

Book Review

Baruch Maoz, *Come Let Us Reason: The Unity of Jews and Gentiles in the Church*.
Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012. 256 pp., paperback
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Reviewed by Brian N. Brewer

This is the third edition of *Judaism Is Not Jewish: A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement* (2003), yet retains the title from the second edition published in 2009. While each subsequent edition is essentially the same as the original work, this third edition contains new material in the Appendix that bolsters Maoz's argument. As a longtime Jewish believer in Jesus, the author is not opposing the retention of Jewish national and cultural identity. What he questions is the legitimacy of Jewish believers in Jesus who attempt to syncretise rabbinic tradition with Christianity for a purported goal of evangelising non-believing Jews. Thus, his current appraisal of the Messianic Movement (MM) is divided into two parts: Part One a theological assessment and Part Two a practical assessment.

For Maoz, any evaluation of the MM must be measured according to the sole authority of Scripture—both the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, perceived human needs or social theories, though being admitted, must be subservient to Scripture (29). Chapter One opens the theological assessment asking: “Should We Preach the Gospel to the Jewish People?” Adoption of Jewish customs—particularly, rabbinic Judaism that utterly rejects Jesus as Messiah—commonly results in the Gospel being subsumed by Jewishness (42-44), therefore a brief exposition on the book of Galatians is used

to demonstrate that the Gospel is not a cultural issue (44-54). Consequently, this challenges all Christians (especially Messianics) that their goal should be to proclaim the Gospel to Jews and not be distracted by “busying ourselves with Jewishness” (55). Maoz acknowledges that there is no reason for Jewish believers in Jesus to reject their national identity (63). The issue raised is why and where Jewish customs are to be practiced, rather than adopted. The author is resolute that true religious identity for Messianics must be ‘Christian’ rather than present-day Judaism, which is defined by rabbinism that rejects Messiah Jesus. Thus, the caveat is issued that “national identity” must never be confused with “religious identity” (63).

Chapter Two addresses the Mosaic Covenant and surveys significant biblical texts in order to address perceived errors within the MM that often seem to place Jewishness at the centre rather than Jesus himself. Philippians reflects the surpassing value of knowing Christ (Phil 3:8) rather than being occupied with Jewishness (73). This leads to a discussion of Hebrews and its description of Christ's superiority (75-83). The result is a sobering refutation of Messianic Jewish writers such as Mark Kinzer, Dan Juster and David Stern who adhere to obligatory Torah observance (87-92). Consequently, Maoz reviews the book of Ephesians to enhance his argument against obligatory Torah observance. Thus the emphasis is made regarding how Jews and non-Jews become one new man—no

longer separated by the Law, but are united by a common faith in Messiah Jesus (cf. Eph 2:11-22). The chapter culminates with an exposition of Colossians and Acts for the purpose of clarifying that spiritual perfection finds no advantage in keeping the Law, but in Christ alone. War is not being waged against Jewish traditions per se as long as those customs are not regarded in any manner as a pathway to spiritual advantage; for any form of “Law-keeping is not a means to spiritual progress; it is a retrograde” (110-11).

Rabbinic customs are the focus of Chapter Three. Maoz argues against the ability of the MM to co-exist with rabbinic Judaism as he questions an apparent pick-and-choose affectation with rabbinism among Messianic believers. Consequently, Maoz disputes practices such as Messianic Jews wearing kippas (head coverings), which he believes deviates from the biblical prohibition of 1 Corinthians 11:4 (123). In Chapter Four, Maoz returns to a discussion of the book of Ephesians in order to highlight that God has saved both Jews and non-Jews for the purpose of making them into one new man by one common work of grace through Messiah Jesus. Maoz believes this ‘new man’ requires a congregation not void of cultural nuance; nevertheless such a congregation should never impose cultural forms as being either spiritually binding or advantageous to worshipers (165). Chapter Five concludes Part One by addressing how to make Jewish Christians more comfortable within contemporary Christian churches that are increasingly characterised by pervasive ‘individual divisiveness’. Growing individualism commonly results in churches segmenting worshipers according to language, culture, or age groups, which comfortably avoids the challenges of multicultural, multi-

layered church dynamic. Maoz’s solution: multicultural churches that incorporate “inner- and intra-congregational fellowships” (170).

Section Two (practical assessment) opens with and is singularly comprised of the final section, Chapter Six. The author proposes that the MM has not been effective in reaching non-believing Jews because of a misplaced emphasis on Jewishness (179). Citing data from other Messianic Jewish writers, the implication is that only a small, single-digit percentage of Jews has come to faith in Yeshua by Messianic congregational evangelistic efforts. In a stinging analysis, Maoz believes the MM will fail unless it quickly eradicates the tendency towards cultural pride that supplants Messiah Jesus (191-193). Following this final chapter are four appendices: Appendix A is an unedited, protagonist letter from a Gentile Christian involved in the MM. Appendix B is a brief, but helpful historical review of the MM’s development—information that could be quite helpful at the beginning rather than at the end of the book. Appendix C offers new material not found in the original work. A reprinted article from the 1911 *Scattered Nation* by David Baron is a disparaging analysis of motivations, assumptions and arguments that found expression in a Movement that led to the formation of the contemporary MM. Needless to say, Baron’s negative appraisal implicitly strengthens Maoz’s critique of the MM. Lastly, Appendix D closes the book regarding those who attempt to justify Judaism, which Maoz contends is due to a lack of understanding regarding “the relationship between justification and sanctification” (227). This third edition closes with a sobering warning: “Brethren, do not buy into a romantic view of Judaism” (228) because contemporary Judaism is asserted to miss the mark of grace. Maoz’s assessment

is that the MM is misguided and doomed to ultimate failure for attempting to co-exist with rabbinism (i.e., Judaism).

There had been the anticipation of substantial, additional information in this third edition, but apart from the new material in Appendix C, the overall content essentially parallels the original work. This edition contains fewer chapter breaks; consequently, each chapter is notably longer and inclusive of numerous subtopic, which results in the index being somewhat lean and too general. For this reason, the first edition's overall structure of shorter chapters (and more detailed index) is preferred, which makes it easier for the reader to stop and contemplate Maoz's systematic and theologically reflective style.

Maoz's perspective is an important contribution for anyone interested in the MM. Engaging not simply one or two opposing writers, sufficient evidence is provided that indicates tendencies by some in the MM who espouse various forms of legalism and replace grace with works. The overall message of the book is a purposeful effort to diminish any focus on 'Jewishness' having spiritual advantage for either Jews or non-Jews. For those who are looking for the author to demonstrate some type of organising principle, programme or structure, this is not Moaz's goal. His aim is to issue a caveat against anything that would surreptitiously replace the superiority of Christ Jesus. Whilst he provides a critical appraisal of Judaism, Maoz expresses a compassionate concern towards those within the MM although challenging key Messianic theologies and praxis. Maoz proffers a position that is diametrically opposed to those such as Mark S. Kinzer (*Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism*, 2005) and others who believe that Torah observance does provide

some basis of spiritual advantage to believers in Messiah Jesus. Thus, this third edition should be included in the resources for anyone who desires a more balanced perspective regarding the complex issues facing the Messianic Movement.