

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Missionaries Masquerade in the Guise of Judaism



As part of Jews for Judaism's outreach efforts, we visit messianic conferences held by groups such as the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations and Jews for Jesus.

On one occasion in New Mexico, my colleague, Rabbi Michael Skobac, and I checked into the hotel and spent the majority of our time in the lobby. When approached, we eagerly dialogued with Jews about their decision to accept Christianity.

During one cordial conversation with a "messianic Jew," a conference leader approached us. Upon hearing my name, he became visibly upset and insultingly remarked, "Rabbi Kravitz. You are merely a rabbinic Jew. We are biblical Jews."

Like the founder of Jews for Jesus before him, this messianic leader considers Judaism to be a "false religion" that follows the words of men. Messianic Jews reject rabbinic Judaism and claim that they have the truth because their faith is based solely on the word of God.

I responded to the messianic leader by asking, "What's on your head?" When he answered, "A kippa," I pointed out that wearing a *kippah* [yarmulka] isn't in the Bible; rather, it is a rabbinic tradition. Similarly, the eight strings and five knots of the *tzitzit* [corner fringes], which he was wearing, are rabbinic and not mentioned specifically in the Bible.

I also told him that I witnessed some of the conference attendees lighting Shabbat candles Friday night, and others putting on black *tefillin* [prayer boxes] Sunday morning. With each example, I stressed that the details of these mitzvot are not found explicitly in the Bible but are based on rabbinic tradition passed down from generation to generation.

"You have the audacity to say that I am merely a rabbinic Jew."

Having made my point, I declared, "You have the audacity to say that I am 'merely a rabbinic Jew' and you are a biblical Jew, when everything you do to masquerade your Christianity in the guise of Judaism is based on rabbinic tradition." Furthermore, his theology is one hundred percent Christian. This is what some cults call "Heavenly Deception."

Having successfully demonstrated the hypocrisy of condemning rabbinic Judaism while at the same time using it to validate one's Jewish identity, the messianic leader was silent.

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Contrary to what messianic Jews say, rabbinic Judaism is a part of biblical Judaism. In this week's Torah portion *Yitro* (Exodus 18:1-20:23), the Torah is given to Moses on Mount Sinai and he transmits it to the Jewish people. With God's permission, Moses institutes a judicial system and appoints wise judges to assist the Jews in keeping the Torah by providing guidance for "*The path they shall follow and the deeds they shall do*" (Exodus 18:20). This pivotal event laid the foundation for an authoritative God-given "rabbinic" tradition.

Furthermore, the Bible emphasizes the legitimacy of this rabbinic tradition with the directive, "*Judges and officers you shall appoint*" (Deuteronomy 16:18-20) and the statement, "*It is not for man's sake that you judge, but for God's*" (2 Chronicles 19:6).

The sages (Shabbat 23a) reference another biblical verse for following the rabbis. The verse states that the Jews should "*Act according to the law they [the judges] instruct you and the judgment they tell you*" (Deuteronomy 17:11).

The written Torah and the rabbinic tradition have survived the test of time.

Additionally, Maimonides (*Laws of Blessing* 11:3) explains that when Jews observe rabbinic commandments, they are, in fact, following God's command to obey the decisions of properly appointed Jewish religious authorities. Maimonides also points out that blessings recited on rabbinic commandments should be understood as "God's command" based on the authority He invested in the rabbis.

The written Torah and the rabbinic tradition have survived the test of time. For example, when archeologists unearthed a 2,000-year-old pair of *tefillin* and a *mikvah* [ritual bath] on the Judean fortress of Masada, remarkably, the dimensions matched the specifications followed today.

Judaism consists of the written Torah and the oral law transmitted by the rabbis. Both are an intricate part of God's plan to reveal Divine spirituality in the world. By endowing man with the wisdom to apply the Torah, we become partners with God and fulfill our biblical mandate to perfect the world and infuse morality into every aspect of our lives.

Shabbat Shalom,

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