

Critical Analysis Paper
Postmissionary Messianic Judaism – Mark S. Kinser

Dr. Mark S. Kinser's *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* represents one of the most ambitious contemporary attempts to rethink Christian ecclesiology after the repudiation of supersessionism. Writing from within the modern Messianic Jewish movement, Kinser argues that the church has failed to reckon adequately with the theological implications of Israel's enduring covenantal election. While many Christians now reject explicit replacement theology, he contends that inherited ecclesial structures and habits continue to marginalize Jewish covenantal life. His proposed solution—a postmissionary form of Messianic Judaism expressed through a bilateral ecclesiology—seeks to preserve both Christological confession and Israel's ongoing covenantal vocation without allowing either to collapse.

Kinser rethinks revelation, tradition, and Israel's historical response to the Messiah in order to sustain a non-supersessionist ecclesiology. He advances several interrelated claims, three of which are central to this analysis: theological accountability of the rejection of Messiah is placed on the church; the risen Messiah remains present within Jewish communal life in a “hidden” manner; rabbinic tradition constitutes a theologically legitimate and divinely sustained mode of covenantal interpretation. While affirming Kinser's aim to heal the schism between the church and Israel, this paper argues that these aspects of his framework introduces Christological ambiguity, instability in authority and tradition, and an overly resolved interpretation of Israel's non-belief, suggesting the need for further clarification.

Kinser begins by outlining the theological problem he addresses: although many Christians have formally rejected supersessionism since the Holocaust, the church has not constructed an ecclesiology that genuinely affirms Israel's enduring covenant (17). He illustrates

this problem through a puzzle-piece analogy. The church affirms both “the mediation of Yeshua in all of God’s creative, revelatory, reconciling, and redemptive activity” and “the church’s participation through Yeshua in Israel’s covenantal privileges” (12–13), while also rejecting supersessionism, defined as “the ekklesia replac[ing] the Jewish people as the elect community in covenant with God” (12). Kinzer argues that these affirmations require a fourth piece: a postmissionary Messianic Judaism, defined by treating Jewish observance as covenant fidelity rather than evangelistic technique, locating Messianic Judaism within Jewish communal life, and assigning it a vocation of linking the church and Israel in order to fit together (16).

Kinzer’s hermeneutical framework treats New Testament texts concerning Israel as often ambiguous and requiring historical, ethical, and contextual accountability alongside exegesis. He does this by arguing that while interpretations are not equally valid, scholarship identifies an “established range of interpretations” (Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel*, 11–12) and that Scripture is carried by interpretive communities, but readers must remain open to God correcting tradition through the text (28–29). Kinzer emphasizes that modern Christians often read the New Testament over against Judaism, predisposing them to view Torah as obsolete (31), that theology must be evaluated by its fruit, particularly where interpretation has contributed to violence and exclusion (33–38), and that God is revealed in and through history (39), a claim underscored by Jewish survival through centuries of Christian anti-Judaism and the events of the twentieth century (38–46).

From this framework, Kinzer argues through exegesis that the New Testament does not abolish Torah observance for Jews. Jewish Yeshua-believers, including the apostles, remain obligated to Jewish practice (49), while the Jerusalem Council clarifies that this obligation does not extend to Gentiles (Acts 15). He further contends that the New Testament affirms Israel’s

enduring election and covenant with God (97). These commitments lead him to propose a bilateral ecclesiology in which the ekklesia consists of Jewish believers living within Jewish communal life and Gentile believers who participate in Israel's blessings without replacing Israel (152), alongside a historical account of how supersessionism became institutionalized within Christian tradition.

Kinzer then turns to the Jewish people and asks how Judaism can remain theologically valid if Jesus is Messiah. He argues that once the church prohibited Jewish Torah observance, Jewish rejection of Yeshua paradoxically functioned as covenant fidelity rather than infidelity (213–14). Under these distorted historical conditions, God continued to act within Jewish life, and the risen Messiah remains present in Israel in a hidden manner, awaiting recognition. In a similar way, Kinzer argues that rabbinic Judaism is biblically legitimate because Torah itself requires authoritative interpretation (Deut 17:8–13). Rabbinic tradition thus becomes the means by which Israel's covenantal life has been preserved through history and is presented as compatible—though not identical—with New Testament faith (235–36).

The central claim in Chapters 6–7 is that Israel's rejection of Yeshua must be evaluated within the historical conditions created by the Gentile church, particularly the prohibition of Jewish Torah observance. Under these conditions, he argues that Jewish rejection of Yeshua paradoxically functioned as covenant fidelity. Kinzer is right to note that Jewish rejection of Yeshua did not occur in a theological vacuum, and that Christian supersessionism reshaped the Jewish–Christian encounter. The difficulty is that Kinzer appears to reassign theological responsibility almost entirely away from Israel and onto the church, and seems to ignore the theological accountability that is present in the New Testament. In the New Testament, Israel's rejection of Yeshua is both historically conditioned and theologically accountable. Paul affirms

this as he indicts Israel's leaders, grieves their unbelief, yet affirms their election and future confession (Rom 9–11). The risk of this argument is that if rejection can transform into fidelity, then this undermines the category of “rejection” itself, and theological judgment is reduced solely to descriptive historical explanation. I think a more cautious approach would be to say that Jewish rejection is mitigated by historical distortion, without suggesting that rejection becomes a positive theological act. There is a historical distortion that has indeed affected the Jewish people across the centuries, but to remove full responsibility and accountability for rejection, and to paint the rejection of Yeshua by the Jewish people in a positive light, is a mistake in my opinion.

Kinzer continues the argument by arguing that the Messiah's presence remains “hidden” yet actively present within Jewish communal life (213-14). By making this point, Kinzer avoids supersessionism and the abrogation of Jewish covenantal life, while presenting an account of post-biblical Judaism that is not purely negative. The difficulty with this argument is the risk of detaching Christological presence from Christological confession in a way that is not present in the New Testament. In the New Testament, Yeshua's presence is inseparable from recognition, proclamation, and faithful witness to the Messiah (Matt 10:32; 2 Cor 4:5–6; John 15:26–27; Matt 16:15–17). When rejection of Yeshua is acknowledged (Rom 9–11), it is treated as tragic and oriented toward a future profession, not as an enduring mode of faithful covenantal life. Kinzer's proposition creates a third Christological category in which no explicit faith is expressed, but there is a form of unconfessed messianic participation. This is a position the New Testament does not present and could weaken the normative role of confessing Yeshua as Lord, unintentionally suggesting that acknowledgment of the Messiah is not necessary for covenant faithfulness. This position is also not universally agreed upon within the Messianic Judaism movement. Kinzer's contemporary, Juster, critiques the phrase “postmissionary Messianic Judaism,” stating: “If this

means that we do not want to see an assimilation type of evangelism, I agree. If it means that our calling to Jewish life is not only for the sake of evangelism, but for Jewish calling for its own sake, I also agree... However, for some, this means a change in evangelism whereby the Jewish person is not looked upon as someone who needs to embrace Yeshua for personal salvation, for other goals, such as coming into fuller truth or hastening the day of the coming of Messiah. These motives are important, but the motivation toward the personal salvation of Jewish people is also crucial” (Juster, *Jewish Roots: Understanding Your Jewish Faith*, 339).

Lastly, Kinzer argues that rabbinic Judaism is “compatible with—though not identical to—the teaching of the New Testament,” and that rabbinic tradition represents a providentially sustained form of covenantal life within Israel (235-236). Kinzer’s argument proceeds as follows: the Torah requires interpretation, interpretation requires authoritative tradition, and rabbinic Judaism supplies such a tradition. Therefore, rabbinic Judaism is biblically legitimate and compatible with the New Testament. I think it is a very large jump to say that rabbinic literature that often explicitly rejects Yeshua, grounds authority in halakhic decisions, and develops theological trajectories independently of Christological claims is compatible with the New Testament. What is not sufficiently discussed is the underdeveloped ontological hierarchy of authority once Messiah is confessed. Kinzer offers little guidance for how messianic authority is to function within communities that continue to live by rabbinic customs. Yeshua is not an additional voice within Israel’s tradition, but the revelation of God’s will and the locus of divine authority. It is unclear how Kinzer supposes Messiah governs covenantal life in the present, and how messianic authority takes precedence when rabbinic authority presupposes its absence. Although Kinzer may not need to offer a fully developed rule of messianic discernment for Messianic Jewish communities, if his target audience is the church, this lack of clarity becomes a

stumbling block in ensuring a secure Christological foundation for a tradition with which many Christians are unfamiliar.

Postmissionary Messianic Judaism represents one of the most serious theological attempts to rethink Christian engagement with Israel after the repudiation of supersessionism. Kinzer's work exposes the inadequacy of inherited ecclesiological categories and offers a constructive vision marked by historical accountability, covenantal fidelity, and eschatological hope. At the same time, unresolved tensions surrounding Christological normativity, historical responsibility, and the authority of rabbinic tradition suggest that the project, while indispensable, remains theologically incomplete.