

Torah Observant "SHOMER MITZVOT"

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

Who is a Jew?

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

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The material that we will be dealing with here originally appeared as one of my short answers on the web-forum series "Ask the Messianic Rabbi," located at <http://www.Saltshakers.com>. As part this series on **Torah Observance**, I have decided to develop the teaching a little further. During the course of this commentary I will be covering such topics as Messianic Gentiles, Messianic Jews, Jewish lineage, Two-House theology, and finally the topic of conversions. Three bonus sections on "What is the Position of the UMJC on Conversion?," "The Heresy of British Israelism," and "Biblical Birthright" also appear within this commentary.

Allow me to work in reverse. By dismissing who is NOT a Jew perhaps the final question will be easier. Many well-meaning Christians are beginning to return to the Hebraic roots of their faith in Jesus the Messiah. Many are beginning to return to the Torah of Moshe! Many are beginning to find that the label "Christian" does not really best describe the lifestyle they embrace. Surely this "return" is the work of the Spirit of God! What shall we call these folks? Are they Jews?

Messianic Gentile: A Simple Definition

It is generally understood that being Jewish means being a descendent of Avraham (Abraham), Yitz'chak (Isaac) and Ya'akov (Jacob) and it implies being a follower of Judaism and its practices. In another sense, it is applied to anyone who has joined himself to the people of Isra'el through ritual conversion, including circumcision for men. The term "Messianic" (i.e. "of Messiah or Christ") refers to anyone, Jew or Gentile, who has chosen to follow the Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). Scripturally, the term "Gentile" refers to someone who was born of non-Jewish parents and who did not identify himself with Isra'el through ritual conversion and circumcision. Thus, a "Messianic Gentile" could be applied to anyone who was born of non-Jewish parents and who is a follower of Yeshua.

Most Messianic Gentiles have chosen to worship the LORD in a setting that is largely devoid of any Jewish [culture], namely the traditional church. There is, however a small

but growing group of Gentiles who have left the gentilized form of Christianity to join with their Jewish brothers who worship the Messiah of Isra'el in an original Jewish and Scriptural way. They have found that in returning to the Jewish roots of their faith they have achieved a deeper understanding and a more fulfilling expression of their faith. Many of these Gentiles live out their faith in a Jewish context, celebrating in their own homes the Jewish holidays as fulfilled by Yeshua. They often keep Biblical kashrut (Kosher laws) and other customs freely and without legalism, as a way to worship the LORD.

We see in the New Covenant that Messianic Gentiles have met every requirement to be accepted as full spiritual partners with their Jewish brethren in the messianic faith. "Do not lose sight of the fact that you were born 'Gentiles'..., utterstrangers to God's chosen community, Israel; and you had no knowledge of, or right to, the promised agreements [covenants] ... But now, through the blood of the Messiah, you are with us inside the circle of God's love ... (Eph. 2:11-13, Phillips). Furthermore, Acts 15:23-29 makes it clear that in order to become a child of God, a Gentile does not need to undergo conversion rites to Judaism. In fact, Rav Sha'ul (Paul) seems at times to take it one step further: Messianic Gentiles should remain as they are and not seek to become part of Isra'el in the flesh. (I Cor.7: 18-24). In reality he is not forbidding conversions, but rather forbidding unnecessary life changes in light of doing the more important work that Messiah has called us to do, namely enlarging his Kingdom. The operative word is "unnecessary."

In the Body of Messiah those who are Gentile participants in the Messianic Jewish faith are not second-class citizens, but are equal partners with their Jewish brethren. As equal partners attending Jewish congregations, however, Gentile believers must share the vision of a culturally Jewish expression of faith and an outreach that reaches the Jew first, as well as the unsaved Gentile. After all, there are an abundance of places of worship where the faith is expressed in a culturally Gentile context. Those who are uncomfortable in a Messianic Jewish context can fellowship there.

In summary, although it is somewhat improper and inaccurate to claim a Jewish lineage if you are Gentiles, it is good to share how you too have come to faith because of your relationship with the Jewish Messiah Yeshua. When unbelieving Jewish people hear of your zealotness for the Jewishness of your faith, and your excitement over the Jewish Messiah, it can provoke them to jealousy. We trust that they will see that Yeshua is not the "Gentile god," but the "Redeemer of Isra'el."

Messianic Jew: A Not-So-Simple Definition

A simplistic definition with its roots in logic would suggest that a Messianic Jew is a Jewish person who believes that Yeshua is their Messiah. Some people think that a Jewish person who believes in Jesus is no longer a Jew. But what could possibly be more Jewish than believing in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua? No, the term "Jew" can tend to be a bit harder to define.

What does the term "Jew" mean to you? Maybe you have never even given it serious thought. For many people over the last two centuries or so it has often meant a "person of the Jewish race." This idea has its origins in ignorance and so-called "scientific racism." Unfortunately, the erroneous notion that Jews constitute a "race" is still believed by a significant number of people.

Even traditional Judaism understands that the term "Jewish" transcends both race and religion. It must of necessity include people born into Jewish heritage as well as sincere converts to that heritage. To suggest that there is a pure Jewish strain of untainted blood existing in the world today is to make an ignorant suggestion. The Torah and history have shown that the seed of Avraham has been scattered to the four winds, and have in fact intermingled with every society in which they were found.

Efrayim, Judah, and Converts

Again using basic logic here, one who converts to Judaism (any branch) is identified as a Jew. Some of my friends are former Gentile believers who have converted to Messianic Judaism, and now consider themselves Messianic Jews.

According to Two-House theology if you are born an Isra'elite (from one of the tribes other than Judah) then you are not really a "Jew" per se, but instead a "non-Jewish Isra'elite." In essence, a non-Judah-ite, is a physical child of Jacob, descended from one of the tribes of wandering and lost Efrayim, but a child of Jacob non the less. Confusing?

Let me state it another way. Well-known author Eddie Chumney explains Judahites and Isra'elites quite succinctly.

In a personal email to me he explained:

"In order to establish a foundation for what the LORD has given me to share with you for the benefit and blessing of the entire body of Messiah, you need to understand that the term ISRA'EL was a name give to JACOB and NOT JUDAH. Jacob had 12 sons who each became head of the 12 tribes of Isra'el. So, ALL of Jacob's descendents are ISRA'ELITES.

"However, while Abraham was a HEBREW (which means 'one that crosses over') and Isaac was a HEBREW and Jacob was a HEBREW, it was JUDAH who was the first JEW in the Bible. The word JEW comes from the word JUDAH or YEHUDI in the Hebrew language.

"When God delivered the children of Isra'el from Egyptian bondage, He redeemed the physical descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who put the BLOOD on the doorposts and a MIXED MULTITUDE (Exodus 12:37-38). BOTH left Egypt along with the physical descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when they put the BLOOD of the Passover Lamb upon their doorposts. When

they came to Mount Sinai, this "mixed multitude" of Exodus 12:37-38 AND the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were then named the 'house of Jacob' (Exodus 19:1-3).

"Later following the days of Solomon, the house of Jacob became divided into Northern Kingdom (house of Isra'el) and the Southern Kingdom (the house of Judah). The Northern Kingdom (house of Isra'el) are ISRA'ELITES but NOT JEWS. The Southern Kingdom (house of Judah) are JEWS AND ISRA'ELITES. Because of idolatry, the Northern Kingdom (house of Isra'el) was taken captive to Assyria. Because of idolatry, the Southern Kingdom (house of Judah) was taken captive to Babylon.

"The book of Hosea is written as a prophetic judgment and restoration upon the house of Isra'el (Northern Kingdom)."

(End of direct quote)

Some of those within the Church call themselves "Jews," without having undergone a formal conversion ceremony (known as "b'rit milah"). It is true that this ceremony is not necessary for receiving the free gift of salvation from Yeshua. To be sure, the ceremony that seeks to change Gentiles into Jews, viz, for the sole purpose of granting achieved covenant status to the convert, is in fact non-biblical and—at least in 1st century practice—opposed to the true Gospel message. HaShem invites all who are open to receiving his Son Yeshua the ability to embrace the Messiah without having to change one's station in life first. Interesting by historical argument are the spiritual and physical implications of just who is deemed Jewish and who isn't. I'm not too sure that conventional definitions are 100% acceptable by the Holy One, particularly when some who call themselves "Jewish" fail to live up to the responsibility of what that designation entails.

I think it is safe to assume that the label "Jewish" can be a bit misleading at times. Many in the Church, therefore, refer to themselves as a "new man," and in my estimation this is a very good and biblical identifier. To be sure, using the context of where that phrase is found in Ephesians chapter 2, this title should really include every single believing Jew, natural or achieved (understood as the "convert")—i.e. the Messianic Jews—who name the name of Messiah Yeshua, also. Jew and Gentile in Messiah constitute this "one new man" that Rav Sha'ul is referring to. Both groups have come together in the Messiah to form what Evangelicals refer to as the Church, but what the Torah also calls the "Remnant of Isra'el." Profound indeed!

Pitfalls to Avoid

For one thing, if Two-House Theology is correct (and I believe that some of it is indeed Scriptural and sound, let the reader understand) then some Christians according to a midrash on Romans chapter 9:25, 26 might just well fit the description "those who were not my people," i.e., Lost Isra'elites! They just don't know it. After all, the passage from

Romans is a quote from Hosea and we are well aware that Hosea was referring to physical Isra'el and physical Judah in that passage!

And if they do know it then corporately they are not professing it. I am comfortable with the assumption that an important part of what it means to be Jewish is tied into the very confession of such a state of being. To whatever extent truth may be found in the Two House teachings, what we must avoid teaching is the heresy known as British Isra'elism, which is a perverted form of the truth of the identity of God's chosen people. British Isra'elism does not foster unity between Judah and Isra'el, but rather it teaches replacement of Judah with another, new Isra'el! Such heresy indeed! No wonder many well-meaning Christians avoid anything that speaks of Two Houses. Education on the important differences between the genuine and the counterfeit will help to avoid the gross misunderstandings that correct Two-House Theology is attempting to present. More on the British Isra'elism heresy appears at the end of this commentary.

We must also avoid teaching that Christians must be made to look like Y'hudahites. Can you imagine if I made a proposal that every Evangelical male grow his beard really long, buy a black hat and black coat, and begin to speak Hebrew? Such a proposal would be ludicrous indeed! Our primary identity is not to be found in the clothes we wear, the way we style our hair, or even the family heritage from which we spring! Our primary identity is bound up in the Man from Natzeret—the Mashiach of both Jews and Gentiles!

Truly there must exist the Christians (Gentiles) who did not come from either of the Two Houses but rather are genuine converts (believers in Yeshua) from the other nations. They are truly righteous if they are found in Messiah! In my estimation, the term "Isra'el" is the best term that can be applied to all who are found in Messiah. Moreover, this term is in complete accord with what the Apostolic Scriptures teach. Indeed, many Gentile Christians are not compelled to identify physically with Avraham (convert to Judaism), yet they must be counted as a "spiritual descendents" as it were, adopted by God himself into Avraham's family tree. Are we Jews better off?

Not entirely (read Romans 3:1-9; 11:27-29).

If we blur the lines completely (i.e. an incorrect view of Galatians 3:28), at the expense of the redemption of Yeshua's bloody sacrifice, then the literal promises given to the People of Isra'el here in Ezekiel become non-effectual. Replacement theology and gross spiritualization of the Scriptures does damage to the literal promises of a holy, unchangeable God.

My concluding thoughts at this time on the Two-House movement:

(As originally appearing in an email dialogue that I had with Batya Wootten of 'Who is Isra'el?')

'I have been and shall continue to be a seeker of the Truth. If the Two-House theology is just a case of good theology taught by poor teachers then God help me for rejecting truth simply because I don't like the messenger. I'm not one to simply dismiss something without putting up a good personal, theological, and Scriptural fight first. Two-House simply is not that easy to dismiss. Anyone who conducts an honest, serious, non-biased investigation for themselves will find this out. Maybe because the underlying thesis of Two-House teachings are based on a literal understanding of the promises of God made to Avraham and his offspring. Such promises are not meant to be so easily dismissed with a wave of the "allegorical" hand.

'In my opinion a balance can be found between what Messianic Judaism teaches and what Two-Houses teach. The two are not mutually incompatible as some might suppose. It is indeed more or less a new twist on the age-old problem of trying to properly identify the physical offspring of Avraham (Who is a Jew?). Rabbis, laity, and secular folks have been pondering this question for quite some time now. Perhaps we shall have to wait for such a ministry to arise which is able to reconcile both views, or we shall have to wait until Yeshua comes to set the records straight. The real question, is after all, not whether or not you are Jewish, but whether or not you are righteous.

'In my estimation, a wise and careful Messianic Judaism would do well not to speak out so quickly against the Two-House teachings, but instead wait and carefully examine the fruits. After all, Scripture itself teaches us that only good trees produce good fruit. If this thing is from God then we can't fight it anyway; if it is from error then it will dry up and fade away some day anyway.'

(End quote)

What About Conversion?

Allow me to make another significant direct quote from a leading Messianic Jewish organization, one in which I feel some attachment to since I did my yeshiva training there. I'm referring to Messianic Bureau International (MBI). Messianic Rabbi David Hargis makes this information available to all at this site link (<http://messianicbureau.org/>). After reading their conversion paper I felt it was worthy to insert the information here in my commentary. While at this time I may not be in full support of Messianic Jewish conversions, I do in fact feel that MBI is breaking ground by pioneering into this difficult area of Jewish and Christian theology. I applaud their efforts even if I don't applaud all of their methods:

'The Jewish Conversion Process (Approved in principle by the 2nd Annual MBI Conference March 3, 2001)

[The Jewish Simcha is another way of referring to "Gentile conversion to Judaism." Simcha originally means celebration.]

The Messianic Jewish Simcha (conversion) is a controversial subject among Messianic Jews. This is because we are careful not to do anything to confuse or conflict with the simcha/celebration we have obtained in knowing Messiah Yeshua our L_RD. Knowing Him is the highest and best form of Judaism in our estimation.

Messianic Believers Want Conversion

However, we must recognize that many non-Jewish believers, who have come out of the Gentile world into the commonwealth of Israel through Messiah, feel and live much more as a Jew than a Gentile or even a Christian. They are surely no longer Gentiles in lifestyle or adherence. When Messianics do not have a way of obtaining Simcha, it sometimes results in a strong urge to adhere to Israel through a less than authentic means: either trying to get an orthodox conversion or accepting the Ephraimite doctrine as their claim to Israel.

All Messianics, whether from Jewish heritage or not, are unified as one new creation of G-d through their faith in Messiah Yeshua. This takes care of the spiritual connection, but there remains the need for many Messianic non-Jews to obtain people-hood in the earth. People-hood provides culture, which comes from a shared heritage, history, trouble and glory. Many non-Jewish Messianics feel closer to the Jewish culture than say their Irish, African, Hispanic, etc. roots. That should not be a surprise, since the Messianic Jewish restoration naturally promotes that sensibility. It does this by connecting the Ancient G-d of the Jews with His prophetic and revelatory work happening today.

Some Reasons for Jewish Conversion

These are some valid reasons for having a Messianic Jewish Simcha:

1. Unification of a mixed marriage. A married couple might find it to be a unifying help for both of them to be considered Jewish.
2. Unassimilated Jewish ministry. A non-Jewish person called for ministry to the Jews may want to make sure that their work does not think to remove Jews from their Jewishness.
3. Ambiguous Jewish heritage. A person may have strong indications that they have Jewish heritage, but no "proof," so the Simcha serves as a point of assertion and commitment to their Jewish heritage.
4. Other motivations. There may be other valid reasons that yet need to be tested.

Messianic Judaism Wants to be a Valid Judaism

All other branches of Judaism provide for Gentile "conversion." Such seems to demand that Messianic Judaism must also provide for Gentile "conversion." If not, Messianic Judaism is called into question as a "true" or "valid" Judaism. Also, Messianic Jews normally accept Gentile conversions from other branches of Judaism. If Messianic Judaism does not have its own conversion process, then that means that Gentiles must go (and in fact are encouraged to go) to "non-believers" as the only path to becoming a Jew. Therefore in practice, other branches of Judaism seem to be more authentic or

authoritative than Messianic Judaism. How is it that “non-believers” are considered more authoritative than believers? If conversions by other branches are "authentic" how is it that the Messianic Judaism branch does not perform such? Are we less "authentic" than the others? This perceived impotence by some may be one reason why Messianic Judaism cannot shake itself from being viewed by non-believing Jews as a mis-named sect of Christianity.

Pitfalls

Yet, there are great difficulties with a Messianic Jewish Simcha that must be considered:

- First, a Messianic Jewish Simcha is likely to be confused among the unlearned with conversion to Messiah Yeshua, which is a spiritual conversion from sin, from darkness to light in Him.
- Second, those Messianic non-Jews who do not want to have Simcha may feel second-class. Their position as equals in the promises may seem to be watered down. They may experience increased alienation unless their Messianic group is capable at explaining the situation properly. (I propose an adult non-Jewish confirmation as “a grafted in member of the Olive Tree of Israel” for them.)
- Third, some will say that Messianic Jewish Simcha is a form of Judaizing, in that becoming “officially” a Jew may seem to some as the proscribed or preferred path. (Actually, biblical Judaizing was a doctrine of a very small Jewish sect who thought that being circumcised would make one exempt from being accountable for sin.)
- Fourth, presently no other branch of Judaism will accept a Messianic Jewish conversion. Aliyah is presently not available to Messianic Jews. (Of course, Messianic Judaism does not recognize being Jewish or Jewish conversion as sufficient for salvation either, touché’.)

Safeguards

It may be possible for Messianic Judaism to develop a standard conversion process using these safeguards:

- Jewish commitment: Candidates must be tested as to their Jewish commitment. They must be able to confess they are Jews with the understanding they may never recant. They must know and show their love and ability to live as a Jew.
- Full disclosure: Candidates must accept that Messianic Jewish Simcha probably will not give them acceptance in the non-Messianic Jewish community. Also, they may not be guaranteed acceptance in some Messianic Jewish circles.
- Messianic commitment: Candidates must have proved their loyalty to Messiah Yeshua as primary and above their Jewish conversion.
- Extent of Simcha: It must be clear with candidates that the conversion is basically an association with people-hood and is not a verification of spiritual stature of any kind.
- Inter-support: Ultimately the various Messianic Jewish organizations and congregations should conclude that they will accept and validate the Simchas of each other.

Process

The Messianic Jewish Simcha requires a recognized and somewhat standardized process or "examination" period. Here are the requirements:

- The candidate only becomes an official candidate on the third request. At least a six month waiting period from first to third request.
- The candidate must be actively participating in a Messianic Jewish synagogue.
- The male candidate must be or have been circumcised.
- The candidate must choose a Hebrew name.
- The candidate must show ability to perform major Hebrew blessings.
- The candidate must write out a full and clear account of their lifestyle as a Jew.
- The candidate must appear before the Beit Din (Council of Elders) for verbal examination and confession.
- The candidate must have a publicly witnessed Jewish mikveh.
- The candidate should receive a certificate of Jewish conversion (this certificate will not mention faith in Messiah, so as not to confuse the purpose).

Conclusion

While this paper may be amended, it stands as the first principles regarding Jewish Conversion under Messianic Judaism, which has been adopted by Messianic Bureau International.

(End direct quote)

Is Conversion Necessary?

In his letter to Rome, Paul wrote in 3:28 that a person is considered righteous by God on the grounds of trusting which has nothing to do with the Torah (or as in KJV "works of Law"). On the surface this seems problematic for my own teachings, which consider Torah observance to be of great significance. Yet, the problem here is really more a matter of translation than of theology. What Sha'ul is really talking about when he employs the Greek phrase "ergon nomos," translated here as "works of Law" is in actuality a technical phrase that the Judaisms of Sha'ul's day employed to speak of the halakhah, that is, the proper way in which a Jew is to walk out Torah. Indeed, the prevailing view of the sages of the 1st Century held to the common belief that Isra'el and Isra'el alone shared a place in the world to come. Thus, if a non-Jew wished to enter into HaShem's blessings and promises, such a person had to convert to Judaism first. To be sure, this is one of the primary arguments delineated in the letter to the Galatians.

But for Sha'ul no such 'man-made' conversion policy existed in Scripture!

By contrast, Sha'ul taught most assuredly that Gentiles were grafted into Isra'el the same way that Avraham was counted as righteous by God in B'resheet (Genesis) chapter 15: faith in the promised Word of the LORD. Thus, the phrase "works of Law" has a Hebrew counterpart: ma'asei haTorah. What meaneth ma'asei haTorah? The Dead Sea Scrolls used this phrase as well, and since the discovery of those

manuscripts we have now come to know that it refers to “some of the precepts of the Torah,” as adjudicated by the halakhah and by the particular community wielding the most influence. To be sure, the halakhah that teaches Gentile inclusion only by way of conversion (read most often as “circumcision” in Galatians) was naturally at odds with the True Gospel of Gentile inclusion by faith in Yeshua plus nothing! If we understand that quite often Sha'ul's use of the term circumcision in Galatians is actually shorthand for “the man-made ritual that seeks to turn Gentiles into Jews” then the letter begins to make more sense Hebraically and contextually.

With this knowledge at hand we are now prepared to better interpret Sha'ul's pasuk, “*a person is considered righteous by God on the grounds of trusting which has nothing to do with the Torah...*” as really saying, “*a person is considered righteous by God on the grounds of trusting which has nothing to do with the conversion policy that seeks to make Gentiles into Jews first!*”

God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles! One need not change his station in life before God can accept him. What is more, the real change that takes place in a person's life is effected by the Ruach HaKodesh when, because of Yeshua's bloody, sacrificial death, the sinner takes on the status of righteous! Man cannot add to that which God perfects. A conversion to Judaism (a.k.a. circumcision), in Sha'ul's mind, added nothing to those wishing to be counted as true Israelites in the Torah Community. To Sha'ul, their genuine faith in the Promised Word of HaShem, as evidenced by the genuine working of the Spirit among them, was all the “identity” they would ever need! Once counted as righteous by the Righteous One Himself, all the new [Gentile] believer needed to do was begin to walk in that righteousness, a walk already described in the pages of the Written Torah, a walk formerly impossible due to the deadness of flesh and bondage to sin.

*****BONUS MATERIAL (p.1)*****

Conversion of Gentile Believers

An Official Paper of the UMJC

The issue is not whether Gentiles should or must become Jews to attain full status in the Body of Messiah. All Messianic Jews agree this issue was settled by the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem in C.E. 49 (Acts 15). Believers from among the nations were not required to accept the yoke of the Torah, but only the basic biblical principles referred to as the Seven Laws of Noah in the rabbinic literature. The issue is whether or not it should be possible for willing Gentile believers to identify more closely with the Jewish people by voluntarily converting to Messianic or some other expression of Judaism.

Majority Position*

1. Despite inferential, contrary arguments, a clear biblical emphasis plus serious practical problems should prevent the UMJC from promoting any such conversions.

2. Regarding conversions to Reform, Conservative or Orthodox Judaism, this can hardly be an option for any follower of Yeshua because these forms, despite their many differences, share an active disbelief in our Messiah. Close identification with, much less conversion to, any of these groups would be unbiblical.

3. Several reasons may be offered against adopting a rite of passage for willing Gentile believers into Messianic Judaism.

a. In I Corinthians 7:18 Rav Shaul specially addressed the issue of conversion, directing all believers to be content in the state in which they were called. Gentiles should not convert to Judaism. Likewise, Messianic Jews should not consider it an option to forsake their divine calling as Jews.

b. There is no example in the B'rit Hadasha of a Gentile believer becoming a Jew. Rav Shaul's circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) was a pragmatic measure primarily motivated by the Apostle's desire to have Timothy accompany him into the synagogues of Asia Minor. More important, Timothy was already half-Jewish by his mother and according to II Timothy 3:15, was raised according to the Jewish Scriptures. Thus, his circumcision cannot provide an adequate example for any such practice involving Gentiles today.

c. Gentile believers who feel a strong identity with the Jewish people may join Messianic synagogues, participate in congregational life, and thus express a high degree of identification without actually becoming Jews. Conversion becomes unnecessary.

d. A conversion to Messianic Judaism would not be recognized in Israel nor among a majority of Jews in the Diaspora.

e. Such a practice could easily result in "two-class" mentality among Gentiles in Messianic synagogues - the inner circle of converted Gentiles and the larger group of the "less committed."

Even a non-obligatory conversion of Gentiles would be viewed as heretical by many in the churches. Messianic Jews can ill afford risking possible rejection by the majority of the believing community, as would likely happen once such a practice became widely known.

*At the September 1983 UMJC conference, a show of hands indicated that roughly 90% of the congregational leaders represented favored the Majority Position and the remaining 10%, the Minority Position. (Last Printing 11/95)

Minority Position

1. A means whereby individual Gentile believers could convert to Messianic Judaism should be adopted by the UMJC.
2. Such conversions would in no way convey a higher level of spirituality of acceptance by God but would merely allow willing individuals to identify more closely with the Jewish people.
3. Reasons for adopting a positive procedure for such conversions are:
 - a. Some Gentile believers have a deep longing to become Jews. There should be a commonly-accepted means of acknowledging and satisfying this need.

b. The Tenach made provision for such "conversion," allowing those sojourners within Israel's borders who wished to keep the Passover to become circumcised (Ex. 12:48-49, Deut. 21:10-14).

c. The issue in Acts 15 and the Book of Galatians is mandatory circumcision (conversion) of Gentiles. To allow an occasional Gentile to convert is different than demanding that all must do so.

d. In the first century, since receiving circumcision indicated one's obligation and intention to keep the Law of Moses, Rav Shaul's circumcision of Timothy may be regarded as the conversion of the non-Jew to Judaism. Thus, we have a precedent in the B'rit Hadasha for such a modern day practice.

e. Strict guidelines should be adopted to prevent a "band wagon effect" among immature believers who may be tempted to convert and "play Jewish" for awhile. Thus, following the pattern of traditional conversion, spiritual leaders can discourage casual inquirers by putting off all initial expressions of desire to convert by requiring circumcision and by initiating a rigorous educational program for the serious-minded.

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The Bible's view of the term "Jew"

Who is a Jew? Let's take a look now at a seemingly cryptic passage by one who professed to be a Hebrew of Hebrews, Rav Sha'ul (Apostle Paul). In writing to the believers in Rome he decided to address the issue of those who call themselves Jews (in Hebrew this would be "Yehudi"):

"2:17 Indeed you bear the name of a Yehudi, and rest on Torah, and boast about God,

2:18 and know his will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed from the Torah,

2:19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,

2:20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of babies, having in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth.

2:21 You therefore who teach another, don't you teach yourself? You who preach that a man shouldn't steal, do you steal?

2:22 You who say a man shouldn't commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

2:23 You who boast in the Torah, through your disobedience of the Torah do you dishonor God?

2:24 For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Goyim because of you," just as it is written.

2:25 For circumcision indeed profits, if you are a doer of the Torah, but if you are a transgressor of the Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

2:26 If therefore the uncircumcised keep the requirements of the Torah, won't his uncircumcision be accounted as circumcision?

2:27 Won't the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfills the Torah, judge you, who with the letter and circumcision are a transgressor of the Torah?

2:28 For he is not a Yehudi who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh;

2:29 but he is a Yehudi who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God."

(Romans 2:17-29, taken from the Online Complete Tanakh with Kitvei Talmidei HaMashiach)

I want to add some comments on these verses from David Stern's 'Jewish New Testament Commentary' a little later, but for now let's continue looking at the Biblical implications of the identity of those known as Jews.

Some of the Biblical implications, starting with the TaNaKH (Old Testament):

- Born into the natural lineage of Avraham
- Father is of this lineage, or willingly converted to this lineage
- Mother is of this lineage, or willingly converted to this lineage
- Male children are circumcised on the eighth day, in accordance with the covenant
- One God-given Torah exists for everyone in the community, and anyone who actively, and by faith, participates, is part of the community
- Etymologically, one who was/is from the Tribe of Judah, the region of Judea, or a follower of the Jewish religion. The Hebrew word literally means “One who praises YAH”

Now let's examine some the New Covenant implications:

- Possibly born into the natural lineage of Avraham, but not necessary
- Father is of this lineage, or willingly converted to this lineage
- Mother is of this lineage, or willingly converted to this lineage
- Males should not be compelled to be circumcised (in accordance with the covenant), unless they positively feel directed by the Ruach HaKodesh to identify specifically with the physical aspect of Jewish lineage
- One God-given Torah exists for everyone, as detailed and interpreted by the Messiah Yeshua and the Apostles who wrote the letters of the New Covenant. Anyone who actively, and by faith, participates, is part of the community
- Etymologically, one who was/is from the Tribe of Judah, the region of Judea or a follower of the Jewish religion; to include now “spiritually,” those who, like faithful Avraham, believe and come to trust in HaShem, through Yeshua
- One whose circumcision is not [only] outward, and of the flesh, but [also] inward, and of the heart; one whose praise comes not from men, but from HaShem

As you will notice, most of the qualifications of both lists repeat themselves, with a few very important differences. “Who is a Jew?” Based on this list the short answer might read like this: A Jew is anyone who willingly or decidedly falls into one or more of the categories from one list, the other list, or both combined. Being a Jew includes the subjective side of the issue: acknowledging one’s own Jewishness (as opposed to denying or ignoring it) privately and corporately. The Biblical heritage of Feasts and Festival and identity with the nation is critical. The modern thinker needs to remind himself that this is the way that HaShem sees them on this issue, regardless of where the Synagogue or the Church might disagree! God and the final authority of his Word define the truest definition of a Jew. There are physical Jews, and there are spiritual Jews! There are children born into the family and there are those who belong by “adoption”—both are legitimate heirs to the parental inheritance rights! The Torah says in the book of Ephesians that because of Messiah, we are no longer two separate men, rather, we are now one new man! This paradigm shift boggles the mind! Yet it still defines the answer to the question of who is a Jew. Some of the physical, natural-born

Jews forfeit their Biblical right to be called as such. And HaShem knows who they are, even if we don't. Likewise, every person who calls himself a spiritual Jew is not necessarily a genuine one either. To be sure, the Torah recognizes these "fakes" also.

A real Jew (physically or spiritually) is not necessarily a good Jew. "The full scope of being a loyal Jew includes involvement in the Jewish community and support for Isra'el. However, it means as well the preservation of the very historic-biblical roots of our heritage, which make these involvements possible... Not all will be able to fully give themselves to the whole of the Jewish heritage, but as loyal Jews, we do so the extent that we can in the Spirit's leading" (Taken from Growing to Maturity, A Messianic Jewish Guide, Daniel C. Juster, 1982, 1985, 1987). Historically, when the Jews became disinterested, by faith, with HaShem, then he became equally disinterested with them. Covenants require a response on the part of the participants. HaShem has never reneged on his part of the agreement!

Conclusion

In closing let me quote from David Stern's Jewish New Testament Commentary on the passage of Romans 2:28, 29:

'Sha'ul was not a modern but a Pharisee who grew up in the home of Hebrew-speakers and had his mind steeped in rabbinic modes of thought at the feet of Rabban Gamli'el (Ac 22:3, 23:6; Pp 3:5).

'Carrying many new ideas in his head, Sha'ul could produce a sentence that had both a simple sense (p'shat) and a hint (remez) of something more profound; furthermore, he would not be averse to making an allegorical or homiletical application (drash) of his own words or looking in them for a secret meaning (sod); because these four ways of interpreting texts were well known among educated Jews and were part of Sha'ul's thinking equipment...

'Thus a born-again Gentile, one who has come to faith in the God of Isra'el through trusting Yeshua the Messiah, is indeed a Jew inwardly; his heart is circumcised even though his flesh is not; he is a true God-praiser, whose praise comes from God and not from other people—in many senses a real Jew. In the present verse we find a hint (remez) of such ideas which Sha'ul will develop in the rest of Romans.

'Elements of drash are present in the implicit challenge and exhortation to Jews who make a show of their Jewishness to change their ways and repent, and not risk being overtaken or even replaced by Gentiles (compare 11:11-25).

'One can perceive a sod (secret truth), in that Yeshua, the Son of God identifying with all mankind by his atoning death, overthrows human categories by divine intervention.

‘But the simple sense of the text, the p’shat, the meaning arrived at by linguistic and historical analysis, even though in some senses less profound than the other levels which rest upon it, is that the only real Jew is the born Jew who has been born again by trusting in Yeshua the Messiah, for only he lives up to what the name “Jew,” conferred on him at birth and confirmed by physical circumcision, implies and demands.’ (pp. 339-340)

*****BONUS MATERIAL (p.2)*****

The Heresy of British Israelism

Lacking any biblical or historical proof for their doctrine, supporters of British Israelism have produced maps describing fictitious migrations of the "ten" Isra’elite tribes from the Babylon area across Europe to England. They also have tried to connect Queen Victoria with the House of David, saying that the English coronation stone is the stone Jacob slept on at Bethel (Gen. 28:11), but the English stone is a type of red sandstone which is not found anywhere near Bethel.

British Israelism has also concocted a peculiar kind of verbal evidence. It is argued that the word "British" is derived from two Hebrew words: (b’rith, meaning "covenant") and (ish, meaning, "man"). B’rith is pronounced "Brit" since the Hebrews never say a "th" sound. Thus, "Brit-ish" is said to come from the Hebrew for "covenant man" or "man of the covenant."

The Hebrew words b’rith and ish simply translate as "covenant" and "man," not "covenant man," and certainly not "man of the covenant." If we were to translate it as a phrase, the closest we could get is "covenant of man." Connections between similar sounding words in Hebrew and English are not supported by The Oxford Dictionary, Webster’s Dictionary, or any other study of English word derivatives (etymology), for the two languages are linguistically unrelated.

British Israelism originated in the mid-1600s as a political argument to persuade Oliver Cromwell to allow the Jews to return to England. Appealing to Cromwell’s British pride and nationalism, influential patrons convinced him that the Jews represented the southern tribe of Judah, and Anglo-Saxons were descended from the ten northern tribes, which were said to have been scattered and "lost" after being conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. These two groups (the Northern and Southern Kingdoms)-God’s Chosen People-should work together until the Throne of England would rule the world with the help of the Jews.

By the end of the 19th century, British Israelism claimed two million supporters-mostly Church of England members. In the 20th century, Herbert W. Armstrong’s Worldwide Church of God preached these doctrines. He identified the tribe of Efrayim (Ephraim) with Great Britain, M’nasheh (Manasseh) with the United States, the other Isra’elite tribes with various European nations, and Judah with the Jews.

Since Armstrong's death, the Anglo-Isra'el teaching has been repudiated by his church, along with most of his other heresies. A November 1995 Worldwide Church of God study paper, "United States and Britain in Prophecy," reported that Anglo-Isra'elite literature depends on "folklore, legends, quasi-historical genealogies, and dubious etymologies." It went on to say there is no recorded eyewitness to any Isra'elite tribal migrations across Europe and that no medieval or ancient genealogies have ever linked the royal families of the British Isles with the Isra'elites.

British Israelism crosses denominational lines and has no official church organization. Some British Isra'elite groups go so far as to say God's chosen race, the "true Isra'el," includes only white Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, and kindred peoples. Adam is said to be the father of the white race only, and whites alone have the divinely implanted spirit. All nonwhite peoples are excluded from the redemptive work of Messiah. Jews are a "race of vipers," "Satan's seed," "Christ killers," and persecutors of God's "true Isra'el." These ideas have been adopted by the so-called Christian Identity Movement and Revival Centre International, and other extreme conservative religious organizations, as well as extreme right-wing political groups and survival groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan.

Other organizations sharing these beliefs include the American Nazi Party, Aryan Nation, National Association for the Advancement of White People, and many more.

Not all British Israelism supporters endorse these anti-Semitic extremes. But racist ideas are easily derived from British Israelism because it demotes the Jews and exalts Anglo-Saxons as "true Isra'el." Racist groups do not hesitate to rewrite history, mistranslate words, and ignore Paul's warning: "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: . . ." (1 Tim. 1:4; see also Titus 3:9).

*****BONUS MATERIAL (p.3)*****

Biblical Definition of "Birthright"

What is "birthright" by a biblical definition? And, in what way is inheritance different between the children of the same parents? We find the answer in the book of Deuteronomy:

"But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a *double portion* of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the *right of the firstborn* is his. (Deuteronomy 21:17, NKJV; emphasis added)

It is that simple. *All* of the children share the inheritance there is, but the firstborn gets a portion *twice as big* as the others. All inherit, but the firstborn gets a "better" portion, that is, a double portion.

There is even a spiritual Inheritance for God's firstborn, but that is something for another study. Right here, we are talking about a *physical* inheritance, and that is mostly about *land*. The firstborn gets a portion (of *land*) which is twice as big in size as the other children.

We know how Ya'akov (Jacob) deceived his brother 'Esav (Esau) and then, helped by his mother, even his father Isaac, to get 'Esav's birthright ('Esav's double share). Even the name *Ya'akov* means "supplanter" (Genesis 27:36), or also, literally, "the one who holds the heel" (Genesis 25:26).

Then, among the sons of Ya'akov, it was Re'uven who was the firstborn. He was due to get the birthright (firstborn's) portion which was twice as big as the his brothers' portions, but:

“Now the sons of Ruben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright.” (1 Chronicles 5:1, NKJV)

Even there the birthright went to another person because of the immoral character of the one in line to receive it. These things were recorded as warnings for us. Later, the dying Ya'akov also made some arrangements:

“And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Isra'el's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn.” (Genesis 48:13, 14, NKJV)

Now, this did not affect the matter of the right of the firstborn when it came to *inheritance* after Ya'akov. That (double lot) was given to *Yosef*, and since Yosef's sons Efrayim and M'nasheh shared his double lot, that meant that they only received a single lot each, that is, as much as the other sons of Ya'akov.

What the above passage describes Ya'akov doing was only that he gave his special personal *blessing* to those two sons of Yosef, Efrayim and M'nasheh. That did not affect the *inheritance*. Sharing Yosef's double lot, Efrayim and M'nasheh received only a *single* lot each, not more than the other sons of Ya'akov.

But what was that *blessing*? What was it all about? Ya'akov explained the nature of that blessing:

“And Joseph said to his father, Not so, my father! For this one is the first born; put your right hand on his head. And his father refused and said, I know, my son, I know. He also shall be a people, and he shall become

great. But his younger brother shall become greater than he, and *his seed shall become the fullness of the nations*. And he blessed them in that day, saying, In you shall Israel bless, saying, May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh. And Isra'el said to Joseph, See, I am dying; and God will be with you, and will return you to the land of your fathers. And I will give to you one spur of land beyond your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.” (Genesis 48:18-22, Green's Literal; emphasis added)

M'nasheh was to be a nation, and become great, and Efrayim was to become the "fullness of nations." (So is the Hebrew, *fullness*, not "multitude" as some translations have it.) What is meant by that "fullness"? Perhaps that the dying Ya'akov felt satisfied with his family. The explanation of the meaning of the word "fullness" (*melo'*) may lie therein: Ya'akov perhaps felt that now with those "added sons" (Yosef's sons which he adopted as his own), he had his *dreams fulfilled*: "a full house," so to say.

Efrayim made the number of nations to come out of Ya'akov "full." That is a possible explanation of that "fullness"; perhaps the most reasonable one.

The noun *melo'* (fullness et cetera) comes from the verb *male'* which means "to fill," "to be full"; in certain forms/combinations the verb *male'* means "to satisfy," "to fulfill," "to accomplish," "to complete," "to confirm."

The blessing Ya'akov "gave" to Yosef was this:

**“By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty who will bless you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.”
(Genesis 49:25, 26, NKJV)**

That was about the LORD giving Yosef, through M'nasheh and Efrayim, *many descendants* and *a good (portion of) land*. A part of the land we know to be "the Promised Land." Despite what some preachers claim, there is *no other* "promised land" except the land of Canaan, right where the modern state of Isra'el is. (That is, on the physical level.)

Verse 25, "blessings of heaven above." That can be of two kinds: Rain in due season, combined with good weather, and then, possibly, even other kinds of blessings from *the LORD* in the Heavens.

"Blessings of the deep that lieth under" obviously refer to the sea and the lakes and the rivers, fountains and springs. They water and make fruitful the land given to Isra'el, and have even fish and other useful things.

The name M'nasheh (really, *Menashsheh*) referred to the LORD causing Yosef to *forget* his sorrows, but *'Efrayim* meant "a double ash-heap." Yosef himself gave the explanation of that name: "The LORD has caused me to be *fruitful* in the land of my affliction." Now, ash can be a very good and fruitful fertilizer, helping plants to grow. That is obviously the meaning of the name *'Efrayim*. And indeed, even Ya'akov prophesied that Efrayim (along with M'nasheh) would receive "blessings of the breasts, and of the womb," fruitfulness in that way, many descendants. And they did while they lived in the Promised Land, and even earlier; that is a historical fact.

But again, the "special" birthright of Yosef, what was it? Not more than this: "And I will give to you *one spur of land beyond your brothers*" (Genesis 48:22, Green's Literal). The word "beyond" means here "more than."

Again, the "special" right of the firstborn was simply a portion twice as big as what the other children receive. Here that double portion (of land) was given to Yosef's two sons, whom Ya'akov had adopted as his own, to be shared between them. And since they shared it between themselves, each of them individually received only as much as the other sons of Ya'akov did.

Again, the right of the firstborn:

"But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a *double portion* of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his." (Deuteronomy 21:17, NKJV; emphasis added)

That is what there was: A portion twice as big as the other children. Also, the "honor" of having the firstborn "title" in a family.

Please notice that *Efrayim* was not made "firstborn" in Genesis 48, nor did he receive the birthright alone. It was *Yosef* who was made to be "the firstborn" in Re'uven's stead. Yosef's two sons had to share (divide) what Yosef received. Consequently, that meant only a single portion for each of them. Efrayim and M'nasheh were even blessed together, although Ya'akov placed his right hand on Efrayim and the left hand on M'nasheh. But that was the *blessing*, not the *inheritance*. Birthright was connected to the inheritance.

Yosef's birthright was simply a double portion of the Promised Land, twice as big as the other sons of Ya'akov were to receive. That birthright was given to *Yosef*, and as his sons M'nasheh and Efrayim had to divide that double portion, they did not receive any more than the others.

The same matter is stated in clear words of the Bible:

“Then Israel said to *Joseph*, “Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. “Moreover I have given to you one portion *above* your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.” (Genesis 48:21, 22, NKJV; emphasis added)

It was all concerning the Promised Land, the one formerly called the land of Canaan. Not any other land, and no other things but land, as far as we are speaking of physical things here on earth.

Genesis 48:22: What was the *blessing* Yosef (his two sons together) was to receive? Good *growth*, both of descendants and crops of the ground (Genesis 49:25-26). That is what it was.