

How Can a Jew Believe in Jesus and Still Be Jewish?

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It all depends on who Yeshua is! The New Covenant presents Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah (John 1:41, 45, 49). If He's not the Jewish Messiah then no one should believe in Him because His credentials as Savior of the World are based on His credentials as the Messiah of Israel. If He is the true Messiah, then it is kosher that I a Jewish person believe in Him. And I would be a Jew in good standing with God, even if no one else agreed.

For argument's sake, suppose that Yeshua is a false Messiah. In the eyes of rabbinical authority I must still be seen as a Jew. Why? Because, believing in a false messiah does not make any Jew a non-Jew. For example, in 132 c.e. Simon Bar Kochba was a leader during the Jewish revolt against Rome. Rabbi Akiva (a very famous rabbi) declared Bar Kochba to be the Messiah, although at the time Bar Kochba had none of the accepted credentials. The declaration appears to have been a pragmatic attempt on Rabbi Akiva's part to unite all Jews against Rome. However, no Jewish authority has ever said, "Akiva is no longer Jewish for believing in a false messiah." If, after endorsing a false messiah, Akiva is still considered to be a Jew in good standing, then one who believes Yeshua is Messiah cannot be considered otherwise.

In a synagogue on Long Island, New York, I once gave a presentation of why I believed Yeshua is the Messiah. Afterward, the senior rabbi stood up and declared, "Nadler, you're no longer a Jew because of your belief in Jesus!" "Rabbi," I responded, "If the Bostoner Rebbe says I'm still a Jew, though a wayward Jew, and if the Encyclopedia Judaica declares I'm still a Jew, though a wayward one, then on what basis can you say I'm no longer a Jew?" "Well," the Rabbi said, "perhaps I'm wrong." "Rabbi," I quietly responded, "maybe you're wrong about more than just that?" To my astonishment, the synagogue audience of over a hundred Jewish people erupted into applause. It was apparent to all who would consider the issues objectively that a Jew who believes in Yeshua is still a Jew, whether the Rabbi approves or not.

In the New Covenant book of John the early believers in Yeshua described Him as "the Messiah," "the One spoken of in Moses and the Prophets," "the King of Israel," and so on. They consistently saw Yeshua in a Jewish frame of reference, as the centerpiece of Jewish history.

Please notice also how these believers understood themselves. In both Acts, 21:39 and 22:3 in the New Covenant, Paul declares first to the Romans, then again to his own Jewish people, "I am a Jew from Tarsus." Now at this time, Paul had been a believer in Yeshua for well over twenty years. So it isn't that he's confused or that he's trying to say one thing to the Romans, and something else to the Jews. Paul doesn't say that he "was a Jew," or "an ex-

Jew from Tarsus,” or a “former Jew,” etc.---Paul considered himself a present tense Jew.

In Romans 11:1, Paul reiterates his Jewish identity when he raises the rhetorical question, “Has God forsaken His people (Israel)?” He then answers, “Not at all! For I am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” His first “proof” that God has not forsaken Israel is himself. God chose a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Philippians 3:5) so that the Gentile world would never think that God would forsake “a people whom He foreknew.”

Today it’s the same story. Every Jewish believer living his or her present tense Jewish identity testifies, “Am Yisrael Chai b’Yeshua HaMashiach.” The people of Israel live in Yeshua the Messiah! For if the Lord would break His promises to Israel, why should anyone else think Him trustworthy regarding the Good News of Yeshua?

Many people, both Jewish and Gentile, are unaware that the New Covenant does not restrict in any fashion Jewish believers from identifying and living as Jews. Yes, coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua is a radical change, a heart transformation of turning from sin to God. That said, the New Covenant only builds upon and fulfills the ethical, moral and spiritual teaching and revelation of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. So, in the New Covenant we read that early believers continued attending the Temple and synagogue, kept the feasts, circumcised their Jewish children and kept other aspects of the Law, not to deny Messiah’s authority or to show they merited righteousness, but for the sake of identifying with their own people. In short, they remained Jewish (Acts 3, 15:10, 16:1-3, 20:6, 16; 1 Corinthians 16:8; Matthew 11:29).

Unfortunately, because of church history, there’s a lot of “stinking thinking” on this subject, even among Christians. A few years back, I was invited to speak on a secular radio call-in show in Miami, Florida. I received a number of “you’re-no-longer-a-Jew” calls from Jewish listeners. Then a call came in from a more polite gentleman: “Mr. Nadler, now that you’re a believer in Jesus you’re no longer a Jew, for the Bible says that ‘in Messiah there’s neither Jew nor Greek.’”

I recognized the Scripture portion and responded over the air, “Oh, you mean Galatians 3:28, ‘there’s neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female; for we are all one in Messiah Jesus’.”

“Exactly,” the caller replied.

“Then let me ask you a question. Are you a believer?”

“Yes, I am,” he answered.

“Great. Are you married?” I asked.

“Well, yes, I’m married,” he slowly answered.

“Is your wife a believer?”

“Yes, she’s a believer,” he responded after a longer pause.

“Well,” I said, pausing to catch my breath. “If you’re a believer and still a male, and your wife is a believer and still a female, then I’m a believer and still a Jew. The verse in Galatians is not teaching that we lose our identities in Messiah, but that there’s only one way to God for all people.”

An extremely long pause, then “You mean... I’m still Jewish?”

“If you were born a Jew,” I responded, “then you’re still a Jew.”

“Hallelujah!” he shouted over the airwaves, “They told me I was no longer Jewish.”

Yes it has been said that one cannot believe in Jesus and still be Jewish. However, if, as the Jewish Bible teaches, Yeshua is our Messiah, then trusting in Him is the most Jewish decision you can ever make!