

Identity crisis: Do believers in Messiah Yeshua join ‘the Church’ or Israel?

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All passages from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

As God’s appointments of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and Sukkot (Tabernacles) approach, an important theme in both appointments is what God teaches us about who we are. This is the first part of a study on our identity as believers in Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah.

A large number of believers in the God of Israel and Yeshua as the Messiah of God seem to have an **identity crisis**. Many have been taught that believers in Yeshua (Jesus) are part of “the Church” or a “new Israel,” which “died” to the Torah. However, Yeshua, the Prophets and apostle Paul said believers join ancient Israel and take on its heritage in the Torah.

Fifty-nine percent of U.S. children raised in Christian homes — nearly three in five — permanently or temporarily stop regular attendance of services or study of the Bible after age 15, according to five years of interviews with 1,300 young adults.¹ Their top six reasons for walking away were:

1. Churches seem overprotective.
 - Everything outside the church is demonic: 23 percent
 - Real-world problems are ignored: 22 percent
 - Harmfulness of movies, music and video games are overemphasized: 18 percent
2. Christianity is shallow.
 - Services are boring: 31 percent
 - Faith isn’t relevant to my career or interests: 24 percent
 - The Bible isn’t taught clearly or often enough: 23 percent
 - God is missing from the church experience: 20 percent
3. Churches come across as antagonistic to science.
 - Too confident in having all the answers: 35 percent
 - Out of step with scientific knowledge: 29 percent
 - Antiscience: 25 percent
 - Turned off by the creation vs. evolution debate: 23 percent
4. Church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic and/or judgmental.
 - Catholics think their teachings on chastity and birth control are outdated: 40 percent
 - Feel judged about past mistakes with sexual purity: 17 percent
5. Christianity is too exclusive.
 - Afraid of other religions: 29 percent
 - Forced to choose between faith and friends: 29 percent
 - Only for insiders, “like a country club”: 22 percent
6. Church feels unfriendly to those who doubt.
 - Can’t ask my most pressing life questions: 35 percent
 - Can’t ask significant intellectual questions about faith: 23 percent
 - Can’t get help with depression or other emotional problems: 17 percent

For those who stick with their belief in God and maintain regular meetings with fellow believers and a regimen of reading and applying God’s words, a small fraction of the more than 1 billion who trust in Yeshua as the Messiah see themselves as part of the same Israel who stood at the base of Mount Sinai and accepted God’s instructions, including God’s weekly, monthly and annual appointments and admonitions to abstain from certain foods, associations, etc.

This is manifested in a spectrum of “replacement theology” — ranging from the most innocuous idea of Yeshua haMashiakh (Jesus the Christ) believers’ takeover of the framework of Israel at Pentacost after Yeshua’s death and resurrection to God’s closing the book on Israel at that time and writing the first chapter of something new, known as The Church. It’s a teaching said to be backed by the testimony of Yeshua and His emissaries, the apostles.

God answers many of the underlying young people are asking by opening up the family of God — an ancient group called Israel — to all who like Abraham are willing to trust God’s answers to the problems ailing the world.

Who is our God?

This is a “50,000-foot” view of God’s testimony about His identity.

- Our God is the Creator of Earth, the Universe and the mechanics of how they work.

¹ Based on the Faith That Lasts project, a 2007–2011 survey of 1,296 18- to 29-year-old current and former church-goers nationwide by Barna Research Group. <www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>

- Our God is the Creator of life on Earth, with human life being at the pinnacle.
- Our God is the Destroyer of life on Earth to interrupt the rebellion of humanity against God.
 - Our God was the Bringer of the Flood.
 - Our God was the Creator of languages at Babel.
 - Our God has been the Establisher and Destroyer of empires.
 - Our God was the Creator of Israel, the chosen representative of God to persuade the nations to return to God's plan.
 - Our God was the Destroyer of the might of Mitsraim (Egypt), freeing Israel.
 - Our God is master of human empires.
 - Our God foretold of the rise of six major empires that would influence the Land from Israel's first exile to the Day of the LORD: Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and its four-part successor, Rome, and a confederation of stronger and weaker powers.
 - Our God orchestrated Assyria and Babylon to conquer Israel then broke up those empires.
 - God will be the Bringer of vengeance on the Day of the LORD.
- Our God is the Sender of the Messiah, God's Wisdom and chief representative, to make that return ultimately possible by ending the separation between God and humanity.
- Our God is the Sender of the Spirit to establish and maintain the connection between God and humanity.
- Our God is the Re-Creator of the Earth and "heavens" after the Day of the LORD.

Who does God say we are?

- "Children of God," i.e. no longer "sinners" but "holy ones," or "saints."
 - This does not mean we will never sin (absentmindedly stray from God), transgress (purposely stray) or pursue iniquity (live in rebellion).
 - It does mean that God will progressively transform us from that lifestyle.

(1st John 2:1–3:12) My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

³ By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

⁷ Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. ⁸ On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. ⁹ The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰ The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks

in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

¹² I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

¹⁵ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be

shown that they all are not of us.

²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.

²⁶ These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. ²⁷ As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

²⁸ Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. ²⁹ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

¹ See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

⁴ Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is

(John 1:9–18) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even

(Rom 8:12–17) So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For

- Not only are we “children of God,” we are part of Israel.

(Eph. 2:1–22) And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of

- Thus, the “dividing wall” between Jew and *ger* (Eph. 2:14-15) was not the Torah, because it commanded there to be no such wall between *ger* and God.²

lawlessness. ⁵ You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. ⁷ Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸ the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and

to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John *testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me

all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our

yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands — ¹² remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments

he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

¹¹ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹² not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.

has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.” ¹⁶ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷ AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR [Isa. 57:10]; ¹⁸ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

² For an in-depth study on this topic, see J.K. McKee, *One Law for All: From the Mosaic Texts to the Work of the Holy Spirit*, TNN Press, Richardson, Texas: 2012.

- All Israelis, native or not, could approach the tent of meeting and offer sacrifices.
- The Torah also condemns all Israelis, native or not, for sin, transgression and iniquity.
- What the Messiah gets us out from under is the equal curse of violating the Law, not the Law that points toward holy behavior and about the work of the Messiah.
- Paul taught that a great work of the Messiah was to turn those outside the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:12) into more than resident aliens but citizens (v. 19).
- This adoption of the nations into Israel was foretold long before.
 - At the dedication of the first temple on Sukkot, King Shlomo (Solomon) prayed:

<p>(1st Kings 8:41–43) “Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name’s sake ⁴² (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty</p>	<p>hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, ⁴³ hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that</p>	<p>all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name.”</p>
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 - Prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah, “YHWH is salvation”) foretold the restoration of Israel:

<p>(Isa. 56:1–8) “Thus says the LORD, ‘Preserve justice and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come And My righteousness to be revealed. ² How blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who takes hold of it; Who keeps from profaning the sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil.</p>	<p>“Behold, I am a dry tree.” ⁴ For thus says the LORD, “To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, ⁵ To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, And a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.</p>	<p>LORD, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath And holds fast My covenant; ⁷ Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.’</p>
<p>³ “Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely separate me from His people.” Nor let the eunuch say,</p>	<p>⁶ “Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the</p>	<p>⁸ “The Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, ‘Yet <i>others</i> I will gather to them, to those <i>already</i> gathered.’ ”</p>