

The composition of the people of God, is a definite place where some critical thinking and reflection are surely needed by today's Messianic people. Ecclesiology is not an area of theology which enough adequately understand the importance of. Yet, given the end-time or eschatological significance of today's Messianic movement, ecclesiology is something many need a better handle on.

For today's Messianic movement, ecclesiology affects how Jewish and non-Jewish Believers read the Bible, and the instructions which God wants them to follow. Ecclesiology undeniably affects the unity of Jewish Believers and Believers from the nations as one in the Body of Messiah.

Is the *ekklēsia* an actual separate entity known as "the Church"? Or, is *ekklēsia* no different than the assembly of Israel itself—which takes Bible readers back to the mixed multitude of physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *and* the welcomed persons from the nations, who received His Ten Words and Instruction at the base of Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 12:38)? Did Yeshua the Messiah come to found a separate group of elect called "the Church," or did He come to rebuild and restore His Father's assembly of righteous ones (cf. Matthew 16:18; Jeremiah 33:7, LXX), restoring the Kingdom to Israel (cf. Acts 1:6)?

The basic choices of ecclesiology today's Messianic people have are rather striking: either God (1) has two groups of elect, or sub-peoples: Israel and "the Church"; or God (2) recognizes all as a part of an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel. How are we to approach non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement, and things like the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13), the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), or being grafted-in (Romans 11:16-18)? There is much which we need to be considering from the text of Scripture, as we evaluate what our future beholds.

Are Non-Jewish Believers Really A PART OF ISRAEL?

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J.K. McKee

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messianicapologetics.net

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
Ger: German
GNP: Greek New Testament
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)

JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)

JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

KJV: King James Version

Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)

LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)

LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)

LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)

LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)

LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)

LXX: Septuagint

m. Mishnah

MT: Masoretic Text

NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)

NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)

NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*

NEB: New English Bible (1970)

Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*

NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)

NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*

NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*

NIV: New International Version (1984)

NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)

NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)

NKJV: New King James Version (1982)

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)

NLT: New Living Translation (1996)

NT: New Testament

OT: Old Testament

REB: Revised English Bible (1989)

RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)

t. Tosefta

Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament

Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)

TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition

v(s). verse(s)

Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*

Vul: Latin Vulgate

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

Introduction

The current Messianic Jewish movement has been around for over a half century or so, since the late 1960s and early 1970s. What has been mainly witnessed, is that a great number of Jewish people have come to faith in Yeshua as their Messiah, and many non-Jewish Believers have been exposed to the origins of their Messiah faith in Judaism. But in all of the time which has taken place, many of us have witnessed how Messianic theology has not developed to the degree which it should have. With all of the years which have gone by, and with certainly all of the resources which have been invested into Jewish ministry and related endeavors, one would naturally expect much more to have been worked through. Today as we find ourselves in the mid-2020s, many of us recognize how there may be some significant tension, and even pain up ahead, if we do not better align ourselves to what our Heavenly Father intends for the future of this very unique and special faith community.

There are too many theological assumptions made by people within the Messianic sphere of influence, which need to be challenged, or at least evaluated on some significant level. A less charismatic and a more systematic approach to many issues is necessary. Many of the people, and even some leaders and teachers, within parts of the Messianic community, need to be less anti-intellectual than they might tend to be—and/or need to steadfastly avoid the great amount of problems caused by a group-think or horde mentality. Many people also need to steadfastly avoid the violent currents and eddies which have been caused by a rather uncivilized Messianic blogosphere at times, and an abuse of other online social media.

A distinct area of theology which Messianic people need to have a better handle on, is **ecclesiology**. But other than being some technical term, what is ecclesiology and what does it involve? A standard definition of ecclesiology is provided by the *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*:

"The area of theological study concerned with understanding the church (derived from the Greek word *ekklēsia*, 'church'). Ecclesiology seeks to set forth the nature and function of church. It also investigates issues such as

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the mission, ministry and structure of the church, as well as its role in the overall plan of God.”ⁱ

The composition of the people of God, as broad and deep as this sector of theology is, is a definite place where some critical thinking and reflection are surely needed by today’s Messianic people. Ecclesiology is not an area of theology which enough Messiah followers adequately understand or appreciate the importance of. To far too many, it is just a big word without a great deal of significance. Yet, given what many of today’s Messianic people, Jewish and non-Jewish, are convicted of, have read in Scripture, and have had the witness of the Holy Spirit of—regarding the likely future of our faith community and what God intends for us—ecclesiology is something which is very important.

Why is understanding ecclesiology so important? Initially, given the predisposition to describe the theological sector of ecclesiology as “The study of the church as a biblical and theological topic” (*Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*),ⁱⁱ the question for many Messianics is whether or not the term *ekklēsia* should even be translated as “church” in English Bibles. Given the background of the term *ekklēsia* via the Greek Septuagint, often rendering the Hebrew term *qahal*,ⁱⁱⁱ alternative translations such as “congregation” or “assembly” are vastly preferred. Still, there is much to be considered and probed regarding ecclesiology.

Ecclesiology widely affects a person’s eschatology, or approach to end-time events which are supposed to occur prior to and subsequent to the Messiah’s return. For today’s Messianic movement, ecclesiology affects how Jewish and non-Jewish Believers read the Bible, and the instructions which God wants them to follow. **Ecclesiology undeniably affects the unity of Jewish Believers and Believers from the nations, as one in the Body of Messiah.**

While there are many important components of ecclesiology, such as those persons who are qualified to lead and teach groups of Messiah

ⁱ Stanley J. Grenz, David Gurezki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 42.

ⁱⁱ Donald S. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 85.

ⁱⁱⁱ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 196 describes how *ekklēsia* “in the Septuagint [is] often equivalent to [qahal], *the assembly of the Israelites*,” and would have been specifically employed by the Apostles to describe the First Century Body of Messiah’s undeniable origins in Ancient Israel.

Cf. K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp 397-402.

followers, and the organization of the local assembly—what we are principally concerned about in this study concerns the relationship of non-Jewish Believers—especially those who are a committed part of today's Messianic movement—to Israel. Are these people just specially called of God to help with some form of "Jewish ministry," and to live in solidarity with Messianic Jews, those who are Jewish Believers in Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah of Israel, Torah observant along with them? Or, do non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah (whether they recognize it or not) actually possess citizenship in an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel, which incorporates the righteous from the nations into the *malchut haElohim*, the Kingdom of God? The latter position, that non-Jewish Believers are a part of an expanded or enlarged Kingdom of Israel, is the view of many people in the broad Messianic community—including not only many individual non-Jewish Believers, but also many individual Jewish Believers.

What does this mean in terms of the *ekklēsia*? Is the *ekklēsia*, an actual separate entity known as "the Church"? Or, is *ekklēsia* no different than the assembly of Israel itself—which takes Bible readers back to the mixed multitude of physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, *and* the welcomed persons from the nations, who received His Ten Words and Instruction at the base of Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 12:38)? Did Yeshua the Messiah come to found a separate group of elect called "the Church," or did He come to rebuild and restore His Father's assembly of righteous ones (cf. Matthew 16:18; Jeremiah 33:7, LXX), restoring the Kingdom to Israel (cf. Acts 1:6)?

We presently find ourselves in a significant and massive phase of Messianic theological and spiritual development (mid-2020s). *What will we do?* Obviously, being open to the Holy Spirit is absolutely required and imperative—but so is evaluating Holy Scripture, and having a focus centered on the legitimate trajectory of salvation history. We also have to be willing to recognize how far too much of our faith community has been negatively swayed by religious politics and maneuvering, and try our best to stay out of it for the sake of the Lord's purposes, and for our own objective reasoning.

Much of what is discussed in this publication will lay out for you not only some answers to critical questions, but also put forward some challenges, per what is foretold to take place in future prophecy. This publication is intended for both Jewish and non-Jewish Messianics alike, but understandably might have a little more importance for the latter group, in the event that they are struggling to find a place of comfort and solace in the current Messianic movement. And, given various divisions we have seen in

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the broad Messianic community regarding the people of God since the mid-to-late 1990s, all of us need to be admonished a bit, and to return to a more reasonable and fair-minded course of direction.

The title of this publication, *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*, is certainly a bit provocative. Its main section, from which this publication's title is derived, is a rather long exegetical article. It seeks to address and consider the subject of ecclesiology, and issues common to the Messianic movement as they concern things like the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13), the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), being grafted-in (Romans 11:16-18), and whether "the Church" really is a second group of elect. It has been updated in 2024, as our family and ministry have had to factor in new developments and experiences we have had, since this resource was originally released in 2013. A new, second half, **Ecclesiology Matters**, has added new material, mainly reproduced from various back issues of Outreach Israel News, released during the past decade. We ourselves, like many in today's Messianic movement, have improved and advanced in our understanding and implementation of the original Messianic Jewish mission of Jewish outreach, evangelism, and Israel solidarity—and how non-Jewish Believers embracing their faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures, join with Jewish Believers as co-laborers in the salvation of Israel.

Regardless of where you stand on Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Kingdom of God, a wide range of changes are inevitably coming our Messianic faith community—which are going to leave a demonstrable impact on all of us, as we approach the final stages of time before the Messiah's return. The basic choices of ecclesiology we have are stark: either God (**1**) has two groups of elect, or sub-peoples: Israel and "the Church"; or God (**2**) recognizes us all as a part of an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel. Will the Messianic movement emerge into something which tends to be exclusive *or* inclusive? There is much which we need to be considering from the text of Scripture, and what many have said and are likely to say, as we evaluate what our future beholds.

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?

The Messianic Jewish movement which has grown and been emerging in the late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries, has achieved much for the Kingdom of God, which it should be genuinely proud of and satisfied for. It has made a significant, positive contribution in the lives of many Jewish men and women who have come to saving faith in the Messiah of Israel, giving them a place where they do not have to assimilate and give up their Jewish heritage, traditions, and customs.

Perhaps an unforeseen side-effect, is how the Messianic movement has also made a significant, positive contribution in the lives of many non-Jewish, evangelical Protestant men and women, who have come to know the Jewishness of Jesus and the New Testament in a much more profound and tangible way. Many of these people have entered into the Messianic movement, its congregations and synagogues, and have adopted a Torah obedient lifestyle, as they have sought to emulate Messiah Yeshua. As we continue to see various developments occur within our broad Messianic community, the question of how non-Jewish Believers relate to Israel—especially given the end-time reality of the nations coming to Zion to be taught from Moses' Teaching (Micah 4:1-3; Isaiah 2:2-4), and those of the nations joining with the Jewish people (Zechariah 8:23)—is undeniably going to increase.

Many of the people who compose and/or encounter the broad Messianic community, are in a state of relative confusion, or at least uncertainty, when it comes to the subject of **ecclesiology**. *Ecclesiology is not a word they tend to hear in their weekly Shabbat teachings, or at their various Bible studies or prayer groups.* They certainly do not read about it that much, if their spiritual regimen is mostly constrained to various devotion books. Yet, ecclesiology, the study and identity of God's elect, is a theological discipline which can draw some heavy lines of demarcation and division among various groups of Messianic people—especially as the Messianic community continues to