

The Calling of Ruth and Non-Jewish Believers in Today's Messianic Movement

The place of non-Jewish Believers, in today's Messianic Jewish movement, has tended to invoke any number of responses or reactions, some of them being positive, and others of them being negative. With only a handful of exceptions, non-Jewish Believers have never been summarily dismissed from attending Messianic Jewish congregations. Most Messianic Jewish congregations would affirm, that in some way, non-Jewish Believers are grafted-in to the olive tree (Romans 11:16-17), and are co-members of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) along with Jewish Believers. What that means, to be sure, is not entirely agreed. Some think that it means that non-Jewish Believers are "fellow citizens with the saints" (Ephesians 2:19, NASU) in an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel, per the Tabernacle of David having a rule that extends beyond Israel proper (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:15-18). Others think that it means that non-Jewish Believers are part of the Christian Church, which along with the Messianic Jewish community, constitutes one of the two sub-peoples of God. Discussions and debates over ecclesiology, the study of God's elect, will internally continue among Messianic people until Yeshua the Messiah returns.

One common thread that is easily detectable in today's Messianic Jewish movement, regarding the place of non-Jewish Believers, is the wide affirmation **that non-Jewish Believers need to be genuinely called by God into the Messianic movement.** The original vision and purpose of the Messianic Jewish movement is to serve as a venue for Jewish outreach and evangelism. So, it is not inappropriate, that if non-Jewish Believers are coming into Messianic congregations—even if initially that their reasons for doing so involve their connecting to their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures—to make sure that such people really are there, because God wants them there. Messianic Jewish leaders, whose main focus rests in focusing congregational activities toward presenting local Jews with the good news that Yeshua is Israel's Messiah, do not want to be overwhelmed with non-Jewish issues so that the main reason for the congregation existing in the first place gets totally forgotten. Even though non-Jewish Believers, who are genuinely supposed to be a part of Messianic congregations, will go through a season of acclimation—**they need to be quite conscious of how they are going to contribute to the mission of reaching out with the good news to their Jewish neighbors.**

The Messianic Walk

The Calling of Ruth

While today's Messianic Jewish movement has been established to be a venue for Jewish outreach and evangelism, throughout its history, the Messianic Jewish movement has always recognized that non-Jewish Believers are going to be attracted to its synagogues and congregations. While the place of non-Jewish Believers, and their participation in the assembly, vary across the spectrum—from full membership to associate membership to welcome visitors—it is widely acknowledged in many Messianic sectors that non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, probably bear some kind of Ruth calling on them. Let us remember that a significant majority of non-Jewish people who come through the door of today's Messianic congregations, are not there to become members, as most are only there to investigate. *They have tried so many denominations and churches, that the Messianic movement is just another place where they can kick tires.* Experientially speaking, many non-Jews who come into a Messianic congregation, leave within three years. But for those who stay, and are fully committed to the Messianic walk and mission, they are often viewed as the figure of Ruth.

What does it mean for non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement to have a Ruth calling upon their lives?

The Book of Ruth is a very important text for understanding the workings of God upon those in desperate situations. The family of Naomi moved to pagan Moab, because of a famine in Israel (Ruth 1:1-2). Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died in Moab, with her two sons having taken Moabite wives (Ruth 1:3), one of them being Ruth (Ruth 1:4). Her two sons die, leaving their two Moabite widows (Ruth 1:5), and so Naomi naturally decides to return to her homeland as the famine had abated (Ruth 1:6). Naomi bids her two daughters-in-law farewell (Ruth 1:7-9), and they actually insist that they return with her to Israel: "No!" they said to her, 'we will return with you to your people" (Ruth 1:10, TLV). Naomi insists that they should stay in Moab, as she has no future husbands to bear them, and that the future she has in returning home is going to be more difficult than they realize:

"Now Naomi said, 'Go back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Do I have more sons in my womb who could become your husbands? Go home, my daughters! I am too old to have a husband. Even if I were to say that there was hope for me and I could get married tonight, and then bore sons, would you wait for them to grow up? Would you therefore hold off getting married? No, my daughters, it is more bitter for me than for you—for the hand of *ADONAI* has gone out against me!" (TLV).

One of Naomi's daughters-in-law, Orpah, decides to stay behind in Moab (Ruth 1:14), with Naomi informing Ruth, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Return, along with your sister-in-law!" (Ruth 1:15, TLV). Naomi implies that it will be easier for Ruth to return to her people, their gods, and their way of life, than joining her and the people of Israel. The famed response that has received a great deal of attention throughout history, especially when people come together in common cause or solidarity, is Ruth's exclamation, "Do not plead with me to abandon you, to turn back from following you. For where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16, TLV). Ruth insists to Naomi, *ameikha ami, v'Elohayikh Elohai* (אִמִּי וְאֱלֹהֵיךָ אֱלֹהֵי), "your people are my people, and your God is my God" (ATS). While Bible readers tend to be impressed at Ruth's

The Calling of Ruth and Non-Jewish Believers in Today's Messianic Movement

declaration of being a member of the people of Ancient Israel, just as Naomi, and of monotheism, Ruth's statements do not end there. Ruth made a commitment of being a part of Israel, and of only serving Israel's One God, until her death:

"Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May *ADONAI* deal with me, and worse, if anything but death comes between me and you!" (Ruth 1:17, TLV).

Ruth is not witnessed just making a claim based on the good feelings and positive sentiments she had in being once married to Naomi's son, and in desiring continued association with Naomi. Ruth is witnessed to make **an all out claim of total loyalty and devotion** to the people of Naomi and to their One God. Naomi cannot dissuade Ruth from staying in Moab, as it is recorded, "When she saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she no longer spoke to Ruth about it" (Ruth 1:18, TLV). Ruth was "stedfastly minded" (KJV) about her decision.

The story of Ruth continues with Boaz arriving on the scene as the kinsman-redeemer, marrying Ruth, and Ruth actually being an ancestor of King David. That God used a non-Israelite such as Ruth, in an important way, is clear enough. **But Ruth had to be completely committed to Israel, and to Israel's God.** Ruth was not just committed in the sense that she would worship Israel's God, and do her best to stay away from previous religious activities from Moab, but in the event that the Moabites ever attacked Israel, still end up siding with her own people. Ruth made a commitment to the people of Israel and the One God of Israel which was to last until death, and God was to condemn her if she ever deviated from this.

When non-Jewish Believers, who are genuinely called by God to be a part of today's Messianic movement, are told that they have a Ruth calling upon their lives, what does Ruth 1:16-18 actually translate into?

1. **It means a complete commitment to the Messianic movement, the Messianic mission, and the Messianic walk.** Non-Jewish Believers with a Ruth calling upon their lives should not be members of both an evangelical church and members of a Messianic congregation, as there will be divided loyalties and attentions.
2. **It means that being associated with the Messianic Jewish and the Jewish community requires a non-Jewish Believer's total loyalty, even if it involves death.** Non-Jewish Believers with a Ruth calling upon their lives need to recognize that it may involve dying right alongside of their fellow Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters, especially in these end-times.

Being a part of the Messianic community, is not like being a part of a denomination of Protestantism that happens to be ethnically Jewish, and is only concerned with declaring the good news to the Jewish people in a Jewish way and in a setting more like a synagogue. Being a part of the Messianic community decisively places one's attention on the Romans chs. 9, 10, and 11 trajectory of salvation history: "and in this way all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). This is something which is to culminate in the Second Coming of Israel's Messiah. Non-Jewish Believers have a definite role to play in the anticipated salvation of the Jewish people (Romans 11:11, 31). But should all non-Jewish Believers find themselves one day attending a Messianic congregation? While ultimately a question to be left to God, it is entirely appropriate for today's Messianic Jewish leaders

The Messianic Walk

to recognize non-Jewish Believers who have a Ruth calling upon their lives, and those who do not.

If you are a non-Jewish Believer who decisively has a Ruth calling upon your life, then you will demonstrate a complete commitment to the Messianic movement and its mission. While you might still appreciate your evangelical background and upbringing, your church experience is now going to be a part of your past, and not your future. Your future is the Messianic movement, and in contributing something substantial to the Messianic mission of Jewish outreach and evangelism. While your interest in the Messianic movement may have legitimately begun, because of wanting to reconnect to your faith heritage in the Scriptures of Israel, and to be a part of a congregation that was more like the First Century assemblies of Jewish, Greek, and Roman Believers—as you connect to such a dynamic, so should you also be steadfastly compelled by a word such as Romans 11:12: “Now if their transgression is riches for the world, and their failure is riches for the nations, how much more will their fullness be!” (PME). *How do you see a great fullness of Jewish people come forth via their salvation?*

Ruth exclaimed her total loyalty to the people of Naomi and their God, but this went far beyond religious or spiritual loyalty. Ruth exclaimed her total loyalty to the people of Naomi and their God, until death: “Wherever you die, I will die—and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I do not keep my promise! Only death will be able to separate me from you!” (Ruth 1:17, NET). Today’s Messianic Jewish movement does not often discuss this part of non-Jewish Believers needing to have a Ruth calling, but the ramifications of Ruth’s statement are quite severe. Ruth invokes God’s condemnation upon her, if Ruth demonstrates herself unwilling to be loyal to Naomi’s people and God until death. *Only death was to separate Ruth’s integration into the community of Israel.* The significance of this, when considering the persecution and discrimination of the Jewish people throughout history—often at the hands of Christian authorities—are indeed striking. While various political and religious powers have often made promises and commitments to the Jewish community, to be more fair or tolerant, their track record can frequently be one of betrayal. It is hardly a surprise why many Jews throughout history have been very distrusting and suspicious of non-Jewish people! And today’s Messianic Jewish community has every right and reason to suspect that not every non-Jewish person in its midst, is going to be loyal to the end.

If you are a non-Jewish person involved in today’s Messianic community, have you made a commitment to not only stand by your Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters—but Jewish non-Believers in the wider Jewish community—even if it costs you your life? There are certainly many stories from the Second World War of faithful Christian people, upon witnessing the injustices of Nazi Germany, who hid Jews in their homes, and even took a public stand against Nazism’s atrocities. There were those who stood against Nazi Germany’s persecution of the Jews, and who went to the concentration camps with their Jewish friends and neighbors, dying right alongside them. **A non-Jewish Believer in today’s Messianic movement, having a Ruth calling upon their lives, may require the very same thing sometime in the future.** So, how committed are you to truly being a part of the Messianic movement? Is this something that you will remain a part of, until the end? Or, perhaps just like Peter insisted that he would not deny the Lord (Mark 14:30; Matthew 26:34), and yet did so, might you answer the question “Are you part of the

The Calling of Ruth and Non-Jewish Believers in Today's Messianic Movement

Messianic Jewish movement?" in the negative? Peter said he would die with the Lord, if he had to (Mark 14:31; Matthew 26:35).

Provoking the Jewish People to Jealousy

Provoking Jewish non-Believers to jealousy, that they might come to faith in Yeshua the Messiah, is one of the major, central features of the Messianic experience. Paul himself expressed the intent in Romans 11:14, "if somehow I might provoke to jealousy my own flesh and blood and save some of them" (TLV). Paul was absolutely distraught over the widespread Jewish dismissal of Yeshua that he witnessed in the First Century, that he said that he would give up his own individual salvation, to see his fellow Jews come to faith (Romans 9:3).

What does it mean to provoke Jewish non-Believers to jealousy? When non-Believers witness born again people experiencing a life of peace and blessing, a life of tranquility, and a life where a person has been reconciled with his or her Creator—non-Believers should be so jealous and envious of it, that they want it too! Paul was the example of someone who recognized that what Yeshua the Messiah had accomplished, was far superior to his own human achievements (Philippians 3:8)—and as one who was a *completed Jew* who knew his Messiah, was to be an example to his fellow Jews who should want to know the Messiah as well.

While Paul in his person demonstrated that Messianic Jewish Believers are to provoke Jewish non-Believers to jealousy for faith in Israel's Messiah—he also stated how non-Jewish Believers have to especially be doing this as well. Communicating to First Century Greeks and Romans, likely having to process why they had received Israel's Messiah into their lives—a Messiah not directly, at least, promised to them—and wanting them to be deflected from harboring any thoughts of superiority to a Jewish community widely dismissive of Him, he directed, "by their transgression salvation *has come* to the nations, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11, PME). Far from harboring any ungodly prejudices or anti-Semitic venom toward a Jewish community that had broadly rejected Yeshua as Messiah, non-Jewish people to whom He was not directly promised, were to be experiencing lives of great spiritual fullness, peace, love, and mercy—and provoke Jewish people to want a quality of life that was indeed directly promised to them in the Messiah! Non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah have a distinct vocation, because of the mercy shown to them, to demonstrate mercy toward Jewish people who have not yet recognized Him:

"For just as you once were disobedient to God but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, in like manner these also have now been disobedient with the result that, because of the mercy shown to you, they also may receive mercy" (Romans 11:30-31, TLV).

The great tragedy, throughout history, is that most (claiming) followers of Israel's Messiah, have not provoked the Jewish people to jealousy *for faith in their own Messiah* by being great beacons of love and grace toward them. As much of the history of historical Christianity has demonstrated, replacement theology or supersessionism has prevailed, where non-Jewish Believers are thought to have totally displaced the Jewish people in God's eternal plans. Misunderstanding and prejudice, discrimination and

The Messianic Walk

persecution, have marred institutional Christianity's relationship with the Jewish Synagogue.

In today's Messianic community, there is a widespread conviction that Jewish and non-Jewish Believers can fellowship as one in Messiah, with the latter making the significant effort to correct many of the Christian errors of past history. While it is true that many of today's evangelical Protestants, who have been called by God into the Messianic movement, are not directly responsible for mistakes made centuries ago by people long since dead—it is also true that social prejudices and misunderstandings of the Jewish people and Judaism, have still persisted. Many of us have heard it said that non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah, who are a part of today's Messianic community, actually wield more spiritual power than Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah. Why might this be thought? Because non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah, who are a part of today's Messianic community, have to make sure that they have received correction for any misunderstandings they have had about the Jewish people and Judaism, they must demonstrate great love and mercy for their Jewish neighbors, *and* they must express solidarity with the Jewish community when anti-Semitic acts take place.

From a perspective of individual salvation, non-Jewish Believers hardly have to be a part of Messianic congregations to be saved. There are millions of Christian people in today's world who have never heard, or will ever hear, of the Messianic movement, and they will be in the Kingdom of God. Non-Jewish Believers who come into the Messianic movement, and who indeed stay, are going to raise questions when they come into contact with Jewish non-Believers. These non-Believers might be the extended family of their Messianic Jewish friends, or they might be those they encounter in the marketplace. While these Jewish non-Believers might understand why Jewish Believers in Yeshua would want to express their faith in Yeshua in a Messianic context, these Jewish non-Believers might not fully understand why non-Jewish Believers in Yeshua would want to express their faith in Yeshua in a Messianic context. For those raised in a North American Protestant context, a person gives up a great deal in leaving an established evangelical denominational church, to be part of a very young and still-developing Messianic movement. There are new dynamics present in a Messianic congregation, that are not present in an evangelical church. And, Jewish non-Believers will ask a non-Jewish Believer in the Messianic movement, something to the effect, "Don't you know how difficult it is to be a Jew?", reflecting on historical anti-Semitism.

A big part of non-Jewish Believers provoking Jewish people to jealousy, for faith in Israel's Messiah, is fully grasping the ramifications of the Ruth calling. Technically, you do not have to be a part of a Messianic congregation to be saved. And, if you are a non-Jewish Believer in today's Messianic movement, you will be leaving an established evangelicalism for a young faith community. Are you willing to persevere and see it through? Certainly as one recognizes that the restoration of Israel (Acts 1:6) is the centerpiece of the end-times, then being a part of the Messianic movement will enable someone to be where the center of the action is!

Is the Messianic movement for everyone?

It is very natural for non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, who tangibly reconnect to their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures and do things that the First

The Calling of Ruth and Non-Jewish Believers in Today's Messianic Movement

Century Believers surely did—to want this to be something that *everybody needs to do*. In the naiveté of many, it is thought that the Messianic movement is something that should be a universal movement. Perhaps some form of this might indeed be universal, subsequent to the Messiah's return. However, the great influx of non-Jewish Believers into the Messianic movement over the past two to three decades (1990s-2010s), has unfortunately demonstrated that a great majority of these people were not called in to help accomplish the Romans 11:26 trajectory of salvation history, and that many of these people would, sadly, balk at having a Ruth calling upon their lives.

It is indeed to be anticipated from the Tanach Scriptures, that the nations of Planet Earth will stream to Zion to be taught God's Torah (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3). But what good does it do for non-Jewish Believers to be educated in the truths of Moses' Teaching, if implementing such instruction is not understood within the context of Romans 9-11, and in helping provoke Jewish non-Believers to faith in Israel's Messiah? Today's non-Jewish Torah movements are largely not interested in the salvation of the Jewish people, as you seldom if ever see them talk about Jewish outreach or evangelism, and they tend to make every effort that they can to distance themselves from the mission of the Messianic Jewish movement. Too many of today's non-Jewish Believers, who have reconnected with a Torah foundation of some sort, do not expel the effort to understand mainline Jewish traditions and customs, but instead eschew them. They do not care about studying and understanding the Jewish experience in history. They have not totally Heeded Paul's warning: "do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, it is not you who support the root but the root supports you" (Romans 11:18, TLV).

Is the Messianic movement for everyone? It is safe to say that many of us have evangelical people we know, who we believe should not only be exposed to the Messianic movement, but should be considering some level of participation in it. But for many of us, this is also wishful thinking. Many evangelical Believers do not have a Ruth calling upon their lives. While they may be considered born again people, they are not able to spiritually and theologically process all of the different dynamics of what it means to know the Jewish Messiah. Forcing people into the Messianic movement, who are not called into it, and are not mature enough to be a part of it, will do more to deter its mission of Jewish outreach, evangelism, and Israel solidarity than accelerate it. And, too many non-Jewish Believers who enter into a Messianic congregation, are only there to experiment because they have been a part of so many other assemblies and groups...

Are you a non-Jewish Believer who has a Ruth calling upon your life? This is a very serious question as we consider when we are in human history. It is insufficient for a non-Jewish Believer in today's Messianic movement to simply say that he or she believes in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and considers the Jewish people to be kindred in some way (Ruth 1:16). Because of the rising tides of anti-Semitism, even in North America, it will not be convenient for non-Jews to have labels like "Israel" or "Jewish" (or ironically enough, even "Hebrew Roots") associated with them. If you indeed are thrust into a situation where you have to stand in solidarity with a Messianic Jewish Believer, or even a Jewish non-Believer—**and die alongside of them**—will you be able to do it (Ruth 1:17)? How loyal will you truly be to the people of the Messiah of Israel?