

Gentiles Within the Messianic Jewish Community

It might help us in dealing with this issue to look back at the call of Israel. Abraham was called to leave everything he had known to follow the God he could not see to a place he had never been, abandoning all security for himself, his servants, and, even more, for Sarah. All this was done for the purpose of his being blessed and being a blessing – or, we might say, be blessed by being a blessing: “through you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Abraham would represent his God, despite being without might or power of his own, yet having the intimate and personal oversight, protection, favor, and provision of the Creator of the Heavens and the earth. He would be the delegate of the Divine One to a broader world that since the Fall in the Garden had not a clue as to what to expect from the Holy God. In God's dealings with Abraham and his fledgling band, He established that He would show Mercy, Faithfulness, Rachamim (Parental Compassion), and Power, among other infinite qualities, to those willing to enter into a covenantal relationship of complete trust. The world, now made up primarily of a people to be known as Gentiles, needed to see the Character of God acted out, demonstrated in real time and real events, and, so it happened. God showed His Power and Might through the events so eloquently portrayed on the pages of the T'nakh – the birth of Isaac, the wisdom given to Joseph, the plagues on Egypt and subsequent Exodus, the supply of manna and water from the rock, the parting of the Jordan, destruction of Jericho followed by the Conquest of the Land, the triumphs of David, et cetera. Even when the people turned away, God's “Soul could bear no longer the misery of Israel” (Judges 10:16). Hence, He raised up deliverers such as Barak, D'vorah, Gideon, Shamgar, et al. And, bearing in mind the stirring promises of passages like the great statements of Deuteronomy 7:6-9, “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God ; the Lord your God has chosen you to be His own treasure out of all peoples that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His Love on you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people – for, you were fewest of all peoples – but, because the Lord loved you, and because the Lord would keep the oath

which He swore unto your fathers, has the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Know, therefore, that the Lord your God, He is God, the Faithful God, that keeps Covenant and Mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations...” It should not surprise us if many who recognize this God as the God of the Jewish people would want to identify as closely as possible with His people. The texture of the world causes many of us to feel small, obscure, unimportant, unnoticed, and powerless. A God like the One just described is so appealing. What would it be like to be one of His very own?

Even the call to humility in passages such as Deuteronomy 8, “Beware lest you forget the Lord your God... lest when you have eaten and are satisfied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage... and you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth.’” But, you shall remember the Lord your God, for, it is He that gives you the power to get wealth, that He may establish His Covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is today.’ (Deuteronomy 8:11-18) could be understood to be telling Israel not to allow pride to obscure the role of the Nature and Character of the God of Israel from the eyes, not only of their own future generations, but, also, of the nations, who need to also trust in Israel's God.

Having said all this, we, as the Messianic Jewish community, must humbly realize that we, as an avant garde of the future believing Remnant of Israel, carry the standard and responsibility of serving as the collective witness of the Faithful rule of the Lord before the greater world. As such, our response to the Gentiles among and around us, must be handled with some sensitivity and dexterity. The Gentile world, born again and not, still has a need to see the Faithfulness of God to His Covenant in action. There is a very real danger that the survival of Israel will be perceived merely as the survival

of culture and philosophy, rather than the rule of God over all. The use of the Pual stem, “yulad”, in Isaiah 9:6, testifies to the demand for God to exert Divine force to carry out His Plans, even in the gifting of Messiah's Birth. The real message of Israel is less cultural and religious tenacity than Divine stamina and resilience. That message still desperately needs to be communicated.

Bearing in mind that the Messianic Jewish community has in the forefront of its collective consciousness the need and focus to reach our own Jewish community for Messiah Yeshua, we need to maintain a genuine Jewish expression of faith in Yeshua. Since the Jewish community is largely suspicious of our congregations as some sort of church-financed, church-directed, and church-controlled front that is not really Jewish at all, but, is merely some sort of sham with Jewish trappings meant to bait an evangelistic mousetrap, there is a genuinely felt need to maintain a viable Jewish face that has an integrity of real Jewish identity. Some feel a need to limit Gentile inclusion to a bare minimum. Some fear the temptation to welcome Gentiles for their financial and administrative support, rather than welcoming them sincerely as partners in ministry.

It is wise to recognize that, while many Gentile Christians might be interested in Messianic ministries of various sorts – because of a desire to reach Jewish friends, relatives, neighbors, business associates, etcetera, for Messiah ; for personal enrichment of their faith through exploration of its Biblical, Jewish roots ; due to a fascination with Jewish heritage, such as feasts and festivals ; and the like – only certain ones would have a desire for long-term residential relationship with such ministries. It is here where we might wish to place our focus - on the issue of personal sense of calling.

First of all, we all recognize that not all of us in Jewish ministry have the same personality, temperament, skills, style, motivations, giftings, et cetera. Some work better with more traditional Jewish people, some with mixed marriages, some with professionals, and so forth. Some of us attract

certain types of people, functioning better in particular types of settings and formats. Some need more of a team approach, at least in certain circumstances. This needs to be recognized as provision, even Fathering, by the sovereign Hand of the Lord. In this light, some of us are going to attract more Gentile teammates than others. Others of us are going to draw out Jewish people who might be frightened, uncomfortable – at least initially – by the presence of Gentiles, fearing this might be indicative of a less than Jewish identity should they decide to commit themselves to Messianic faith. These perspectives seem so natural to those in possession of them that it would almost seem that everyone should operate the same way. But, there is still that element of Divine calling and equipping. All need to be reached, and so, God equips different individuals to reach the different types of Jewish people.

However, God is not so cold and calculating, even manipulative and mercenary, merely exploiting His children/servants in such ways. Psalms 37:4 says, “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and, He shall give you the desires of your heart.” “Desires” here is a rendering of the Hebrew noun “mishalot”, derived from the verb “shaal”, to pray. It refers to cravings sent from God, cravings so intimate and personal that they become part of the relational context between Himself and us that we find them at the core of our lives. It was these that caused Adonai to say to Jeremiah, “I have gifted you as a prophet to the nations,” in spite of all that man's angst and trauma. It was the mishalot in Paul that led him to state, “Woe to me if I preach not the Good News,” not that God would kill him, but, that he could not be himself if he failed to carry out his calling.

As servants of the Lord, we also have a role in helping the people who come to us determine their “mishalot” - including the Gentiles. We need to help discern whether they have a sincere calling – a “mishalah” - to join us as true partners, or not. There are some who, having become disenchanted with their own identity, merely wish to dump it for another. Jewishness may look exotic and alluring, but, if

their involvement is not Holy Spirit-directed, they will be a liability to themselves, as well as to the ministry. Their motivation is personal pain, not Divine direction.

There are, however, Gentiles who genuinely find their sincere calling in involvement and identity within the Messianic Jewish community. Recently, one of our non-Jewish women was asked by an elderly Jewish woman why she, as a Gentile, was involved with a Messianic Jewish congregation. This Jewish woman had been given a very questionable response by another person, and was highly disdainful of us as a result. The non-Jewish woman responded that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is God. The elderly woman was so impressed by the maturity and sincerity of the response that she has become very open to the younger one. This Gentile woman, with one statement, communicated the integrity of message of the Jewish scriptures in a way only a Gentile could.

When all has been said, there are avenues open to Gentiles in relating to the larger Jewish community not available to us who have been born naturally into the Jewish world. Paul had this in mind in his famous Romans 11:11 when he spoke of the ministry to Gentiles being a provocation to Jewish jealousy. While the exact meaning of this concept has been the topic of some debate and discussion, certainly, the love of Gentiles for Israel's people, heritage, and God would certainly expose a deficit of appreciation in the eyes of many Jewish people for their own heritage. That, against the background of so much anti-semitism by Gentiles down through the centuries, Gentiles loving Jewish people, culture, Jewishness itself, stands in stark contrast and can certainly grab attention, at least raising attention as to why and how this came about in this person.

Ezekiel 47:21-23 makes a profound statement about the role of Gentiles in the Kingdom Age “So, you shall divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you and to the strangers that sojourn among you, who shall

beget children among you; and they shall be unto you as the homeborn among the children of Israel ; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord God.” Here, Gentiles have obviously chosen to live among Israel, to the point of establishing their homes and rearing children. They submit themselves to the culture, economy, education – the very life of Israel. This could not be speaking of any or all Gentiles, but, those with a particular motivation to select such a life and home, to the point that God's statements here go so far as to protect their interests and rights. From a Biblical perspective, I believe we must refer to this motivation as a sense of Divine calling.

In summation, I believe that, we should recognize that not every Gentile is called to live among us, identifying with us and our lives and communities, and, that many who claim to wish to do this may well be desirous of an unhealthy escape from their own identity. Also, we should acknowledge that the Messianic community is not desirous of denigrating other cultures and ethnicities, instead recognizing that those other identities are just as gifted from Adonai as ours. Further, we also need to recognize that there are also people who have a genuine call, a “mishalah”, if I may borrow the term from Psalm 37:4, to be among us as more than occasional visitors. If we were to deny them, we would, from a pastoral perspective, being doing them, as well as our ministries, even our communities, a great disservice.

We seek constantly to develop a viable strategy to carry out the tasks presented us by the Lord. The danger, as the previously cited passages from Deuteronomy 7 and 8 warn, is in not giving priority to the supreme role of the Lord Himself over our own perspectives. If the Divine Composer has written parts for the instrumental gifts of Gentiles, not including them in the orchestra of the Messianic community would, if not causing the sounding of some sour notes, would at least deprive the world, and Avinu, Malkeynu, of some of the sweetest notes of His symphony.

-- Jeffrey A. Adler