

Why Should I Investigate my Religious Roots?

Alex Haley's best selling 1976 novel "Roots," and the 1977 companion movie, aroused in multitudes the desire to inquire about their backgrounds, their genealogy, their origin. Genealogical research became the "in" thing to do. About the same time also began a revival of investigation into religious roots among spiritually inquiring minds, hearts and souls. Folks around the world began to realize the richness of relating their spiritual backgrounds, their spiritual genealogy, their spiritual origin to current spiritual life. Naturally, such searches began to uncover surprises, questions, realizations and insights when the Word of G-d¹ was explored.

The fact that you are reading this indicates that you are interested in your religious roots. Do you ever wonder why? Are you ever asked why you are interested in your religious roots? Or in things Hebraic? Or in things Jewish? Do you sense a warm feeling toward Israel, or its people, or its place in Scripture, or its most famous Rabbi?

Please note that all Scripture was given by G-d to Hebrews, was written by Hebrews, was recorded largely if not entirely in Hebrew, has the nation of Israel as a focus, and culminates in the revelation of a Rabbi as the Messiah. Is it any wonder, then, that investigation into our religious or biblical roots becomes an investigation into our Hebraic roots?

Therefore, let's rephrase the title to read, "Why should I investigate my Hebraic Roots?" and answer it 15 ways. (*I hope to make this 18.*)

I. Our roots support us. Romans 11:18.

. . . You do not support the root, but the root supports you.

Matthew Henry² observes the privilege which the Gentiles had by being taken into the church. They were grafted in (v. 17), as a branch of a wild olive into a good olive, which is contrary to the way and custom of the husbandman, who grafts the good olive into the bad; but those that G-d grafts into the church he finds wild and barren, and good for nothing. Men graft to mend the tree; but G-d grafts to mend the branch.

The church of G-d is an olive-tree, flourishing and fruitful as an olive (Psalm 52:8; Hosea 14:6), the fruit useful for the honor both of G-d and man (Judges 9:9). Those that are out of the church are as wild olive-trees, not only useless, but what they do produce is sour and unsavory, wild by nature, v. 24. This was the state of the poor Gentiles, that wanted church privileges, and in respect of real sanctification; and it is the natural state of every one of us, to be wild by nature. Conversion is the grafting in of wild branches into the good olive. We must be cut off from the old stock, and be brought into union with a new root. Those that are grafted into the good olive-tree partake of the root and fatness of the olive. It is applicable to a saving union with Christ; all that are by a lively faith grafted into Christ partake of him as the branches of the root, and receive from his fullness.

The Gentiles, being grafted into the church, partake of the same privileges that the Jews do, the root and fatness. The olive-tree is the visible church (Jeremiah 11:16); the root of this tree

was Abraham, he being the first with whom the covenant was so solemnly made. Now the believing Gentile partakes of this root; he also is a son of Abraham (Luke 19:9). The blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles (Galatians 3:14), the same fatness of the olive-tree, the same for substance, special protection, lively oracles, means of salvation, a standing ministry, instituted ordinances; and, among the rest, the visible church-membership of their infant seed, which was part of the fatness of the olive-tree that the Jews have, and cannot be imagined to be denied to the Gentiles.

"But remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you." Though you are grafted in, you art still but a branch borne by the root, an engrafted branch, brought into the good olive contrary to nature (v. 24), not free-born, but by an act of grace enfranchised and naturalized. Abraham, the root of the Jewish church, is not beholden to you; but you art greatly obliged to him, as the trustee of the covenant and the father of many nations. Therefore, if you boast, know (this word must be supplied to clear the sense) you do not support the root but the root supports you².

II. To love G-d is to want to know more about Him.

From Isaiah (e.g. 62:5) to Revelation (22:17), believers are symbolically termed the bride. In Hosea 2:19, 20 G-d shall betroth her to himself in righteousness. He will take pleasure in His church. As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, is pleased with His relation to her and her affection to Him, "so shall your G-d rejoice over you: he shall rest in His love to you" (Zephaniah 3:17); "He shall take pleasure in thee" (Psalm 147:11), and shall "delight to do you good with His whole heart and His whole soul," Jeremiah 32:41. This is very applicable to the love Christ has for His church and the satisfaction He takes in her, which appears so brightly in Solomon's Song, and which will be complete in heaven.

I have the best wife in the whole, wide world. I love her devoutly. Although I have known and worked with her for years, and have been married to her for years, I enjoy getting to know her more deeply, closely and intimately. Why? Because I love her so much.

I also love G-d devoutly. And although I have known and worked with Him for years, I enjoy getting to know Him more deeply, closely and intimately. Why? Because I love Him so much. Just as G-d rejoices over me as part of the bride, I rejoice over him as the groom. Just as He is pleased with His relation to me and my affection to Him, I am pleased with my relation to Him and His affection to me. Just as my G-d rejoices over me, so do I rejoice over Him. Just as He rests in His love to me, so do I rest in my love for Him. I reciprocate taking pleasure in Him (Psalm 147:11); I delight to do Him good with my whole heart and my whole soul (Jeremiah 32:41).

Brides become very passionate just before the wedding. Why, then, should I, as part of the bride in the soon-coming wedding³, not be very passionate toward my groom? Why should I not want to know much more about Him? He's my hero! "I want to be just like Him when I grow up!" I want to be "conformed to the image of His Son." (Romans 8:29)

III. Our elder brother is a Jew. Romans 8:16, 17.

When wearing a Star of David, or a Shalom belt buckle, or a lapel pin containing the paired flags of Israel and America, we are often asked, “Are you Jewish?” Our comment often includes the clause, “My elder brother is Jewish,” followed by an appropriate explanation.

“¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are G-d’s children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of G-d and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:16, 17 NIV)

“Christ, as Mediator, is said to be the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2), and true believers, by virtue of their union with him, shall inherit all things. (Revelation 21:7). Those that now partake of the Spirit of Christ, as his brethren, shall, as his brethren, partake of his glory (John 17:24), shall sit down with him upon His throne (Revelation 3:21). Lord, what is man, that You should thus magnify him! Now this future glory is further spoken of as the reward of present sufferings and as the accomplishment of present hopes.²¹”

Simply put, as a believer, I am a co-heir with Christ, son of G-d, of the kingdom of G-d. I am also a child of G-d (e.g. John 1:12). Therefore Christ is my brother, my elder brother.

IV. Yeshua (often called Jesus⁴) was a Jew, even a Rabbi.

History and Scripture confirm that Yeshua was born and raised, lived and ministered as an observant Jew, always obedient to the commandments of the Father given on Mt Sinai to Moses. Yeshua observed carefully and diligently every instruction given to the nation of Israel.

As Brad Young⁵ (recommended reading) points out, the far-reaching ramifications of the fact that Yeshua was a Jew “are routinely passed over. Although Jesus was Jewish, his theology is sometimes treated as if he were Christian. But Jesus never attended a church. He never celebrated Christmas. He never wore new clothes on Easter Sunday. His cultural orientation was rooted deeply in the faith experience of his people. His teachings concerning G-d’s love and the dignity of each human being were based upon the foundations of Jewish religious thought during the Second Temple period. The more we learn about this fascinating period of history, the more we will know about Jesus. Jesus worshiped in the synagogue. He celebrated the Passover. He ate kosher food. He offered prayers in the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish religious heritage of Jesus impacted his life in every dimension of his daily experience.”

Yeshua routinely quoted from the Tanach, never from the New Testament. The Complete Jewish Bible cites 484 passages from the Tanach quoted a total of 695 times in the *B’rit Hadashah* (New Covenant, often called the New Testament).

“Jesus must be understood as a Jewish theologian. His theology is Jewish to the core. The tragic history of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity makes it extremely difficult to hear his forceful voice. The attacks of the church against the synagogue have stripped Jesus of his religious heritage [in the minds of believers, ed.]. As Christians we have been taught

wrong prejudices about Jews and Judaism. Hatred for the Jewish people has erected a barrier separating Jesus from his theology. Ethnically he may be considered a Jew, but religiously he remains a Christian who failed to reform the corrupt religious system of the Jews. Such an approach fails. Jesus is Jewish both in his ethnic background and in his religious thought and practice.”⁵

- V. **We can be more like Yeshua if we know our Hebraic roots.**
- VI. **The Church was born in Jerusalem, and from there the Messiah will rule and reign.**
- VII. **The Bible is a Hebraic book, through and through.**
- VIII. **Shaul⁶ (often called Paul) was a Jewish theologian.**
- IX. **We are commanded to rightly divide the Word of Truth. 2 Timothy 2:15.**
- X. **We will all live by the Torah⁷ when the Messianic Kingdom is established. Isaiah 2, 63, 66; Zechariah 14.**
- XI. **We are challenged to “provoke to jealousy” through our ministry.**
- XII. **We will never fully understand the Scriptures if they are interpreted apart from the culture, people and nation to which they were given.**
- XIII. **We can receive revelation that has been reserved for what the Bible calls “the last days” or “the end of the age.**
- XIV. **We will fulfill prophecy. Zechariah 8:23.**

1. We hope and pray that these writings will serve both Messianic believers in Yeshua and Jewish readers. Both desire the Truth and His manifestation on earth and to know more about Him, and the soon coming of the Messiah. To honor the commitment of Orthodox Jews to never take G-d’s name in vain, when the Creator is referred to directly in this study, we will use G-d, L-rd, or another designation, e.g. Adonai or Hashem.

The ban on the use of the name derived from extreme reverence for the name. The reasoning behind the ban was based on Exodus 20:7: "You shall not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain," and Leviticus 22:32: "You shall not profane my holy name." Not pronouncing G-d at all, or writing it where it might be defaced, soiled or handled irreverently removed any chance of profaning it or taking it in vain.

Granted, we must not get so hung up on a name as to forget the message, and we must not be so hard headed as to be hard hearted, but we must also be sensitive to what G-d would

have us do – yesterday, what we knew then, today, what we know now, and tomorrow, what we will learn in the future.

2. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Hendrickson Publishers, 1991 New Modern Edition. First published in 1706.

3. Many signs point to the soon-coming wedding of the church with the coming Messiah. Those signs are found from Genesis to Revelation, in the daily newspaper, and in the conversation and spirits of believers, and in the daily life of Israelis.

4. We prefer to use the Hebrew name, Yeshua, the name His mother called Him. As we strive to love our Master, to do our best to please Him, to worship Him, to adore Him, shouldn't we want to call Him by his real name? The Son's Hebrew name can be transcribed (not translated) as *Yeshua*. That's what his mother called Him. Shouldn't we? See also endnote 5.

5. "Jesus, the Jewish Theologian." Hendrickson Publishers, 1995.

6. Names embody the individual. When you hear the word Hitler, you know exactly who is being named or described. If your name is John or Joan, and someone speaks of you, there is no doubt you are being referred to. Few people like to be called by a nickname.

All Hebrew names are supposed to bear a significance, as originally individual subjects were called by a name expressive of some characteristic, e.g., Edom, red; Esau, hairy; Jacob, supplanter. They were carefully and solemnly selected, especially personal names. Leaving aside cases where the name was Divinely given (Abraham, Genesis 17:5; Isaac, Genesis 17:19, Ismael, Genesis 16:11; John, Luke 1:13; Yeshua, Matthew 1:21; etc.), the naming of a child usually devolved upon the parents, and, it appears, preferably upon the mother. The women of the family (Ruth 4:17), or the neighbors (Luke 1:59), talked over the name to be given. The name seems to have been given ordinarily at the time of the birth; but at a late period the day of circumcision was more usual (Luke 1:59, 2:21).

The argument for translating Hebrew names into English does not make sense. *Guiseppe* in Italian corresponds to Joseph in English; however *Guiseppe Verdi* cannot be translated as Joseph Green in English, even if that is what it means in English! The proper name of any individual is not translated; it is always transliterated or transcribed in order to approximate its original pronunciation. To repeat, the proper name of any individual is simply not translated, more especially when we are dealing with the most important Beings in all the universe: the Most High (יהוה) and His Son (יהושע)!

7. The first five books of Scripture, often called the Books of Moses or the Pentateuch.