

*Recently I received a letter inquiring about my views on Torah observance for Gentiles, and Gentile participation in Messianic Jewish congregations. Here is an edited version of what I said.*

Although the Torah has applications for Gentiles in the moral realm, and in terms of principles of life, clearly the Torah was given to Israel. As Deuteronomy states, “Moses charged us with a law, A possession for the assembly of Jacob” (33:4). (See also Ps 147:19-20; Dt 4:5-9). Acts 21:17-26 demonstrates that first century Jewish Yeshua believers assumed they, and not Gentiles, had a responsibility to keep Torah, and Paul associates Torah keeping with those who are ritually circumcised, that is, Jews (Gal 5:3). Richard Bauckham, professor of New Testament studies at St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, and an expert on Yeshua's family, states, “As far as we can tell, the vast majority of Jewish Christians in the NT period continued to observe the whole law, taking for granted that they were still obligated to do so.” This was not so of Gentile Christians, a fact ignored by proponents of Torah observance for Gentiles.

My congregation is a family-friendly community of Jews and Intermarrieds. Gentiles not intermarried who are members of my congregation are a distinct minority, and must be people with a demonstrated calling to and involvement with the Jewish people, and not just those who “love the feasts,” who want to keep the Sabbath and Torah.

When Gentiles presume that Torah is as much given to them as to the Jews, it fosters a reverse supersessionism: if everyone is a de facto Jew, then the Jews lose their distinctive and disappear as a distinct people. This is contrary to the Bible and to the will of God. It is also contrary to the liturgy of Jewish prayer which highlights the distinctiveness of the descendants of Jacob. Congregations that are majority Gentile, with Gentiles who keep Torah in their

fashion, cease to be a sign, demonstration and catalyst of God's consummating purposes for the descendants of Jacob. Jews find such congregations cultish.

Recently I heard a leader whom I respect suggest that the following questions be used with Gentiles who seek membership in Messianic Jewish congregations. These questions reflect his conviction that most Gentiles who want to bond with the Messianic Movement do so out of unresolved conflict with the Church, or out of a naive assumption that Messianic Judaism is the more perfect religion for all.

1. Do you believe in the basic legitimacy of the Church, in its many varieties, when it confesses the historic creeds; that its celebrations and sacraments are legitimate?

2. Do you believe that Gentiles have a different relationship to the Torah than Jews and are not responsible as Jews for the Jewish patterns of life within the Mosaic revelation but only responsible for the universal ethical teachings of Torah as also expressed and applied in New Covenant teaching?

3. Do you believe that as a Gentile believer in Yeshua, joining a Messianic Jewish congregation, you have a special calling to the Jewish people but reject the view that the Messianic Jewish congregation is a more ideal form of congregational life for all?

What do you think?