

A photograph of a dirt path winding through a grove of olive trees. The trees have dark trunks and green, silvery leaves. The path is made of light-colored stones and dirt, leading into the distance. The lighting is natural, suggesting daytime.

OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries
and MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS



OCTOBER 2023

THE TEST OF YOUR CALLING

Maneuvering Messianic Judaism and Hebrew Roots

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STATEMENT OF BELIEF

*Outreach Israel Ministries
and Messianic Apologetics*

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts

All Believers in Israel's Messiah are to be regarded as a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to respect one another in mutual love as brothers and sisters, and are to work together for the salvation of the Jewish people and return of Israel's Messiah.

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be studied and heeded by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the Believers after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

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OLM UPDATE

October 2023

J.K. McKee

The experience of many people, especially non-Jewish Believers from evangelical Protestant backgrounds, becoming involved in things Messianic, can often be one of blind idealism. People enter into the Messianic movement for a wide variety of reasons—

but many non-Jewish Believers are frequently seen to enter in, because of being convicted about the need to have a Torah foundation in their theology, and because of the importance of outward practices such as remembering the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, the appointed times or *moedim*, and a kosher-style of diet. By attending a Messianic congregation or fellowship, alongside Jewish Believers in Yeshua, it is quickly concluded that not only is such a place clearly representative of the “one new man/humanity” envisioned in Ephesians 2:15—but that surely all followers of Israel’s Messiah, the world over, should want to be a part of this.

For certain, many of us eagerly declare and sing the exclaim of Psalm 133:1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!” (TLV). Yeshua Himself prayed to His Father, “that they all may be one. Just as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You, so also may they be one in Us, so the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21, TLV), as the unity the Father and Son have, is to be a unity the Messiah’s followers are to aim toward in their association and gospel labor with each other. And indeed, Paul spoke of how “There is one body and one *Ruach* [Spirit], just as you also were called in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4, TLV). To many, it seems so clear and obvious: the redeemed in Israel’s Messiah are to be part of a single body or community, with a single hope of being called into a life experiencing His salvation and sanctification.

You may not realize it, but to invoke the word “calling” (Grk. *klēsis*) in some Messianic venues, can be something somewhat controversial, even dangerous. This is because within Holy Scripture, context can determine *what kind of “calling”* is being spoken of in a passage. Most frequently, Bible readers tend to associate “calling” as being Divinely summoned to salvation and sanctification, or being born again and set onto a life of spiritual

THE TEST OF YOUR CALLING Maneuvering Messianic Judaism and Hebrew Roots

growth. In other places, however, “calling” can be associated with a Divine vocation, such as Ancient Israel being “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6, NASU). There are a number of people in today’s Messianic Jewish movement, who are of the position that by non-Jewish Believers doing various outward things of Torah, that their unique vocational calling and distinction as Jews has been nullified. Given the fact that non-Jewish Believers now make up the majority of persons within the Messianic Jewish movement, are there some useful ways to navigate around some of the insecurities which can manifest, when one’s “calling” is in view? How can any of us be correctly aware of the different dynamics, and even uses, of “calling”?

Non-Jewish Believers Called into the Messianic Movement

Many years ago when our family was drawn by the Lord, to be permanently a part of the Messianic community—it was only natural for us to conclude that *this was something which was going to get much bigger*. Why would any sincere, maturing follower of Israel’s Messiah, not want to do the things that He did? Why would today’s Christian people not want to remember *Shabbat* or the feasts? And indeed, many controversies arose in the mid-to-late 1990s and into the 2000s, regarding the place of non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement, which are still being debated today. Some of this has led to various spin off non-Jewish Torah sub-movements, most commonly grouped together as the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement. While emphasizing a faith heritage in Israel’s Scriptures to some degree, it widely does not focus on the Messianic Jewish mission of Jewish outreach, evangelism, support for the State of Israel, and standing against anti-Semitism.

There is a broad consensus in today’s Messianic Judaism, that if one is non-Jewish, then he or she needs to be specially called into the Messianic movement. Pragmatically, given the fact that the Messianic Jewish movement is still a developing and emerging faith community—it cannot be overwhelmed by non-Jewish people and non-Jewish issues, when its main focus is to see Jewish people brought to saving faith in Yeshua the Messiah. So, while many non-Jewish people have entered in through a door of wanting to remember Yeshua in the feasts of Israel, or study the weekly Torah readings, or be a part of a congregation which was more like the First Century *ekklesiā*—being specially called also involves co-laboring with Jewish Believers in the salvation of Israel. Being specially called involves having a sensitivity to the unique mission and purpose of the Messianic movement, and the different dynamics and contours of Jewish evangelism.

I absolutely believe in an inclusive Messianic movement, where non-Jewish Believers whom God is stirring, need to be welcomed in and not un-

necessarily turned away. However, whether a non-Jewish person is **genuinely called, summoned, or assigned** by the Lord to the Messianic movement, is something which will be challenged from time to time. The enemy does not want to see Jewish people come to faith in Israel's Messiah—and with that certainly does not want to see Jewish and non-Jewish Believers colobar and collaborate their gifts, talents, and resources to facilitate the salvation of Israel and herald the return of the Messiah. Much, I fear, has been stymied in the development of the Messianic movement, when non-Jewish people have some sort of negative experience or encounter—often involving them not being treated fairly, or as the equals of Jewish Believers—and then they leave and move on to something else. *Such people were probably not called or summoned by the Lord into the Messianic movement.* Yet, even for those who have been called, such as my family, the legitimacy or sustainability of such a calling, has indeed been tested from time to time.

Hebrew Roots Cosplay

One of the biggest tests, to see whether or not a non-Jewish Believer is truly called or summoned by God, into the Messianic movement, **is to see how they approach various outward elements of Torah.** Frequently, because historical Christianity has focused itself more on internal matters of heart and mind, participating with various outward matters as seen in much of Judaism and Jewish tradition, is something quite exciting to various non-Jewish people in the Messianic movement. *And, their zeal for doing outward things can often exceed that of many Messianic Jews.*

Most non-Jewish people who enter into the Messianic movement, go through a season of extreme fascination with various outward symbols. In many cases, wearing a *kippah/yarmulke* and *tallit* during a *Shabbat* worship service, often takes place to try to fit in with the rest of the congregation. Likewise, employing some new Hebrew or Yiddish terms in one's speech, also takes place to try to fit in. Some people experiment, feel somewhat awkward, and then seek education from their Messianic congregation's leadership regarding the best way to approach outward elements of Torah. *They learn and make corrections where necessary.* A few non-Jewish people, though, become so enamored with outward elements of Torah, that they embrace many aspects of Jewish tradition and culture, so as to actually be perceived as Orthodox or Chassidic Jews. Yet others may go the opposite way, and wear Biblical period styled clothing, and employ various outward elements of Torah, widely devoid of having consulted any kind of recognizable Jewish tradition (i.e., Conservative, Reform).

A panel discussion, at this past Summer's Messiah 2023 conference, discussed what some of the deterrents were to the growth of the Messianic

Jewish community, and in seeing Jewish people and young Messianic Jews more integrated into it. A relative lack of uniform *halachah* or Torah application, in many Messianic synagogues, was one of the major issues raised. Another major issue raised was the presence of non-Jewish people at Messianic synagogues, practicing what could be best labeled as: **Hebrew Roots Cosplay**. Three specific areas of Torah practice, being observed outside of a great deal of mainstream Jewish *halachah*, were classified as:

- affluent blowing of the *shofar*, outside of the traditional holiday times
- use of homemade *tzitzits* or fringes on beltloops
- affluent speaking of some form of the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH, contrary to Second Temple convention where Divine titles would have been employed instead

Of course, a few other things could probably have been added to the list as well, such as the diversity of so-called “restored Biblical calendars” out there, contrary to the Jewish calendar observed by all major branches of Judaism.

For many years, my ministry and teachings have a longstanding history of speaking against much of what has been labeled as “Hebrew Roots Cosplay,” non-Jewish Believers appropriating various outward elements of Torah, often with little or no concern for mainstream Jewish *halachah* and sensitivities. While an ongoing issue, many non-Jewish Believers, in their eagerness to embrace their faith heritage in Israel’s Scriptures, are often not as eager to consider their role as collaborators with Jewish Believers in the salvation of Israel and the Jewish people. As many have found themselves being prompted to consider what various outward matters of Torah mean for them, how do some of these observances align with Paul’s missional imperative of Romans 11:11? “I say then, did they stumble so as to fall? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the nations, to make them jealous” (PME).

Some would say that by non-Jewish Believers wearing homemade, belt-loop *tzitzits* or fringes, they will provoke Jewish people to jealousy for faith in Messiah Yeshua—and that by following something which is apparently “more Biblical” and not a “tradition of men,” that they will be more successful in presenting the good news, than Messianic Jews who may limit their observance to wearing a *tallit* during a *Shabbat* morning service, as would be seen in most non-Orthodox synagogues. Actually, at this point in 2023, by not often caring how Messianic Jewish observance tends, on this kind of a matter, to be in alignment with the Reform or Conservative Synagogue—**non-Jews failing to consider mainstream *halachah* can make their**

“Torah observance” a hindrance, rather than a help, to Jewish evangelism.

Now it is true, many non-Jewish people who do outward things of Torah, without any consideration for mainstream Jewish *halachah*, do not concern themselves with outward perceptions. *Many of those who practice “Hebrew Roots Cosplay” do not have the burden for the lost of the Jewish people, as Paul did in Romans 9:3.* But if some non-Jewish Believers do have such a burden, then if Paul was indeed willing to give up his own personal salvation for the salvation of his kinsfolk—**perhaps a shift toward a more philo-traditional approach to outward matters of Torah would be in order.** The adjustments of being aware who might be offended by what they consider to be a misuse of sanctified objects and practices, are actually quite minor. The offense which any of us gives to the Jewish community, has to be over the Person of Yeshua of Nazareth, His challenging words of discipleship and ethics, where people stand before the One God of Israel, their internal heart attitude and morality, and where they will be spending eternity. We cannot unnecessarily offend Jewish non-Believers over issues of wearing fringes or the religious calendar employed.

What does your local congregational leadership do, to best facilitate the Messianic mission? Something which sits way off of the map of what is seen in the Jewish world—or something which parallels the Jewish world? Mind you, every congregation is different, as is everyone’s local community. There might not be a one-size-fits-all approach.

An Irrevocable Calling

Anyone who reads Holy Scripture, should be able to easily recognize that today’s Jewish people—the undisputed descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—have a unique purpose and destiny. This is a unique purpose and destiny, which the nations of Planet Earth at large, do not have. Paul attested in Romans 11:28-29, “As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (NRSV). Paul’s Jewish people, while in severe corporate error for denying Yeshua as Israel’s Messiah, are nonetheless said to possess an irrevocable calling, for the sake of the promises given to their ancestors by God.

What is the irrevocable calling? It decisively involves what is stated in Exodus 19:6: “and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (NASU). The irrevocable calling, originally upon Israel in the Tanach, was to serve as intermediaries between the One God and the world at large, testifying to His name and His goodness. In the Apostolic Writings, we see how the calling to be a holy nation, kingdom of priests, and declaring forth

God's goodness to a dark world—is a vocation which is shared between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers (1 Peter 2:9), as Messiah followers colabor as His representatives. Yet, non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah hardly are to replace or displace Israel proper. And what is often not stressed enough, regarding the irrevocable calling upon Israel proper, is how it is directly tied to "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22) and the salvation historical trajectory of "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). While Believers from the nations get to participate in priestly service and declaring forth the goodness of Israel's God and Messiah, along with Jewish Believers—**the salvation of the Jewish people and resultant return of the Messiah is to be the culmination of history here on Planet Earth.**

Today in the almost mid-2020s, our Messianic faith community still greatly struggles through the issues and factors of Jewish and non-Jewish identity. No one should be naïve to think that Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are one-hundred percent identical or exactly the same. But, the thrust of the Holy Scriptures and our common salvation, is precisely to focus on our common faith and redemption in Yeshua *first*—not focus first on our apparent differences or distinctions. A great deal of the Messianic Jewish movement, has difficulty with such an ideology—and resultant of it, many non-Jewish people have been turned away, sometimes giving birth to some less-than-stable Hebrew Roots and Torah movement offshoots. Furthermore, rather than wanting to focus on Jewish Believers' Biblical destiny, **constituting the center or nexus of salvation history on Earth by heralding the return of the Messiah—and seeing the 144,000 sealed servants of Revelation 14 reared up, among other things**—various groups and sub-movements within parts of Messianic Judaism, have expelled great time and energy to simply seek recognition from religious establishments. This has ranged from wanting to be recognized as a formal branch of Judaism (alongside Orthodox, Conservative, Reform), as well as having a Messianic Jewish delegation actually meet in 1998 with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) at the Vatican (contra: Revelation chs. 17, 18). Neither has been a worthwhile use of the limited resources the Messianic movement possesses.

If one returns to what the actual thrusts of being a holy nation, kingdom of priests, and people declaring forth the goodness of Israel's God *actually are*—then it would involve a significant renewal of evangelism and holiness. It would involve a sure evaluation of *when we are* in human history, and the emergence of a genuine prophetic movement of the Holy Spirit like the First Century Believers, who worked together in common cause, in spite of their diversity as Jews, Greeks, and Romans. It would not at all involve a great deal of the religious politics and posturing, our family has had to navigate

around since 1995. But how ready or willing is today's Messianic movement to step into a genuine salvation historical vocation, being placed at the very center of God's work on Earth? Many Messianic Jewish people are not as willing to step into this aspect of their calling, as they may think they are

“Stay in Your Place”? Not as Simple as Some Have Said

Many of us, especially Americans, absolutely abhor or despise being told to “stay in our place.” We instead have the mindset, that if one is honest and works hard, that anyone can see his or her situation improved, and one can advance up the social ladder. So, when various non-Jewish Believers find themselves either restricted, or discouraged from doing outward things of Torah, in various Messianic Jewish environments, they find themselves greatly offended. *Should we not be focusing on our common identity in the Messiah first?* When these people are told that the Bible itself says for them to “stay in your place,” many do not know what to do, other than recognize that there is a huge dynamic of controversy and division at play.

Have you ever heard about “Paul’s rule in all the churches/assemblies?” It is derived from instruction given by the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. While doubtlessly important, the way that it has been applied in some Messianic Jewish settings—particularly hardshell bilateral ecclesiology environments—should be open for questioning and reevaluation. Typically, the way “Paul’s rule” has been applied, is that 1 Corinthians 7:20 is repeated to non-Jewish Messiah followers: “Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called” (NRSV). This means that Jewish people need to stay Jewish, and not assimilate by giving up their heritage. *We agree with this premise.* But it also is taken to mean that non-Jewish Messiah followers should not try to be Jewish (i.e., “circumcised”), specifically by taking on any outward Torah observances such as the seventh-day Sabbath, appointed times, or dietary laws. To do those things would constitute a violation of “Paul’s rule.” Suffice it to say, very few people I have encountered in the past decade, have known that there are some legitimate alternatives, indeed rooted within the text of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, to such an approach to “Paul’s rule.” But given how there are some Messianic Jewish leaders, with weighty credentials, who tend to drown out the discussion—various alternatives have scarcely had a chance to be heard. **And many have been spiritually and emotionally damaged because of it.**

What is the best approach to “Paul’s rule in all the churches/assemblies”? It is not some abstract philosophy. A contextual reading of what the Apostle originally communicated in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, and First Century circumcision status, need to be kept in mind. First to be recognized, is that the Greco-Roman world of the First Century Mediterranean

knew of no medical circumcision, as has been practiced throughout much of the Nineteenth to early Twenty-First Century West. Secondly, when Paul is seen to condemn non-Jewish Believers from being influenced by “circumcision” in the First Century C.E., this was intended to strongly discourage them from going through the formal proselyte circumcision to Judaism, in order to somehow be truly reckoned among God’s people. Such non-Jewish Believers in Israel’s Messiah were reckoned among the community of redeemed by the faith and trust they placed in Him.

It is clear enough, based on Paul’s words appearing in **1 Corinthians 7:18-20**, that both circumcised and foreskinned were called to Messiah faith, in these two different dispositions:

“Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters is* the keeping of the commandments of God. Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called” (1 Corinthians 7:18-20, NASU).

The instruction Paul gives in 1 Corinthians ch. 7 can be particularly difficult to understand, because it specifically pertains to “the things about which you wrote” (1 Corinthians 7:1a, NASU), meaning that the Corinthians had sent Paul a piece of correspondence, asking him various questions. These ancient issues, coupled with the various conditions at work—along with the regular presence of the Greek verb *menō*, meaning either “remain,” “abide,” or “continue” (cf. F. Hauck, “*ménó*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 581)—can complicate one’s reading of the issues a great deal. The rendering of *menō* as “remain” can be a bit misleading, for the specific reason that a static-permanence in a certain condition is not intended for **any** Messiah follower. The verb *menō* appears in Yeshua’s word of John 15:7: “If you remain [*menō*] in me and my words remain [*menō*] in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (NIV). Nobody can honestly argue that by “abiding” (cf. NASU, RSV) in Yeshua people are not to grow in their relationship with and understanding of Him, and with such growth integrate various changes and alterations, both expected and necessary, in condition. Similarly for the Corinthian situation, abiding in the current sphere of one’s life—notably as someone unmarried or in a condition of slavery—should not have dismissed the possibility of future, God-directed changes.

Failing to approach **1 Corinthians ch. 7** for a Corinthian-specific or ancient situation *first*, in the scope of all of the other problems and issues pre-

sent for this group of ancient people, can lead to errant conclusions like Paul not highly valuing the estate of marriage, and that he thought that young men staying unmarried was always best (1 Corinthians 7:1b). Perhaps for someone such as the Apostle Paul, who had a significant ministry responsibility to spread the good news among his fellow Jews and the nations in the Mediterranean, an unmarried condition was to be preferred, as he could dedicate his time exclusively to God (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). Yet, he also observed that because of the presence of fornication in Corinth, men and women should not only marry—but they should be mutually submitted in body to each other (1 Corinthians 7:2-9).

The axiom in play here is, “as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the [assemblies]” (1 Corinthians 7:17, NASU). This is further detailed as, each “must remain in that condition in which he was called” (1 Corinthians 7:20, NASU), with *klēsis*, “condition” (NASU), more literally meaning “calling” (KJV/NKJV). One way to approach this is that each person has been called to a particular vocation or life disposition, which they are to never leave. If held rigidly, then this means that no changes to such a vocation are to be allowed—no “growth” or even “continuance.” Another, and we should think more preferred way to view 1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, is that the *klēsis* or “calling” involves a person being called into salvation and sanctification by the Lord, i.e., “Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called” (1 Corinthians 7:17, American Standard Version; cf. Ephesians 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:9 for Greek linguistic parallels). If there are any changes to occur to one’s station in life, then those changes would become manifest as a person would abide in their calling to salvation and sanctification, growing in faith.

The individual Corinthians were not to allow themselves to be influenced by any outside or inside persons or factions to change the fact that they each had different personal conditions when they received salvation. Being within the sphere of the Messiah Yeshua, “continuing” or “abiding” in Him (*menō*), anything that might actually change is entirely incumbent upon one’s maturation in Him, as “continuance” in a calling to salvation and sanctification moved forward.

Opening the complicated vignette of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24, Paul asked, “Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised” (1 Corinthians 7:18a, NASU). This actually happened to many Jewish men during the Maccabean crisis via the process of epispasm, whereby steps were taken to regrow the skin that had been removed from the male sexual organ (1 Maccabees 1:15), leading to an abandonment of one’s Jewish heritage and a full assimilation into paganism. It would be un-

thinkable for Paul, for any male Jewish Believer to remove the mark of circumcision he had received from time of birth, resulting in apostasy from the One God of Israel! Throughout his letters, Paul upheld the value of circumcision for Jewish Believers. Paul would further say, the far more important, "Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised" (**1 Corinthians 7:18b**, NASU). Circumcision or non-circumcision status is not to be a pre-condition of one's calling into Messiah faith, and none of the non-Jewish Corinthians should have been pressured to being circumcised, going through ritual proselyte conversion to Judaism, in order to consider themselves as "true Believers." Their incorporation into the Body of Messiah was to decisively come through the Messiah, not a formal conversion to Judaism.

Paul follows his statement with, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters is* the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Corinthians 7:19, NASU). Obviously as far as salvation is concerned, circumcision status does not matter. But when Paul says "obeying the commandments of God is everything" (NRSV), what does this mean? Previously in Galatians 6:15, Paul had said, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (NASU). It is fair to recognize that the stress he makes on the commandments of God here, are those deep, internal heart matters, directly affected by being called into Messiah faith and the enaction of the New Covenant—the sorts of principles elucidated by the Lord in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chs. 5-7).

The First Century Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds did not know of the medical practice of circumcision as the Western world often knows today, as circumcision was widely regarded as an ethnic mark of the Jewish people. A man circumcised to Greeks and Romans was guilty of defacing the body, *and* for many Jews being circumcised was the quintessence of being elected of God. Given this reality, it was most improbable that many non-Jewish male Believers could ever be physically circumcised, even if they wanted to be. Yet, the fact that the condition in which one is found, when being called into Messiah faith, can change, is realized in how those who were First Century slaves, were indeed to take the opportunity to be freed should it present itself (1 Corinthians 7:21-23). *Abiding* with God, means that *He clearly and supernaturally directs* any changes to one's original status (1 Corinthians 7:24).

For a number of the non-Jewish men in today's Twenty-First Century Messianic community, who may be physically uncircumcised, the social and religious pressures against circumcision which were present in the First Century, are largely not there any more. Non-Jewish men do not have the responsibility to be circumcised on the eighth day as *b'rit milah* as ethnic male Jews (Leviticus 12:3). However, it is entirely possible, that an uncir-

circumcised, non-Jewish male in today's Messianic movement, may be personally convicted as he progresses in holiness, to honor the spirit of the Torah commandment—even though it has not been specifically enjoined upon him in the Torah. Practically speaking, this would involve going through a medical circumcision—with the full knowledge that it has absolutely nothing to do with salvation status, and that it will not reckon him as an ethnic Jew. (This might also be done in association with the advice of his doctor, for various health matters.)

The main thrust of Paul's actual "rule in all the assemblies," is "Let each one abide in the calling in which he was called" (1 Corinthians 7:20, PME). ***This is a calling to salvation and sanctification, a Divine summons to abiding in the Lord.*** Each person, whether in the First Century C.E. or Twenty-First Century C.E., is called into Messiah faith, in a different disposition. Non-Jewish people, in either the First Century C.E. or Twenty-First Century C.E., do not have to go through ritual proselyte circumcision or conversion, in order to be truly reckoned as a member of God's own. Yet, as we get closer and closer to the return of Israel's Messiah, many non-Jewish Believers, as they continue in the Lord, and abide in His calling to salvation and sanctification, are being directed by Him to partake of their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures, in more tangible ways than the Christians of yesterday. As prophesied and witnessed throughout the Messianic movement, the nations are streaming to Zion, to be directed from Moses' Teaching (Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4).

Unfortunately, due to some inappropriate approaches to 1 Corinthians 7:20, a number of non-Jewish Believers—even including myself on numerous occasions—have been told that nothing except the moral and ethical prescriptions of Moses' Teaching are necessary for my family to be really considering. *This is true even if we have embraced things like Shabbat or the appointed times as we have grown in faith and been directed by the Spirit, and are not coercing them onto others.* Many non-Jewish people have been turned away from the Messianic movement, as a consequence of the common approach to "Paul's rule in all the assemblies/churches," meaning "stay in your place." I am sad to say that I think that a number of today's Messianic Jewish leaders and teachers, are not as aligned with salvation history as much as they think they are—and they find people like myself, and my family, to be more of a threat to them than potential allies and collaborators in the work of the Kingdom and restoration of Israel.

(For a more detailed verse-by-verse and Greek review of "Paul's rule in all the churches/assemblies," consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, "1 Corinthians 7:17-24.")

Still Emerging, Still Maturing

Today as I write this (09 October, 2023), there has been a huge upheaval taking place in the Holy Land, between Israel and the Palestinians. Over a thousand Jewish people have lost their lives in just a few days. The exact circumstances behind this new wave of terror are not fully known, as information continues to be updated and changed. **What is not in dispute, is that the Lord is trying to get the attention of today's Messianic people.** While the violence has been taking place, so has a major conference of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance (IMJA) in Israel. *I pray that He has the undivided attention of many Messianic Jewish leaders, and that they have collectively sought Him for direction.*

Among many of the people of today's Messianic community, out there in the world of ideas, there is also a battle taking place for the future of this faith community. A generation of Jews have come to saving faith in Israel's Messiah. A large group of non-Jewish Believers has come to a conscious knowledge of their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures. All of us have been called to salvation and sanctification, spiritual growth and maturity, and being better equipped to accomplish the tasks of the Kingdom. Yet as can be expected, human limitations, fear, pride, arrogance, and power jockeying have frequently gotten in the way. We are an emergent faith community, which does not quite know what it is going to emerge into. Are we to emerge into a Jewish renewal movement, another formal branch of Judaism, or a prophetic move to herald the return of the Messiah Himself?

That today's Jewish people are distinct is not in dispute. The issue of Jewish and non-Jewish equality, and employing all of the gifts, talents, and skills of both men and women in the Body of Messiah (cf. Galatians 3:28), continues, though, to be a lively debate, and is likely also a major generational divide. Whether or not non-Jewish Believers—who are hardly one hundred percent identical to Jewish Believers—can be true collaborators and coparticipants in Israel's restoration, is also an ongoing matter. Many non-Jewish people have entered into the Messianic movement, and then left to return to Church, or go off to Hebrew Roots persuasions. Equality does not mean sameness for everyone, but it does mean a greater appreciation and employment of spiritual gifts for the maximizing of Kingdom objectives.

Do today's non-Jewish Believers have to be specially called, or summoned, into the Messianic movement? This month marks a full twenty-eight years since our family entered into the Messianic community. The Lord doubtlessly assigned us to this, because we have a full-time educational ministry. The Lord has also given us Divine favor with various Messianic Jewish leaders over the years, and we have been able to witness, firsthand, many things which those of you reading or listening to this have not.

Still, with as much longevity as our family has had in the Messianic movement—and with an acknowledgment of unique circumstances drawing us in, and unique encounters and opportunities keeping us in—there have been challenges, rivalries, demonic attacks, inequity, intolerance, and huge sacrifices made. All of these have personally tested my calling over the years, to truly wonder, “Is it worth it?” There are millions of faithful Christian people we will see in the Kingdom, who kept the moral and ethical teachings of the Law of Moses. Why not just be another one of them?

There are non-Jewish Believers, who when entering into the Messianic movement, cannot make it beyond two or three years, given how their Protestant value system can run into direct conflict, at times, with a still-emerging and maturing Messianic worldview. While a non-Jewish Believer is expected to acknowledge the difficulties and rejection Messianic Jewish Believers have gone through in receiving Yeshua—this is usually not reciprocated with a recognition of the difficulties faced by non-Jewish Believers joining into the Messianic community. For many non-Jewish Believers, *including myself*, being a part of a faith community where one is recognized as an equal, is actually far more important than whether you are doing various outward things of Torah. But for me, at least, the Lord has supernaturally impressed upon me that I have been called into this because of long-term salvation history matters—not short term squabbles and inadequacies.

A great deal, of today’s Messianic Judaism, is still working through the same fears and insecurities, we first saw in 1995. I agree with today’s Messianic Jewish pioneers that Jewish identity is something worth fighting for, and that assimilation must be opposed. If today’s Messianic Jewish movement continues to operate, first and foremost, from the value system of an ethno-religion, though, it will probably not achieve everything it can achieve for the Kingdom of God. It may not be “the end-time move” many of its leaders claim it to be. **The calling upon today’s Jewish people is to serve as the nexus of salvation history on this planet, requiring a worldwide scope.** Formal Messianic Judaism needs to walk into this, and indeed fulfill its vocational calling of heralding the return of Yeshua the Messiah.

All of us, at one point in our lives, have probably had our calling into salvation and sanctification, severely tested. We have wondered if God is truly there, able to answer our prayers and heed our cries. **But have you ever had your calling into the Messianic movement be tested?** It usually comes when something happens which seriously upsets or disappoints you. It also usually comes when the Lord wants to teach us something, and He is trying to refine us for greater and deeper levels of service unto Him. *What does He need to do with us, so that the Messianic calling becomes a greater reality? What unknown adjustments may be in store for us?*

