

Shabbat Shalom Ori!

You can call me Gary, and I am writing this on Friday, as Shabbat is approaching with the setting sun. I don't know how much "Messianic" stuff you know so please don't be insulted if I over explain something. I also don't know what resources you have access to but I will try and see if there is anything we can do to help with that issue as I get to know you. You mentioned several topics that in themselves would take up an entire posting so I will deal with each of them separately and you can respond with follow-up questions until we have each issue covered.

Most religious guys try and give short, easy answers to questions, but I will tell you up front that short and easy doesn't work if you want to actually know what God, (YHVH), is saying to us through His word. I will not insult you with easy, half answers, if you won't bail when the ideas get complicated. You might think of our discussions as if you were taking a class on Jewishness and the NT. To be a Messianic Jew you need the twin elements, acknowledging, aka obeying Messiah, and knowing what it is to be a Jew. Being a Messianic Jew will get you all the responsibilities of "Jewishness" but few of the benefits in this life. This letter will be lesson 1 of your Yeshiva, (School), training.

I would like to say a few things about myself to give you perspective on where my views come from. I teach instrumental music, Jazz, at Western Oklahoma State College, (WOSC), in Altus Oklahoma, and I also teach New Testament, (NT), in the spring and Old Testament, (TaNaCH), in the Fall. Here in the Lawton/Altus area I often get ask to do weddings and funerals for our various Messianic folks when the needs arise. I don't go by the title Rabbi because; **1.** I don't feel like I have anywhere near the education that a non-Messianic Rabbi would have to get that title, (I am working on a Doctorate in the Torah to remedy that issue), and **2.** My Rabbi, Messiah Yeshua, (Jesus), tells us in **Mt 23:8-12/Mk 7**, to not call ourselves Rabbi.

**8 But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. NKJV**

I believe that this means that while you are able to function in the role of a Rabbi, or have the title of Father, or Teacher, we should not seek or except the special treatment that comes from those titles. Literally the term Rabbi means, *My Great One*, although it has come to mean teacher, or in a Jewish sense, Minister. (Not all Rabbis "minister" many are simply scholars.) Often we blame Catholicism for the use of Father as a title but if you search back into the Tanach in **1 Kgs 8:1** and **2 Kgs 5:13** you'll see that the term was used in ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East, (ANE), for their great leaders.

**1 Kings 8:1 Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the City of David, which is Zion. NKJV**

**2 Kings 5:12-13 12 Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?'" NKJV**

Now are you getting the idea of how longwinded complete answers are? This is a full page and I haven't addressed your first question yet!

The first issue you brought up that I want to address is the, “Who’s a Jew” idea. In the Jewish community and Israel this is a huge question that has yet to be answered in a satisfactory or consistent way, (in my opinion). You mention this because you pointed out that you did not know of any Jewish ancestry in your back ground. So first, some back ground on what other groups say about being a Jew or just being, “Jew-ish”.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Judaism there are three main branches, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed, none of whom acknowledge Yeshua as Messiah. Each branch has subsets that are more or less observant than the others, but all the groups accepted into one of the three main categories accept those from that same category. The general definer of each group is how observant they are of the Torah. The Orthodox are the most observant and the Reformed are the least, with Conservatives in the middle. But two caveats need to be added: **1st**. Observance is not gauged on the written Torah, (WT), that is part of the Christian and Jewish bibles, but of adherence to the Oral Torah/*Torah Peh*, (**TP**), called the Tradition of the Elders in the NT.

**Matt 15:2-32 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." 3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? NKJV**

The TP is a vast collection of wisdom on how to keep the commands of the Torah. For example when the Ten Commandments say to keep the Shabbat and to not work, what is the definition of work? To someone without the TP it is open to interpretation but the TP gives exact details on how to keep Torah correctly. As to the Shabbat commandment about not working, the written Torah has 6-10 general commandments on how to observe it; the more detailed TP has 1583 specific types of work to avoid, and positives to do on Shabbat. It is taught that the TP was spoken to Moshe and the 70 elders at Mt Sinai and has been passed on orally until it was finally written down about 800CE. Many things in the TP are clearly not from 1500BCE when Moshe was at Sinai but it is a point of faith among the Orthodox and the Conservative Jews that it all came from YHVH and from Moshe. (Just as some things are points of faith in Christianity.) The TP was the standard of Jewish practice until the Renaissance in Europe, so it is a very authentic and ancient form of Judaism. The difference in the Conservative approach to observance is that Conservative Jews do feel an obligation to the TP and definitely to the WT but Conservatives have modernized some of the Orthodox rulings on Torah. For example an Orthodox Jew will not drive on Shabbat and will tear off toilet paper sheets the day before so they will not need to be torn off on Shabbat. A Conservative will drive to Synagogue and tear off sheets as needed. These are examples of TP based *Halakah*, (the walk, or law of how to live out Torah). The Orthodox don’t drive because the WT teaches to not make a fire on Shabbat, and when driving the car is making many little fiery explosions in the motor. The Orthodox don’t tear off toilet paper because that would be reaping and reaping is a form of work. Conservatives have a more pragmatic approach to the Torah and TP.

The **2<sup>nd</sup>** caveat is the Reformed approach to the Torah. They see the written Torah as an authentic ancient document; from about 400BCE and that the TP is a collection of cultural adaptations to the observance of Torah. As such the WT has more authority than the TP, but...Reformed Judaism looks at the WT as being from man, not YHVH so they tend to interpret away observance, even to the point of allowing pork and no literal Shabbat in some extreme cases. They do look at the TP as a good thing worthy of knowing and studying but do not feel an obligation to follow it.

Where do Messianics land? Most Messianics do not believe that the TP is from YHVH, and due to passages like the one cited earlier, (**Mt 15/Mk 7**), do not feel obligated to follow those rules. Most Messianics do look for wisdom in how to keep Torah from traditions found in the TP, like lighting two candles on Shabbat, but do not believe that it is sin to miss lighting candles on Friday night at the beginning of Shabbat. Messianics tend to agree with the reformed that the WT is the word of YHVH and TP is commentary but believe that the WT, Tanach, and NT are from YHVH and need to be kept. Messianics also follow the traditional understanding of Moshe being a real person and that the WT was actually given in its fullness at about 1500BCE. This means that most Messianics eat what is biblically Kosher but do not follow rules from the TP about what to eat. So if you were to buy only Kosher meals you would be following a Rabbinically Kosher diet that is far more demanding than a biblically Kosher diet is. (**Lev. 11.**) Rabbinically Kosher diets don't have meat and dairy products on the same meal, so no butter on your mashed potatoes with your chicken fried steak.

This is a long way to answer the question of, "Who's a Jew", but I want to be thorough so you will understand what it means to be a Jew if you choose to move forward and join the *Mishpokah*, (family). So, if someone converts to Orthodox Judaism all the groups consider them a Jew, Messianics through Orthodox, and all their descendants are counted as Jews. There is absolutely no difference between the native born and the convert, but...if a person converts to Conservative Judaism the Orthodox do not consider that conversion legit, so that person is still a Goy, (gentile), to the Orthodox, and so are all their descendants. Likewise a convert to Reform Judaism is not counted by the Conservatives or the Orthodox. As you can guess a convert to Messianic Judaism is not "counted" by any of the other three movements. The unspoken reason that the three none-Messianic groups don't count the others converts is their adherence to the TP. Orthodox don't count Conservative converts because they interpret TP to allow what Orthodox Rabbis forbid and Conservatives don't count Reform converts because Reform interpret TP even more radically than the Conservatives do. Messianics are more observant than Reform and some Conservatives, but due to Messianics acknowledgement of Yeshua as Messiah, they are "out of the camp" for all three groups regardless.

This is where things get interesting. What does Israel do? Israel has a law that allows any Jew anywhere to immigrate to Israel and become a citizen. The nation of Israel counts all three groups as Jews and allows them to immigrate if they want to. However, most Israelis are not religious. The religious in Israel tend to be some form of Orthodox, even though there are far more Reform Jews globally than there are Orthodox, the Orthodox are disproportionately represented in Israel. But...

Even though the Orthodox don't count other groups converts as Jews, members of the other groups can still be Jewish because the Orthodox and Conservatives count Jewishness through the mother. This means that since up through the renaissance all Jews were "Orthodox", a Messianic Jew may still be considered a Jew if his mother's line has an unbroken chain of *halakically* Jewish ancestors. To the Orthodox and Conservatives it doesn't matter how much Torah you keep, or if you even believe in the God of the Tanach, if your mom or grandma was a Jew you are a Jew too. You may be an apostate Jew but you count. Conversely if you keep all the WT and even the TP and have a father or grandfather that is a Rabbi but don't have a mom or grandma who is a

Jew, you are not a Jew regardless to your Jewish actions, it is up to you to get a formal conversion, which may only be respected by the group giving the conversion.

Here is where the inconsistency comes into play. The mark of Jewishness is Torah, for the Messianic it is WT for the others it is TP. When someone converts to Christianity the discipling is back loaded. Meaning you get “saved” then you are taught how to live. In Judaism discipling is front loaded, the convert shows that they are Jews by living up to the standard imposed by that group for up to 2 years in some cases before they are immersed and called Jews for all times. So, if some one is following Orthodox, Reformed, or Conservative halakah why aren’t they Jews? Meanwhile the nation of Israel and the Reformed movement do count you as Jewish if any parent or grandparent was a Jew, *and you consider yourself a Jew*, you are a Jew.

Israel and the three largest movements count Jews as Jews if they have Jewish ancestors but want to deny Messianics and any Jew with a “lower” level of observance the right to adopt new members. The more TP observant groups don’t even consider the less TP observant groups as Jewish at all, ignoring the clear evidence that they are *some* kind of Jewish movement.

It is somewhat analogous to a large clan named Smith. They have a rich patriarch who is overseas for an extended time. The descendants waiting for his return get into an argument over what it means to be a Smith. All the descendants have a tradition of adoption but they won’t “count” the children adopted by the other descendants. Further they don’t believe that other descendants are moral enough to know that their kids are really theirs, so they only count the children born to “real” Smith women as Smiths. When you become a Smith/Jew you are a Jew, but only to those that adopted you. As a Messianic only the Messianics adopted you so you are a Jew, but you have to wait until the Patriarch, Messiah, comes to tell us who is right. The other Smiths/Jews don’t have a right to take away any other Smiths right to be a Smith, but they also aren’t required to accept other Smiths decisions.

As a potential convert you need to understand that any conversion is what it is. If someone converts to Reformed Judaism and that conversion is overseen by halakically Jewish people, then you are part of the Jewish family but...it is only that part that accepts you. The same applies to a Conservative conversion, it is approved only by Reformed, Conservative and Messianic groups as authentic. Even if someone converts to Orthodox Judaism the Messianics are going to count that person as a Jewish brother but want to see them “born again”. Conversion usually consist of males being circumcised, (previous hospital circumcision is sufficient in most groups, sometimes a “one drop” of blood rule is needed to make it legit if the person is already circumcised), a period of instruction and observation to see that you are living as a Jew. The third and final step is immersion in a *mikva*, (aka baptistery), at which point you are a Jew!

We have talked about being a Jew as defined today but what does the Bible say? If you remember the story of Ruth she was a Moabite who not only became a Jew but was the grandmother of David and an ancestor of Messiah. The Torah tells us that the Moabites are especially accursed.

**“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his *descendants* shall enter the assembly of the LORD forever, <sup>4</sup> because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, <sup>[a]</sup> to curse you. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD**

your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you.<sup>6</sup>  
You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.  
<sup>7</sup> “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian,  
because you were an alien in his land.<sup>8</sup> The children of the third generation born to them  
may enter the assembly of the LORD. NKJV

You can see that the Moabite falls under a bigger curse than even the Egyptian!  
How could Ruth be allowed to join as a Moabitess?

<sup>16</sup> But Ruth said:  
“ Entreat me not to leave you,  
Or to turn back from following after you;  
For wherever you go, I will go;  
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;  
Your people *shall be* my people,  
And your God, my God.

<sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die,  
And there will I be buried.  
The LORD do so to me, and more also,  
If *anything but* death parts you and me. NKJV

It looks like all Ruth did was confess the God of Israel as her God and she was in.  
With that idea in mind I believe that you and every other Christian are able to be full  
fledged members of the Commonwealth of Israel, (**Eph 2.**), if only Christians would  
embrace the covenants found in YHVH’s word. That is what we as Messianics try to do.  
If you look up Caleb in the Torah you will see that he too was a Goy who was chosen to  
represent the tribe of Judah as one of the two righteous spies. Elijah is another great from  
the Scriptures that might possibly be a “convert” or *Gair Toshav*, aka resident alien.

*(By the way the TP says that when YHVH told Moshe to write down the law about  
Moabites YHVH also told Moshe that it only applied to male Moabites. That is why Boaz  
knew it was okay to marry Ruth. That tradition is found in the TP but not in the bible or  
WT. As a Messianic we are not convinced of its veracity! Torah is Torah period.)*

Now for the short answer on “Who’s a Jew”; if you begin to live out the Torah,  
and have acknowledged Yeshua as Messiah you will be ready to become a Jew. For me  
and those around here, Jewishness is a life changing action that we don’t create, it is  
something we observe and acknowledge. A Christian doesn’t convert to being a Jew;  
they are already a disciple of a Jew. A Christian is choosing to live a Jewish life, they  
have already chosen Messiah. When you feel you have reached a point where you fully  
see yourself as a son of Abraham, we can get you a *Mikva*, (immersion), and you can join  
the Mishpokah. At that point you will be as Jewish as the Prime Minister of Israel!

This lesson is to let you know that being a Messianic Jew doesn’t give you many  
privileges, but if it is the direction you think your life needs to go, we are happy to  
accommodate you. You should also know that some Messianic groups don’t do  
conversions, so even some of them will not think of you as Jewish! The reason to go  
forward with this is only because you think that it is the best way to please YHVH. The  
price of being a Messianic Jew is too high for any other reason to sustain you.

Well, this was lesson one on Jewishness, my next letter will be on another approach to being “Messianic-ish”, the Two-House approach and maybe the Noachide alternative. All approaches have WT observance at their core so once we have covered the three main ideas we will get into why Christians should observe all of the Torah and not just the so called “moral” parts, which is really a much more important issue. If you have any follow-up questions please let me know and we’ll cover them before we move on.

I hope to hear from you soon, Shalom Gary Gardner.

PS. To further your education I have a question for you. What is the Biblical definition of sin? That may seem like a simplistic question but you would be surprised by how many Christians can give a Sunday school answer but not a Biblical answer. Give it a shot and we’ll go from there.