

JOINING ISRAEL WITHOUT BECOMING A JEW

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There is significant controversy in the Messianic Jewish movement over the best way to receive the Gentiles who participate in our communities. There is a growing consensus that these need to be there for the right reasons. Primarily it should be because of a real calling from the Holy Spirit and that in this calling that one desires to serve God's purposes in seeing the Jewish people come to know the Messiah and enter his Kingdom. Secondly, one appreciates and embraces a common life with the Jewish members of Feast celebration and Sabbath cycle, liturgy and spontaneity, and traditions that are enriching. This requires wisdom so the Gentile members do not seem to be claiming Jewish identity. Messianic Gentiles should eschew false views which teach that the Messianic Jewish expression(s) is(are) the ideal form(s) of the Church, and that all Church traditions and ways are inferior to the Messianic Jewish. This is the wrong reason to be in the Messianic movement. I have written in other places on this.

So now we come to this consensus but this still leaves much unsolved. What about Gentiles who come for a season to fulfill a calling in the Messianic community for a period of time but then return to other Church communities? Is this valid? Yes, and all Christians have a part in the salvation of Israel, so one may still fulfill a dimension of significant service to the Jewish people in the world of the Church. The time in a Messianic Community may equip for that service. Then what about Gentiles who believe they are called for a life time to live their life with and before the Jewish people. They are committed to live in the context of the Messianic Jewish community and the larger Jewish community for good. This seems to establish a different category of commitment and covenant. What should be done?

Some think that these folks should be converted. They simply go through a conversion process and call themselves Jews. However there is nothing in the New Covenant Scriptures to support this and much to discourage it. In addition, to convert under traditional Judaism without hiding the truth of one's beliefs is rare. Is this honest? There have been exceptions. In addition, a Messianic Jewish conversion will not be accepted in the larger Jewish community.

I believe that there is another solution. I call this the Ruth II commitment. I call it Ruth II to distinguish it from the general Ruth call that many have taught concerning the place of all Christians. Ruth II is a deeper thing and actually is a joining of the people, not just an attachment and connection to Israel as is true of committed believers. Rather the Ruth II call is a calling and life commitment to live within and before the Jewish community and within a Messianic Community for life as expressed above as well. So what is to be done? I believe that such persons should undergo a process of education and discipleship in this calling and then make a covenant commitment that is explicit. Gentiles in the Bible are never said to become Jews, but we do see Gentiles who joined Israel. When such a covenant commitment takes place the status of the Gentile changes. Here are some aspects:

1. I believe that few traditions are now inappropriate. Only traditions that profess to be a Jew would be off limits.
2. Such a person can marry a Jew. Their children will be considered Jewish and the family will be embraced as a Jewish family.

What of the children of such a marriage? The Jewish community will not recognize as Jewish the child of a Jewish father except in Reform Judaism and if the person believes in Yeshua, this status in Reform will be questioned or rejected. However, in the Messianic community such children are fully embraced as Jewish. In addition, the status of one born of a Jewish mother who believes in Yeshua will not be accepted as Jewish by most. The one who is born of a Jewish mother and who comes to faith in Yeshua is also not required to be accepted by Israel for citizenship, but this is now being seriously addressed again in Israel. So in general people in such questioned categories will have to be accept the declaration of the Messianic community as to their status.

There is one interesting point, however, and that is that Israel accepts as citizens children of one Jewish grandparent even if they are not designated as Jewish. They will be Israelis. This is certainly helpful.

In conclusion, I believe that a Ruth II Covenant is the way to solve this problem.

Mentored Study

I. Reading and Discussion of Key books.

- a. *To be a Jew*, by Haim HaLevy Donin.
- b. *Jewish Roots*, by Daniel Juster
- c. *The Irrevocable Calling*, by Daniel Juster
- d. *Growing to Maturity* by Daniel Juster

II. Study of Hebrew Language

- a. Sufficient to read and write basic Hebrew
- b. One year of College level Hebrew or equivalent at JCC or other

III. Jewish Practice Mentoring

- a. Knowing the Blessings for bread, wine, Kaddish, blessings for various occasions, Feasts etc.
- b. Knowing Jewish practice: handling the Torah, Tallit, Mazuzah, Tefilin
- c. Ability to pray the most basic Jewish prayers; Amidah, Kaddish, etc.

IV. Clarity of Spiritual life examination that this is being done for the right reasons, that Yeshua is truly central to one's life and expression and one is not wrongly enamored of the Jews and Judaism.

The Covenant Ceremony

In the covenant ceremony one comes before the congregation and professes to take on a Jewish life as one joining Israel but not one claiming to be a Jew.

1. The person comes before the congregation and professes

I come before you today after serious examination of myself and examination by others. It is my conviction that I am called to live my life with and before the

Jewish people. I therefore profess to live as part of the Jewish people. Though I am not a Jew, I come to take up a life that is a reflection of the promise that the Gentile among you shall be as a Jew. I say to the Jewish nation, your people shall be my people and your God my God.

2. The person comes to the service and participates in the service. The issue of a call to Torah for women is according to the local practice, but there can be participation in the service in some way.
3. The person recites the blessings over the Torah and reads a portion of the Torah in Hebrew and then recites the concluding blessing. Where women are not called to Torah, a reading from the New Covenant may be done or some other appropriate participation.
4. The person gives a short presentation.
5. The elders of the congregation come forward and pray for the person with the laying on of hands.

Though circumcision is not required for this commitment, I do believe that when a man marries a Jewish woman and will produce with her children considered Jewish and a family considered Jewish, before marriage to a Jew, he should be circumcised.