

The Hebrew Roots Movement: What Went Wrong?

BLOGCAST

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Why does the Hebrew Roots movement have such a negative reputation in the Messianic Jewish movement? Why is it looked at as a spiritual plague?

The development of today's modern Messianic Jewish movement goes back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, as Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah established congregations, synagogues, and assemblies with the mission of facilitating **Jewish outreach, Jewish evangelism, and solidarity with the State of Israel**. This is a mission which continues to our present day, and should ever be on the hearts and minds of those involved with today's Messianic congregations. A major reason, for the establishment of Messianic Jewish congregations, was to combat the errant idea that Jewish people, who come to faith in Israel's Messiah, stop being Jewish, start being "Christian," and should readily assimilate into a non-Jewish Christian Church system and culture. In stark contrast to this, Jewish people coming to faith in Israel's Messiah, hardly stop being Jewish; some would say that being a Believer in Israel's Messiah is one of the most Jewish things that one can do. The Messianic Jewish movement is present, to particularly communicate to the wider non-believing Jewish community, that expressing faith in Yeshua of Nazareth does not mean an abandonment of one's Jewish heritage and traditions. For much of Messianic Judaism's modern history, these convictions have put it at odds with a great deal of traditional Christianity.

Throughout much of the 1980s and into the 1990s, Messianic Judaism grew, primarily in North America, with the establishment of congregations to reach out to the local Jewish community in their immediate vicinity. This mission continues to our present day. However, while the original vision and purpose of the Messianic Jewish movement innately involved Jewish outreach, evangelism, and Israel solidarity—Messianic Jewish rabbis and congregational leaders frequently do get invited to speak at evangelical churches, and in particular speak not only on the Messiah in the Biblical festivals, but frequently host Passover *seder* presentations. The late 1990s saw a wide number of non-Jewish Believers being called into the Messianic community, for a variety of reasons. Many of these reasons involved evangelical Believers wanting to partake of their Jewish Roots in tangible ways, learning about the Tanach or Old Testament on a more regular basis, and participating in things that Yeshua and His first followers did. Some Messianic Jewish congregations were very welcoming of such non-Jewish Believers as their fellow brothers and sisters, actually concluding that as the Messiah's return was steadily approaching, that the Messianic movement would probably start looking more and more like the First Century *ekklēsia*. Others, however, did not act so positively toward the large numbers of non-Jewish Believers coming into their ranks. Were these people going to help aid Jewish outreach and evangelism, or bring an all new series of issues (and problems) into the assembly?

Following the turn of the Millennium in the early 2000s, there were varied Messianic Jewish reactions to the many non-Jewish Believers coming into the Messianic movement. Some of these reactions were positive, and others were negative. Messianic Jewish leaders have properly emphasized that non-Jewish Believers need to be supernaturally called into the Messianic movement (certainly at this phase of its development), and committed to Jewish ministry, even though it will obviously involve some significant investigation and study of their own faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures. *This would also necessarily include being sensitive to Jewish concerns and historical resistance to Yeshua the Messiah*. Many Messianic Jewish leaders have eagerly embraced non-Jewish participation in the Messianic Jewish movement, with an emphasis on congregations representing the "one new man" or "one new humanity" of Ephesians 2:15, where all can confess sins of prejudice and misunderstanding to each other, and we can pool our talents and resources for the salvation and restoration of Israel (cf. Romans 11:26). Other sectors of the Messianic Jewish movement have not been so welcoming of non-Jewish Believers in its ranks. And, because of this, a number of movements or sub-movements spun off of the Messianic Jewish movement, from the 1980s to the 2000s.

It is safe to say, that just as many of the First Century Jewish Believers did not anticipate many Greeks and Romans embracing faith in Israel's Messiah—so did a number of Messianic Judaism's early pioneers not prepare themselves sufficiently for non-Jewish Believers coming into the Messianic movement. The salvation of the nations at large was anticipated in the Tanach, and in the case of non-Jewish Believers being drawn into the Messianic movement in significant numbers, in modern times, it is also prophesied that the nations will stream to Zion to be taught God's Instruction, resulting in worldwide peace (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3). These prophecies are taking place in our day, just as in our day more Jewish

people have come to Messiah faith than since the times of the Messiah. Yet, a holy message of seeing all of God's people with a faith grounded in all of God's Word, has been frequently used in an inappropriate manner to promote division, rather than to better understand the ways of God, so that we can better and more genuinely understand the two critical commands of loving Him and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

In the 1990s, when one encountered the term "Hebrew Roots" being used, it was most probably employed by various evangelical Christian teachers trying to stress how Christian people have a faith heritage in the Old Testament, the Bible of Jesus, and that it is important for people to understand the richness of the Hebrew language and how the Tanach points to the Messiah. The term "Hebrew Roots," for many, was a synonym for "Jewish Roots," or the term "Hebrew Roots" was used as a complement to the term "Jewish Roots." The term "Hebrew Roots" was a term which could be employed to specifically emphasize the foundational importance of the Hebrew Scriptures, the importance of Hebrew language study, and getting Christian people plugged into more detailed examination of the Old Testament. The term "Jewish Roots" could be used to emphasize study of the Second Temple Judaism of Yeshua and His first disciples, the necessary examination of the broad history of this period and immediately thereafter, as well as a review of significant bodies of extra-Biblical and Rabbinical literature germane to this time. Certainly in many of my own writings, I have stressed how we all have Hebrew Roots in the Tanach Scriptures, and Jewish Roots in the Second Temple faith of Yeshua and His early disciples.

Today, the term **Hebrew Roots** is used by a wide variety of non-Jewish groups, with a starkly contrasting purpose to today's Messianic Jewish movement. Some of these people have a sincere desire of wanting to study the Tanach Scriptures and live in a similar manner to Yeshua and His first followers, but do so in a way much differently than non-Jewish Believers called into Messianic Judaism. For far too many, the term "Hebrew Roots" is used to represent a non-Jewish Torah movement, **not at all interested in Jewish outreach or evangelism**, widely dismissive of mainline Jewish traditions and customs, and coupled with a huge array of theological and spiritual problems teetering on disaster. Many non-Jewish people who are involved in "Hebrew Roots" not only have a great deal of unfair disdain toward the Jewish Synagogue, but also the positive legacy of evangelical Protestantism. An entire host of sensationalistic hype is today connected to the label "Hebrew Roots," not only involving a great deal of end-time paranoia and fear, but also conspiracy theories, postulations about the Nephilim of Genesis 6, and most recently Flat Earth—among other things. **It is an understatement to say that today, when the term "Hebrew Roots" is invoked, that many of today's Messianic Jewish leaders and teachers get tense.**

The major problem with the Hebrew Roots movement of the late 2010s is not non-Jewish Believers wanting to reconnect with their faith heritage in the Scriptures of Israel. The major problem with the Hebrew Roots movement is that it does not at all care about facilitating the Romans chs. 9, 10, 11 trajectory of salvation history! This most especially involves the non-Jewish vocation of "because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy" (Romans 11:31, NASU). The mercy shown to those of the nations via the salvation of Israel's Messiah, is to be reciprocated via acts of humility and kindness to the Messiah's own Jewish people. **This is decisively not something that is practiced by those identifying as a part of today's Hebrew Roots movement.** If anything, the Hebrew Roots movement is stigmatized by a great deal of anti-Semitism, failing to follow Paul's warning of Romans 11:18-21.