-3 x Week</b>  | <b>20%</b> |
| <b>2-3 x Month</b> | <b>6%</b>  |
| <b>Monthly</b>     | <b>2%</b>  |
| <b>Rarely</b>      | <b>7%</b>  |

### **Number of Places of Worship Attended:**

|             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| <b>1</b>    | <b>75%</b> |
| <b>2</b>    | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>3</b>    | <b>7%</b>  |
| <b>None</b> | <b>5%</b>  |

### **Prior Places of Worship:**

|                                 |            |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| <b>None</b>                     | <b>39%</b> |
| <b>Same kind of Church</b>      | <b>27%</b> |
| <b>Different Kind of Church</b> | <b>21%</b> |
| <b>Other</b>                    | <b>11%</b> |

### **Things Liked About Former Fellowship:**

|                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| <b>Music/Liturgy</b> | <b>14%</b> |
| <b>Teaching</b>      | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>Pastor</b>        | <b>11%</b> |
| <b>Location</b>      | <b>2%</b>  |
| <b>Fellowship</b>    | <b>13%</b> |

The picture presented here is of a primarily faithful type of Jewish believer who attends a place of worship with a high level of commitment to the body. They do not appear to be in attendance by compulsion or because they were talked into being there, but because they honestly derive spiritual benefit from where they attend.

### **Things Liked About Present Place of Worship**

|                               |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Music/Liturgy</b>          | <b>41%</b> |
| <b>Teaching</b>               | <b>46%</b> |
| <b>Pastor</b>                 | <b>32%</b> |
| <b>Fellowship</b>             | <b>73%</b> |
| <b>Outreach Programs</b>      | <b>14%</b> |
| <b>Service Opportunities</b>  | <b>9%</b>  |
| <b>Sunday School Programs</b> | <b>4%</b>  |
| <b>Spouse Likes It</b>        | <b>4%</b>  |

### **Anything Jewish about Present Place of Worship:**

|                               |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| <b>No</b>                     | <b>73%</b> |
| <b>Sponsor Seders</b>         | <b>11%</b> |
| <b>Other Jewish Believers</b> | <b>7%</b>  |
| <b>Messianic Songs</b>        | <b>16%</b> |

The prime factors for Jewish believers attending their churches appear to be the quality of the fellowship, because it is there that they find encouragement in their walk with the Lord. The quality of the teaching and the type of music and liturgy also play major roles. Most of these places offer little or no Jewish elements for the Jewish believers attending. The issue of fellowship may contain several different factors. It is hard to believe that only the churches provide adequate fellowship, and the Messianic congregations do not. This answer may also include the issue of how the individual believer came to know the Lord. The churches may be the places where they were brought and encouraged as a new believer by the person who led them to the Lord. They may also be made to feel more special in a church than in a Messianic congregation where it is not a special thing to be a Jewish believer (unless you are Israeli).

### Aspects of Jewishness Important to Maintain:

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| Identity/Ethnicity   | 41% |
| Holidays             | 39% |
| Jewish Evangelism    | 4%  |
| Belief in Messiah    | 4%  |
| Jewish Causes        | 9%  |
| Jewish Worship style | 4%  |
| Family Ties          | 4%  |
| Fellowship with JB's | 2%  |

Most respondents considered identity and holidays the most important aspects of Jewishness to maintain, and as recognized earlier, belief in the Messiah is part of that identity.

### Preference for Day of the Week for Worship:

|          |     |
|----------|-----|
| None     | 79% |
| Saturday | 7%  |
| Sunday   | 16% |

### Factors in Determining Worship Location:

|               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| Teaching      | 57% |
| Jewishness    | 13% |
| Pastor        | 9%  |
| Outreach      | 5%  |
| Liturgy/Music | 20% |
| Fellowship    | 46% |
| Location      | 5%  |
| Denomination  | 4%  |
| Sunday School | 2%  |

### Have Ever Attended Messianic Congregation:

|     |     |
|-----|-----|
| Yes | 54% |
| No  | 46% |

### Would Ever Attend (or attend again):

|       |     |
|-------|-----|
| Yes   | 70% |
| No    | 9%  |
| Maybe | 21% |

As seen earlier, teaching, worship, and fellowship are of prime importance to where these Jewish believers worship. It appears that there is little or no bias against Messianic congregations, and in fact, when questioned, most seemed positive about them and would be open, but their present situation did not hold Messianic congregations as viable options.

**Literature Received in the Home:**

|                             |            |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| <b>Mission Newsletters</b>  | <b>86%</b> |
| <b>Church Newsletters</b>   | <b>27%</b> |
| <b>Messianic Literature</b> | <b>13%</b> |
| <b>Christian Magazines</b>  | <b>39%</b> |

The literature received in the home would indicate a strong mission influence in the views of Jewish believers.

The survey only scratches the surface of these issues, yet they do dispel several misconceptions. First, Jewish believers in churches do not all reject the importance or validity of Messianic congregations and have no real negative views about them. They do not attend Messianic congregations for a variety of reasons, mostly relational. The Messianic congregations should not be seen to be deficient in their ministries because Jewish believers in churches don't attend them.

Secondly, Jewish believers are not in churches because Jewish missions steer them there. Many are in churches because their friends who cared enough to share also brought them into their fellowships.

Thirdly, Jewish believers in churches still have need for outlets of Jewish expression, and this needs to be recognized by Messianic congregations, Jewish missions, and their churches and all should seek to provide as many helps as possible to our brethren in the churches.

Fourthly, far more work needs to be done in the study of this subject.