

Is the Traditional Understanding of Pentecost in Acts 2 Totally Wrong?

Over the years that I have been a Messianic rabbi, I have been invited to share in hundreds of churches. Whenever possible, I try to set up a time for questions and answers from the congregants. I know that there are many people who do not fully understand what a Messianic Jew is, so this gives me an opportunity to share who we are and what we believe.

During these question and answer sessions, one of the first questions asked of me is “Why don’t Jews believe in Yeshua (Jesus)?” I usually respond by saying “I do.” This allows for a slight change of mindset for the group as many, even when speaking to a Jewish believer in Yeshua, don’t realize that there are more than a million Jewish believers in Yeshua today. The person will invariably ask a follow-up question. “Why don’t more believe?” They often will follow that with a few verses like Isaiah 53 or Isaiah 9 and continue by saying, “How can they read these verses and not see Yeshua?” “How can they be that spiritually blinded?”

For years I responded by saying something like, “Jews believe what they are taught by the leaders, just as Christians do.” In other words, no matter our faith background, we tend to believe that our rabbis, pastors and priests know what they are talking about. After all, they went to Bible college or seminary to learn so they could teach us.

But more recently, I start, not by showing how Jewish people have been blinded to Yeshua for thousands of years but by sharing just how blinded many Christians have been for thousands of years. For context, I use Acts 2 and the Pentecost narrative. When asked what happened on Pentecost,

the usual answer is "The birth of the church." I follow up by asking "from a plain reading of the text of Act 2, why do you believe the church was birthed or born?" This question usually is followed by a spirited conversation.

The truth is that nothing in the actual text says anything about the birth of the church. Now before you start getting mad at me, please read on. Acts 2 begins with: