

The Church And Israel Share a Destiny

Note: *I was with my Messianic Apostle Dan Juster recently at our annual Tikkun leaders conference in Maryland. In my opinion, he is the most notable Messianic theologian alive today, and has written some wonderful books on both Messianic Judaism and Israel and the church. Dan also has a great love for the church.*

There we entered into an interesting discussion about the reconnection in God's family between Jew and Gentile and Israel and the church. This is what came out of the conversation and I was so touched by Dan's wisdom in this area, that I asked him if he would write an article for Reconnecting Ministries on this subject.

I think this message lays an excellent foundation and kick off to my new focus. To bring this reconnecting issue in God's family to the forefront of the church by interviewing many of its leaders, both from Jewish and Gentile perspectives; where they will be free to express their views and beliefs. For what will this spiritual reconnection between Jew and Gentile actually look like in the church as it begins to take hold and develop amongst us.

I truly believe here, that the full revelation of this new unity in the family of God will only develop as more of His love and forgiveness flows between both groups. In my mind, this will naturally broaden our tolerances of how each of us practice our faith in Yeshua, with some overlaps I might add that will become wonderfully enriching to us all. So here's what Dan had to say (Grant Berry, Reconnecting Ministries).

The Identity of the Church

A contingency of Messianic Jews presented their position to a group of highly regarded Roman Catholic theologians, in some cases connected to the highest levels of leadership in that church body. We were responding to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the church. After our presentation, there was stunned silence. Revelation had broken through. Cardinal Christoph Schonborn of Vienna spoke up and embraced the Messianic Jewish position. He later opened the door for the presentation to be presented in article form in the prestigious journal *First Things!* (See Mark Kinser, *Messianic Jews and Gentiles*, Jan. 1, 2009).

What was so amazing to the gathered thinkers? In our presentation, we noted with gratitude that the Catholic Church had officially repudiated replacement theology or supersessionism, the view that the church had replaced ethnic Israel as God's elect people and the instrument of the salvation of the nations. The church, not ethnic Israel, in this view was the recipient of God's promises, and Israel was now to be considered merely as other nations. We are indeed thankful that this view has been rejected.

However, the description of the church was deficient. The Catholic statements acknowledged that the church was born out of Israel, but subsequent to its birth, it is described as a reality of its own, disconnected from corporate ethnic Israel. However, a fair reading of the New Covenant Scriptures shows that the identity of the church is not just a corporate Body birthed from Israel, but a corporate Body in inseparable union with corporate ethnic Israel.

This becomes quite clear from reading Romans 11 when read with the idea of the identity of the church in mind. The church is that body of people composed of people from all nations that are made one with the saved remnant of Israel (Paul's designation of Jewish disciples of Yeshua in Romans 11:5). The Jewish Yeshua/believers are the first fruits (Romans 11:16) that show that the whole lump of dough (ethnic Israel) is

still holy. The biblical analogy for the people of God is the Olive Tree. The Yeshua/believers from the nations are grafted into this Olive Tree. But what is the Olive Tree? It is called the cultivated Olive Tree and represents the people of God that existed before the coming of Yeshua.



That Olive Tree, before the day of Pentecost, was the people of God from Abraham, and was primarily ethnic Israel. Even the branches that are described as broken, are still the branches of that tree and are preserved to be grafted back, and thus all ethnic Israel will be saved (Romans 11:23-26). Yeshua is the King of Israel. The Messianic Jews are the saved remnant of Israel, the first fruits, that sanctifies the whole (11:16).

So when Yeshua/believers from the nations, from wild olive trees, are grafted into the cultivated Olive Tree, they are corporately connected to branches remain in their ethnic identity when they are called (I Cor. 7:17) which fits agricultural grafting, but they are part with ethnic Israel through their union with Yeshua and the Messianic Jews, now known as the church. Hence Ephesians 2:19 can call the church the commonwealth (of Israel) in the RSV translation. The church is as to its identity, the commonwealth of Israel without replacing Israel analogously to the commonwealth of the United Kingdom, all under the King of England without replacing England, but tied to England through their King. In other words, the meaning of the commonwealth is an expansion of the People of God beyond ethnic Israel.

The identity of the church is in its essence a Jewish connected reality and a tied to Jewish destiny reality. This was the understanding that brought stunned amazement. The Messianic Jews are the Jewish component of the church and the saved remnant of Israel. They are part of both and the bridge between or over lap between Israel and the church. They with

the Gentile Yeshua/believers constitute the "One New Man" without dissolving the Jewish identity of Jewish members or the ethnic identities of the Gentiles. I should note that the church, as the child of the Jewish people, is also part of the future identity of Israel (as a parent finds their identity in their children)!

A Shared Mission Destiny

The church shares the mission of Israel to be a light to the nations under the leadership of Yeshua who is the light of the nations. By preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, the church moves history to a point that is called the "fullness of the Gentiles." I understand this to be a sufficient saved remnant from every nation that can call upon Yeshua to return and to rule the nations. However, God's witness to the nations is also through Israel. Her preservation and return to her ancient Land is a sign to the nations. Nothing comparable to this has ever happened before. It is a fulfillment of Scripture and prepares the way for Israel to be transformed, we believe through Yeshua (Ezekiel 36:24ff.). Those things that will occur in Israel, on the world stage, will be part of the complex of last days events, that with the witness of the church, will effect the salvation of the nations, which salvation is the other side of the last days judgments.

However, the church, both Jew and Gentile, is given the very special role of making Israel jealous, that is desirous of entering into the reality of the life they see in those Gentiles who love them and show them mercy. Grant Berry always emphasizes in his articles on the reconnection how significant it is for us in the church to present the gospel back to our Jewish brothers from a reconnected perspective to our Jewish roots. That they may understand we are operating out of the covenant that was given to them through Yeshua, which is the gospel (Jer. 31:31-34); to show gratitude for it, which helps immensely for them to make the connection and to see that

Christianity is Jewish.

Paul magnifies his ministry—that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit—to provoke them to jealousy and to save some. This is his example to be followed by the Gentile Yeshua/believers. Why? Because the full acceptance of the Jewish people will lead to life from the dead (Rom. 11:15), which is variously interpreted as world revival and/or the second coming of Yeshua. Thus we see that the destiny of the church is tied to Israel. It is coming into the full reward of the Age to Come is contingent on fulfilling its role with Israel and fostering the fulfillment of Israel's calling and destiny. They have a shared destiny, which is why it is so important for us in the church to grasp this mystery at this time.

A Destiny of Mutual Blessing and Appreciation

When I speak about a heritage being biblical I am asserting that understandings and traditions are coherent with the biblical revelation. This of course, includes more than practicing what the Bible teaches us to do, which is essential.

With regard to the streams of the church, there is much enriching content that truly coheres with the biblical revelation. There are different enriching traditions that enhance life in wonderful ways. There is also the heritage of poetry, hymns, weddings, holidays, stories of saints and theological and ethical writings. There is much variety in different streams. Not all is coherent with the Biblical revelation.

In regard to the Jewish people there is so very much enriching content that coheres with biblical truth. We find this in the traditions of Jewish prayer, circumcision for Israel, Holy Day observances, weddings, poetry, ritual traditions, theological and ethical writings, good applications of Scripture, stories of holy men and women and so much more. Describing some of the

best features of both the Synagogue and the Church with some adequacy would take a large book. However, it is important to make sure that what is affirmed is really in accord with the Scriptures, which is also practiced on the Messianic side of the Church in different measures. In addition, due to common origins there is an overlap of tradition that is often not perceived.

There is an overlap of church and Jewish tradition that is quite important. This was pointed out sometime ago in *The Sacred Bridge* by Eric Warner. The synagogue was the predecessor of the gatherings of the church. The readings of the Psalms, the Hebrew Bible and some of the liturgy was taken from the Synagogue. In addition, Lous Bouyer in his classic book *Eucharist*, shows how the most ancient liturgy for celebrating the Lord's Supper (he believes from the Apostles) was derived from interweaving the texts of the ancient faith confession of Judaism, the *Amidah* (a great confession of faith/prayer from the first century in the form of 18 blessings), the Grace After Meals, and parts of the Passover Seder Liturgy. I can testify that the tradition of renewal through the Messiah's Supper is full of power and meaning. Of course, this is part of Messianic Jewish celebration.

If we would learn to study and really appreciate the heritages of Judaism and Christianity where they are biblically coherent, we would find wonderful mutual enrichment and a deeper knowledge of one another.

In summary, the church and Israel are part of one another's identity. Israel is the nation that has given birth to the church and will forever be connected to it. The church was born from Israel and is tied to Israel through Yeshua and the Messianic remnant and will forever have its identity in that connection.

The church and Israel have a shared mission to the nations while the Church has a special mission to Israel. Israel's

mission to the church is to call the church to a more accurate self-understanding through a contextual understanding of the Bible. Finally, the church and Israel are meant to understand their biblically coherent traditions so that they will be mutually enriched by the understanding of one another's heritages.

Dr. Daniel Juster is the Director of Tikkun International, a network of congregations and ministries in Israel, the United States and internationally. He was a honors graduate from Wheaton College and received an M. Div. from McCormick Theological Seminary. Dr. Juster was the founding President of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations. He pastured two Messianic Congregations in the US from 1978-2000. In recent years, he and his wife Patty have resided near Jerusalem. Dr. Juster is an author of several books on Messianic Jewish theology, and apologetics and serves on numerous boards furthering the Messianic Jewish Movement with the church. For more information, visit .