



The Smiling Maven

Grace for Grace (John 1:16)

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Walking on the Razor's Edge - Questions

Is a Jewish believer in Jesus still Jewish? Is a Jewish person that believes in Jesus a Christian and therefore no longer Jewish? Are believing Gentiles Jewish? Does the church replace Israel? Is God finished dealing with Israel as a nation, as a people, or as a land? Do Jewish believers have a special place with God? Are they doubly blessed? That is an interesting slew of questions. No, this article will not fully answer all of them, but it will touch on a core issue. What about physical/natural Israel: the people, the nation, the land?

On occasion I find myself in a conversation with someone who seems to take all biblical references to Israel (approximately 2609 references to Israel and the Jewish people in the bible) and apply them to the church and to all believers in Jesus. They seem to state that all believers are Israel, all believers are Jewish. Somehow everyone who believes in Jesus is Israel; they are all Jewish. I find some of these conversations a bit challenging and a bit unnerving. They seem to rob a part of my identity. I actually feel a bit persecuted.

When I was in elementary school I remember a teacher bringing up the subject of U.S. immigration and that all Americans

(except American Indians) were immigrants. We were told to go home and ask our parents about our national backgrounds. I remember the gist of a conversation with my mother regarding the subject. I had relatives that had emigrated from Poland, Latvia, Austria, and Russia, but I also remember my mother explaining that we were not really Polish, Latvian, Austrian, or Russian. We were Jewish. We had lived in those countries, yet our culture was really Jewish. The Jewish people had been without a homeland since 70 A.D. and had wandered through many countries, but our national identity always remained Jewish. That conversation about my ancestors was focusing on national and cultural identity, not religious belief.

Let me share a non-Jewish example. My mother-in-law, who is of German descent, was born in Poland, West Prussia, prior to WWII. Though this was technically Poland, the Germans that lived there maintained their German culture, spoke German, and identified with Germany more than with Poland. National identity can be a deeply implanted sense regardless of other factors. For many cultures, there may be a religious connection along with national identity. Many Germans are Lutheran. Many people from India are

Hindu. Many people from England are Anglican. However, there are Germans that are not Lutheran, Indians that are not Hindu, etc. In some cases it is easier to separate national culture from religious influence than in others. For the Jewish person, attempting to completely separate the religious or spiritual connection from national identity becomes a bit harder; those 2609 references also mix the religious, cultural and national identity along with a physical land.

When I was in elementary school, following in the religious traditions of my parents and of the rabbis, my cultural identity was Jewish. I was not really Polish. I was not really Latvian, etc. I was Jewish. In college, while I was spiritually searching, my national identity was Jewish. As a believer in Jesus, guess what my national identity is – yes, I am a Jewish man. Someone who is not Jewish does not have this national or cultural identity. This does not abrogate the New Testament passages that explain that believers in Messiah Jesus have become part of the commonwealth of Israel or children of Abraham by faith. One could say that they are spiritually Jewish, and this could be technically correct though their faith has not changed their national nor cultural identity.

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Why Do I Write? Why Do I Speak?

I believe the gospel. I believe in Jesus. I believe He is the Messiah of Israel. I believe that in Him is the fullness of grace. He is full of grace and truth. I believe that one of the last and one of the nastiest spirits to come down in the last days is one that stands opposed to God's grace. It is the religious spirit. I believe that the influence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil continues to affect the human race, even within the community of faith. The knowledge of good and evil regarding religious and spiritual things can entwine itself within the emphasis that man imposes upon himself. I say that it is nasty because it is not something that the "down and out" sinner normally struggles with; it is something that the believer and community of faith struggle with. The religious spirit is nasty because it mixes with genuine spiritual teachings, with genuinely positive and truly biblical concepts. Only

the razor-sharp righteous judgment of God can correctly divide the religious spirit from the genuine image of Messiah that is in the believer by grace.

Y'shua was the most free, unstrained, human being that has ever walked this planet. It is doubtful that anyone would have accused him of being "religious," a Bible-thumper, or overly spiritual in any way. He was not the master of some great height of religious or spiritual achievement. He was the lowly Lamb of God sent to save those who would receive him. He was life itself. He was joy itself. He was the fullness of life walking in human flesh.

I grew up with some religious zeal. I was religiously zealous around the time of my Bar Mitzvah. After becoming a believer in Y'shua in 1984, that religious zeal may not have shown up immediately, but it did eventually show its face. The problem with

our religious zeal is that it is *our* religious zeal; it is rarely, if ever, *His* religious zeal (the passion He had to give Himself freely for us). His love, His manner of life was completely natural. There was no reason to put on, to make believe, or try. He was who He was. That image is what He is restoring in His people, not our zeal, but Messiah in us – the hope of glory. What He is in us *is* what He is, not something we ever need to work up.

There has been a slow discovery of these things in my life. It has been slow for a number of reasons. I am a stubborn stiff-necked descendent of Jacob. There is a line of religious zeal in my family – a line that could go back to some of the individuals who were involved in the very trial and condemning of the lowly Lamb of God. In that sense, the discovery has been slow because of what I am naturally without Jesus. That is quite

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Therefore using the term "spiritually Jewish" is confusing because the term Jewish has cultural and national implications.

One of the many exciting factors about faith in Messiah is the reality that the gospel goes to all nations. My in-laws who are German in national/cultural identity believe in Jesus. Their national/cultural background does not improve or weaken their spiritual standing with God. It is all based on Y'shua's atonement. My friend Amit is from India. His Indian culture does not improve or weaken his spiritual standing with God. My friend Stanley has a Chinese wife (Enya) who is a Christian. Enya's national/cultural background does not improve or weaken her spiritual standing with God. It is all based on Y'shua's atonement. Yet, coming from these unique cultures, all of them have a unique perspective and a testimony of faith based on their own unique lives - which includes their national and cultural identity. This shows both God's diversity among the cultures and his grace to all these people groups. It is a fulfillment of the great commission: disciples of all na-

Why Do I Write? (continued from page 1)

simple. Another reason it has been slow is because the body of Messiah, the church, can easily place a burden of religious self-attainment on believers' lives. This is not something reserved for those outside of the Evangelical community. It is not something reserved for those that are not Pentecostal. It is something that can affect a vast majority of teachings. We can take a positive biblical and godly concept and make it into a religious rule that we determine to follow zealously. The Gospel is about Grace - God's grace - our receiving of it and our living in it. Simple. Yet man will always complicate it.

Part of my journey has been within this nasty battleground. It has been between Messiah and the self-induced religious/spiritual burdens in my life. Many of them might have looked biblical and godly from the outside, but the Holy Spirit deals with the heart. Sometimes the atmosphere of certain teachings, attitudes of other believers, and my own human desire to appear spiritually and religiously correct has made the break from my own religious zeal difficult rather than simple. There is something very strong in us that can be afraid to break from our own religious zeal. Maybe it is a fear that God is not that good, that merciful, and that we are not really transformed by His grace but by our own efforts. That fear is contrary to true faith. So our religious zeal, however it may manifest itself, is actually a

tions. There is something beautiful about the witness of Messiah Y'shua among the nations. I am glad that none of these individuals walk around saying, "Oh, I am no longer German, Indian or Chinese; I am just a Christian." It is special that there are German Christians, Indian Christians, Chinese Christians etc. It is part of the wonder and beauty of the gospel.

This is what I feel is being pulled away from me when someone says that all believers are Jewish. That emphasis weakens the uniqueness of my being a Jewish believer. No, my being Jewish does not improve or weaken my spiritual standing with God. It is all based on Y'shua's atonement. Yet there is something very special and unique about Y'shua saving Jewish people - at least similar to God saving German people, Indian people, Chinese people etc. Some of those 2609 references tell us that we are a stubborn and stiff-necked people and that we have often had spiritually blind eyes and hearts. Considering all of this, it is a wonder and a beauty that God in His mercy is bringing Jewish people to faith in Y'shua. Calling all believers Jewish weakens the wonder of the

human insurance policy just in case Grace is not Grace.

But you know what? I happen to believe in God's grace - more now than ever before. My testimony, my writings, my speaking are all an expression of these things. Yet, at times, I am going to step on toes - not on purpose but simply because my testimony will not set well with the human/spiritual zeal someone may be clinging to. This might be true for an individual as well as for a group of individuals. There seems to be a tendency to believe that our own Bible believing, Evangelical/Pentecostal (_____, fill in the blank) fellowship, and our own spiritual practice is somewhat exempt. I do not believe that. I have been slowly realizing that I can obtain or self-create my own religious or spiritual induced burdens from even the best of teachings. That realization has been a major part of my continued discovery of the greatness and awesome wonder of God's grace. That is my testimony! As my own religious zeal continues to be broken, I have become more enthusiastic about the incredible goodness of His Grace concerning the human race. As I let go of the human insurance policy of my own religious zeal I discover more and more of His grace every day. Hallelujah!!



mercy God is doing concerning those that are nationally and culturally Jewish.

This is a sharp two-edged sword. There is potential for the non-Jewish person to be jealous of Israel's long-standing history with God. That could be a factor in some persecution. The Jewish person could be proud because of this history. On the other hand, what does the Jewish person have to be proud of? What does the non-Jewish person have to be jealous of - a stubborn stiff-necked people, who had trouble with Moses' leadership, who were not always receptive to the prophets, and whose leaders did not warmly welcome Messiah two thousand years ago? That is not something to be proud of or to envy. The mercy that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continues and will continue to do for Israel is not because the Jewish people are better or more faithful in some way. God continues and will continue to do His incredible kindness to Israel because God is good and His mercy is forever. It is the same goodness and mercy that any believer finds at the cross of Y'shua. Glory to God in the Highest and on earth, peace, good will to men!

The Smiling Maven is a bi-monthly Jewish - flavored newsletter sharing God's incredible grace. There is coming a spiritual atomic bomb of that incredible grace. It is an imminent spiritual explosion soon to happen in Israel that will have an awesome effect in Israel and all the world.

Life is often hard. Suffering is a real part of life. Sometimes suffering enables us to see more clearly the reality that God loves us. He loves us unconditionally; it is not based on how we are doing. We may begin to understand the wonder of God's salvation through Messiah Y'shua. Grace might actually be breaking through into our lives. It is the experience of grace that can generate the most genuine smiles. "Maven" is a Yiddish word that means "a person with special knowledge or experience." Evidence of God's grace should be characterized by an ability to smile. *The Smiling Maven* newsletter is an encouragement for all of us to be smiling mavens, smiling people with special knowledge of God's amazing grace.

EditorArthur Weiner
Someone needing to Smile More

Copy Editor.....Peter Toeg
Making sure that our articles can produce smiles.

Text Editor.....Valarie Dillenbeck
No frowns because of grammar or punctuation

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