

# Why Messianic Judaism?

## A Position Paper

### The Biblical Pattern for Jewish Religious & Cultural Practices Among Jews Accepting Yeshua (Jesus) Of Nazareth As Messiah.

by

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## Introduction

The simplest statement of **why Jewish people who believe in Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth as the Messiah should keep their Jewish religious and cultural identities is because the Bible (Old & New Testaments) instructs them to do so.** This truth taught straightforwardly by Yeshua and all His *Shalichim* (Apostles or Emissaries), has not been not taught in the non-Jewish "church" mostly because it does not apply to non-Jews. The confusion of Jewish believers has arisen when they have been taught that all the exact same directives G\*d gave to non-Jewish believers apply to the Jewish believers. This is not the case.

Some factions of Christianity teach that virtually any Jewishness is antithetical to a New Testament "grace" relationship to G\*d. These factions maintain that for a Jewish believer to hold onto any vestige of relationship to the laws and festivals given by G\*d to the Jewish people, or especially the *cultural* practices of the Jewish people, is to fall under the "Galatians error" and to "come under the law" from which we have been set free. Many further believe that for Jewish followers of Yeshua to hold onto any vestige of their cultural identity is to "rebuild the partition wall" between Jewish believers and the "the church." Both these teachings are wrong scripturally, as you will see further into this paper.

At best, what has been prevalent up to the rebirth of the Messianic Jewish synagogal movement since 1970 is that the Church merely *tolerates* whatever manifestation of Jewishness is necessary as a tool to bring Jews into the Church. Expression of Jewishness is therefore an acceptable technique for turning Jews into churchgoers, whose cultural lives meld with the non-Jewish cultural stream of the church-world. Toleration of some flecks of Jewishness is at times taught in the church as a viable life-style option among "Jewish Christians." However, the heart and soul of much church dogma has been that Jewishness is passé, the Torah has no bearing upon our lives except as a reminder of how much we need Messiah, and the quasi-nation called "the church" is a place where Jewish

people who accept "Jesus" can forget about all that spiritual bondage they were under as Jews. Such a position contradicts the direct content of Scripture on these very matters.

The premises of this paper are as follows:

- The Jewish Messiah did not come to save Jewish people from Jewishness: He came to save us, and all mankind, from sin.
- Jewishness is not a spiritual flaw cured by coming to Two-Testament faith.
- The only "Judaizing" against which the New Testament teaches is the doctrine non-Jews must "become Jews" in order to know G\*d. This is indeed error. (Acts 21:25)
- The clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures is that for Jewish believers **it is G\*d's directly-stated will that we practice** whatever of the Torah is able to be practiced, and our adherence to whatever customs of our people (especially religious customs) are not clearly anti-Scriptural in letter or spirit. Jewish believers are not "saved by" their adherence to circumcision, Torah or custom; however, contrary to some opinions in sectors of the non-Jewish church, we are told nowhere in the New Testament to abandon them. We are, in fact, not given the "liberty" to do so (Acts 21:18-24), any more than non-Jewish "Christians" are given the liberty to disregard what the Torah says about moral behavior (Acts 21:25). Therefore, maintenance of Jewish identity is not a casual option of no consequence for Jewish believers: it is a biblical incumbency of serious import (Matt. 5:19).

In order for Jewish believers in Yeshua (Jesus) to fulfill G\*d's desire for their lives, it is necessary that they gain a Scriptural understanding of these issues, unsullied by two thousand years of cultural confusion, or non-Jewish primacy-of-population in the Body of Messiah.

## **I. What Did Yeshua (Jesus) Teach About The Relationship Of A Jewish Believer To The Torah ("The Law" Or "The Five Books Of Moses")?**

Yeshua The Messiah taught that as long as the sun and the stars held their courses, not one yod or makkef (the smallest letter or stroke) would disappear from the Torah or the Prophets "until all was accomplished" (Matthew 5:17-19). Concerning the question as to whether His coming and His work were intended to nullify the Torah or the Prophets, He *commands us* not to think that! The Resurrection of Messiah *cannot* be the point at which all was accomplished *because the sun and moon are still* in the heavens up to this day. Doctrinally, no ground exists for maintaining that these verses mean anything other than what they plainly state. All arguments I have seen attempting to nullify the clear sense of this passage are extensive circumlocutions of the direct statements, or allegorizing of the language. Yeshua meant what is stated here. The least directive of the Torah was not negated by His coming: the curse of the Law was negated by His coming (Galatians 3:13).

We are no longer "under the tutor" described in Galatians (a tutor imposes knowledge upon a trainee from outside, and penalizes him when he errs). Via the New Covenant, we now have the Torah written in our hearts, and the Spirit of G\*d within us causing us to walk in His ways (Jeremiah 31:31ff, Ezekiel 36:24ff). We are no longer "under the tutor" because He is now within us (John 14:17). *This does not mean we are released to ignore all the tutor (Torah) taught us!* Since virtually all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the New Covenant speak of the Torah being written on our hearts, and our being motivated by the in-dwelling of G\*d's Spirit to "walk in My statutes and obey My ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:27/Jeremiah 31:31ff), I am hard-pressed to see how any commentator upon a practical Messianic theology could posit that the Word teaches us upon salvation 99% of the statutes and ordinances in the Torah are things we can casually discard at will!

Some statutes and ordinances have been rendered impossible by G\*d's own actions (because of the destruction of the Temple and the priestly lineage-records); and some cannot be practiced because we no longer live in a Torah-theocracy (e.g.: we do exact the death penalty for adultery nor impose "levirate" marriages). We cannot impose the juridical Torah upon people living in modern non-theocratic, non-Israeli societies, and that understanding has been well-understood by Jewish theology for centuries, as expressed through the Talmudic precept "*Dinah malkhutah Dinah.*" ("*The law of the land is the law.* Rav Saul (Paul) validated this precept for New Testament application in Romans 13:1ff.

However, these are things outside our personal control and ability to choose. Matthew 5 deals with persons advocating for Messiah-related reasons the abandonment of the practice of the Torah still within the reach of Jews living outside of Israel, where all of the Temple-related Torah was not possible to practice in any case. Practice is the issue; hence ... Yeshua went on to say that any person who abandons the practice (and practice is the focus of this paper) of the least of the commandments (*mitzvoht*) and teaches others to do the same, shall be least in the kingdom of heaven. He seemed to be saying that you will not lose your salvation over an unscriptural relationship to the Torah as a Jewish believer, but you can severely affect your personal destiny!

Yeshua's rebuke directed towards a segment of the *P'rushim* (Pharisees) in Matthew 23:23 is sometimes used to support the notion that Yeshua taught an end to the entire Torah by ending practices like tithing. The passage is a good example of how such Scriptures can be misapplied. Yeshua ended His indictment by calling for an end to hypocrisy, not tithing. His words are clear: "These things (tithing) you should have done, and not neglected the others (justice and mercy). How some theologians have bent those words into an end to the Torah is beyond me.

When Yeshua healed on the Shabbat (Sabbath), He did not annul the commandment of the Sabbath; He challenged the rabbinic interpretation of the Sabbath, which had gotten so far removed from the intent of the Torah, that certain rabbinic leaders would not even allow a person to be healed on the day of rest. (Luke 13:14-16) The Spirit of the Sabbath

was a day of rest and refreshment according to the Torah, not a day of legalistic bondage and insensitivity.

Nowhere does Yeshua teach or example that either abandoning the Torah, or teaching others to do so, is G\*d's will; and since Yeshua was addressing an almost exclusively Jewish audience, His meaning was clear. The rulings of His Shalichim later affirm and expand upon this.

## **II. What Did The Shalichim (Apostles) Teach About Jewish Believers Relationship To The Torah? Did Yeshua's Death and Resurrection Change Things So That New Testament Teaching On This Subject Was Different After Yeshua's Death Than Before It?**

The Apostles taught (after the Resurrection of Yeshua) that for Jewish believers, it was G\*d's will that they retain their Torah-life and Jewish cultural life which did not conflict with Scripture. What has confused church-going Jewish believers is that the Apostles did dis-obligate the non-Jewish believers from observing either the ceremonial and separative laws in the Torah and the Jewish customs. These edicts are recorded in Acts 15 and Acts 21. Let us examine them here.

### **A. Acts 15**

After Paul had won masses of non-Jews to faith in the Yeshua as Messiah (or "Iyaysoos Kristos" as they called Him in the Greek-speaking world), the question was raised as to whether or not the non-Jewish believers had to "become Jews" by being circumcised, adopting the practice of the entire Law of Moses, and observing Jewish ceremonial and festival commandments (Acts 15:5).

The Apostles' concluded that G\*d's will was not for non-Jews to become Jews: it was for non-Jews to receive salvation. As long as the non-Jews who believed repented from general immorality and idolatrous practices, they did not need to adopt all that G\*d has given to the Jewish nation by way of covenant obligations. (Acts 15:19-20) The involvement of the non-Jews in Jewish practice is made voluntary in verse 21, citing the availability of Jewish synagogal worship everywhere. Hence, if they wish to practice their faith in a Jewish context they have the means within reach to do so. It is important to note that nowhere do any of the Apostles condemn the existence or the use of Jewish worship practices.

This entirely agrees with the teaching of the Torah, for the Torah nowhere provides any mechanism by which a non-Jew can "become a Jew". Biblically, there is no such thing as "conversion," if the word conversion is taken to mean making a non-Jew into an actual Jew. The most they can attain is the standing of what the Torah calls a "ger" (male) or "gera" (female). The definition of such a person is a non-Jew who feels a calling to live in and among the Jewish people, and adopt our ways and practices. While G\*d commands us to treat such a person in a totally non-discriminatory way, He also draws certain limitations upon the ingrafting. One example is that the ger can eat certain foods not permitted to the Jewish people (Deuteronomy 14:21). Non-Jews were permitted to affix

themselves to the Jewish nation, and participate in its spiritual inheritance, but they were never made "Jewish" (a blood-descendant of Abraham) by such a choice.

## **B. Acts 21 · Circumcision, The Torah (Law) & Jewish Customs: Asked And Answered**

While Paul strongly defends the Gentiles from the error of seeking salvation through observance of Jewish custom and rite, he goes out of his way in Jerusalem to disprove rumors that he was "teaching Jews who live among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, not to circumcise their sons, nor to observe the customs (of the Jewish people)." (Acts 21:21) Let us examine this text carefully, for its teaching has immense implications.

The doctrine mentioned above which Paul was accused to be teaching is perfectly clear, and has two components:

- i. Paul was rumored to be teaching Jews who live among non-Jews to forsake the Torah, and even the rite of circumcision given to Abraham by G\*d.
- ii. Paul was teaching the Jews who live among non-Jews to forsake the customs (or in Greek, the egesin ethèe-seen) of the Jewish people.

It is imperative to note that Acts 21:15-25 is a definitive biblical treatment of these doctrinal issues for all time. No matter what seventeen centuries of church practice might say, if the Scriptures teach otherwise, it is the seventeen centuries of tradition which must be abandoned, not the Word of G\*d!

The first **false accusation was that Paul was teaching Jews to abandon the Torah.** If that were Paul's opinion, this would have been the perfect time to state it. The Apostles also could have demanded that Paul make a clear statement to the population of Jerusalem's Jewish leadership that he was standing for a new approach; one in which Jewish customs and even Torah observance were obsolete for Jewish followers of Yeshua ("Messianic Jews"). Instead, the Council of The Apostles makes the exact opposite demand! They tell Paul that these rumors about him must be shown to be false, and they give him a plan to follow which will make a clear demonstration to all of Jerusalem that "... concerning these things which they were told about you are nothing; but that you yourself still walk in order, keeping the Torah." (Acts 21:24)

Is there anything unclear about this at all? Does it leave anything to the imagination? Both the issues of Torah observance and Jewish custom are raised, and we are given the opinions of the Apostles, James The Just (or more accurately, Jacob the Tzaddik), and Paul. They all agree without one dissenting voice! Some arguers against an New Testament incumbency upon Jewish believers to retain the Acts 21 inventory say that they are willing (how gracious of them) to observe circumcision because it is "Abrahamic", or pre-dating the Mosaic Law: but the Apostles made no such distinction in Acts 21. They dealt with circumcision (Abrahamic Covenant), the Torah (Mosaic Covenant) and Jewish customs (no covenantal source) in one lump. Clearly, their focus was the preservation of the Jewish faith and national identities in the face of a new phase

of the plan of G\*d. However, they also agreed, as per the decisions in Acts 15, that heritage of Israel is not binding upon non-Jews: only the general moral and anti-idolatrous directives given there and repeated in Acts 21:25.

There is, therefore, perfect harmony between the teachings of the Yeshua and His Apostles: they all agree upon this point: Messianic Jews are not to cease to observe what Torah is possible to observe, and they are not to abandon their Jewish culture for another culture when they become believers in Yeshua. There is no unclarity to these teachings at all.

I have actually heard some sources in the church, in order to justify the prevailing church-view towards "Judaizing", accuse Paul and the Apostles of "slipping into 'man-pleasing'" here, and that this was not a "good decision" by them. They were just giving in to their Jewish side, and that the church developed into a better understanding of these issues: an understanding which abolishes all the things Yeshua said He did not come to abolish, says Yeshua's crucifixion fulfills "all things" and entirely ignores the timing statement Yeshua put in His support of Torah (it would endure as long as the sun and moon in the heaven held their places in the heavens), and contradicts all that the Apostles decided in two momentous councils held in Jerusalem! This view is very hard to support biblically, and it is even harder to support historically, as you will see in the next section.

### **III. What Does History Have To Say About The Life-styles Of The Jewish Followers Of Yeshua In The Era After Yeshua and The Apostles Lived?**

In the writings of Iraeneaus, a 2nd-century Messianic leader who was taught by a student of the Apostles themselves, tells us of the Apostles and the First-Century Messianic Jews, or "Nazarenes" as they were called:

*"They themselves continued in the ancient observances: the Apostles scrupulously acted in accord with the dispensation of Mosaic law."*  
*AGAINST HERESIES III:23:15*

Is that not perfectly clear statement? History outside the Bible records that the Apostles acted just as Acts 21 says they did: they did not abandon either "Moses" (the Torah) or "the customs" (of the Jewish people), nor did they teach others to do so. In this they were following The Master's (Yeshua's) teaching in Matthew 23:2-3.

Further on this point, the 4th-century historian Epiphanaeus records about Yeshua's first-century to third-century followers ...

*"They are mainly Jews and nothing else. They make use not only of the New Testament, but the Old Testament of the Jews; they do not forbid the books of the Torah, the Writings or the Prophets. So they are approved by the Jews, from whom the Nazarenes do not differ in anything... except they believe in (Yeshua as the) Messiah."* PANARION XXX:18, XXXIV:7

So, Scripturally and historically the view that Jewish believers in Yeshua should retain the bulk of their religious and cultural heritage is on completely established ground. The view advocating or casually permitting Jewish believers to abandon Jewish practice and identity is not. It is simply confusing G\*d's directives towards believing non-Jews with G\*d's directives towards Messianic Jews. The decrees in Acts 15 and Acts 21, as well as Paul's behavior whenever he was ministering to his own people, leave no room for doubt as to what the responsibilities of a saved-Jew are. No Jew is saved from sin's penalty by the Law; however, no Jew is authorized casually to abandon it, nor teach others to do so. This comes from the mouth of Yeshua, Himself. (Matthew 5:17-19)

DISCLAIMER· The aforementioned conclusions do not translate into an advocacy for Jewish believers to swallow talmudic Jewish practice whole! I advocate the "SEA" test.

S = Scriptural. Is the practice in question biblically based, extracted, or advised?

E = Elevating. Does the practice help spiritual life or hinder it?

A = Authentic/Accurate. Is the practice carefully or carelessly undertaken? Is it being practiced in such a way as to engender a view of Messianic Judaism as scholastically and culturally respectful of Jewish life and culture; or does it taste of casualness, shallow research, and/or lack of acquaintance with Jewish history and traditional practice?

If the practices pass the SEA test, they are probably in the sphere of practices a Messianic Jew or Messianic synagogue should embrace. While there is no desire in any Messianic leadership of which I am aware to make mandatory the observances of Messianic assemblies denominationally, there is a sincere desire in many Messianic leaders to see the amount of spiritually life-radiant, credibly and authentically Jewish practice increase among the synagogal movement's adherents.

#### **IV. Why Does "The Church" Often Teach That Against The Doctrines Above By Saying That To Maintain Torah-Practice or Jewish Culture Is To "Come Under The Law," and That "Judaizing" Is "Rebuilding The Partition Wall"?**

The simplest answer to that question is to point out that almost all of "the Church" is non-Jewish. The things they are saying do indeed hold true FOR THEM: if anyone were to teach non-Jews that in order to be saved, or to walk out their salvation correctly, they need to be circumcised (men only, of course) and/or to practice the ceremonial and covenantal laws in the Torah, they would be wrong. That would indeed be bondage. It would be creating a separating wall between such non-Jewish believers and the rest of the Church.

However, this teaching, which is entirely correct for non-Jewish believers, is entirely incorrect for Jewish ones. The New Testament never teaches anywhere that Jews are, upon accepting Yeshua, to abandon even one iota of Torah that is possible to observe. It teaches the exact opposite, and historical sources outside the Bible completely confirm

the accuracy of this statement. The Church's error has been to apply G\*d's directives concerning them to the Jews. Let us examine this error in detail, and see what truth the Scriptures hold forth.

### **The Heart Of The Error Can Be Seen In How Galatians Is Misinterpreted**

The primary error I have encountered in my years in the ministry is well-embodied by the standard view of certain passages in the book of Galatians. In his Letter To The Galatians, Shaül (Paul) writes to address a problem: some mis-informed Jewish believers from Israel visited Galatia and told the non-Jewish Galatian believers that if they did not become Jews by circumcision and by practice of the entire Torah, they were not truly saved (Acts 15:24). THIS is what "Judaizing" truly is, and it is wrong and it is bondage.

However, to apply this edict concerning Gentiles to the Jewish people is to entirely ignore the rest Galatians, as well as the rest of the New Testament! Galatians 3:28 is often misapplied by reciting the first part of it, and not examining its entire sense: "There is (in the New Testament dispensation) neither Jew nor Greek ..." is chanted to say that there are now no differences between Jew and Gentile, and that all differences in religious practice and national identity should therefore be done away with. Yet, the passage does not end there.

It goes on to say " ... there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua." If we were to apply the same logic as most of the church uses in the first line to the rest of the verse, then it would naturally follow that since there is no longer any difference between slave and free, all the workers in any company can now go straight up to the executive suite and sit down in the President's chair, kick back their feet on the desk, and light up one of his best cigars. Further, if there is no longer any difference between male and female, then any saved person may now enter the locker-room of the opposite sex any time they wish!

Of course, the worker mentioned in the first example will be fired, and the locker-room visitor in the second example will go to jail. Why? Because Galatians is not saying that these differences no longer exist or have meaning in the real world ... Paul was writing that these things mean nothing with regard to how a person gets saved! Jew, Greek, master, worker, male, female all get saved the same way: by repenting from sin and turning in faith to G\*d to receive atonement through the finished work of Yeshua The Messiah. Galatians does not teach that Jewishness is wrong or bad. It teaches that Non-Jews are not required to adopt the mandates upon the Jewish people in order to receive salvation.

### **V. Did G\*d Nullify *Kashrut* (Kosher Law) In Peter's Acts 10 Vision?**

No, G\*d did not. When people have cited this passage (Acts 10:9-28) to support the idea that New Testament life is devoid of any Torah observance, they treat this Scripture very carelessly, and ignore what it states clearly. Peter had a problem left over from his days



as a rabbinically observant Jew (and he was such, as Acts 10:14 tells us clearly!): he still had the rabbinic pattern of entire separation from contact with Gentiles imbedded in his heart. Even though G\*d had called Peter as an apostle specifically sent to the Jewish people and NOT to Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-8), G\*d wanted him to have a heart of mercy towards the Gentiles and not regard them as unclean. If Peter had understood Isaiah 49:6ff more clearly, perhaps this whole episode might have been unnecessary, but it seems that only Paul understood from the start of his Messianic life that G\*d had a heart for the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1-8) as G\*d said in Isaiah 49.

So G\*d spoke to Peter in a vision, in which all kinds of non-Kosher animals were before Peter, and a voice came telling Peter to eat some of this "trayf" (non-Kosher food). We are told by Peter that he "pondered the vision to understand its meaning", and when he arrived at an understanding of what G\*d was trying to tell him, he states the message for us clearly:

"You know it is (rabbinically) unlawful for a Jewish man to keep company with Gentiles: but **G\*d has shown me that I should not call ANY MAN common or unclean.**" Acts 10:28

**What Peter's vision meant** (10:17) is that Jews are not to regard non-Jews as inherently unclean, or even common (Hebrew = *hol*, for lower, unholy use). Messianic Jews are to fellowship with non-Jews ... but that does translate into abandoning our culture and adopting theirs! It cannot, when Messiah and all His Apostles taught against doing that very thing! This passage is never in Scripture as nullifying the kosher laws for Jews. *If it had been, it would have directly contradicted* the teaching of Yeshua in Matthew 7 and the Apostles in Acts 15 and 21.

When Paul wrote about issues of freedom related to this in Romans, he simply laid down the principle that a believer should not wound a brother or refuse fellowship to him by making food an issue. This is a common manner of relating to mitzvot in the Torah ... putting people ahead of ceremonial principles. The rabbis have a maxim called "P'kuach Nefesh" or the "rescue of a soul," which permits any law to be broken if a life or soul is rescued by such breakage. We get glimpses in the New Testament of the apostles walking in this "freedom" [Romans 14:13-23, Galatians 2:12], but these exceptions made for the sake of fellowship can in no way be established as a new rule to abandon kashrut entirely, and dine on lobster freely at whim! Again, to do so would be to directly contradict the teaching of Yeshua in Matthew 7 and the Apostles in Acts 15 and 21.

## **VI. Didn't Yeshua "Declare All Foods 'Clean'" In Mark 7:19? Doesn't That Teach Kosher is no longer in force?**

This passage cannot teach a nullification of the Torah or it would be a direct contradiction of Yeshua's statement in Matthew concerning "nullifying even the least of the Torah commandments, or teaching others to do so." The end of the passage has been translated in some versions of the Bible "Thus He declared all food to be clean." but that

is not what the Greek text says. The words "Thus He declared" do not appear IN THE GREEK TEXT of the New Testament! Those words are added by many modern church-translators to convey the doctrinal position that Yeshua was nullifying Kashrut (biblical kosher law). The Greek text simply says:

"                    μ                    [ ]                    μ                    "  
"kai eis ton afedroma ekporeuetai katharizon[one] panta ta bromata"  
"and into the drain it (digested food) goes out (of the body) purging all the food"

Yeshua was simply teaching that eating foods without **ritually washing one's hands** before eating had no power to defile us spiritually. That was the context of this teaching, and not the laws of *Kashrut*. **The issue of kosher law never even entered into this discussion.** I am sure I do not need to spend large amounts of time defending a doctrine based on **words added to the translated text** of Scripture.

I have seen arguers for disobligation from *Kashrut* attempt to say that the sense of this passage concerning hand-washing cannot be "confined" to its direct sense; it can and should be expanded to include *kashrut*. I must disagree. The first rule of hermeneutics (biblical exposition) is "It says what it says." To expand with no direct grounds, through quasi-rabbinic *kal v'chomer* (lower to higher premise), cannot be justified. One could as easily reason that because a man is allowed in the Torah to nullify his daughter's rash vows, all people can at all times nullify all their vows. We cannot nullify things of greater force (directly-written Torah, like *kashrut*) because things of lesser legal force (man-originated customs, like ritual hand-washing) have been shown to be unnecessary. This is hermeneutically and logically unsound.

## **VII. Are You Telling Me That as a New Testament Believing Jew, I Need To Buy and Use Two Sets of Dishes, Eat Only Foods From Kosher Markets, and Observe All The Rituals That Orthodox Jews Do?**

No, I am not saying that. Just as Yeshua did, we also must make a distinction between Scripture and tradition. I, as a Messianic Jew, keep Biblically kosher. I do not eat pork, shellfish, fish with no scales (like shark) or any of the other foods which the Bible directly tells me I, as a Jew, should not eat. I do not have to keep all the Talmudic kosher rules, many of which are not directly based upon Scripture, but upon the Talmudic rabbis' opinions. For example: I have no problem with a cheeseburger, because I do not see any prohibition in the Scriptures to eating milk and meat together: I see only one commandment not to boil a calf in its own mother's milk (Exodus 23:19), and I do not believe that fulfilling that commandment means never allowing milk and meat to touch. That practice was, as some scholars have argued, a regional cult-practice which G\*d forbade the Jewish people to adopt. Throughout the Scriptures, G\*d teaches a sanctified relationship between parent and child, and the practice of deliberately cooking a calf in its own mother's milk shows contempt for that relationship. (Keil & Delitsch *Commentary On The Old Testament*· Volume II, pg. 151)

**Messianic Judaism does not mean an automatic adoption of all the practices of Talmudic Judaism:** I believe it means walking out of a lifestyle in accord with the teachings of Acts 15 and 21. It means not throwing out wholesale one's entire Jewish identity simply because the rabbinic, Talmudic system of relating to the Torah has produced a lot of quasi-Jewish stuff that is either biblically invalid or unnecessary. We must simply judiciously examine the contents of Judaism, embrace that which is of value, discard that which is not, and live as Scripture-believing, Torah-practicing, Messiah-accepting Jews. Jews who have received the forgiveness of our sins through the shed blood of the Messiah (as per Isaiah 53), who have had the Holy Spirit of G\*d placed within us (as per Ezekiel 36:24ff), who have been brought into a New Covenant [or New Testament] as per Jeremiah 31:31ff), not seeking justification by keeping the commandments of the Torah (Romans 4:16), and not nullifying either the Torah or the customs of our Fathers (Acts 21:24), but having the Torah written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31ff, Ezekiel 36:24ff) and walking in the newness of the Spirit (Romans 8:11).

A Jewish Believer within the church-realm would be hard-put to defend how living a life (a) devoid of any Jewish practice, (b) devoid of Jewish culture and (c) teaching other Jewish people to do the same constitutes obeying the spirit or letter of any of these highly neglected Scriptures.

I therefore respectfully submit to my Jewish believing brothers and sisters in the churches that it is time for them to **adopt a more sound biblical relationship with the blood of Abraham and Sarah that flows in their veins.** If churches are the only avenues of fellowship available to the Jewish believer in their region, then it is certainly better to be in a church than to live without fellowship of believers. However, if a Messianic fellowship of reasonable quality exists within reasonable distance, then biblically it is necessary that Jewish believers develop some connection with their Jewish identity, Jewish religious practice (Messianic, of course) and Jewish culture, as per Acts 21. Biblically it is incumbent. Is this limiting the freedom of the believer? No more than for the Scriptures to teach that we are to fellowship primarily with believers rather than non-believers (I Corinthians 15:33), or that we may not choose to marry unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14). These directives are not limitations: they are freedom-giving, life-enhancing directives from G\*d. The same is true of the directives for Jewish believers in Acts.

### **VIII. Why "Yeshua" Instead Of "Jesus"? Why "Messiah" Instead Of "Christ"? Why "Synagogue" Instead Of "Church"? Why All This Jewishness?**

There are two reasons for practicing New Testament faith in Jewish cultural context: one reason is directed inwardly, and the other outwardly. The first reason has been amply stated above: G\*d commands us to live a culturally and religiously "Jewish" life. Hence, we practice our faith this way simply because it is G\*d's will. If no one ever saw us do it, we should still do it because biblically it is the right thing for a Jewish believer in Yeshua

to do. There is, however, a second reason, made clear by two New Testament scriptures: I Corinthians 9:20 and Acts 22:1-3.

Paul told us in I Corinthians 9:20 "to the Jew I became as a Jew that I might win Jews." Paul is not saying that from a culturally-neutered life he masqueraded as a Jew, or smeared some Jewishness in which he did not really believe on surface upon his "Christian" message! The entire book of Acts shows us that he remained a devoutly practicing Jew his entire life. He always tried to be in Jerusalem for the pilgrim feasts of Israel (which all Jewish males were required by Torah to attend). Paul did not become a gentile in practice, and then pretend to be Jewish in religious/cultural practices when he was witnessing to Jewish people!

Paul was not selling our Jewish people a new religion by pretending to be one of us! He was sincerely approaching us respecting our G\*d-given unique situation being Jews (descendants of Abraham and heirs to G\*d's covenants with him); and "under the Law" (having a unique G\*d-given relationship to Torah different from those not under the Torah)! In Acts 22 we see Paul defending his faith in Yeshua to the crowd in Jerusalem. On the stairs of the Temple, he cries out "Men, brothers and fathers, hear my defense before you now!" The next verse says something very powerful:

"When they (the Jewish crowd in the Jerusalem Temple) heard that he spoke to the in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then Paul said, "I am indeed a Jew ..."

The Jewish crowd heard this man, whom they had been told was teaching a new religion that wanted to annihilate both the Torah and Jewish culture, speak to them in Hebrew, using phrases familiar to them, like "Brothers and Fathers" (terms used by students of rabbinic leaders in the Temple). This caused the crowd to become "silent" ... more attentive to his message. A few moments previously there was a riot and he could not make himself heard because of all the fears the rumors had generated about him. A few words in Hebrew, and now the whole crowd is listening intently to a lengthy message about how his faith in Yeshua does not negate Jewish identity or the Torah-observance. There is power in doing things G\*d's way, is there not?

The outwardly directed reason for using Jewish terminology in reaching Jewish people with the message of Yeshua is that it is simply more effective than trying to reach them with the gentile-flavored message of the same content! I have personally led Holocaust survivors to faith in Yeshua who told me moments after receiving Him that they never would have accepted Him in the form of "Jesus Christ" and never would have abandoned their Jewish heritage to become a "Christian" (church-culture person). These people were fully aware that they were accepting Yeshua of Nazareth, whom the gentiles call Jesus. But they could not do so in a non-Jewish manner. They could, and did, embrace Him willingly and joyfully once they understood that to do so was not to commit cultural and religious treason.

## IX. CONCLUSION

I believe that G\*d is calling his ancient covenant people to awaken to their destiny (Deuteronomy 30:1-6, Hosea 3:4-5). He is calling us to remember that we are the actual descendants of the Jewish nation scattered from Israel among the nations nearly twenty centuries ago. We are commanded by G\*d to remember what happened to our people since Dispersion, and to return to Him. One half of this process of return, Isaiah 44:5 says, involves knowing G\*d; "One will say, 'I am the Lord's' ... another will write on his hand 'I am The Lord's'" But that is only half of the process! The second half of the verse says, "Another will call himself by the name of "Jacob ... and name himself by the name of Israel." We must re-appropriate our lost Jewish identities, individually and corporately, to fully walk in G\*d's will.

Entering into an relationship with G\*d in which our sins are atoned for by accepting Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah is the starting point of a complete return to the purpose for our lives. It is the most important step, and G\*d puts it first in order here. But we must go the rest of the way! We must "call ourselves by the name of Jacob, and name ourselves by the name of Israel!"

The Messianic Jewish vision is not to build congregations of mostly non-Jews, nor is it to gather only Jews who live on the far fringe of Jewish society, alienated enough from Jewish life that they have no deep burden for Jewish people or Jewishness. Some Messianic congregations fit into this category, and their impact on the heart of their surrounding Jewish community has been minimal compared to the size of the Jewish populations to which they minister, and the time most have been around. The mainstream Jewish community never sees them.

New Testament Scriptures teach us that many of the leaders of the Jewish people became disciples of Yeshua and His Apostles.(John 12:42/Acts 6:7) Having an excellent Jewish education is not a crime leading to hell. Being zealous for the welfare of our Jewish people and the preservation of the Jewish faith and culture are not sins or flaws. Oddly enough, many church-aculturated Jewish believers unwittingly automatically consign such some among our people to ignorance of Messiah by dismissing them as "unreachable" or "too intellectually proud" or some such stigmatizing label having its source in historic anti-Semitism! The fact is that most Jewish believers have simply been unequipped to reach effectively into the mainstream of the Jewish community, where there are people with vibrant Jewish lives as well as the broken and the disenfranchised.

With the best of intentions, they have come to Jews who have risked their lives to save our people from physical extermination, and told them that their Jewishness is something G\*d either wants to make disappear, or doesn't really care about. They go away from such encounters talking of "how hard Jewish people are to the Gospel." Some "Jewish-Christians" have approached Jewish people in this way, and have been astounded when, as they display their own low acquaintance with Jewish faith, Jewish history, Jewish survival and Jewish life, they are dismissed out of hand by their hearers. They have not learned the lesson of Paul ..."To the Jew I go as a Jew" (not *masquerading* as a Jew!): and

"When he (Paul) spoke to his own people – our own people - in Hebrew, they became silent (listened to his message)." Acts 22:2

We need to go to our people G\*d's way ... and when we do, we will have a better chance of seeing the great promises of revival given in Joel 2:28ff, Hosea 3:4-5, Romans 11:21ff come to pass before our eyes. We will be further towards seeing the Jewish Messianic revival trigger world-wide revival among the nations! We will be closer to seeing our people fulfill the destiny written in Zechariah 8:23... "Then ten men from every nation will grasp the garment of a Jewish person, saying `Let me go with you, for I hear that G\*d is with you.'" Then our people will become the born-again, visibly Jewish nation of priests to G\*d that His Word says He intends us to be.

Do you want to reach the nations for Yeshua (Jesus) Messiah (Christ)? Then, **FIRST** return to G\*d through repentance of your sins and acceptance of Messiah (Psalm 2/Romans 10:9); and return **ALSO** to your G\*d-given heritage (Isa.44/Acts 15/Acts 21). Many of your own people are dying daily without knowing their G\*d or Messiah. I appeal to you, as you study this paper, to allow G\*d to awaken compassion in your heart for your own people. **If any of your parents, grand-parents, great-grand-parents or great-great-grand-parents were Jewish, then you *are* Jewish!** There are billions of non-Jews to answer the call to the non-Jews... but of your own Jewish people the Scripture applies, "How shall they hear without someone to speak the message to them?"

Come home. At the very least, begin to cultivate your own and your family's Jewish identity. Attend Shabbat services at **SOME** Messianic synagogue, even if you elect to remain in the church. Develop **SOME** connection to the great revival current among your people in this era. You have been a part of it without even realizing it thus far. Like Apollos in the Book of Acts, you have been faithfully sharing part of the right message ... but you may have been missing some important components of the full message G\*d wishes you both to live and convey. After Apollos received the additional input from Aquila and Priscilla, it tells us that he "greatly strengthened those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the (non-Messianic) Jews in public, proving from the Scriptures that Yeshua (Jesus) was indeed the Messiah.

If you are a Jewish Believer, come home. If you are not Jewish, but like Ruth in the Bible, you have a calling to live among and minister to the Jewish people ... then, come home. Come home, and be used of the Lord, for the days of Jewish revival are at hand.

