



A Reflection of Messianic Jewish Life

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I often find myself in tension. A recent experience brought this tension again to mind. Going Passover shopping at "the Kosher Jewel," grabbing expensive Seder matzah, a few boxes of kosher for Passover treats, and then practicing for a youth-led worship night that is sponsored by the local high school's Christian club the following evening.

This is the practical reality of a Messianic Jew living in a community with a large Jewish and predominantly religious presence. This tension is not for the faint of heart. Think about what Yeshua warned us about.

"Just as the world hated me, they will hate you." (John 15:18) Yeshua even says to his disciples that they will be thrown out of the synagogues. (John 16:2)



My love and desire for a deeper connection with the wider Jewish world is in direct conflict with my open belief in Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel. My belief in Yeshua is a major stumbling block. It is seen as a betrayal of the people of Israel.

For Jewish believers outside of religious Jewish communities, the tension is there but expressed in different ways. It shows up at tense family Seders. It is felt by the side comments from extended family or the off-handed remark at a Jewish event. However, the tension and heartbreak are magnified to an even greater extent when we live amongst our own people and bump into each other in the kosher grocery aisles.

This anguish is not novel. Paul writes about it too.

"I am speaking the truth in [Messiah] —I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from [Messiah] for the sake of my brothers,[a] my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the [Messiah] , who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." (Rom 9:1-5 ESV)



This is not a woe is me topic. It is just a fact and reminder that living out our calling amongst our own people as Messianic Jews is a profound challenge, as well as a high and honorable calling. Being upfront and honest about your belief while appreciating and respecting the religious life and dimensions of the Jewish people is a path few take. It is often not taken because it is hard.

There is another option, however. It is much easier. Slowly assimilate into the wider church culture. Maybe light a Menorah or enjoy bagels. This is an easier and more frequent path. Maybe it is even rejecting your connection to the Jewish people and hiding it because of societal pressures. This is part and parcel of my own family's history during the 1930s and 40s. A connection masked by outward Christian identity and hidden Jewish sentimentality at home.

Yeshua was clear and direct when it came to criticizing the religious leaders of His time. The Pharisees were leading the people astray. Religious hypocrisy was called out in harsh terms. There was a clear conflict. He also wept over Jerusalem as His people rejected Him. Yet, he did not break from being enmeshed with the people of Israel.

Yeshua was faithful to the Torah and the customs of His people. Consider how He blesses the bread in His meal with the disciples in Luke 24. Although common for us, blessing food before eating is distinctly a rabbinic custom, developed near the time of Yeshua.

The Torah only requires a blessing after the meal. This shows the depth of Yeshua's identification with His people. If Yeshua Himself engaged with Jewish custom post-resurrection, are we not to reconsider our own faithfulness to Jewish identity?

Paul echoes Yeshua in his tension with his own people as well. Paul is ridiculed and thrown out of the Synagogues where he preaches Yeshua. He realizes that they are enemies of the Gospel, yet still deeply beloved by God. Their calling is still valid.

As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. (Rom 11:28-32 ESV)

The plight of Messianic Jews living amongst the wider Jewish community will not be solved by simply giving up, severing all ties, and retreating into the Church. It is solved and supported by pressing into the community with Messiah's love. It is supported by being a vocal supporter of the Jewish people, volunteering at Jewish events, and making inroads and real relationships with Jewish people.



Our call is strengthened by finding ways to participate in the community in thoughtful ways while being upfront with our faith in a respectful, non-aggressive manner. It is sharpened by respecting Jewish practice, even if we theologically disagree. These actions will lead to an openness from others that few imagine is possible. Our call is refined when the body of Messiah embraces the identities God has created us in.

It is hard. And costly. And it might even cost us our lives. As I write this, I think of Sarah Milgrim and Yaron Lischinsky of blessed memory. Yaron was an active member within the Messianic community, and Sarah came from a strong Jewish background. Both were killed in an act of antisemitic violence outside the Jewish Museum in our nation's capital. The attacker didn't know or care about their faith or non-faith in Yeshua. They were killed for being Jewish. Their outward identification and presence at a Jewish event were the cause of their targeting.

May their lives, courage, and conviction to shine in their community convict us as well.





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