

ARE ALL BELIEVERS IN YESHUA JEWS?

by Michael Rudolph

There are some in Messianic Judaism who are teaching that all Gentile believers in Yeshua are Jews. This view is similar to, but the reverse of replacement theology, which holds that Israel has fallen from grace through its rejection of Yeshua, and the Christian Church has therefore replaced it as God's people. The "Gentile believers are Jews" theory likewise promotes assimilation, but instead of directing all believers into the Christian Church to become Christians, it directs them into Judaism. Interestingly, this is also the reverse of the "anti-missionary" claim that believers in Jesus cannot be Jewish (even if they are).

This is of great concern because what we believe about this matter has a significant impact on for whom we pray, when we pray for the Jewish people. If the view is correct and all Gentile believers have become Jews, then when we pray for Israel, our prayers should include Gentile believers as well. And when we consider who will return to the land of Israel, we should expect a much greater immigration than previously thought.

Let me go on record. While Gentiles may become proselytes to Judaism through covenant conversion as did Ruth, they do not become Jews automatically by believing in Yeshua or by affiliating with Messianic Judaism.

Even though she preceded Yeshua, Ruth is our quintessential example of how a Gentile can become a proselyte and join Israel in a physical way. When Naomi, a Jewess, prepared to leave Moab to return to Bethlehem, Ruth said to her:

Ruth 1:16-17: "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."

Since Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah and the fullness of the deity in bodily form, Gentiles who accept Him as their Messiah, like Ruth, are saying (as did Ruth):

"Your God is my God."

But unless, like Ruth, they also covenant...

"Wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and where you die I will die."

... they do not become members of physical Israel.

Not all Gentile believers are called to make such a statement, so this should not pose a problem for them unless they think that being a Jew is a preferred status which brings them closer to God. It isn't, and it doesn't. Scripture makes this clear in Romans 10:12:

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."

And similarly, in Galatians 3:28:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua."

Ironically, these Scriptures are two of the ones most commonly used to incorrectly support the notion that Gentile believers are Jews. After all, does not Galatians say that there is neither Jew nor Greek? Yes! But it also says there is neither male nor female. If this Scripture were meant to be taken literally, it would lead to an absurd result (Similarly, Colossians 3:11). What is actually true is stated in the very next verse, Galatians 3:29:

"And if you are Messiah's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

But, you say, "If I become the seed of Abraham by faith in Messiah, doesn't that make me Jewish?" Romans 4:16 shows that it is not so, for it distinguishes between the two kinds of seed:

"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all ..."

Yes, Gentile believers in Yeshua become Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise – his seed by faith, that is – not his physical seed. This connection to Israel is further explained in Ephesians 2:11-13:

"That at that time you were without Messiah, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ..."

The NIV translation uses the term "citizenship in Israel" rather than "commonwealth of Israel" as does the NKJ. Breaking down the middle wall of partition has allowed Gentile believers to draw near – not becoming physical Israel, but becoming part of the commonwealth – citizens if you will. Consider an analogy to the Commonwealth of Great Britain. Canadians are members of the Commonwealth – in fact, as head of the Commonwealth, the Queen of England is their queen. However, Canadians are not English, and cannot become English without renouncing their Canadian citizenship, and taking on English citizenship by saying to England: "From now on, your people are my people."

Finally, the apostle Paul demonstrates that there exists a distinction between Jews and Gentile believers for in Romans 11:13-14 he speaks to Gentile believers about Jews, while calling those to whom he is speaking "Gentiles":

"For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them."

He then goes on to explain in verses 18 and 19 that Gentile believers in Yeshua are grafted into the olive tree of Israel. However, although they become partakers of the root, they do not become natural branches:

"And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you."

Although Gentile believers are not automatically Jews by virtue of their membership in the Commonwealth of Israel, they do, along with their brother Jewish believers, become a people of God:

Romans 9:24-26 *"... even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea: 'I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved.' And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God."*

1 Peter 2:9-10 *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."*

So, if Gentiles in a Messianic Jewish congregation are not Messianic Jews, what are they? They are Gentiles who have joined the Commonwealth of Israel through their faith in Yeshua – but more than that – they believe themselves to be called to live a Jewish lifestyle and share community with their New Covenant Jewish brothers – the remnant who are the olive tree into which all Gentile believers are grafted.¹ These "Messianic" Gentiles (as they are sometimes called), remain Gentiles unless they take the additional step of saying to Israel, "Your people are my people," and the Jewish remnant responds by receiving them as proselytes.

Those who would make the covenant conversion to Judaism should not do so lightly, for Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 7:18-20:

¹ It is a priestly attribute of Israel (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:8) to be the host olive tree into whom Gentiles are grafted when they become born-again in Yeshua (Exodus 19:6; Romans 3:1-2).

"Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called."

This is a caution, not a prohibition, for Paul circumcised Timothy in circumstances he considered appropriate. Why the caution? Because men are prone to run to do that which God has not told them to do. Being a grafted-in wild branch has a special calling of its own,, since such a branch testifies to the unity of Jew and Gentile in Messiah. True, if the Gentile becomes a Jew he gains a calling, but he loses one as well. That is why he should not take the step of conversion unless he is certain that God approves.

Conversion to Judaism is a topic of controversy both in and out of the Messianic Jewish community. Gentile readers of this paper who are considering such a step should pray for God's guidance, and consult their spiritual leaders for advice and confirmation. Meanwhile, they should enthusiastically walk in their "grafted-in" calling and, in order to preserve God's intended distinctions, not refer to themselves as Jews.

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