



New Jewish Competition for Gentile Souls

BY RAY GANNON

heed God's voice and let the power of His name be manifest in the earth. God manifested His presence at Sinai and at Pentecost to awaken a spiritually slumbering Jewish people out of their lethargy and move them into the blessings of God.

When Jesus stood before 500 Jewish believers on the Mount of Olives to issue the Great Commission, Jewish responsibility for Gentile well-being was not a new concept.

Months ago, God poured out His Spirit during a Pentecostal Messianic conference in New Jersey. Many Jewish believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, four were born again, and two people were miraculously healed. Pentecostal Jews who knew the voice of the Spirit showed the light of Christ to those in spiritual darkness.

Do Pentecostals need to compete with conventional religious practitioners or seemingly religious magical formulas? Has mystical, intuitive knowledge of the divine been the basis of our appeal? No! We are neither religious idolaters nor Gnostics. We understand that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is God's doing and beyond human invention or religious machination.

ISRAEL AS AN EVANGELIZING NATION

All Israel and all Gentile believers are called together (Ephesians 2:11–22) to

The Torah made it clear that Abraham's progeny played an ongoing redemptive role among the nations. The seed of the patriarchs was to be a blessing, functioning both as a corporate priesthood and a holy nation, and spiritually enlightening the world. Israel remains divinely commissioned to proclaim God to all humanity and to demonstrate the social benefits of national allegiance and obedience to Him.

In keeping with modern America's devotion to religious pluralism, pagan and Christian conversion to Judaism is now making a strong comeback.

During the biblical period, pagans were accepted into the Jewish faith providing they were genuinely converted — willing to accept circumcision, water immersion, and full observance of the Jewish law. Judaism was characterized by intense missionary endeavors particularly throughout the intertestamental period and up to the time the Church came to Roman political power in the fourth century A.D. At that time pagan and Christian conversion to Judaism was officially outlawed within Christendom. As a result, the culturally resilient Jewish world manufactured an official nonproselytizing policy in an attempt to legitimize their radical departure from the missionary activities that had always been an important part of Jewish religious practice. Throughout the centuries, Judaism has not pursued Gentile conversions for pragmatic reasons: to avoid legal or religious persecution. Adopting a nonconversionist policy, Jews have since condemned proselytizing efforts as the

distinctly imperialistic practice of missionary Christianity.

Contrary to common Christian myth, Jews did not deliberately withhold biblical revelation from honest seekers of

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truth because of supposed ethnic prejudice. The Bible reports pagan conversions since the Exodus and even includes two women in David's ancestry. The intertestamental laymen-led synagogue movement spreading from Babylon throughout the Mediterranean world fostered new congregations as communal sites for Jewish worship. They also served as conversionary centers for Gentiles seeking religious assurance in an uncertain world of pagan adulteries and idolatrous mystery religions.

Paul's apostolic mission to the Gentiles commenced in the local synagogues. He often addressed their members and shared the gospel with them. But after many Jews and proselytes embraced Jesus, others stiffened their resistance. Paul then began preaching among the spiritually hungry Gentiles. As God's grace was given to the uncircumcised, many previously unresponsive Jews were provoked to spiritual jealousy. As Gentiles experienced Spirit regeneration, Spirit baptism, and God's rich anointing for divine service, many Jews reevaluated their rejection of Jesus. Since God was obviously enriching

the lives of Gentiles with His anointing, some Jews recognized they could spiritually benefit by submitting to God's anointed One, Jesus.

Except for early Judaizing believers in the Book of Acts and Galatians, rabbinical Judaism never maintained that Gentiles must embrace Judaism to have eternal life. Conversely, the righteous of all nations would inherit life eternal. Whereas

Jews were obliged by God to observe the 613 precepts of the Torah, the Gentile righteous were expected to keep the seven of the Noachide code — also called the Seven Laws of Noah, a universal code of law prescribed by the Torah of Israel for humanity.

Jews generally regard conversion to Judaism as an unnecessary encumbrance on Gentiles, who could reap the same heavenly benefit without the full measure of earthly Jewish obligations. For this reason, during most of the post-biblical period, Gentiles seeking conversion

to Judaism have been refused three times before gaining rabbinical approval to convert. Only when an absolutely determined Gentile was under long-term compulsion to convert would the rabbis finally yield.

CONVERSIONS TO JUDAISM TODAY

Today, Christians are not alone in their attempt to convert people of other religious persuasions. In recent decades, Jewish scholars have advocated the biblical Jewish mission. Many Jews are realizing that they are to do more than improve the judicial system or make new scientific discoveries. They are to fulfill the biblical mandate to offer Judaism to all humanity. This God-issued religious alternative will establish a better material and social experience for mankind in the here and now.

In keeping with modern America's devotion to religious pluralism, pagan and Christian conversion to Judaism is now making a strong comeback. Jewish sources report between 185,000 to 200,000 Gentile conversions to Judaism in recent decades. Many of these conversions are due to growing intermarriage where Gentile mates and children are converted. But other new Jews are attracted to the well-defined practices and high ethical codes of Judaism and the communal intimacy in Jewish society. In addition, converts are sympathetic and aggressive Gentile students of Judaism. Like Ruth, their predecessor, they are welcomed to join in the Jewish mission on equal religious footing with the Jewish world.

JEWISH CONVERSIONS TO CHRISTIANITY

Curiously, the modern estimates of the number of Jews accepting Jesus as their Messiah roughly corresponds to the number of Gentile converts to Judaism. The



Assemblies of God has played a significant role in the modern Messianic Jewish revival and Messianic congregation-planting movement since the early 1970s. Jewish anti-missionaries consider the Assemblies of God to be one of the Christian groups most likely to impact Jewish people with the gospel. We gladly wear this badge. God has raised up the Pentecostal movement in part to proclaim the gospel to all Israel with God-supplied signs, wonders, and miracles to confirm His truth.

As national representative for Jewish ministries, I have record of more than 50 Assemblies of God pastors, evangelists, and appointed missionaries who are Jewish believers. I believe there are hundreds more. Everywhere I travel, I find Jewish believers in our congregations. Without exaggeration, it is probable that thousands of Spirit-filled Jews are scattered throughout our 12,000 churches.

Judaism requires converts to adhere to rabbinical Torah-Law, but Pentecostals encourage Jewish brethren to learn to hear the Spirit, who makes known to all the proper application of the Law (Torah) of Christ. Rabbinical authorities have precisely defined and encoded religious practices for Gentile converts, but Pentecostals instruct Jewish believers to work out their own salvation in submission to the Holy Spirit's counsel. Gentile converts to Judaism are expected to fully adopt Jewish culture, but Pentecostals recognize that Jesus is Lord of all nations and wants each culture to be distinctly used to glorify God. In Pentecostalism, Jewish believers are not required to abandon their Jewish cultural expression, but to bring it into conformity with God's fuller revelation in Christ.

Thousands of Jews are embracing Jesus every year. Simultaneously thousands of Americans are accepting Judaism, and hundreds of apostate Christians are

taking up cabalistic Jewish mysticism. Sometimes anti-missionary efforts, in league with Satan, persuade former Jewish Christians to return to their former beliefs and they fall away from Christ. In 35 years of Jewish ministry, in America and Israel, I have both rejoiced and wept.

Today, Pentecostals demonstrate the greatest potential for impacting all Israel with the gospel. Sometimes religious platitudes and magical number games partially aid the spiritually devastated. But pristine, first-century Pentecostalism is still God's sign to Israel that the Jewish mission can only be accomplished in Jesus' name and in demonstration of the Spirit's power. ■



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