

# Your Identity in Yeshua – A Living Stone

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Turn with me to Ephesians 2. I want to talk a little about the identity of the church in Israel.

The Church is not Israel proper. It is the larger commonwealth of Israel. The Church is so important in God's plan and in its connection to the nation of Israel.

Identity is a really strange kind of a thing. Anthropologists tell us that tribal people do not have much of an individual identity. Their identity is the tribe. We grow up in the west and we cannot quite figure this out. As big as China is, they still have somewhat of a tribal mentality.

I was speaking to a group of Chinese and I said to them publically, "You know right now there is a new oppression taking place in China." Many of you know that it is happening in Hong Kong. I went on to say, "We should pray. We should have faith. What if the leader of China was struck with cancer and one of the believers came and prayed for him and he was healed and he proclaimed Jesus?"

I thought that was a nice thing to say. They were horrified! These were not people from Hong Kong, they were from the mainland. They were horrified because I had just spoken something very hard about their leader. Even though they were Christians, they had this sense of being in the tribe and you do not speak negatively about the tribal leader.

 **Key:** Identity is not only who you are as an individual. Identity is made up of all that has been poured into you by family, culture, and associates.

It is hard for us to get our arms around that as Western post enlightenment people who have this individualistic strain. But our identity is not just who we are as individuals, it is who we are in terms of our ancestry, our upbringing, our family, and our corporate relationships. Some years ago the Lord took me through my life and I realized I am so much of an integration of the wonderful people that gave into my life and made me who I am - elders, pastors, youth leaders, professors, and especially my spiritual father from Wheaton College, Evan Welsh, who has been the model of my life.

I was crying when the Lord took me through my life and then He said something else, "You have been called to Messianic Judaism because you have honored your father and mother. You have honored your mother's Norwegian faith where the family believed in Yeshua. And you have honored your Jewish father in Messianic Judaism. You are more connected to this Jewish calling because of your Norwegian family than to your Jewish family roots." I was shocked. So, when I say that I am a Jewegian Presbyterian Messianic Jew, it is funny, but it is a very real thing to me.

A great deal of what I shared in the Five Pillar message goes back to that Norwegian rooting that went back to the Lutheran Pietists and Zinzendorf in Germany. I was discovering a part of my identity.

 **Key:** As a Believer, your primary identity comes from who you are in Christ and who He is in you.

I gave a message in 1987 in Atlanta where I said something very important. For every believer in Jesus, your primary identity is who you are in Him and who He is in you. You are a new creation in the Messiah no matter if you are Jew or gentile, Japanese, Chinese, African, South American, English, etc. Whatever identity you may have nationally, tribally, or even being Jewish, that identity has to be secondary to that centrality of your identity in Yeshua. When you have an identity in Yeshua, you have a corporate identity now as a living stone in the body of the Messiah. You are being built into a holy house.

 **Key:** Our identity in Christ trumps all other identities we have related to heritage.

## **The Body of Christ: A New Revelation**

There is this thing called the Body of the Messiah which was a mystery that was not revealed to the prophets of old. It was a new revelation.

The new revelation was not that gentile nations would come into the Kingdom of God and be saved. This revelation of the gentiles coming into the Kingdom is written throughout the Prophets and the Psalms. There was the expectation that someday the gentiles would flood into the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God would be an international body covering the whole earth.

Isaiah 2:2 says that “all nations would go up to Jerusalem.” The Torah says “the law would go forth from Jerusalem.” Isaiah 65 and 66 and Psalm after Psalm speaks about the day when the whole international community is gathered together and comes into the Kingdom of God and the blessing of God. The book of Revelation talks about this, but it is based on what we already find written in the Prophets.

What is new in the Bible is this thing we call the Body of Christ, the Body of Messiah, or the Church. It is something that was not foreseen in the Prophets clearly. Paul talks about it. In Ephesians 2, Paul is making all sorts of identity statements. You have to look more closely and realize the identity statements that Paul is making about you and the church, are identity statements in connection with Israel. Your identity as the Church is as tied to Israel.

 **Key:** Our identity as the Church includes Israel as part of the Church.

In Ephesians 2:1-2 we read of the gentiles that “you are dead in your trespasses and sins. At that time you walked in the way of this world in conformity to the ruler of the dominion of the air. The ruler of the spirit who is now operating in the sons of disobedience.” That is a very dark condition.

Then Paul has to put a parenthesis in there because it could sound a little bit like Jewish pride. Ephesians 2:3 “We too lived among them in the cravings of our flesh indulging the desires of our flesh.” In other words Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, Jew and gentile.”

**Ephesians 2:3-8** *By nature we too were children of wrath, just like the others, but God was rich in mercy because of His great love which He loved us Jew and gentile. Even when we were dead in our trespasses He made us alive together in the Messiah. By grace you have been saved and He raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in Heavenly places in the Messiah Yeshua, in Christ Jesus, to show in the age to come the measureless riches of His Grace in kindness towards us in the Messiah, Yeshua. For by Grace you have been saved by faith.*

If you have been a believer since childhood, you learned this passage of scripture in Ephesians as a child. Paul is telling us that if you are a follower of Yeshua, Jesus, you attain in Him the highest possible status that can be attained by a human being. You have an identity now as ‘with Him’ on the throne.

 **Key:** Our identity is both *in* Christ and *with* Christ.

## Who Am I?

I am one who is seated with Him on the throne and His throne is at the right hand of the Father. That is an astonishing identity statement. So, whether you are the janitor at the gym, or whether you are the president of a major nation, all of these things pale in regards to the identity you have having been raised with Him and seated with Him in Heavenly places at the right hand of the Father.

 **Key:** Our first identity is found in Christ. We are raised with Him and seated with Him.

So, you should never ever allow anybody to cause you to think that because you are not Jewish you have an inferior identity. Some people say, “Oh, if only I were Jewish!” Why would you want to do that? You mean you want persecution and anti-Semitism? You mean you want to have a Holocaust in your history? We are chosen. We are elect.

Sometimes gentiles get the feeling that because the salvation of Israel is so important and the election of Israel is so important, that you feel being a gentile is just chopped liver. That is not so. You are a new creation in the Messiah.

Paul goes on to help us understand this identity issue.

**Ephesians 2:11-18** *Therefore keep in mind that you gentiles in the flesh were once called uncircumcision by those who were called circumcision which is performed in the flesh by hand. At that time you were separate from Messiah, excluded from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah, Yeshua, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. For He is our Peace, the One who made the two into one and He broke down the middle wall of separation. Within His flesh, He made powerless the hostility, the law code of commandments contained in regulations, He did this in order to create within Himself one new man from the two groups making Peace and to reconcile both to God in one body through the Cross by which He put hostility to death.*

It is important to recognize there is a cultural background here in Ephesians 2 about barriers. In the Temple there were several barriers.

## Divisions within the Temple

There was the Court Of The Gentiles, which a gentile could go to, to seek God. Paul was accused of bringing one of his gentile disciples past the Court Of The Gentiles into the Court of the Jewish people which had a court for women and a court that the men could go in, so there was another division there. And then only the priest and the person bringing the sacrifice could go to the Altar with the sacrifice. Then only the High Priest could go into the Most Holy Place.

Now if you understand something about the Temple in the original days, it was like a transition place between Heaven and Earth. It was thin space. When you were in the Holy of Holies, you came into a dimension like you see in Science Fiction movies where you really are at that representation of the Throne at the Ark of the Covenant and you are also connected to the Throne in Heaven. There is a connection between the two.

When the High Priest went in the Holy of Holies, he was really going into the Presence of God. Space and time were no longer relevant. Isaiah saw this when he saw the Throne of God and the Throne representation in the Temple. He saw the Lord and His train came down into the Temple and the angels were crying, "Holy." Only the High Priest could go into that Most Holy Place.

We learn that that Most Holy Place in the Temple is a representation of the Tabernacle in Heaven where the Throne of God is, where the Heavenly Altar is, where the Heavenly incense is, and where the 4 and 20 elders are, and where the 4 living creatures are.

So, the gentile could only go into the court of the gentiles and then there was a wall. With the wall, there was a hostility because of the commandment of Torah — of Scripture — that, that was as far as a gentile could go. So, the Jewish people looked at gentiles as unclean. This created distance. It created hostility.

 **Key:** Jesus broke down every wall of division making way for both believing Jew and gentile to have access to the Father.

Now, in the Messiah, Jesus, even though the earthly Temple continues, that whole thing of division has been transcended. Now, if you are in Jesus, you can go all the way in to the Most Holy Place - Heaven. Now, you have the status of the High Priest. Every one of you can go right to the Throne of the Father.

This is astonishing. So, the idea of there being a barrier between Jew and gentile no longer exists. We share this status together. We share this identity together as new creations in the Messiah. The barrier that existed within the Temple before Christ no longer exists. We have to recalibrate ourselves.

 **Key:** The dividing wall that existed in the Temple before Christ, no longer exists. Jew and gentile believers are one!

**Ephesians 2:14-18** *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*

Paul says that we both have access - Jew and gentile. Now the mistake is to say, "Well what this means is that Jew and gentile, they no longer have relevance. There is one new man. It is the third race. There is no longer an importance for being Jewish. There is no longer importance to have national identity. We are just to be made the same." It would be a big mistake to say that. It would not help us to understand the identity of the Church and Israel.

## God's People, the Jews

Paul says, "You are no longer strangers, but you are fellow citizens WITH God's people." Ephesians 2:19

Who are the "God's people" referred to there? The Jewish people.

If you read Ephesians more carefully, the Jewish people do not dissolve into a new thing. Instead, you who are not Jewish are fellow citizens with the Jewish people. Gentile believers are *with* them.

**Ephesians 2:20-22** *You have been built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ, Himself being the Chief Cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a Holy Temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

## A Holy Temple is Growing

You are growing into this Holy Temple of the Lord. *You* are the Temple. The Holy of Holies dwells here when we gather.

 **Key:** When we dwell together, His Presence is amongst us.

**Ephesians 3:3, 5-6** *How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery.....which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets that the gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.*

## Fellow Heirs

Fellow heirs. This begins to show us that the relationship between Jew and gentile is the closest possible relationship that we share. We have membership as family together.

 **Key:** Believing Jews and gentiles are fellow heirs in Christ.

In Romans 11:16, Paul brings this out in a different way when he talks about engrafting. He says of the Jewish people, "if the first fruits is Holy (Jewish believers in Jesus) then the whole batch of dough is Holy. If the root is Holy so are the branches." The Jewish people are still Holy and elect because Messianic Jews exist. We are called the "saved remnant of Israel." The nation is still there.

Then Paul says in Romans 11:24 in regards to the identity of the people that are from the nations, the gentiles, "If you are cut out by that which of nature is a wild olive tree and grafted contrary to nature to a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted into *Their. Own. Olive. Tree?*"

 **Key:** In the Old Testament, the Jews were the only ones known as the people of God. Once Jesus came, gentiles were grafted in and became known as the people of God, too.

## Gentiles are Grafted In

The olive tree is Israel's and gentiles are *grafted into* that tree. The olive tree is the people of God, and the people of God at that time were only the Jewish people until the New Covenant came. Now gentiles are grafted in and they become part of the people of God because they are grafted to Israel.

Now, if you get this picture of identity, you will see

- » First, you have the Jewish people and they did not all come to Yeshua.
- » Then, you have the Messianic Jews that did come to Yeshua and they are the saved remnant of Israel. Our existence makes the rest of the nation Holy. We are the enhancement of the reality of Jewish election because we are the first fruits that make that Holy.
- » Then, the people from the nations that believe in Jesus are the prophetic anticipation of their nation being in the Kingdom of God someday.
- » Then, the Jewish people who believe in Jesus are joined together as one new man with all of the people from the nations who believe in Jesus.

The nations are still preserved. God does not do away with nations. There they are in Revelation 21 entering into the New Jerusalem, bringing their distinctive glory. The nations will be saved, but there is a remnant in the nations that have a privilege to be the priesthood of those nations. The priesthood of those nations, those that are saved before the Lord returns are the ones that are joined to the Messianic Jews.

 **Key:** The saved remnant within the nations will become the priesthood of those nations and the priesthood will be the ones who are grafted in with the Messianic Jews.

Now look at how this works.

- » The saved remnant from the nations bring sanctification to those nations. It is not taught. It is implied.
- » The Messianic Jews in Israel bring sanctification to the nation of Israel.
- » From the nations that are sanctified by a saved remnant, they are now joined as one new man with the Messianic Jews who are said to be the saved remnant of their nation.
- » By being joined to the King of Israel, Jesus, and by being joined to the Messianic Jews, you are joined to Israel.
- » The Church is — as to its identity — joined to Israel.

You have been joined to Jesus, the King of Israel, and you have been joined to the Messianic Jews who are the saved remnant of Israel, and you have been grafted in to a Jewish olive tree. Now, here is the identity statement that is extraordinary.

 **Key:** The Church is made up of those from all nations who are saved that have been joined to Israel and its destiny for the sake of world redemption.

Think about this, you now, as a believer in Jesus are joined to Israel. You have a “joined to Israel” identity. I will say it again. The church is those from all nations that have been joined to Israel and its identity for the sake of world redemption. **That is why when you think about Israel, you are thinking about your own family.** You are thinking about the fact that YOU are joined to them.

🔑 **Key:** Our connection to Israel through salvation makes us family.

So, when Israel sins and does bad stuff, you are not condemning and proud against Israel. You are grieved. You are interceding because it is like part of you is sinning.

When there is victory and Jewish people are coming to Jesus, you are rejoicing because it is like a family member that had not been a believer coming to Jesus.

You are — as to your identity — joined to Israel! You do not replace Israel. Now, you are the Body of Christ and you are no less than Israel. And you have been raised with Him so that you will rule and reign with Him in the age to come, with Israel.

🔑 **Key:** Our being grafted in to Israel does not replace them, it makes us joint heirs with them.

This is an amazing change that you do not see in the Hebrew scripture. I want to encourage you today that when you connect to this burden to see the Church rightly aligned, Asher's book "*Alignment*", speaks into being rightly aligned with the Messianic Jewish community and Israel.

We are talking about the Church recovering something of its own identity as being adopted into the family of God. I will say it again.

**The church is those from all nations who have been joined to Israel and its destiny for the sake of world redemption.**

How are you joined to Israel?

- » By being one with the Jews who are the saved remnant and
- » By being one with Jesus who is the Messiah and King of Israel.

You are joined to us and we are joined to you and we are one new man together.