

Gentiles in Messianic Judaism

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A few weeks ago, Dan Juster visited us and spoke on “Messianic Judaism – Restoring the Book of Acts.” I am always relaxed when I hear Dan speak, because I know that he and I ordinarily see things the same way theologically, and his message was what I expected it would be. A few days later, though, I was surprised to hear that several among us were unsettled by the message because Dan seemed to be speaking to the Jews among us, and not so much to Gentiles. To these hearers, he made it sound as though Messianic Judaism was a religion for Jews who have come to believe in Yeshua, and not a movement of both Jews and Gentiles. The result was that some Gentiles among us that heard Dan’s message felt excluded, like “I thought I belonged here; was I mistaken?”

No, you were not mistaken that you belong here if God brought you here, but you may have been mistaken if you thought that Messianic Judaism is just a Jewish-styled expression of Christianity. Ohev’s vision statement on its web site states:

“We are a congregational home for Jewish believers in *Yeshua* and for Gentile believers called to serve *Messiah* alongside their Jewish brethren.”

The statement was worded “alongside their Jewish brethren” intentionally – not to offend, but to make it clear that Ohev Yisrael sees itself as a specialized kind of Jewish congregation – one that is primarily a home for Jewish believers who are joined by Gentiles called to serve Ohev’s covenantal Jewish vision. Not all Gentiles are called to live and serve within a Jewish community but, if you are, this is your home as well.

There have always been Gentiles who have come to Ohev Yisrael for other reasons – legitimate reasons – and who have stayed to become good and valuable members. Perhaps the reason they came was that they discovered that the church should be more Jewish-rooted than it is. Perhaps it was discovering that keeping the Sabbaths is for Gentiles as well as for Jews, and they could not find a church that would accommodate them. Or perhaps it was discovering that the Land of Israel is important to God, and their church did not see it that way. Or perhaps it was our fine musical worship, or the presence of the Holy Spirit that they did not experience where they were. Or perhaps it was my messages – yes, many Gentiles have come to Ohev Yisrael and stayed, principally to hear my messages. <Pause for laughter> In any case, there may be completely legitimate reasons for a Gentile to attend (and even become a member of) Ohev Yisrael that is not squarely aligned with Ohev’s stated reason for being. That’s okay, but he or she should nevertheless keep in mind what the primary purpose of the Ohev Yisrael community is, and be willing to serve within its framework.

Now on the other hand, there are those Gentiles among us that have come and stayed because their lifelong calling is to live and serve alongside their Jewish Brethren. Their calling as Gentiles is the same as that of the Jews to which they are joined, which is first and foremost to minister Yeshua to the Jewish people who do not yet know him, and second, to assist the larger body of believers in regaining its biblical Jewish roots that it lost in history. These Gentiles we

call by a special name. We call them *k'rovei Yisrael* (or “close family members of Israel). If you are a *k'rov Yisrael* you know it, and you know that your covenant obligations are the same as, and are joined to, those of the Jewish people. But if you are not a *k'rov Yisrael* – no worries. Most Gentiles are not, and God will use you within Ohev Yisrael or elsewhere in whatever calling you have regardless.

Since I have said that there are Gentiles who are specially called to live and serve among the Jewish people, perhaps I should justify it with some biblical examples. The first example I would give would be the Gentiles who lived within Abraham’s household and were circumcised along with Abraham’s family; in Genesis 17:9-14 we read:

“God said to Avraham, ‘As for you, you are to keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. Here is my covenant, which you are to keep, between me and you, along with your descendants after you: every male among you is to be circumcised. You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Generation after generation, every male among you who is eight days old is to be circumcised, including slaves born within your household and those bought from a foreigner not descended from you. The slave born in your house and the person bought with your money must be circumcised; thus my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who will not let himself be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin- that person will be cut off from his people, because he has broken my covenant.’”

And in verses 26 and 27 we read:

“Avraham and Yishma'el his son were circumcised on the same day; and all the men in his household, both slaves born in his house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.”

It seems to me that these Gentiles who lived in Abraham’s household and were circumcised along with Abraham’s family were the first *k'rovei Yisrael*.

Of course, when Israel went into slavery in Egypt they had no household servants, but *k'rovei Yisrael* surfaced again in the mixed multitude that left Egypt with the Israelites during the great exodus:

Exodus 12:33-38: “The Egyptians pressed to send the people out of the land quickly, because they said, "Otherwise we'll all be dead!" The people took their dough before it had become leavened and wrapped their kneading bowls in their clothes on their shoulders. The people of Isra'el had done what Moshe had said- they had asked the Egyptians to give them silver and gold jewelry and clothing; and *ADONAI* had made the Egyptians so favorably disposed toward the people that they had let them have whatever they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. The people of Isra'el traveled from Ra'amses to Sukkot, some six hundred thousand men on foot, not counting children. A mixed crowd [NKJ: mixed multitude] also went up with them, as well as livestock in large numbers, both flocks and herds.”

That mixed multitude that accompanied the Israelites when they left Egypt were Gentiles of various kinds who had come to know the God of Israel, and knew that God was summoning them to make their lives among the Jewish people. Eventually, the Israelites with their mixed multitude arrived at Mount Sinai from where God spoke His covenant, and we read in Deuteronomy 29:9-12 (Hebrew 10-13):

“Today you are standing, all of you, before *ADONAI* your God- your heads, your tribes, your leaders and your officers- all the men of Isra'el, along with your little ones, your wives and your foreigners here with you in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. The purpose is that you should enter into the covenant of *ADONAI* your God and into his oath which *ADONAI* your God is making with you today, so that he can establish you today for himself as a people, and so that for you he will be God- as he said to you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov.”

Notice that it was not only Israelites who gathered at Mount Sinai to hear and receive God's covenant, but also the foreigners who were the *k'rovei Yisrael* that had followed the Israelites out of Egypt. Notice also, that God specifically recognized their presence and was speaking to them as well. And soon thereafter, similar to the circumcision required of the Gentiles who lived in Abraham's household, God commanded in Exodus 12:43b-49:

“This is the regulation for the *Pesach* lamb: no foreigner is to eat it. But if anyone has a slave he bought for money, when you have circumcised him, he may eat it. Neither a traveler nor a hired servant may eat it. It is to be eaten in one house. You are not to take any of the meat outside the house, and you are not to break any of its bones. The whole community of Isra'el is to keep it. If a foreigner staying with you wants to observe *ADONAI's Pesach*, all his males must be circumcised. Then he may take part and observe it; he will be like a citizen of the land. But no uncircumcised person is to eat it. The same teaching is to apply equally to the citizen and to the foreigner living among you.”

And also in Numbers 15:14-16:

“If a foreigner stays with you- or whoever may be with you, through all your generations- and he wants to bring an offering made by fire as a fragrant aroma for *ADONAI*, he is to do the same as you. For this community there will be the same law for you as for the foreigner living with you; this is a permanent regulation through all your generations; the foreigner is to be treated the same way before *ADONAI* as yourselves. The same *Torah* and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the foreigner living with you.”

These are very significant passages of Scripture because they define this category of Gentiles who live with Israelites (that today we call *k'rovei Yisrael*), as having drawn so close to the Jewish people as to be considered close family members, and subject to the same *Torah* and standard of judgment as apply to Jews.

Having said it as I have, I want to be quick to say that this is not the same as what has come to be known as the “one law movement” to which Messianic Judaism does not subscribe. The “one

law movement” takes the same Scriptures that I cited (and, in fact, the entire *Torah*) and makes them applicable to all Gentiles whether or not they are *k’rovei Yisrael*. That is a serious heresy and an affront to God’s faithfulness, because it denies His promise to the Jewish people recorded in Exodus 19:3-6, in which we read:

“Moshe went up to God, and *ADONAI* called to him from the mountain: ‘Here is what you are to say to the household of Ya’akov, to tell the people of Isra’el: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of *cohanim* for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.’”

And why are we so sure that God has not broadened His special promise made to Israel, to all believers in Yeshua? The apostle Paul answers the question concisely where in Romans 11:28-29 he speaks to Gentile believers and tells them:

“With respect to the Good News they [meaning the Jews] are hated for your sake. But with respect to being chosen they are loved for the Patriarchs’ sake, for God’s free gifts and his calling are irrevocable.”

So, you may ask: “If Jews and *k’rovei Yisrael* are held to the same Law and have the same covenant obligations, is there any remaining difference?” Again we turn to Paul for an answer (at least in part) where, in Romans 3:1 he first asks rhetorically:

“Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised?”

And he then answers his own question in the following verse by saying:

“Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.”

I said “in part” because there is more, and it has to do with the entire subject of grafting that we read about in the Book of Romans, where Gentile believers in Yeshua receive their eternal and priestly connection to God – not directly, but through their connection to the olive tree that is Israel. In Romans 11:16-18 we read:

“Now if the *hallah* [the bread] offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches [meaning the Jewish branches] were broken off, and you- a wild olive- [meaning a Gentile] were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, then don’t boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you [meaning a Gentile] are not supporting the root [meaning the Jewish people], the root is supporting you.”

So, there is the main difference between Jews and *k’rov Yisrael* Gentiles; it is a matter of who supports who. If God withdraws his covenant promise to the Jewish people that they are to be priests to the nations of the world, then Gentile believers have nothing to graft into, and therefore

no way to partake of their New Covenant relationship with God. Why did God choose to bring the Gentiles into relationship with Him in this way? I don't know, but He did, so any theology that denies the special calling of the Jewish people threatens everyone's calling.

Several years ago, I distributed a ten (10) point paper to our Gentile members, to help them explain their participation in Messianic Judaism. I will read it to you and, if you want a copy, see me at the close of this service. It is written as though spoken by a Gentile member of Ohev:

1. I am a Gentile and not a Jew because I am not a proselyte and, so far as I am aware, my physical lineage does not go back to Abraham Isaac and Jacob.
2. I have been born-again through my faith in Yeshua; that means I was given a new spirit and eternal life with God when I confessed my sins and asked Yeshua into my heart. That also means that I have been grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel (Romans 11:17-19) and have thereby become a citizen of the Common-wealth (Ephesians 2:11-13).
3. In addition to being born again, I have chosen or been called by God, to live out my faith in the same way and in the same congregational community as Jews who believe in Yeshua as I do.
4. The Jews in my congregation call themselves Messianic to distinguish themselves from Jews who do not believe in Yeshua, so I also call myself Messianic although I remain a Gentile.
5. Both I and the Jews in my congregation practice a Judaism called "Messianic Judaism." It is a faith, a form of Jewish practice, and a way of life that looks exclusively to the Bible – both the Old and New Testaments -- for final authority on God's Word, and looks to the Holy Spirit for interpretation, application, and guidance.
6. Both Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles such as I am, consider ourselves members in both the Messianic Jewish community and the universal body of Yeshua.
7. Both I and the Jews in my congregation consider that the commandments that were given to the ancient Israelites under the Mosaic Covenant have application to our community today as well. For that reason, we seek to interpret and apply the Scriptures literally when reasonable, but as the Holy Spirit directs.
8. Because my congregation and I practice what we call Messianic Judaism, we call our congregation a Messianic Jewish Congregation. This name reflects our belief in Yeshua as well as our *Torah*-oriented practice that is often (but not always) expressed in similar ways as in non-Messianic Jewish Communities. By "*Torah*-oriented practice," we mean that we seek the Holy Spirit for understanding how to obey God's Law in the New Covenant, and in our individual and corporate circumstances. We obey *Torah* out of our love for God and Messiah; we do not consider obedience the source of our relationship with God, and do not seek our relationship through it.
9. The Jewish practices of my congregation establish its primary culture and lifestyle, but we also incorporate practices that come to us from other traditions. These include contemporary

praise and worship with instruments, dance, the bread and wine of Yeshua, speaking and receiving prophetic words, and spontaneous vocalized prayer. Because we do not accept outside rabbinic authority over us, we are free to adopt certain cultural and Rabbinic Jewish practices while not adopting others, as we find these practices consistent with the Spirit of the Word.

10. My congregation's mission is several-fold: First, we are a family of Jews and Gentiles who are committed to being an example of faith in Yeshua and in holy New Covenant Jewish living. Second, we are a community that is dedicated to upholding, strengthening, praying for, discipling, protecting, and providing for each other as each of us has needs and as the Holy Spirit directs. Third, we are a community that seeks to convey our faith and traditions to our children and their children. Fourth, we seek to provide a congregational home for Jewish believers in Yeshua and for believing Gentiles called to serve Yeshua within our Messianic Jewish community. Fifth, we seek to reach out with the Word of God to all who do not yet know Yeshua – first to the Jew, but also to those of the nations. Sixth and finally, we seek to help the Christian Church understand its connection to Israel, and return to its biblical Jewish roots.