

A CHALLENGE TO JEWISH CHRISTIANS IN THE CHURCHES

By Dr. Daniel Juster

I wish that I could speak with so many of you in person. I am writing concerning your calling. Yes, you have a special calling. It is my hope that you will more and more understand this calling and find your destiny in it.

My Discovery of Jewish Calling and My Church Background

Before I share on this, I do want you to know me better. I had a wonderful and positive background in churches. I can never be too grateful. I came to know Yeshua in the Reformed Church of America, became deeply committed to the Lord in Christian Bible Conferences, attended Wheaton College, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and graduated from a Presbyterian Seminary. I have learned much as well from Pentecostals, Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans and Baptists. Then I learned from new charismatic churches, and restorationist churches. I do so appreciate the churches. The churches have developed wonderful ways of expressing our faith; music, prayers, hymns and more that are very dear to me. Then from this background, God connected me to my Jewish identity. This was many years ago. For roughly 40 years, I have been called to leadership in the Messianic Jewish world, mostly in the United States, and now in Israel. *What was the great discovery? It was that I was called to identify myself as a Jew and live as a Jew.* This produced a radical redirection in my life. I was so very privileged that dear mentors, church leaders and professors supported me in this new discovery. It was really quite amazing that I had such understanding and support.

Living as a Jew

What do I mean by identifying and living as a Jew? The answer to this question came with my new understanding. I studied the Scriptures to search out the information about the identity and life of the first century Jewish believers, the very people whose life reflected the impartation of the apostles among the Jews of Israel. My discovery was amazing to me. It was *that the apostles expected and taught that Jews who came to faith in Yeshua/Jesus were still called to live and identify as Jews. Jewish Yeshua/believers are to live both as part of their people and as part of the Body of Believers made up of Jews and Gentiles.* Some doubted whether or not Paul was in line with the rest of the Apostles. However, the overwhelming evidence of the book of Acts shows us Paul as committed to continued Jewish life. In Acts 21, he engages in a sacrifice specifically to testify that he lived as a loyal committed Jew. This continues to be his testimony in the rest of the Book. In I Corinthians 7, he counsels those who were called through the Gospel, to remain in that calling.

The key verse for this conclusion was Romans 11:29. It states that “**the gifts and call of God (to Israel) are irrevocable.**” Jews have an irrevocable calling! It is based in God’s covenant of God with Israel. We are still to exist as a distinct people in the New Covenant order. Paul calls this group the “Saved remnant of Israel” (Romans 11:5). This discovery of how Jewish followers of Yeshua lived did not give me the answer of why?

Why Live as a Jew?

Further study revealed the answer to the why question. *Our existence as a distinct people is one of the proofs of the existence of God. Our re-gathering to our ancient homeland is another proof.* The Scriptures contain scores of verses that declare this promise of re-gathering. We can only be a wonderful part of that witness of God’s promise to preserve us as a distinct people if we are living as part of that distinctiveness. This unique national-ethnic witness is part of our priesthood as a

people. *The addition to God's priesthood of people from all nations does not do away with his ancient priestly people.*

As I studied more, I came to understand that Jewish priestly life was rooted in the covenants of the Hebrew Bible. Because the New Covenant supercedes the Mosaic, all is reapplied and made new. *However, the New Covenant promises the distinctive preservation of the Jewish people in Jeremiah 31 and 33.* It assumes the pattern of life that is rooted in Torah, namely the Sabbath and Feasts, and other distinctive aspects of life. In Israel such a pattern is enshrined in national law and even secular people connect to the rhythms. *A distinct people have a language, land and a culture.* This is so for us. Our culture is rooted in the Torah, is creatively developed through history, and like all cultures evidences good and beautiful practices and other practices that should be discarded as contrary to the letter and spirit of the Bible.

The Intercessory Meaning of Jewish Life

Some years ago, I was given new insight or revelation. *I understood Jewish life as intercessory action for the redemption of Israel and the nations.* To be effective in this, Yeshua (Jesus) must really be central. All of the Feasts, for example, are prophetic and call into being that which is portrayed. Passover looks to the day when Israel is fully re-gathered and all nations enter into the Promised Land prepared by God for them. It is prophetic of the book of Revelation, the world wide plagues and the exodus of the people of God into the fullness of salvation. Shavuot or Pentecost looks forward to the Spirit being poured out on all flesh. Rosh Hashanah or more biblically Yom Teruah (Blowing the shofar) calls for the return of Yeshua and the judgments of God. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) calls for the forgiveness of Israel and the nations. Sukkot or Tabernacles is the celebration of the Kingdom of God in full international dimensions. They are all full of last days meanings, or as the scholars say, eschatological.

For You Who Are Part of a Church: Embracing the Calling

So you are in a church. You love your church; the pastor, the people, and the program. You now expect me to say that you should be in a Messianic Jewish congregation. Your defences are up. You found the Messianic congregation in your city to not be a credit to mature Biblical faith and people-hood. Well this is true of many churches as well, but there are so many more church choices! I am not asking you to change your congregation; *the congregation you belong in is the one to which you are truly led by the Spirit.* What I am asking you to do is to consider your Jewish calling and identity. Yes, it is easier to live out this calling in the context of a congregation where you are encouraged to do so, and the whole congregation is joined together in this. However, though easier, this is not mandated in the Bible. The gifts and calling of God imply covenant responsibility, but not in all regards are we told just how to live this out. It is a privilege, not drudgery.

Perhaps you are very far from your Jewish calling and identity. Perhaps you are not so far. Yet if you continue without connecting to this calling and identity the very purpose of your life as a Jew could be lost to you and your children. This calling distinguishes you from other Christians. Some say they are fulfilling their calling as a Jew and then defend this by simply describing the same life involvements that a Christian from the nations would describe. This is not the meaning of distinctive Jewish calling. There are many things you can do.

First of all, connect to other Jewish people in a serious way. This includes Messianic Jews and Jews who do not know Yeshua. Become part of the larger Jewish community in some way and seek some connection to the Messianic Jewish community. You can be friends with those in the Messianic Jewish community; attend the Feast celebrations, and visit on the Sabbath periodically.

You could become members of the Jewish community center, take courses, study Hebrew, participate in book discussion groups and even periodically visit a synagogue. There are synagogues that will accept your attendance so long as you are not overtly proselytizing.

Secondly, connect to Israel. Come on a trip and not just to visit holy sites. Become connected to a Messianic Jewish congregation in the land of Israel. There are convocations and tours hosted by Messianic Jewish congregations in the land. This is a very good way to become re-connected.

Thirdly, support ministry to the Jewish people. Everyone can do something in prayer and giving. Be connected to newsletters and web sites.

Fourthly, incorporate Jewish life into your personal and family life patterns. You may worship on Sunday, but you can also take Friday evening as the beginning time of a personal and or family Sabbath. There are very good Messianic Jewish guides to help you. You can also find ways to connect to the Biblical Feasts in personal and family life.

Fifthly, think of sponsoring a Messianic Chavurah (small group) or fellowship group that meets regularly to connect Jewish believers and interested Gentiles in a Jewish context of worship, discussion and mutual ministry. Speak to your pastor about a way for this to be done in a way supportive of the church. We can help you in this dialogue and provide resources to your church to better serve Jewish members.

Sixth, become committed to the study of the best Messianic Jewish books and booklets. This will help greatly. You will see the Bible from within its Jewish context. It will deepen your understanding and enhance your appreciation and interaction with Scripture.

There are many more things that can be done. Your gifts and calling as a Jew in the New Covenant imply a covenant responsibility to maintain a Jewish life and identity. Let us not diminish the numbers of Israel by assimilation, but let us be part of God's very special purpose for us as Jews in the Messiah Yeshua. This is our calling.

Lastly, think of your children and connecting them to Jewish life. There are wonderful opportunities in Messianic Jewish conferences, discipleship training programs provided by ministries such as Revive Israel and Gateways Beyond, Youth With a Missions Jewish Study Programs and so much more. Help your children to re-connect to their Jewish heritage.

We would love to serve you in this. Tikkun International ties together a network of congregations in the United States and is an umbrella organization for ministries in America and Israel. We also have connected ministries in Russia, Ukraine, Cyprus, Brazil, and Argentina. Let us serve you and your church in this matter. You are part of a wonderful gift and call that is irrevocable. Do not abandon your calling and your people. God had a purpose for making you Jewish. Begin to seek him for that purpose. In all of this make sure that you keep Yeshua at the center of your life and know that only in the power of the Spirit can your calling be fulfilled.

May Yeshua richly bless you!

Daniel Juster

Visit our Web sites for ministries and publications

Tikkun International:

www.tikkunministries.org and www.tikkunamerica.org

Ohalai Rachmim:

congregational network and humanitarian aid, Israel – www.tents-of-mercy.org

Revive Israel:

Discipleship Training school, congregational network and humanitarian aid, Israel – www.revive-israel.org

Caleb Company:

mobilizing the Church to partner with Messianic Jews for the salvation of Israel – www.calebcompany.com

Gateways Beyond:

Discipleship training school, Cyprus – www.gatewaysbeyond.org