

# Are We Christian? Are We Jewish?

By James King  
HalleluYah Fellowship

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The answer to those questions may be that Messianic Israelite believers are sort of a cross between Christian and Jewish, somewhere between the two as they are typically understood by most people.

**Are we Christian?** We are Christian in the sense that we accept Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah who paid the death penalty for our sins, rose again to life after three days in the grave, now sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and who someday will return to earth and establish the Kingdom of God. When we repent of our sins (try to stop breaking the laws and commandments in the Bible), believe in Him (which includes obeying Him, not just a mental acceptance of His existence), and confess Him as Lord and Master of our lives, we have the sure hope of spending eternity in resurrected bodies with Him forever and ever.

However, there is much that modern Christianity teaches that we do not accept. For hundreds of years the Word of YHVH (God) has been distorted, perverted, and misinterpreted by Church leaders to the extent that false doctrines are taught today by most churches, preachers, and teachers, doctrines which are radically different from what Scripture teaches. The authority for our spiritual beliefs and practice should be the Holy Bible (*all of it*), not traditions or any church leaders.

**Are we Jewish?** Some of us may be, but as a group, no. A person is Jewish by ancestry if his family tree connects him with the tribe of Judah, one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Just as the USA has 50 states, and you can be an American without being an Oklahoman, Israel was divided into 12 tribes, and Judah was only one of them. Many Israelites were not Jews, although today many people use the terms interchangeably as if the meaning is the same. But technically, there is a difference between Israelite and Jewish.

Hundreds of years before Yeshua was born, the nation of Israel divided into the northern kingdom which was then called *Israel*, and the southern kingdom called *Judah*. The Kingdom of Judah was then made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (with some from the tribe of Levi), while Israel, the northern kingdom, was made up of the other ten tribes. The religion of the southern kingdom (Judah) was *Judaism*, which was "Jewish." The Apostle Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin, but also called himself a Jew:

"For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, *of* the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1, NKJV).

"But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia..." (Acts 21:39, NKJV)

Some believers who identify themselves as Messianic Israelite are indeed Jewish, that is, their heritage and bloodline confirms their identity as such (or they had previously converted to Judaism). On the other hand, many Messianic Israelite believers are not Jewish either by ancestry or conversion; they would be considered by Jews to be *Gentile* (non-Jewish). They may have come from Roman Catholic or Protestant backgrounds, or from no religion at all. Of course, all believers are connected spiritually with Judah through the Messiah Yeshua (Jesus), who certainly was Jewish. But it is more correct (for Gentiles, at least) to say that we are *Israelite* because, as Paul says in Romans 11, all non-Jewish believers are joined to Israel like branches grafted to an olive tree (symbolic of Israel), along with the natural branches (the natural-born Israelite).

Messianic Israelite congregations and fellowships do typically choose to use some Jewish elements of worship including blowing the shofar (ram's horn), reading from the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), giving the Torah scroll a place of honor in the assembly, and including some Jewish songs in the praise and worship music along with non-Jewish components such as popular praise choruses and hymns. Also commonly included are liturgy, prayers, and Bible teaching.

While we honor our Father in heaven, the Creator and King of the Universe, in ways that Jewish people would find familiar, we also worship His Son Yeshua (Jesus), the Messiah and Savior, as He is the Son of God, God "in the flesh" (John 1:1-14) who came to earth as a man to teach us, to show us how to live, to call us to repent and live by the commandments of Torah, and to give us eternal life by sacrificing Himself to pay for our sins.

Our goal is that no matter what our background, we can all come together as one in the unity that Yeshua prayed for:

*"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:20-23, NKJV).*

This concept is reinforced by the Apostle Paul (*note that when he says "Greek" he is referring to Gentiles; this applies to all Gentiles (non-Jews)*):

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:27-29, NKJV).

As Abraham's seed, all believers are part of Israel, and learning more about the Hebrew roots of our faith helps us to better understand Scripture and how YHVH (God) wants to bless us through our obedience to His word as we apply His guidelines, principles, and commands to our lives.