
FAQ

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DNA Test for Semitic Ancestry

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I am non-Jewish, but I am very interested in the possibility of there being some Jewish ancestry in my family line. I am planning to get a DNA test. What does it mean if I have some Jewish markers in the results?

Because of the interconnectivity of the Internet and social media, it is hardly a surprise that one of the most frequently researched topics, on the part of individuals and families, has been genealogy. Decades ago, if people in North America wanted to research their Western European origins, it would have at least required lengthy correspondence with town halls, record halls, libraries, and churches via standard postal mail. For some people, really wanting to investigate their origins, it would have involved taking trips to one's ancestral homelands, and spending weeks sorting through depositories of census records, marriage certificates, and universities. Today, however, via the advent of electronic records—often made freely or at nominal charge to the public—it is much more convenient for people to explore who they are.

Many non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, do wonder if one of the reasons why they have entered into the Messianic movement, is because they have some distant Jewish ancestry. Various non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, have discovered via genealogical investigation, that they do have a Jewish line or two, several, or multiple generations removed. Some of this may have involved a family story, or a deliberate repression of one's Jewish heritage, in an effort to assimilate into Western society. Forgetting about a Jewish line in one's family may also have taken place as a Jewish person intermarried, and the grandchildren and great-grandchildren steadily forgot about their Jewish ancestry.

Beyond researching one's ancestry via genealogical records, census reports, and the like—various services are available, at reasonable cost, to test one's DNA for some analysis of a man or woman's ethnic makeup. Many people who take a DNA test for their ancestry, can attest to being unaware of particular nationalities in their family tree. There are non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, who while being curious about possibly having some Jewish ancestry, have taken some DNA test for resolution to see if this is the case. Some people are not surprised by the results that they see, when some percentage of Semitic DNA appears.

There are likely to be many opinions present among not only Messianic people, but those in the Jewish community, as to whether or not a non-Jewish person, with some percentage of Jewish DNA, is actually "Jewish." While there are those non-Jewish people who find, after taking a DNA test, that their genetic portfolio can be anywhere from 25%-50% Jewish—in which case one's Jewish parent or grandparent may have deliberately withheld knowledge of his or her Jewish heritage to offspring—more likely than not when non-Jewish people have a DNA test, if they have Jewish DNA markers, then they are going to be less than 10%. This would logically mean that one's Jewish ancestor(s) lived several centuries ago.

For the non-Jewish person in today's Messianic movement, who has a DNA test revealing some small percentage of Jewish heritage—it would mean that he or she is a **non-Jewish Believer with some Jewish ancestry**, and it would be presumptuous for he or she to claim being "Jewish." To many in the Jewish community, being Jewish does involve being

raised or exposed to some quantitative Jewish experience from at least one's grandparents or great-grandparents—not a Jewish ancestor or two who lived before the American Revolution, and who was forgotten.

No matter how open-minded various non-Jewish Believers are to learning about the Jewish experience, appreciating it, supporting the State of Israel and actively opposing anti-Semitism in today's world—non-Jews in today's Messianic movement who find out that 2-5% of their DNA is Jewish, should not call themselves Jewish. (The modern State of Israel is not going to consider such persons as candidates for citizenship.) Messianic Jewish congregations may consider you to have distant Jewish ancestry, which is appreciable, but would likely not consider you Jewish. However, various Jewish people one may encounter—seeing non-Jewish Believers actively participating in the Messianic movement—may very well be more open to hearing the good news of Messiah, when non-Jewish Believers with small percentages of Jewish ancestry confirm that their participation in a life of Torah does involve their reconnecting to a forgotten part of their family lineage.