

# The Jewish Christians

by A.T. Robertson

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*A.T. Robertson explores the diverse groups of Jewish Christians in the First Century and their beliefs about faith and identity.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:3

**Topics:** "Early Church", "Jewish Roots"

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## Description

Dr. Ron Mosley delves into the three major groups of Jewish Christians in the First Century: Nazarenes, Messianists, and Ebionites. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the Jewish roots of the Church, highlighting the differences between Hebrew Christians who believed in justification by faith and those who leaned towards legalism. The Ebionites, originally Essenes, accepted Christ as Messiah and influenced others with heretical views. The term Messianists, derived from the Hebrew word Messiah, sheds light on the early believers' identity before being called Christians.

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## Transcript

According to Dr. Ron Mosley, dean of the American Institute of Holy Land Studies there were three major groups of Jewish Christians in the First Century: Nazarenes (Notzrim), Messianists, and Ebionites. In his book entitled Yeshua, A guide to the real Jesus he writes; "In examining the Jewish roots of the Church, it is important to differentiate between the Hebrew Christians, such as the Nazarenes and Messianists at the beginning, and the various groups of Ebionites with Judaizing traits, which were active around the turn of the first century. The early Hebrew Church was composed of those who believed in justification by faith as well as those who stressed traditions that involved legalism. Although most Jewish believers continued to keep the Sabbath and the various laws that differentiated them from non-Jews, strictly as an identification code, they did not require it for their non-Jewish converts. This identification as a Jew had nothing to do with salvation, but was kept by Jews as a reminder of the special eternal Covenant that God had made with them as a chosen people. The Covenant reminded God's people that they were the guardians of the Holy Land and were obliged to maintain and preserve the Law (Genesis 15:18, 17:7-10, Deuteronomy 7:6, Psalms 105:45, Ezekiel 16:6, Isaiah 44:1 and Romans 3:1-2)."

The Ebionites were a sect that were originally Essenes (the Qumran Community i.e. Dead Seal Scroll community ) who had accepted Christ as Messiah after the destruction of the Temple in 66-70 CE. They moved with other believing Jews to Pella and began influencing them into heretical views of the Law and Paul's writings. Some scholars suggest that they openly rejected the writings of Paul and only used the

Hebrew version of the Gospel of Matthew as their N.T. scripture. They would have easily fit the mold of "another Gospel" in Galatians 1.

The term Messianists, According to Dr. Mosley, is derived from the Hebrew word Messiah. Epiphanius' history says that before the believers were called Christians, they were for a short time known by the title lessaioi, probably derived from the name Jesus, (17) a name saturated with the idea of salvation. The Greek term for Jesus is Isus. It must be remembered that the "J" sound that is ascribed to JEHOVAH and JESUS is a western sound. The original Hebrew renderings of these names would have a "Y" consonant sound. The Tetragrammaton (YHWH) (Yood-Hay-Vav-Hay) has no vowels and many Jews believe that when their Messiah comes He will teach them how to properly say the name of God. In referring to God they often simply say "Hashem"- which means "The Name." Their concept of holiness of the name of God is a lesson we could well use today. They will often do something like: "G-d" to reverence the name.

### The People of "the Way"

"The Way" used in Acts 21:14 and 22, was a Messianic term and concept taken from texts such as Isaiah 40:2, which refers to preparing "the way of the Lord." The Nazoraioi is Greek for Nazarenes (Notzrim Acts 24:5) and is derived from Jesus' Jewish hometown of Nazareth. As it is written.... He shall be called a Nazarene. The term Messianists is derived directly from the Hebrew word Messiah. Modern Jewish believers in Christ refer to Him as Yeshua and call themselves Messianic Jews.

Keven Kluetz comments on the name Yeshua saying... The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Biblical name "Yeshua". The name "Yeshua" is found, among other places, in 1 Chronicles 24:11, 2 Chronicles 31:15, Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7. The name is a shortened form of the Hebrew name "Yehoshua" which is the Hebrew form of the name "Joshua", which means "Ya is salvation". The name "Yah" is an abbreviated form of God's name, Yahweh (YHWH), which probably means "I am, I have always been, and I always will be" (see The Stone Edition Tanach, Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1996, p. xxv \*\*\* his reference\*\*\*). The name "Yehoshua" is the name that Zechariah prophesied would be the name of the Messiah, our priest and king:

### Zechariah 6:11-13

11 "And take silver and gold, make an ornate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. 12 "Then say to him, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. 13 "Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices."

Scholars counseling on the making of "The Passion" also concur with the pronunciation of the name of Christ as "Yeshua" or a similar name. As was Yohannan (John) and Keefa (Peter). James in scripture should be "Jacob." It is almost endless.

Some notes:

\* Ebionites were spoken of frequently after the 1st century by the early church fathers as being heretical. This added to the pressure on the Nazarenes to cast off more of their Jewish identity in order not to identify with the Judaizers. This is unfortunate because the Jewish Christians began losing their identity AND their means with which to reach fellow Jews.

\* Google gives 177,000 occurrences for the name "Yeshua"

\* <http://www.geocities.com/athens/parthenon/3021/trinity.html>

\* Dr. Ron Moseley "Yeshua A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church"

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