

Why We Shouldn't Try to 'Convert' Jews to Christianity

I was born Jewish and when I was 18, I confessed faith in Yeshua, Jesus, as the Messiah—but I never *converted*. Let me explain.

The word 'convert' for a Jewish person means that you have left Judaism for another religion, as in *he converted from Judaism to Buddhism or Hinduism*. However one thing we don't see in the New Covenant is anyone—and I mean anyone—converting from Judaism to another religion.

To understand what I am saying, you need to read the New Covenant, divorcing yourself from what you have been taught. Just read it as if you have never read it before. It is a story first and foremost about a man, a Jewish man, who came from heaven and lived amongst his people until he died for them—and the world—as an offering for sin.

His story was foretold by the ancient Hebrew prophets. They told us where He would be born, that He would be of the line of David, how He would die, that He would rise from the dead, and that His own people would reject Him. Of course, they did not all reject Him. In fact, just in Jerusalem alone there were tens of thousands of Jewish people who believed in Him, and none of them converted to a new religion in order to believe in their Messiah.

We only find the word convert used in the New Covenant a few times depending on which version you read. And it exclusively refers to Gentiles who converted from paganism to Judaism. The Greek word is the same word from which we get the English *proselyte*.

In a few cases many, such as 1 Cor. 16:15, English translations speak of Gentiles becoming converts to New Testament faith. However the Greek word there, *aparche*, is not even close to the word convert, but actually means firstfruits of the harvest.

The King James uses the word convert liberally, yet never as a noun like proselyte or firstfruit; always as a verb. The Greek word is *epistrepho*. *Epistrepho* is translated properly in most modern other translations. It doesn't mean convert as we understand it, but it literally means to turn, as in turning to the Lord. One of the oldest manuscripts, John Wycliffe's translated Acts 9:35, where it speaks of a revival amongst Jews in what is now the greater Tel Aviv area, like this:

"And all men that dwelt at Lydda, and at Sharon, saw him, which were *converted* to the Lord."

Every other translation that I checked, including the Modern English Version, uses the phrase *turned to the Lord*, not converted. What does that tell us? That probably once upon a time, back in the days of Wycliffe over 600 years ago, the word convert was synonymous with repent or turning to the Lord. However, today it means switching religions.

And each time that the KJV uses the word convert to refer to people coming faith, it is always the Greek word *epistrepho* or a derivative of it, meaning to turn, and not *proseluton*, which means proselyte.

Okay, enough with the three dollars words—there is an important point. You see my passion is to see the message of Yeshua presented to Jewish people the same way it was presented in the New Testament. Not as a new, or even worse, *foreign* religion, but as the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. The word convert today communicates to Jewish people a lie—that they must convert *from* Judaism to Christianity to receive salvation.

The first Jewish believers in the Book of Acts did not convert or leave their Jewish heritage to embrace salvation through Yeshua, but simply put their faith in the Messiah. That is why this seemingly meaningless teaching about this word 'convert' is actually important.

God has called the nations to provoke Israel to jealousy—to draw Jewish people to the Messiah through your acts of love and kindness, through standing with Israel and speaking out against anti-Semitism. In doing so, it is important that you not seek to make Jewish converts, but introduce Jewish people to their Messiah.

Ron Cantor is the director of Messiah's Mandate International in Israel, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of Tiferet Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book is *Identity Theft*. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.