

Why Messianic Jews Have Second-Class Citizenship in Israel

What is the place of Messianic Jews in Israeli society? When a Jewish believer in Yeshua applies to become an Israel citizen under the “law of return,” is he or she received as any other Jewish person returning to our biblical homeland? When seeking to buy or rent property as a Messianic ministry, is there discrimination? When a modern-day Israeli disciple of Messiah applies for employment, will that believer have equal opportunity to be hired?

While the answers to these questions can be nuanced and varied depending on the situation, the bottom line is that we do not enjoy equal rights with other Jewish returnees to the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

- **Citizenship?** Currently, the Department of the Interior will not even grant citizenship to an applicant who is known to be a Messianic Jew.
- **Property rights?** We have been turned down on several occasions when attempting to rent property for our congregational meetings.
- **Employment?** Employers, particularly those whose business depends on Orthodox customers, may reject an employment application for the reason of faith in Yeshua alone.

Disrupting the Status Quo

To know why these conditions of intolerance exist—especially ironic in a nation whose history is filled with vicious victimization—requires only a basic knowledge of Jewish history for the last 2,000 years. Justifiably, most Jewish associations with Jesus and Christianity are anything but positive—excruciating would be more like it. We can protest

that “Jesus is Jewish. The New Covenant is based on the Hebrew Scriptures and its context is first century Israel.” But those facts are yet largely unknown. Change, however is beginning to happen. And accelerating that change is the goal of this article.

This situation presents us, as Messianic Jews, along with all of our friends throughout the world, with a profound responsibility. With no exaggeration, we have been handed an opportunity to stand against this colossal misjudgment—that (a) One cannot believe in Jesus and remain a faithful Jew, and (b) Israeli society has no “place at the table” for its Messianic Jews.

Historic Examples of Success

Two examples from other ethnic groups encountering societal prejudice inspire me. If other people groups have overcome bigotry, especially through the courageous acts of highly motivated leaders, can we follow a similar path?

In his book, *Profiles in Audacity*, Alan Axelrod chronicles the history-changing initiatives of . DuBois and Mahandas Gandhi. DuBois refused to accept a second-class status for African-Americans. Gandhi stood against the demeaning colonial rule of the Indian people by the British Empire. Both men dedicated long decades of their lives to rallying the hearts of their respective peoples. At the same time, they used every available means (short of violent revolution) to address the injustices suffered at the hands of the dominant race. Gandhi’s bold, non-violent opposition to British oppression ultimately gained independence for India. DuBois, the first African-American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University (in 1895), wrote and spoke tirelessly on behalf of full rights for all African Americans. We are witnesses that his efforts changed history.

Time for Action

Why do I believe that now is the time to challenge the second-class status of Yeshua's Israeli followers?

1. Many Israelis are tired of our society's values and agenda being set by the ultra-religious.
2. The faithful service of several thousand young Messianic Jews, serving in the Israeli Defense Force, has created an excellent reputation for our nation-wide movement.
3. Our devoted friends in the nations are steadily gaining more influence in Israel. Our government is listening to the input of the evangelical church, acknowledging a dramatic reversal. Instead of anti-Semitism. These Christians are now standing resolutely with Israel. If the issue of full rights for Israeli Messianic Jews is addressed by Christian leaders, the government of Israel will hear it.

Let's take inspiration and courage from past leaders like Gandhi and DuBois. The status of Messianic Jews in Israel can be changed. It must change. It's up to us. {eoa}

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