

An Official Paper of the UMJC

The issue is not whether Gentiles should or must become Jews to attain full status in the Body of Messiah. All Messianic Jews agree this issue was settled by the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem in C.E. 49 (Acts 15). Believers from among the nations were not required to accept the yoke of the Torah, but only the basic biblical principles referred to as the Seven Laws of Noah in the rabbinic literature. The issue is whether or not it should be possible for willing Gentile believers to identify more closely with the Jewish people by voluntarily converting to Messianic or some other expression of Judaism.

Majority Position*

1. Despite inferential, contrary arguments, a clear biblical emphasis plus serious practical problems should prevent the UMJC from promoting any such conversions.
2. Regarding conversions to Reform, Conservative or Orthodox Judaism, this can hardly be an option for any follower of Yeshua because these forms, despite their many differences, share an active disbelief in our Messiah. Close identification with, much less conversion to, any of these groups would be unbiblical.
3. Several reasons may be offered against adopting a rite of passage for willing Gentile believers into Messianic Judaism.
 - a. In I Corinthians 7:18 Rav Shaul specially addressed the issue of conversion, directing all believers to be content in the state in which they were called. Gentiles should not convert to Judaism. Likewise, Messianic Jews should not consider it an option to forsake their divine calling as Jews.
 - b. There is no example in the B'rit Hadasha of a Gentile believer becoming a Jew. Rav Shaul's circumcision of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) was a pragmatic measure primarily motivated by the Apostle's desire to have Timothy accompany him into the synagogues of Asia Minor. More important, Timothy was already half-Jewish by his mother and according to II Timothy 3:15, was raised according to the Jewish Scriptures. Thus, his circumcision cannot provide an adequate example for any such practice involving Gentiles today.
 - c. Gentile believers who feel a strong identity with the Jewish people may join Messianic synagogues, participate in congregational life, and thus express a high degree of identification without actually becoming Jews. Conversion becomes unnecessary.
 - d. A conversion to Messianic Judaism would not be recognized in Israel nor among a majority of Jews in the Diaspora.
 - e. Such a practice could easily result in "two-class" mentality among Gentiles in Messianic synagogues - the inner circle of converted Gentiles and the larger group of the

"less committed."

Even a non-obligatory conversion of Gentiles would be viewed as heretical by many in the churches. Messianic Jews can ill afford risking possible rejection by the majority of the believing community, as would likely happen once such a practice became widely known.

*At the September 1983 UMJC conference, a show of hands indicated that roughly 90% of the congregational leaders represented favored the Majority Position and the remaining 10%, the Minority Position. (Last Printing 11/95)

Minority Position

1. A means whereby individual Gentile believers could convert to Messianic Judaism should be adopted by the UMJC.
2. Such conversions would in no way convey a higher level of spirituality of acceptance by God but would merely allow willing individuals to identify more closely with the Jewish people.
3. Reasons for adopting a positive procedure for such conversions are:
 - a. Some Gentile believers have a deep longing to become Jews. There should be a commonly-accepted means of acknowledging and satisfying this need.
 - b. The Tenach made provision for such "conversion," allowing those sojourners within Israel's borders who wished to keep the Passover to become circumcised (Ex. 12:48-49, Deut. 21:10-14).
 - c. The issue in Acts 15 and the Book of Galatians is mandatory circumcision (conversion) of Gentiles. To allow an occasional Gentile to convert is different than demanding that all must do so.
 - d. In the first century, since receiving circumcision indicated one's obligation and intention to keep the Law of Moses, Rav Shaul's circumcision of Timothy may be regarded as the conversion of the non-Jew to Judaism. Thus, we have a precedent in the B'rit Hadasha for such a modern day practice.
 - e. Strict guidelines should be adopted to prevent a "band wagon effect" among immature believers who may be tempted to convert and "play Jewish" for awhile. Thus, following the pattern of traditional conversion, spiritual leaders can discourage casual inquirers by putting off all initial expressions of desire to convert by requiring circumcision and by initiating a rigorous educational program for the serious-minded.