



One in Messiah

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On a recent visit to France my wife Lori and I were privileged to be present in the home of friends when “long lost” relatives (first cousins, once removed) met for the first time. As we sat around the dining room table in suburban Paris, stories were spun that surely seem like fiction when told second hand.

We heard about the “chance” meeting of a French lady shopping in a posh store who confronted an English woman with the question, “So who are you?” The nonplused British shopper could only sputter, “Nobody special. Who are you?” When the French woman, who evidently had seen some family resemblance in the other’s face, announced her name, the English woman gasped, “You’re my mother’s aunt! I’ve been looking for you!”

What followed was the unfolding of the tale of a Jewish family tree reconnecting with a missing branch of more than fifty living souls, including:

A Jewish family immigrating to England from Istanbul, so wounded by the snubbing of the entrenched Sephardic upper crust that they abandoned their Jewish identity. Most assimilated into the prevailing “Protestant” culture (the term is more a social category than a statement of commitment to any creed), and ties with the extended family were severed.

Jewish children attending English parochial school who “made the mistake” of telling their father during a vacation how much they looked forward to returning to the Catholic institution. Immediately they were transferred to “a school they hated.”

A patriarch of the British family who had, generations previously, come back from a visit to Israel thoroughly disenchanted with his experience. He pronounced his decision that the family would no longer be Jewish, and anglicized the family name. Two generations later, one of the sons returned to Judaism, changed his family name back to the Hebrew original, and served as an Orthodox rabbi.

The branches of this extended family have deep historical roots in countries as diverse as Egypt, Turkey, and Italy; these French and English cousins also spoke of present day relatives living in Israel, Brazil, and the U.S. In religious expression, the family members gathered in the suburban Paris home that afternoon ran the gamut from Reform to secular Jews, from practicing Catholics to nominal Protestants to born-again Evangelicals.

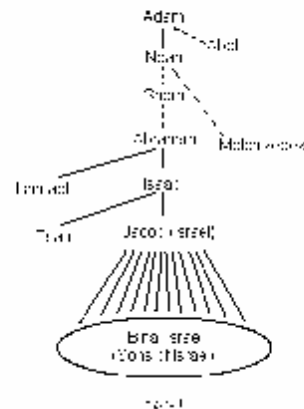
The Family of Israel

Confronted with the reality of such diversity — represented both in the stories related above and

in the lives of those present around the dining room table that afternoon — an outsider might question the validity of the expression, “*Am Yisrael echad*” (“the people of Israel is one”). But *echad* signifies unity, not uniformity. Despite the fact that this was their first-ever face-to-face contact, and no hint of shared commitment to Judaism was present, anyone present would have sensed the affinity — a true Jewish family connection — that was very much in evidence. [While references to familiar physical features (“you look just like . . .”) could be found at almost any family reunion, mention of Ladino speaking family members and shared struggles with anti-Semitism were uniquely Jewish.]

It is this “sense of belonging” to an extended family to which many Jewish people refer when asked what it means to “be Jewish.”¹ For those of us who accept the biblical account of the origin of the nation of Israel, this is no surprise. In Genesis 12:2, God makes this promise to Abraham: “*V’eh’eskha l’goy gadol*” (“and I will make of you a great nation”). A verse later the Lord says, “And in you all the families of the earth (*kol mishpachot ha’adamah*) shall be blessed.” In this first expression of God’s covenant with the Patriarch of the chosen people, a great nation is promised, an extended family descended from Abraham that will be a blessing to the world’s families.

Indeed, the succeeding chapters of Genesis are really the story of the development of the family that inherits these covenantal blessings. The line of promise is traced from Abraham through Isaac to Jacob, whom God renamed Israel. The 70 “sons of Israel” who came down to Egypt with Jacob “were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7) — to the point that the reigning Pharaoh considered them a potential threat and ordered the execution of all male Hebrew babies (vs. 16).



This was only the first of many attacks against the offspring of Jacob. The biblical record is replete with subsequent Satanic attempts to destroy those whom God calls “My people” (*‘ami*).² The scope of anti-Semitism — measured in length of years, breadth of span across continents, and depth of virulence — is inexplicable if the element of spiritual enmity³ is removed as a primary factor. The underlying principle is this: what God especially loves, Satan especially hates. Because God has sovereignly set His love upon Israel (Deuteronomy 4:37, 7:6-8; Jeremiah 31:3) the Enemy has persisted in seeking to destroy the Jewish people, most often through human agency.⁴ [For a number of Jewish believers in Yeshua (Jesus), identification with a persecuted people is part of their Jewish identity (see Appendix 1). A major thesis of Peter Novick’s *The Holocaust in American Life* is that the “collective” (i.e., institutionalized) memory of the Shoah (Holocaust) is the strongest bond linking American Jews today.⁵]

Even a cursory reading of the Hebrew Scriptures reveals the unique relationship of Israel to her Creator. Repeatedly the Lord identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the

God of Israel (or some combination of the above).⁶ Special terms are used singularly of Israel: "My own possession"⁷; "his (God's) inheritance"⁸; "the children of the LORD your God"⁹; "I was a husband to them"¹⁰; and "the apple of His eye."¹¹ God identified Himself as Abram's shield (*magen*); it is He who protects and preserves His people.¹²

Israel was chosen by God to be a unique people, a nation set apart unto the Lord. "For you are a holy people¹³ to the LORD your God; and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 14:2). They were chosen for a special function; to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" for the Lord (Exodus 19:5-6).

The nations around Israel were to see a qualitative difference in the way God's chosen people lived (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). "And the LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; and that He shall set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to the LORD your God, as He has spoken" (Deuteronomy 26:18-19).

A People Apart

An inherent tension is found in Israel's mandate to be a beacon of light pointing to the One true God in the midst of a sea of pagans. On the one hand, this could be done only if the nations around were to see how the Hebrews lived in obedience to the divine ordinances. At the same time, the Jewish people were not to be contaminated by contact with the Gentiles. Israel was to be distinct from the nations around her.¹⁴ Before the conquest, God forbade intermarriage with the Canaanites; in fact, He commanded that they be utterly destroyed.¹⁵

As harsh as this sounds to the modern ear, God's purpose behind these instructions is clearly concern for Israel's spiritual well being: "For they (the Canaanites) will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you."⁵ "But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire" (Deuteronomy 7:4-5).

God's purpose in the Conquest was to rid the land of the influence of detestable pagan practices which polluted the Land. The descendants of Jacob were given the title deed to Canaan, but their ability to live in peace and prosperity was linked to their obedience to the terms of the Covenant.¹⁶ This is clearly seen in Moses' parting words to the people he had shepherded in the wilderness for forty years. In Deuteronomy 27-30 the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience — especially idolatry — are detailed. At the heart of all Moses' warning was concern for God's name, that He alone be feared.^{17 18}

And while it is true that Israel has endured severe consequences over the centuries, God remains faithful to His covenantal promises. Through the prophet Isaiah, whose primary purpose was to call the Jewish people back to repentance, God reassures Israel, "Since you are precious in My sight, since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life" (43:4). "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no

compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me” (49:15-16).

Despite the efforts of anti-Semites to discount Israel’s special relationship with the Creator of the Universe, only a deliberate misreading of the biblical text will lead one to a different conclusion than that the Jewish people are God’s chosen. One passage that clearly demonstrates God’s covenant keeping love and faithfulness to the Jewish people is Ezekiel 20. Having recited Israel’s repeated failures to trust and obey, God concludes with a moving promise of restoration.¹⁹

And for those who would claim, “Yes, but once Israel nationally rejected Yeshua as Messiah, God rejected them,” Scripture has an answer. Paul asks the question directly: “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He?” (Romans 11:1). His swift response: “May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.²God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.”

The Place of Believing Gentiles in the T^enach

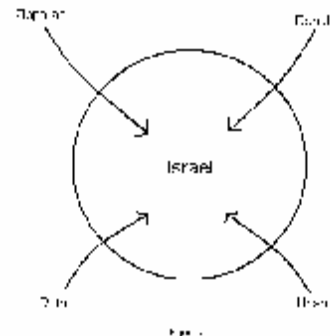
The role of the Jewish people in God’s purposes to make His name known is clearly established in Scripture. But what place is there for Gentiles in God’s dealings with mankind? God’s design was for those who trusted Him to join with the family of faith, the Jews. Space will not allow for a full listing of the people joined to Israel who were not physical descendants of Jacob, but we note the following examples by way of illustration:

Zipporah — the wife of Moses was the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian (Exodus 3:1). Despite the warnings of God against pagan influence, “Hebrew law does not prohibit mixed marriages outright, and certain regulations are laid down for a Hebrew desiring to marry a foreign woman taken as prison in war; see Deut. 21:10-14.”²⁰

Rahab — the harlot of Jericho chose to join with the people of Israel, giving this statement of faith: “For the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Joshua 2:11).

Ruth — the Moabitess woman, widowed from an Israelite husband, elected to throw in her lot with mother-in-law Naomi, saying, “Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Uriah the Hittite — listed as one of David’s mighty men (2 Samuel 23:39) and first husband of Bathsheba.



We have noted above that provision was made for Gentiles to worship at the Temple. Solomon’s dedicatory prayer in 1 Kings 8 includes the following supplication to the Lord:

⁴¹Also concerning *the foreigner who is not of Thy people Israel*, when he comes from a far country for Thy name’s sake ⁴²(for they will hear of Thy great name and Thy mighty hand,

and of Thine outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, ⁴³hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to Thee, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Thy name, to fear Thee, as do Thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Thy name.
[Emphasis mine.]

Finally, we have Isaiah's prophecy regarding the time when His salvation would come:

³Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from His people." ⁶Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath, and holds fast My covenant; ⁷Even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." ⁸The Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered"(Isaiah 56:3-8).

Gentiles in the New Covenant

When Yeshua came to present Himself as the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, His ministry primarily was among the Jewish people. In sending out His twelve disciples, Jesus gave this instruction: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5). In dealing with the Canaanite woman, He said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).²¹

In the Olivet Discourse, Yeshua gave instruction to His disciples that the gospel of the kingdom was to be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations (Matthew 24:13). Despite Jesus' clear post-resurrection command to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19), the idea that Gentiles were to be welcomed into the family of faith was a minority opinion among first generation believers. Peter articulates the reason why in Acts 10:28: "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him." Paul makes reference to "the barrier of the dividing wall. . . which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances" (Ephesians 2:14-15). The very Law of God, designed to keep Israel as a separate and holy people, was akin to a wall around a city, restricting access to outsiders.

The barrier separating Jews and Gentiles was not only philosophical but also physical. Provision was made in Herod's Temple for a "Court of the Gentiles,"²² intended for use by "God fearers" (i.e., Gentiles who embraced faith in the God of Israel, such as the Ethiopian eunuch mentioned in Acts 8 who had come up to Jerusalem to worship). "Gentiles were permitted into the court of the Gentiles but no farther. Two inscriptions have been found on a balustrade²³ separating the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple area. These warned Gentiles they would have themselves to blame for their deaths which would certainly ensue if they would proceed beyond the barrier (cf. Eph. 2:14). So deep was this feeling that the Romans gave permission to Jews to fulfill this death sentence, even if the intruder was a Roman citizen."²⁴

Even as first-century Jews found the Messiah, it was natural for the barriers against Gentiles to remain in place. Acts 11:19 tells us, “So then those (first generation Jewish believers) who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.” After all, Messiah had been promised to Israel — and the Gentiles were, by definition, ceremonially unclean pagans. Paul articulates the spiritual lot of non-Jews as follows: “Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—¹²remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:11-13).

God had to demonstrate dramatically that His redemptive purposes included the Gentiles. Peter’s vision in Acts 10 caused a radical shift in his thinking. Entering the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius, Peter proclaims, “and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean (Acts 10:28).²⁵

Paul faces the “Gentile question” this way: “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also?” (Romans 3:29). He hastens to provide the answer: “Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one” (Romans 3:29b-30).

Paul’s noteworthy welcome to Gentiles is not based on a new-found willingness to lay down a personal bias or conviction — some kind of first century inclusivistic relativism. Rather Paul shows that the door is open for believing Gentiles to claim the God of Israel as their own based on a theological formula: justification comes from the one God by faith.

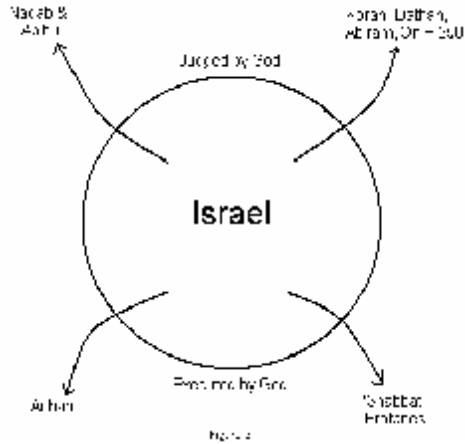
Remnant Theology

The question must be asked, “If it is possible for believing Gentiles (i.e., those not physically descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but who are committed to worship the God of Israel) to be incorporated into the nation by faith, is it possible for those born into the physical family to be excluded for unbelief?” The answer is clearly “yes.”

The Torah teems with warnings about specific behaviors that will result in an Israelite being “cut off from his people.”²⁶ Commentators are divided over whether being “cut off” (the first mention of which is in Genesis 17:14, in the context of the “cutting” sign of the covenant, circumcision) always signifies death^{27 28} or “only” excommunication,²⁹ shut off from the people of God.³⁰ In any case,

Severe judgment from God for egregious sins is easily documented:

Fire “from the presence of the Lord” consumed Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, “and they died before the Lord” (Leviticus 10:1-2).



In Numbers 16, the consequence of “Korah’s rebellion” (though Dathan, Abiram, and On are named as coconspirators who share his fate, along with 250 princes, men of renown) was that “the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah, with their possessions. ³³So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly” (Numbers 16:32-33).

We also have the somewhat enigmatic story of Zipporah circumcising her sons, with the result that the LORD, who had sought to put Moses to death, let him alone (Exodus 4:24-26).

But judgment was carried out by the hands of God’s people against sinners in the camp, as well:

After Achan’s theft of banned articles at Ai, Achan along with “his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him” were taken to the valley of Achor. “And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. ²⁶And they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger” (Josh 7:25-26).

In a case that illustrates someone being cut off for profaning the Sabbath (as commanded in Exodus 31:14), Numbers 15:32-36 tells of the man caught gathering wood on Shabbat. “So all the congregation brought him outside the camp, and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses” (vs 36).

A survey of the First Testament reveals not only isolated incidents such as those shown above where a relative handful of Israelites were cut off from the nation, but also times when the entire nation stood in danger of being annihilated for disobedience and faithlessness. In God’s “sermon” to the elders through Ezekiel, God resolves to pour out his wrath on Israel:

1. for their idolatry in Egypt (Ezekiel 20:7-9);
2. for the rebellion of “Generation One” in the wilderness (20:13; e.g., the Golden Calf incident of Exodus 32);
3. for the rebellion of wilderness “Generation Two”(20:21); as idolaters in the Land after the Conquest (20:28);
4. as those defiling themselves with idols and child sacrifice in Ezekiel’s generation (20:31) — and God quotes Israel’s expressed desire, “We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone” (20:32) to show how far they had strayed from His desire that they be a people apart, a holy nation, reflecting His glory.

That God is concerned for His reputation is documented repeatedly. Three times when God relents, withholding His wrath, He states His motivation, “But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations” (Ezekiel 20:9). But God is not only gracious in His actions toward His Chosen people, He is purposeful. Six times in God’s rebuke to the elders in Ezekiel 20, He states that He intervenes in Israel’s history “that you may know that I am the Lord.”³¹

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13) is a New Covenant expression of an Old Covenant truth, illustrated in the faithfulness of God to His promises to the Jewish people. Arnold Fruchtenbaum states, “For example, although it is clear that Israel in Egypt and Israel in the wilderness was not a righteous nation, since the majority constantly had a tendency to rebel and murmur, yet God rescued them and brought them into the land on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant.”³² Fruchtenbaum continues, “Although Israel in the land had a long history of disobedience and idolatry, and although God frequently disciplined the nation, yet He promised the nation would always survive on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant.”³³

Even when a majority of the nation was in rebellion, God continued to “reserve to Himself” a faithful cadre of obedient believers. The concept of a faithful Jewish remnant, explicitly stated in the New Testament [“In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (Romans 11:5)], is a reflection of both Old Testament reality and prediction (Isaiah 10:21-22).

Of “Wilderness Generation One,” only Joshua and Caleb were allowed into the Promised Land.

In Elijah’s day, he thought himself to be the sole believer in the Lord: “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:10; repeated in vs. 14!). God’s response to the weary, disheartened prophet: “Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him” (19:18).

The idea of a smaller proportion of “true believers” is obviously true of Gentiles as well. Pre-Abraham, Noah was found righteous in his generation with the result that his family (eight souls) was spared the destruction of the world. In Matthew 7, Yeshua contrasted the roads people choose: ¹³“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. ¹⁴For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.”

Paul concludes:

⁹What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹²ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN

ONE” (Romans 3:9-12).

Modern day identity issues

I once was invited to attend a Christian businessmen’s breakfast where, I was told, the speaker would be a Jewish believer. I arrived early and went up to the speaker to introduce myself. I told him that I worked in Jewish ministry and was looking forward to hearing his testimony. The man pronounced firmly, “I am from a Jewish heritage, but I’m no longer a Jew; I’m a Christian.” For the next ten minutes I — a Gentile — tried to convince this man that he was still Jewish. How could he not see that his faith in Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel, in no way negated his Jewishness?

I can only imagine what combination of a lifetime of encounters with anti-Semites plus some well-intentioned but misguided Christians with poor theological understanding that caused this man to deny that he is a Jew. Although he seemingly understood the distinction between religious observance (rabbinic Judaism) and ethnicity (Jewishness), he insisted that his ethnicity was Hungarian (since his parents were born there) and his religion was Christian. As far as he was concerned, calling himself Jewish meant identifying himself with Judaism (which he saw as Christ rejecting) even though he had lived most of his almost-sixty years as an agnostic.

By way of contrast, back in 1976 during our first year of ministry with AMFI in Miami Beach, my wife Lori and I met a young couple who introduced themselves to us as “Messianic Jews.” If I remember correctly, both were from at least nominal Christian backgrounds. The man had only recently discovered, to his excitement, that a grandparent had been born into a Jewish family, but had kept secret the family lineage. This man had changed his name to something along the lines of Shmuel ben Israel, had grown a beard and was wearing a *kippah* and *tzitzit*. The wife was also convinced that she must have some Jewish heritage in her background (since she had “a Jewish heart”) and was actively searching her genealogy for a Jewish ancestor who surely must have existed.

Within a couple of months of this revelation, the couple had moved away from faith in Yeshua as Messiah and had joined themselves to an Orthodox synagogue. In fact, the man became the head of the Miami Beach branch of the Jewish Defense League and a zealous antimissionary. Over the next couple of years he actively opposed our ministry in various ways: bringing a gang of *yeshiva buchers* into our meetings and demanding that all Jewish people leave; grabbing and destroying our literature; breaking in the back door at night and stealing our files with the names of those attending our meetings; throwing buckets of a mixture of paint, ink, and glue all over our entryway; and twice breaking out the plate glass windows of our storefront.

On the one hand, an older Jewish man who had come to faith in the Messiah of Israel was denying his Jewishness, in part because he believed faith in Jesus abrogated his Jewish roots. On the other, a young Gentile couple converted to Judaism and denied their earlier profession of faith in Jesus, because — at least in part — establishing their “Jewishness” was more important to them than Jesus’ atoning work on Calvary.

Implications for the Body of Messiah

It would seem that we who are engaged in Jewish ministry would agree upon the importance of there being a distinctive people who are the historical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to whom the promises of God were given (otherwise how could we be doing “Jewish” evangelism?). Some of us would say that it is important that Jewish believers preserve a “Jewish identity” in order to be a witness to the rest of the offspring of Jacob. But when pressed for a definition of Jewishness, who of us can, without equivocation or fear of contradiction, provide one that is acceptable — even to those of us who include ourselves in the “Messianic movement?”

We have met believers who have identified themselves as Jewish who, like the wife of “Shmuel ben Israel” have no more than a feeling they must be Jewish. Some point to the fact that a grandparent came from a part of Europe where a lot of Jewish people lived. Some have in their lineage someone whose last name “sounds like it could be Jewish.” Some of us have come to smile (at least inwardly) when encountering “Jewish wannabes.” But how many of us personally are acquainted with Gentile believers in Jesus whose desire to identify themselves with the Jewish people was so strong that they ended up converting to Judaism, even denying overtly any identification with Jesus?

Conversely, in the Messianic movement we have believers who are so distressed by what historically has been done in the name of Christianity that they refuse to call themselves Christians, even when speaking to another believer who has no understanding of history or the missiological importance of cross-cultural contextualization.³⁴ Believers who hear such an outright denial of acceptance of the term “Christian” are apt to be confused at best, likely are offended, and left wondering if they are indeed talking with a brother or sister in the faith.

Most of us as parents have a high level of concern regarding whom our children will select as spouses. As believers, our heartfelt counsel to our kids is, “Make sure you marry someone who is wholly committed to the Lord.” Some in the Messianic movement will advise that Jewish believers ought only to marry another Jewish believer. Some advocate that Gentiles go through a conversion process so as to identify with the people of Israel. Are these converts then considered Jewish? If so, by whom?³⁵

A growing number of Gentiles are being convinced that they need to practice the laws given by God to Israel, often with an interlacing of rabbinic tradition. In most cases, in my experience, they have not been moved this way by searching the Scriptures on their own, but are drawn toward law keeping through the influence of a Messianic teacher. The consequences range from feelings of false guilt (“I know we should be keeping the Law”), to confusion (“Shouldn’t we be keeping the Law if we really want to please God?”), to family splits (“Our [Gentile] daughter and her family won’t come to our house anymore because we don’t keep kosher. They even tell us that we aren’t really saved”).

I am coming to the understanding that culture plays a much greater role in our individual and corporate identities than I had ever imagined. Culture is like the aquarium in which a fish swims; it is the environment that is most natural to us. Most of us never even think about the

way in which we were raised until we come in contact with someone who acts, speaks, or thinks differently from us. For most of us, the way in which we were raised to think, speak, and act is by default the “right way” to do things. For various reasons, in the Jewish world, ultra-Orthodox Judaism has garnered the position of “real Jewishness,” this becoming the standard for many — including some in Messianic Judaism — to pattern a Jewish way of living after rabbinic dictates.³⁶

I make no claims to expertise as a social psychologist, but it seems that it is normative for human beings to go through life running all we encounter through a grid (often at the subconscious level) of “me” and “not me.” The setting determines how finely the filters are attuned: when at a family reunion, my relatives register on the “me” scale, and nonfamily are “not me.” At an intercollegiate sporting event those wearing my school colors are “me,” and those cheering the opponent are “not me.” During elections, I choose a candidate who is most like “me,” sharing my values on positions important to me. [This is another potential area of discomfort, of feeling “not me”; Jewish believers encountering conservative evangelicals often find in the other their polar opposite politically.]

Of course, when we tune our filters to the finest settings, everyone else is “not me.”³⁷ Even identical twins have individual identities. (It remains to be seen how clones will view one another.) At the widest end of the spectrum, I am a creation, like everything else in the universe except the triune God. I am a living being (not inanimate); I am a human being (not an animal); I am male by gender (and any absentminded foray into the ladies’ room will bring me instant reinforcement of that reality); I am an American by nationality.

The horrific events of September 11, 2001 have united Americans in a way I have not experienced in 48 years of living. Following the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, we saw more flags in evidence than any combination of Flag Day and Fourth of July celebration ever in my memory. But within a few weeks some of the outward expressions of patriotism were waning. It struck me as I waited in an airport in December that the greatest number of pins, ribbons, and miniature flags were appended to the clothing of folks with middle eastern appearances. Without wishing to cast aspersions on the motivation of any who displayed patriotic symbols, it seems that it was more important for some to overtly send the signal, “I am an American. I belong to this country; this is my flag.” Subconsciously, some doubtless were saying, “When you see me, I hope your grid registers ‘insider’ not ‘outsider.’”

Can a parallel be found in the Messianic movement? In our years of ministry in Israel, we have not encountered many Israeli believers — whose Jewishness is assumed by their neighbors — who have “maintaining a Jewish identity” as a primary concern.³⁸ In my limited experience, most have been assured of who they are, despite rabbinic efforts to, by definition, exclude Jesus-believing Jews from the people of Israel. But here in America we find ample evidence of once secular Jews adopting a rabbinically observant lifestyle as one way of demonstrating Jewishness.

Intrafamilial tensions

Gentiles may gain insight into some of the internal struggles facing (at least some) Jewish people

who have come to faith in Yeshua, yet are faced with the reality that their loved ones — part of the covenantal family of Abraham — do not believe. Two stories illustrate the tension within that many of our survey respondents mention.

Illustration 1: At a large missions conference in Toronto I was giving a Jewish evangelism seminar when a man about 10 years my senior sitting in the back interrupted. “It sounds to me like you are saying that observant Jews go to hell if they don’t accept Christ.”

I responded with a “standard” answer, that only God knows the heart of any individual, and He alone will be the judge when we stand before Him, but that Yeshua didn’t give us much “wiggle room” when He pronounced (to a Jewish audience), “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.”

It was apparent that this answer did not suffice, so I suggested that we talk about his issues after the session. We went out to eat, and I asked him to share his story. He provided a clear testimony of faith, including the fact that at one point he despaired of hope, and recognizing his own sinfulness called out to God, asking Him to save him on the basis of Jesus’s death in his stead. “So, as a Jewish man you understood that your sins separated you from the God of Israel, and that you needed the righteousness only Yeshua could provide?” I asked. His affirmative reply was unforced and assured.

“Why then is it hard for you to believe that other Jewish people must trust in the Messiah of Israel for salvation?” I pressed.

The internal struggle was evident on his face. With emotion he replied, “Because that would mean that my parents, who were devoutly Orthodox, are in hell.”

“But that same reality faces Gentile believers as well, when their loved ones made no profession of faith,” I offered.

“That’s true,” he said. “But the *goyim* aren’t part of the chosen people.”

Growing up, he often heard the prayer “All Israel has a portion in the world to come.” He knew that the Creator identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that He keeps covenant with His people. He told me that I could not understand how difficult it was for his people to believe in a “Gentile Messiah, Jesus” – especially after the Holocaust. He was convinced that surely a loving God provided some other way to heaven for Jews, despite the fact that he had himself come to faith in Yeshua.

Illustration 2: A Jewish believer whom I had the privilege to disciple in our early years of ministry has remained a lifelong friend. When visiting him one time, I sat in on a Sunday School class he was teaching. He was telling the class about the importance of witnessing, and to illustrate told how grateful he was that someone cared enough to share the gospel with him, and of the difference his faith in the Lord Jesus has made. Then, as though thinking aloud — I don’t believe he planned to say this — he said, “My parents are both dead now. When I think

according to what this Book says, they're probably not in heaven. But sometimes I think, *they were Jewish, so maybe they made it in*. I'd sure like to think so."

The internal conflict was played out again, this time on a public stage. Intellectually, my friend understood that "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). But the strong emotional desire that his loved ones were okay bubbled up into expression. This struggle certainly is not unique to Jewish people. But the identity with the Chosen of God makes it all the more difficult to imagine exclusion from the joys of *olam habah* (the world to come).

I do not hope to solve all the sociological issues of identity. After 26 years of Jewish ministry, I confess I still struggle when pressed to provide a satisfactory answer to "Who is a Jew?" What, and who is it, that defines the "us" of Jewishness?³⁹ The diversity of responses by Jewish believers to the survey question [Appendix 1], "What does it mean to you to be Jewish?" would indicate it is unlikely any definition proffered will be universally accepted among believers. Since Scripture is our authority, we do well to be reminded of Paul's counsel:

²⁸For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. ²⁹But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God (Romans 2:28-29).

The reality is that most Jesus-believing Jews face real emotional pain and a tremendous sense of loss when rejected by their people — and especially family members — because of their faith commitment to Yeshua as Israel's Messiah and their personal Savior. As a "preacher's kid" whose family rejoiced when as a young boy I placed my trust in Jesus for salvation, I have no personal experience that compares to being "cut off from my people" for my faith. I do think I now have greater insight into the pain Jewish families must feel when a loved one becomes a believer, moving them from the "us" circle of faith into the "not us" circle. When my brother-in-law (who recruited me to come work with AMF) converted to Catholicism a few years ago, deep emotional pain reverberated in our family. My mother-in-law's question was, "Couldn't you just become Episcopalian?" For a fundamentalist's pastor's wife, that would still have been a "not me" move, but closer in to the "us" circle of evangelicalism.

As important as are core identity issues (how we feel about ourselves in our varied cultural contexts), however, of even greater concern are the theological and missiological issues (what we truly believe); chief among them is "Where does cross-cultural contextualization end and syncretism begin?" These are crucial to defining the "shared us" of the forever family of faith. Though it would be an easier choice, I am unwilling to "throw the baby out with the bathwater," and settle for one of the polar extremes ("Gentile Christianity" with its "You used to be Jewish" stance, or an "Orthodox Messianic Judaism" that converts Gentiles into Judaism and accepts Talmudic injunctions as normative unless directly contradicted by a clear teaching in the *Brit Hadashah*). Some comfort is found in knowing that most of us engaged in Jewish outreach wrestle with these significant issues; though we don't always agree, we find genuine fellowship in the Lord and praise God that the Gospel is being preached and souls are added to the Kingdom.

But we cannot operate with a naiveté that says, “Why can’t we all just get along?” Paul pronounced *anathema* over those who do not love the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 16:22); Peter warned against false teachers (2 Peter 2:1); John instructs not to let those who do not agree with the truth into one’s home or even greet them (2 John 10-11). Paul felt strongly enough about Peter’s duplicity in not eating with Gentiles that he “opposed him to the face because he stood condemned” (Galatians 2:11).

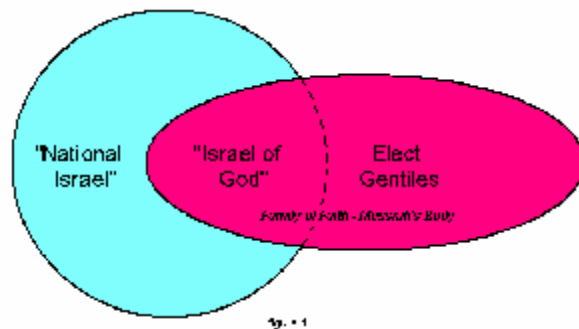
Conclusion

In summing up I wish to state explicitly that my prayer is that the remarks made herein do not add more heat to an already simmering pot. My motivation in even broaching what have been such emotional and at times explosive issues such as Jewish identity is to encourage us to find ways, as brothers and sisters in Messiah who will spend eternity together, to seek for the unity for which the Lord Jesus so earnestly entreated the Father in John 17:

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name — the name you gave me — so that they may be one as we are one. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:11; 20-21).

Paul says in Galatians 3:28 that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” No one need argue that our union in Messiah eliminates the need for

separate bathrooms. My own opinion is that nothing is wrong in one having a sense of ethnic identity (though every nationality has reason for shame as well as boasting, I expect), and those with a Jewish heritage have justifiable cause for praising God for the manifold benefits that come from being part of the Chosen people. [E.g., contrast the advantages of being born Jewish listed in Romans 3:1-2 and 9:4-5 with the Gentiles’ natural state described in Ephesians 2:11-12.]



Ultimately, what Paul is appealing for, I believe, is that when I look at another believer those things that make him or her “not me” fade in comparison to what really matters. Our shared faith in Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel and Savior of mankind, make us insiders, fellowheirs together, members of the same body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah through the gospel:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be

able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:1-12).

I recognize I still need to grow in my understanding, on both the intellectual and emotional level, of what it means to be Jewish, to be Jewish and believe in Jesus, to be Jewish and to find where one fits into the predominantly "Gentile" culture of Christianity. While we work together toward a clarification that will help us distinguish between cultural variances that are merely "different"⁴⁰ from harmful excesses that destroy the unity of the body of Messiah, we do well to remember the Apostle Paul's injunction, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

Sweet fellowship is possible when we walk by faith in the light of the truth of God's Word. Let us remember that it is love that is the identifying mark of the disciple of Yeshua: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). In a world that is seeking for truth and life, we must point them to the Way (John 14:6). I was struck by the fact that the December 2001 issue of the secular periodical, *israel today*, carried an article entitled "One in the Messiah."⁴¹ May many in the international audience (as well as in Israel), read the following quotes from our brothers in Messiah (emphasis as in the original):

"In the last two years, more and more Messianic Jews and Arab Christians have been meeting together," said **Gidon Shmuel**, overseer of *Beit Yedidia*. "Both Jews and Arabs want to pray for each other and for this country."

Philip Saád, with members of his congregation from Haifa. "It is even more important at this time that believing Jews and Arabs meet and pray together," said Saád. "We have to pray for the leadership of this country — that God will continue to give wisdom to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon."

Addressing the conference, [Messianic leader Noam] Hendren posed the question, "**If we are brothers in Jesus, why can't we live together? Arab and Jewish congregations must come together because only in the Messiah do we have the basis for unity. Unity gives us strength!**"

If the love of Messiah Jesus can shine forth in the Land of Promise, between Abraham's offspring who — once embittered enemies, but now brothers and sisters in Yeshua — perhaps a watching world will see that faith in the God of Abraham indeed makes a difference.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:9-13). May God grant to us — and not least to me — a teachable spirit of humility and a heart that reflects the mind of Messiah Jesus — for the sake of His great name!

ENDNOTES

¹An informal questionnaire was sent by e-mail to 85 Jewish believers whose e-mail addresses were known to me. Of these, 28 responded; additionally, responses were received from five other Jewish believers who had received forwarded questionnaires from original recipients, for a total of 33 responses. Three questions were asked: 1. What does it mean to you to be Jewish? 2. What does it mean to you to be Messianic/Christian? 3. In your identity as a Jewish believer, what is the area of greatest tension? The data is shown in Appendix 1 (raw data) and Appendix 2 (analysis).

In response to “What does it mean to you to be Jewish?” 27 of 33 answers centered on ethnicity generally (14) or being part of the people chosen by God for divine purpose (13).

²First found in Exodus 3:7, ‘*ami* occurs 172 times in the Tⁿach, always in reference to Israel; the full phrase “My people Israel” is used 35 times, found first in Exodus 3:10.

³The result of Satan’s fall (described in Ezekiel 28:11-19) is spiritual warfare; Satan and his demons oppose God, His purposes and His people. One poetic description of this is found in Revelation 12:7-17, where the “great dragon” (identified in vs. 9 as “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray”) pursues “the woman (Israel) who had given birth to the male child (Yeshua).” [All Scripture quotations are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.]

⁴Clear biblical examples are Pharaoh’s command to kill all male Hebrew children (Exodus 1:15-16) and Haman’s decree to exterminate all the Jews in 127 provinces of Persia (Esther 3:6, 13). The Jewish people have suffered much throughout their history — unfortunately much at the hands of people identified as “Christians”; the murderous Crusades, edicts of expulsion, the Spanish Inquisition, and *pogroms* (organized persecutions) took place in “Christian Europe.” In the Holocaust, Hitler’s “Final Solution” was designed to extirpate Jewish people from the face of the earth.

⁵“On what grounds can a distinctive Jewish identity in the United States be based? These days American Jews can’t define their Jewishness on the basis of distinctively Jewish religious beliefs, since most don’t have much in the way of distinctively Jewish religious beliefs. They can’t define it by distinctively Jewish cultural traits, since most don’t have any of these either. American Jews are sometimes said to be united by their Zionism, but if so, it is of a thin and abstract variety: most have never visited Israel; most contribute little to, and know even less about, that country. In any case, in recent years Israeli policies have alternatively outraged the secular and the religious, hawks and doves — a less than satisfactory foundation for unity. What American Jews *do* have in common is the knowledge that but for their parents’ or (more often) grandparents’ or great-grandparents’ immigration, they would have shared the fate of European Jewry. Within an increasingly diverse and divided American Jewry, this became the historical foundation of that endlessly repeated but empirically dubious slogan, ‘We are one.’” [Peter

Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, pg. 7).]

⁶“I am the God of your father Abraham” (Genesis 26:23); “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6); “And God, furthermore, said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations”’ (Exodus 3:15; see also 3:16 and 4:5).

⁷*Segulah mi kol ha’amim* (a prized treasure from among all the peoples) – Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2.

⁸*Am nachalah* (a people for inheritance) – Deuteronomy 4:20; cf. Isaiah 63:17.

⁹*Banim atem l’Adonai* (you are sons of the LORD) – Deuteronomy 14:1; cf. Hosea 11:1.

¹⁰*V’anochi ba’alti bam* (though I was a husband to them) – Jeremiah 31:32.

¹¹*B’vavat ‘ainav* (apple of His eye) – Zechariah 2:8 (vs. 12 in Hebrew texts).

¹²As but one of many examples of biblical references to God’s preservation, “Blessed are you, O Israel; who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, who is the shield of your help, and the sword of your majesty! So your enemies shall cringe before you, and you shall tread upon their high places” (Deuteronomy 33:29). The Psalms often reflect this sense of dependence upon the Lord, as in Psalm 124 (““Had it not been the who LORD who was on our side,’ let Israel now say. . . ”).

¹³*Am kadosh* (a holy nation). See also Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:21, 28:9; Isaiah 62:12, 63:18; Daniel 8:24, 12:7.

¹⁴Balaam prophesied of Israel in Numbers 23:9, “Behold, a people who dwells apart, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.”

¹⁵Deuteronomy 7:1-3 – “When the LORD your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, ²and when the LORD your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. ³“Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.”

¹⁶The consequences for Israel’s failure to walk in obedience to their God were stark. The downward spiral of sin and judgment would result in the Jewish people being scattered “among the nations.” The Lord’s threats (Leviticus 26:33 & 38; Deuteronomy 4:27, 28:64; Jeremiah 9:16; Ezekiel 4:13, 6:8-9, 12:15-16, 20:23, 22:15) were not idle (Psalms 44:11; 106:27, 47; Lamentations 1:3, 2:9, 4:15 & 20; Ezekiel 26:19; Hosea 8:8 & 10, 9:17).

¹⁷Excerpts from Moses' final sermon highlighting the dangers of idolatry (as witnessed by the nations) include these verses from Deuteronomy 29:

¹⁸"Lest there shall be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; lest there shall be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood. ²⁰The LORD shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. ²¹Then the LORD will single him out for adversity from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant which are written in this book of the law. ²⁴And all the nations shall say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?' ²⁵Then men shall say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. ²⁶And they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. ²⁷Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; ²⁸and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.'"

¹⁸Idolatry is seen in terms of spiritual unfaithfulness (i.e., "playing the harlot" with foreign gods, as in Exodus 34:15-16). In Deuteronomy 32, God makes explicit what idolatry implies; i.e., demon worship:

¹⁶They made Him jealous with strange gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. ¹⁷They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread. ¹⁸You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth.") That idolatry was a constant plague to the Hebrew people is seen as early as Rachel's stealing the *teraphim* (household idols) in Genesis 31:19, and in God's review of Jewish history beginning with idol worship in Egypt (Exodus 20).

¹⁹The promise of spiritual restoration in Ezekiel 20:33-44:

³³"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. ³⁴And I shall bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; ³⁵and I shall bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I shall enter into judgment with you face to face. ³⁶"As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you," declares the Lord GOD. ³⁷"And I shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant; ³⁸and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I shall bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD. ³⁹As for you, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord GOD, "Go, serve everyone his idols; but later, you will surely listen to Me, and My holy name you will profane no longer with your gifts and with your idols. ⁴⁰For on My holy mountain, on the high mountain of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "there the whole house of

Israel, all of them, will serve Me in the land; there I shall accept them, and there I shall seek your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your holy things. ⁴¹As a soothing aroma I shall accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I shall prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. ⁴²And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers. ⁴³And there you will remember your ways and all your deeds, with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done. ⁴⁴Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.

²⁰R.K Harrison and Robert L Hubbard, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976, pg. 178 (footnote 6).

²¹The text that follows does indicate that Yeshua both healed her daughter and commended her for her faith.

²²Edersheim footnotes mention of "the great Court of the Gentiles" with the following: "We have adopted this name as in common use, though Relandus (*Antiq* p. 78) rightly objects that the only term for it used in Jewish writings is the 'mountain of the house.'" (Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1994, pg. 22.)

²³"Within a short distance, in the court, a marble screen 4½ feet high, and beautifully ornamented, bore Greek and Latin inscriptions, warning Gentiles not to proceed, on pain of death." [Edersheim, pg. 23.]

²⁴John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Victor Books, 1983, pg. 417).

²⁵This was not the end of the internal conflict for Peter. Paul writes in Galatians 2:11-14:

¹¹But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

¹²For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

¹³And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'"

²⁶The following list details specific causes for a person to be cut off from the people of Israel: **an uncircumcised male** (Genesis 17:14); **whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day** [of the Feast of Unleavened Bread] (Exodus 12:15,19); **whoever shall mix any (holy anointing oil) . . . or puts any of it on a layman** (Exodus 30:33); **whoever shall make any (incense) like it** (Exodus 30:38); **everyone who profanes it** [Shabbat] (Exodus 31:14); **who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings . . . in his uncleanness** (Leviticus 7:20); **anyone touches anything unclean and eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings** (Leviticus 7:21); **whoever eats the fat of the animal from which an offering by fire is offered** (Leviticus 7:25); **who eats any blood** (Leviticus 7:27); **who slaughters an ox, or a lamb, or a goat in the camp, or who slaughters it outside the camp, and has not brought it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD** (Leviticus 17:3-4, cf. 9); **eat the blood of any flesh** (Leviticus 17:14); **whoever does any of these abominations** (Leviticus 18:29); **sexual relations with relatives** (Leviticus 20:17), **during menses** (Leviticus 18:18), **with neighbor's wife** (Leviticus 18:20); **offering children to Molech** (Leviticus 18:21); **homosexual relations** (Leviticus 18:22); **bestiality** (Leviticus 18:23); **if it (peace offering) is eaten at all on the third day** (Leviticus 19:7-8); (Aaron's) **descendants approaches the holy gifts which the sons of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness** (Leviticus 22:2-3); **who will not humble himself on this same day** [Yom Kippur] (Leviticus 23:29); **neglects to observe the Passover** (Numbers 9:13); **does not purify himself from uncleanness** (Numbers 19:20).

²⁷“The form of speech. . . by which many of the laws are enforced (cf. Ex. Xii.15, 19; Lev. Vii. 20, 21, 25, etc.), denotes not rejection from the nation, or banishment, but death, whether by a direct judgment from God, an untimely death at the hand of God, or by the punishment of death inflicted by the congregation or the magistrates. . . .” [C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary of the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pg. 224.]

²⁸“Though it has been supposed to involve excommunication from the community, to be ‘cut off’ seems more likely to be divine punishment resulting in the offender’s untimely death. ‘The threat of being “cut off” by the hand of God, in His own time, hovers over the offender constantly and inescapably; he is not unlike the patient who is told by his doctors that his disease is incurable and that he might die any day’ (H. H. Cohn, *ILR5* [1970] 72. . .). [Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1994), pg. 24.]

²⁹“For this interpretation, see J. Morgenstern, ‘The Book of the Covenant, Part III — The Huqqim,’ *HUCA* 8-9 (1931/32) 1-150, esp. pp. 33-58. He states (p. 53) that the expression ‘was really excommunication, cutting off in the most literal sense, from association with the religious community, and perhaps also exile, until such time as the Deity would, in accordance with his purpose and way, inflict the appointed punishment of premature death upon the sinner.’” [Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), pg. 474.]

³⁰Is there an echo of this in Paul's delivering Hymanaeus and Alexander "over to Satan" to be taught not to blaspheme? (Cf. 1 Timothy 1:20.) The idea of divine judgment in the physical realm is also alluded to in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, where "many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

³¹ Much can be gleaned by studying what God will do that the world will "know that I am the LORD." In addition to the six times this phrase is found in chapter 20, Ezekiel uses it an additional 57 times (63 times in Ezekiel all told)! Other OT writers use the phrase 14 times, for a total of 77. Conclusion: God wants to be known!

³²Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1993), pg. 577.

³³Fruchtenbaum, pg. 579.

³⁴"Cross-cultural" is self defining; when any idea or practice is transferred from one culture to another, a cross-cultural transaction takes place. Within the framework of cross-cultural missions, "'contextualization' has been defined as 'the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one's own situation.' There is no single or broadly accepted definition of contextualization. The goal of contextualization perhaps best defines what it is. That goal is to enable, insofar as it is humanly possible, an understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, is authentically experienced in each and every human situation. Contextualization means that the Word must dwell among all families of humankind today as truly as Jesus lived among his own kin. The gospel is Good News when it provides answers for a particular people living in a particular place at a particular time. This means the WORLDVIEW of that people provides a framework for communication, the questions and needs of that people are a guide to the emphasis of the message, and the cultural gifts of that people become the medium of expression." [A. Scott Moreau, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), pgs. 225-226.]

³⁵SUPREME COURT RECOGNIZES NON-ORTHODOX CONVERSIONS (excerpt from Israel Line e-mail newscast, Thursday, February 21, 2002, prepared by Liel Leibovitz at the Consulate General of Israel in New York):

People who undergo non-Orthodox conversions in Israel must be registered as Jewish on their Israeli identity cards, the High Court of Justice ruled on Wednesday in a landmark 9-2 decision, HA'ARETZ reported.

The decision was written by Supreme Court President Aharon Barak, with Justices Shlomo Levin, Theodor Or, Eliyahu Mazza, Tova Strasberg-Cohen, Dalia Dorner, Dorit Beinisch and Eliezer Rivlin concurring. It stemmed from the High Court's ruling seven years earlier that the Orthodox monopoly on conversions in Israel was illegal. At the time, the court refrained from explicitly ordering the state to recognize non-Orthodox conversions performed in Israel, though it had accepted non-Orthodox conversions performed abroad ever since 1986.

In 1998, the Jerusalem District Court ruled that the Ministry of Interior must also register local Reform and Conservative converts as Jewish. The State then appealed that decision, and Wednesday's ruling was the result both of that appeal and of several petitions by non-Orthodox converts. . . .

The Population Registry Law defines a Jew as someone born of a Jewish mother or someone who has converted, but does not define the term "converted." Furthermore, no court has ever ruled on whether non-Orthodox conversions do or do not qualify under this law. The question of what qualifies as conversion is therefore unresolved, Barak said, so a non-Orthodox convert's declaration that he is Jewish cannot be termed blatantly false. . . .

The court also based its ruling on its earlier ruling requiring the State to recognize non-Orthodox conversions performed overseas. That ruling said a convert must be registered as Jewish if the conversion was accepted by the community that performed it. Based on this principle, Barak wrote, any conversion recognized by any community, whether in Israel or abroad, should entitle the convert to be registered as a Jew in Israel.

The two dissenting justices, Izhak England and Yaacov Turkel, argued that whether the ministry registers a person as "Jewish" is not a mere matter of statistics; it implies that the person so recorded in fact meets the definition of a Jew, and is therefore a deeply controversial ideological decision of the sort in which the court should not be involved.

³⁶As one not born into a Jewish family, nor a convert to Judaism, I do not have an “insider’s perspective” on things Jewish. I am aware that historically Jews who “converted to Christianity” were forced to renounce all things Jewish, but nowhere this is commanded in Scripture. (The early church council in Acts 15 rather had to determine how “Jewish” Gentile converts needed to be!) On the other hand, an acceptance of “all things Jewish” presents another danger. In Mark 7, Yeshua responds to the religious leaders of His day with a strong denunciation: “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.’ He was also saying to them, ‘You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. . .thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down. . .’” (vs. 8-9, 13). Culture and tradition are often amoral; when they supplant or contradict the Word of God, they must not be practiced.

³⁷Peter Novick gives the following illustration of the challenges of “defining in or out” from his experience. “It’s like engaging in an endless, highly charged dispute over who is really a New Yorker, while at the same time coyly refusing to say whether you’re talking about a resident of New York County (Manhattan), New York City (the five boroughs), the New York metropolitan area, or New York State. As one who grew up across the Hudson River in Jersey City, and yearned for inclusion, then lived for many years in Manhattan, scorning the pretension of ‘bridge and tunnel people’ who called themselves New Yorkers, I’ve been on both sides of this.” (Novick, pg. 338).

³⁸“The distinction between these [Messianic synagogue and local church] is hazy in Israel. The entire environment of Israel is Jewish and not Gentile. It is natural and normal to observe the Jewish holidays, since they are national holidays. In our congregation we speak the language of the Jewish state, Hebrew, which greatly promotes awareness of Jewishness. For such reasons the consciously intentional emphasis on Jewishness found in American Messianic Jewish congregations is less important here in Israel, and therefore the distinction between ‘Messianic synagogue’ and ‘local church’ is less easy to define. Moreover, in principle EVERY Messianic synagogue ALREADY IS a local church; if it were not, it would violate clear New Testament teaching.” [Survey respondent from Israel.]

³⁹A “short list” of the subdivisions of Jewish people would include: Israeli vs. diaspora Jew; *dati* (religious) vs. *hiloni* (secular); and Ashkenazi vs. Sephardi. Despite evidences that even deep divisions exist within Jewish society, a sense that “*am Israel ehad*” yet remains — especially when Jewish people confront an outside threat such as Israel faces today.

⁴⁰The number of issues over which the Body can quarrel — most of which have little to do with whether a congregation considers itself “Messianic” or “Christian” — is extensive: worship forms; day and time of meeting; symbols; music (classical, traditional, contemporary, Messianic); biblical translation; liturgy; language (primary only or translation; Messiah’s name — Yeshua, Isa, Iesus, Jesus); role of women; baptism (required, recommended, optional; immersion, pouring, sprinkling; immediately upon professing faith or after commitment is

demonstrated; performed by ordained clergy or “believer priest”); communion (wine or grape juice; matzo or bread; frequency; open or closed); prayer (standing, sitting, kneeling; eyes closed or open; silent or out loud; written or extemporaneous); and the list goes on. . . .

⁴¹*israel today*, Aviel Schneider, ed. (Jerusalem: nai, December 2001), pg. 21.