



Alex Schlusser



Pastor Alexander Schlusser was born in South Florida. Raised in a conservative Jewish home, and at the age of 29 he came to know his Messiah. He served as a music minister for nine years in one of the largest Messianic congregations in the US. Feeling a call to deeper service, he completed his studies in pastoral ministry. He pioneered and led a Messianic congregation in Denver Colorado. In 2001 he was introduced to the Adventist message was baptized together with his wife Anjanette and their son Joshua into the SDA church. He is currently serving as the pastor of both “Beth Tehillah Vetikva” a messianic Seventh Day Adventist Congregation located in Hollywood, Fl and The Boynton Beach Seventh Day Adventist Church.

S *habbat Shalom:* Please tell us about your background as a messianic leader.

Alex Schlusser: I was involved in the messianic movement for eleven years as the worship leader of one of the largest Messianic congregations in the United States, located in Denver, Colorado. I worked in all aspects of the ministry. Feeling the Lord calling me deeper into His service, I attended a local Bible college for two years, then went on to pioneer a Messianic congregation in west Denver. I am currently leading Beth Tehillah Vetikva, a Messianic Seventh-day

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Adventist congregation.

Shabbat Shalom: What did it take for you, a Jew, to accept Yeshua as your Messiah? An experience in your life, an argument, an encounter with someone, or something else?

Schlusser: In 1986 my father died unexpectedly of a heart attack. I watched as my mother began to slowly wither away. She had lived for so many years to serve my father. There was no joy in her life, she had no purpose to live, and it was evident that she was giving up on life. One afternoon she called and said she had met someone and I could hear something that had been missing for

quite awhile. I could hear a smile in her voice. I knew something had changed. My mother met her new earthly husband, Mike, and he had introduced her to her heavenly husband, her Lord Yeshua. I saw something I had not seen before—a life touched and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It provoked me to jealousy. I wanted what she had. It would be almost one year later that I would face one of the worst times in my life and with no one to turn to except the Bible that Mike my new stepfather had given to me. I opened it, and the first words I read from the New Testament were from the Gospel of Matthew: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37). My first thought was, who is this with such a heart for the Jewish people? I didn’t know that Yeshua was a Jew, and that He came for His people. As I continued to read, my heart was stirred. I cried out, “I want to know You, God.” In

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the days and weeks that followed, God began to reveal Himself and I became convinced that Yeshua is the promised Messiah that the Jewish people had waited for. I gave my life to Him twenty years ago and have never looked back.

Shabbat Shalom: How did your family and your Jewish friends react to that move?

Schlussler: Many of my family turned their backs on me, saying that I was dead to them. One of my closest Jewish friends told me

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that he hated everything that I now stood for and never wanted to see me again.

Shabbat Shalom: The phrase Messianic Judaism seems to be self-contradictory; if the word “messianic” is the translation of the word “Christian,” how could Judaism be Christian? Or is Christianity Jewish? Could you elaborate on this paradox?

Schlussler: I believe this is only considered a paradox because Christianity has strayed so far from its roots. I think it can be better said that the word “Christian” is a translation of the word “Messianic.” “Christian” as a term is understood to be one who follows the Christ or Messiah. We must not forget that all of the first-century founders of our faith were Jews—that it was only through the stripping away

better understood as a worship style. It encompasses the liturgy, preaching, and music forms used in a congregational service. It draws most commonly on elements found in the conservative and reformed movements of Judaism, but it has also developed its own distinctions, being centered on Messiah.

Shabbat Shalom: What is “Messianic Judaism” as a contemporary movement?

Schlussler: To understand this, it is helpful to know a little of the history of the modern messianic movement. What we see today was birthed in the late 1960s and the early 1970s as Jews were coming to the Messiah through the “Jesus Movement” that was sweeping the college campuses of America. Those same Jews were fellowshiping in mainstream evangelical churches, and they began to question their place in the Gentile Christian church. The question was being asked: “Why must we leave our Jewish culture and our heritage behind as we come to know the Jewish Messiah?” It was their desire to maintain a Jewish identity, and it was this expression of their Jewishness that laid the groundwork for what exists today. At its core, Messianic Judaism accepts that a Jew can come to believe in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel and not become a Gentile. We need to understand that being Jewish is both a religious and cultural experience. It

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is a desire to integrate aspects of that religious and cultural experience that helped to shape the messianic worship style. It is also very natural for a Jew to worship in a Jewish context. As this format of worship has developed and gained popularity over the last thirty years, the number of Jewish members of these messianic congregations has become eclipsed by the Gentiles who are feeling called back to a form of worship that is based on the Hebraic roots. Most, if not all, of the congregations in the United States are largely Gentile in number, or at best Gentiles who may have some Jewish blood in generations past. However, it is interesting to see that not since the first century has there been as many Jews turning to Yeshua, and I believe the day will soon arrive that there will be congregations filled with Jewish believers in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua.

Shabbat Shalom: How do Jews see this movement?

Schlussler: It is sad that the messianic movement is seen as just another method of stealing away the unknowing Jew from his or her family and community by the Christian church. It is seen as a deceptive form of evangelism which employs the use of Jewish trappings and culture to lure Jews away from their religion and heritage.

Shabbat Shalom: How do Christians see this movement?

Schlussler: I may not be the best one to answer this question, but I will say that I have seen an

open-armed acceptance by some and a stiff-armed rejection by others. Some just seem confused that a Jew could believe in Yeshua. There is an increased interest in understanding the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith, and this is drawing Gentile believers to messianic congregations.

Shabbat Shalom: What is the difference between Messianic Judaism and Christianity?

Schlussler: This is not easy to answer. I would like to be able to say that theologically Messianic Judaism and Christianity agree and that the difference can be found in the approach to worship. But this is based on a flawed

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assumption, because we know that Christianity is as diverse in its theology as it is in its ethnic make-up. Rather than trying to find differences, we should see that Messianic Judaism is merely Jews worshiping their Messiah, Yeshua haMashiach (Jesus the Christ) in a culturally Jewish way. Simply put, avoiding a theological discussion, I would say it is how the Lord is worshipped, in a private and public context.

Shabbat Shalom: In what way do Messianic Jews regard them-

selves as Jews and relate themselves to Judaism or the Jewish community at large?

Schlussler: We need to understand that in many respects Judaism is more like a nationality. Being Jewish is like citizenship. Being a Jew has nothing to do with what you believe or what you do. Someone born to non-Jewish parents who believes everything that Orthodox Jews believe and observes every law and custom is still a non-Jew. Yet someone born to a Jewish mother who is an atheist and never practices the Jewish religion is still a Jew, even in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox. There is an exception, however. If you profess a belief in Yeshua, you are no longer Jewish in the eyes of the Jewish community. Messianic Jews desire to remain with the Jewish community to maintain their culture, heritage, and citizenship; but they are no longer accepted as Jews by the Jewish community. Once they come to faith in Yeshua they are seen as dead, as traitors to their people. This has created for many a deep sense of loss, and it motivates many Messianic believers to grasp even tighter to all things Jewish. And herein lies one of the greatest tragedies. Some Jews find their Messiah and unspeakable joy begins to fill their hearts before they realize that they cannot share it for fear of losing everyone they love. Yeshua said that we would have to count the cost, and for many Jews who come to know Him the price has been very high.

Shabbat Shalom: How do Messianic Jews address the tension between the traditional Jewish reference to Torah and the Christian faith in God's grace?

Schlussler: Torah has come to be used in several different ways

in traditional Jewish thinking. Depending on the context in which it is used, it can mean the first five books of the Bible or the complete Bible. It can refer to the Oral Law, Rabbinic teachings, or the Ten Commandments. I believe you are speaking in terms of Torah as “the law” because it is in this context that a perceived tension exists between law and grace. This is not a new discussion; Paul of Tarsus addressed it

sentation of the Gospel as a footnote. I believe God will not honor this. One of the major messianic umbrella organizations changed its policies in regards to membership. This change was targeted at non-Jewish believers who desired to become members. Basically, only those of Jewish descent could acquire full membership whereas non Jews received what was called an associate membership. This I believe was done to keep the

shed light on the persecution Jews have suffered for years in the name of Yeshua. When people understand each other, there can be relationship.

***Shabbat Shalom:* Why as a Messianic Jew did you embrace Adventism? Why did you not simply remain a messianic Jew? How do you consider yourself? How did Adventism affect your relationship to Messianic Judaism?**

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throughout His ministry, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Yeshua said that if we loved Him we would keep His Commandments. We are not saved by what we do, but it is what we do that confirms that we are saved. The way to address this is to see that the tension exists only in the human mind. For God there is no tension because His grace is in every word of the Torah. The grace of God does not invalidate His Torah. It upholds it. It is only when we look to actions as a means of salvation that this tension develops.

***Shabbat Shalom:* What is the future of Messianic Judaism? What are the challenges and tensions that threaten its existence?**

Schlussler: Messianic Judaism was on the fringe of Christianity in the past, but with the Hebrew roots movement attracting many Gentile believers it is growing in popularity and acceptance. But with this growth there is a danger of this movement turning inward. There is a tendency within Messianic congregations to over-emphasize the outward trappings of Jewishness and place the pre-

perceived Jewishness of the organization intact. It all comes back to a desire to be accepted by the Jewish community. My question is, “what does Yeshua think of this?”

***Shabbat Shalom:* Do you think that some day Messianic Judaism will be accepted by Jews as a Jewish movement? What in your view would be the conditions which would lead to that recognition?**

Schlussler: I do not believe that Messianic Judaism will ever be accepted by Jews as a valid Jewish movement. The politics and the history of the church’s actions towards the Jews have left too many scars. I believe we will have to wait for the return of the Messiah to see the Jews accept Messianic Judaism as a movement within Judaism. But then it won’t matter, will it?

***Shabbat Shalom:* Do you think that Messianic Judaism could play a role in the history of Jewish-Christian relations?**

Schlussler: Yes, I do. Messianic Judaism and the Hebraic roots movement have enabled non-Jewish believers to better understand their connection to Judaism. It has also helped to

Schlussler: I embraced Adventism because the Lord brought me to it. I saw that the theology is biblically sound and true and it is what I believed before I knew it was Adventist. My family lived a conservative lifestyle that was very close to what is practiced in Adventism, so the changes have been few and it has been easy for us to accept. I am still a Messianic Jew, and as far as how it affected my relationship with Messianic Judaism, I am the leader of a Messianic Adventist congregation. I am what I am—a Jew who found his Messiah. Let me close with this: of all of the Christian denominations, I believe that Adventism is the closest to Judaism and the most natural fit for Messianic Judaism. What we believe as Adventists removes many of the stumbling blocks that keep Jews from their Messiah. I believe that within Seventh-day Adventism there will be many Messianic congregations birthed as this will be the last great work before the coming of Yeshua.