



# **G-D FEARERS**

## ***The Role Of The Non-Jew In The Congregation Of G-D***

G-dfearers, who are they and what was their function? Although these people have been spoken of for well over 48 years, if you were to ask the average person in the Church, including Pastors and Ministers, they would be at a complete loss as to what explanation they should give. Those that would make an attempt at explaining it would simply say that a G-dfearer is a person that has a reverent fear of G-d. This is somewhat accurate but falls far short of explaining the function and nature of these very important people in the congregation of G-d. In this article I will attempt to explain who these people were and what their function *was*, and for that matter *is*, in the congregation of G-d, for you see, the G-dfearers are still with us.

We will now look in depth at the G-dfearers. In 1986 there was a series of articles in Biblical Archaeology Review (BAR) about the G-dfearers. These articles are from several different perspectives. One of the first real stories written about the G-dfearers was in a German reference work in 1962.

This article is being written in 2004 and after 42 years the Christian community is, for the most part, completely oblivious to the G-dfearers. The question is, why? The answer is that even those pastors and ministers that do know of the G-dfearers do not speak of them because they fly in the face of Christian doctrine.

The G-dfearers were the primary converts to the belief that Yeshua was the Messiah. According to Acts, Sha'ul (Paul) taught in the Synagogue everywhere he went. In those synagogues he taught both Jews and G-dfearers. The G-dfearers were called by several different names in English including but not limited to, "devout men," and "those that fear G-d."

The Greek word for G-dfearers is Φοβούμενος (*Phobeomenoi*) G-dfearers, also known as, σεβομένοι (*Sebomenoi*) Devout Ones. These were not simply ones who feared G-d but were instead, a distinct class or group of people. It is true that they feared G-d but it was more of a title than a description or better yet a descriptive title. This group of people will be the major problem that the believers will have to contend with in the first and second centuries of the common era.<sup>1</sup>

There have always been G-dfearers throughout the life of the Jewish people. They were at Mt. Sinai, which was the birth of the nation of Israel.<sup>2</sup> They were part of the nation as it was ruled by King David.<sup>3</sup> You will find them in the days of Isaiah<sup>4</sup> and they continued with the nation into the First Century common era.<sup>5</sup> To put it simply, a G-dfearer was a non-Jew that lived with the Jewish people, yet remained a non-Jew, but did follow the parts of the Torah that applied to

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1. Also referred to by many as A.D., Anno Domini, *In the Year of our Lord*

2. Exodus 12.37-39

3. Psalms 146.9

4. Isaiah 14.1

5. Acts 10.1-2

them. These people were known as גְּרִיִּם (*Gerim*) strangers. There will be several classes of Gerim (non-Jews) and to help in your understanding, I have included the following list:

1. Ger Toshav      גֵּר תוֹשָׁב      Stranger in the Land (of Israel)
2. Ger ha-Sha'ar      גֵּר הַשַּׁעַר      Stranger in the Gate (of the Jewish People)
3. Ger Tzaddik      גֵּר צַדִּיק      Stranger (Proselyte - Convert to Judaism)

It is somewhat easy to get these Gerim mixed up. The Encyclopedia Judaica CD-Rom Edition, Article on *Strangers and Gentiles* has this to say about the Ger Toshav:

Whereas, as stated, the word ger in the Bible was taken to refer to the proselyte, the ger toshav, the "resident stranger," was regarded as belonging to a different and special character. He was a non-Jew who accepted some, but not all of the commandments of the Torah, as a result of which he was permitted to reside in the land of Israel and enjoy many of the privileges of citizenship. Various views are expressed by the rabbis as to the qualifications which entitle the resident gentile to be accepted as a ger toshav, ranging from the renunciation of idolatry to one who accepts the whole of the discipline of the Torah with the exception of the dietary laws (Av. Zar. 64b). The halakhah was decided that it applies to the person accepting the seven "Noahide Laws" (Maim. Yad, Issurei Bi'ah 14:7; Sh. Ar., YD 124:1). The laws, privileges, and restrictions of the ger toshav are exhaustively dealt with in the Talmud.

The Soncino Talmud CD-Rom Edition in the tractate *Baba Kama 113b* says:

...There is no difficulty, here [where the exception is made it refers] only to a heathen, whereas there [is indeed no exception] in the case of a Ger Toshav. But Abaye said to him: Are the two of them not mentioned next to one another [so that neither forms an exception in the Law], as it says: 'Thy brother...sell himself [implying,] not to you but to a stranger, as it says: 'Unto the stranger; again, not to a Ger tzaddik but to a mere Ger Toshav,...

The Ger Toshav therefore, was any non-Jew who wished to worship the G-d of Israel and live in the land of Israel. It follows then that during the time of the dispersion of the nation of Israel that there were also no Ger Toshav. This does not mean however, that this group of people disappeared. All during the time of the nation of Israel there were also the G-d-fearers known as the Gerim ha-Sha'arim. These were non-Jews who worshipped the G-d of Israel, but did not live in the land of Israel. The only difference between the Ger Toshav and the Ger ha-Sha'ar, was where they lived.<sup>1</sup>

There is one other difference. As mentioned in the article from The Encyclopedia Judaica, a Ger Toshav took upon themselves the parts of the Torah that applied to them. There were some commandments that would apply only if one was in the land of Israel. Some of the commandments that the Ger Toshav had to observe did not apply to the Ger ha-Sha'ar. One may go from a Ger Toshav to a Ger ha-Sha'ar and back many times during one's life. This would most certainly be the case for a Roman soldier who could be stationed in many different places. As he would move in and out of the land of Israel his status would change as well as the requirements that were incumbent upon him. If one was in the land, one was a Ger Toshav and had to keep the commandments that applied to a Ger living in the land. If one was living any place in the world other than Israel then one would be considered a Ger ha-Sha'ar and kept the commandments that applied to a Ger outside the land of Israel. This is not a rule that only applied to the Gerim, Jews as well had this requirement. The commandments that were incumbent upon them changed as they went from living in the land to living out of the land as well.

Acts 10 introduces us to a very controversial person, Cornelius, a Roman centurion in the Italian Regiment. He was referred to as a devout man and one who feared G-d. We have commonly thought that he was just a very good person and feared the G-d of Heaven. The

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1. i.e. In the land of Israel (Ger Toshav) or out of the Land of Israel (Ger ha-Sha'ar).

wording here means much more than that. The term “one who fears G-d,” is more like a title than a description of how one relates to G-d.

The Greek word for *fears G-d* is Φοβούμενος (*Phobeomenoi*).<sup>1</sup> As mentioned earlier, another term that is used interchangeably is σεβομένοι (*Sebomenoi*)<sup>2</sup> devout one or worshipers. This is not the same word used in Acts 10 where it refers to Cornelius as a devout man. The word used in Acts 10.2 is εὐσεβής (*eusebes*) which means a pious person. Phobeomenoi and Sebomenoi will be referred to many times in different places, both will be referring to the same group of people. In Hebrew, they are known as יִרְאֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם (*Yireh haShamayim*) A Fearer of Heaven.

Yireh haShamayim were non-Jews that were on their way to becoming a proselyte, but had not yet reached that status. The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion refers to Yireh haShamayim as half-proselytes that are on their way to becoming full proselytes. This was the thought that was in place during the First Century, that all non-Jews or G-dfearers had to become Jewish to be saved.

To most in the Jewish community, Yireh haShamayim were not yet in the Kingdom of G-d but were on their way. They were allowed to stay at the hinder parts of the synagogue to watch and learn. They were not allowed to have an active part in the services. This was due to the fact that they had not yet gained enough knowledge to participate in a service with all its intricate details and nuances.

It should be pointed out at this time that Yireh haShamayim, *we will henceforth refer to them as G-dfearer*, was not a pagan. That is to say, they did not worship as the other nations worshipped their gods. They believed in the one G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). They had not however, been circumcised according to the Law of Moses. That would not happen until they had completed their conversion which would take at least two years.

When their time of learning was at an end, they would then be circumcised (if a male) and would take hold of the mitzvot (commandments). They would at this time be considered a full Jew with all the responsibilities and honors thereof. Their title would then be a גֵּר צַדִּיק (*Ger Tzaddik*) a proselyte, and they and their children would be considered Jewish.

Up until this time the G-dfearer would have departed from all aspects of paganism. They would have kept the Noahide Covenant, Sabbath, all Festivals, Kosher and any of the other commandments in the Torah that applied to them. They were considered Torah observant in every respect if they kept the commandments that applied to them. This was all anyone had to do to claim the title “Torah Observant.”

In Christianity it has been said that if one wishes to keep the commandments, then one must keep all the commandments to be saved. There are 613 mitzvot (commandments) in the Torah. No one, not even Yeshua, kept all 613 commandments. For example, the High Priest had to apply the blood on the Holy Ark in the Holiest of the Holies once every year on Yom Kippur. This was a commandment that applied to him only. No one except the כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל (*Cohein Gadol*) High Priest, could fulfill this commandment. Yeshua never went into the Holiest of the Holies while on earth, yet we all know that he never broke a commandment. There is a difference between not keeping a commandment and breaking one.

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1. Strong's #5399

2. Strong's #4576

One can only break a commandment that applies to them. No man can break a commandment that applies to a woman and no woman can break a commandment that applies to a man. No Levite can break a commandment that applies to a priest and no priest can break a commandment that applies to a High Priest.

One can, however, commit a sin by attempting to perform a commandment that does not apply to him. This has happened several times in the history of Israel. King Uzziah wanted to burn incense to the L-rd,<sup>1</sup> some Levites, not of the House of Aaron, wanted to be priests.<sup>2</sup> One is to be satisfied in the place that G-d has placed him. If one is a member of the House of Levi, but not of the House of Aaron, then that person should not attempt to be a priest. This applies to the non-Jew as well, they should not attempt to be Jewish.

The rules and regulations of the G-dfearers have for the most part been left in a blurred ancient past. We are just starting to unveil the truths and facts of this group. This much we do know, they...

- 1) Kept the Noahide Commandments<sup>3</sup>
- 2) The Sabbaths<sup>4</sup>
- 3) The Festivals<sup>5</sup>
- 4) Kosher<sup>6</sup>

And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."

Acts 16.20-21

The word for customs is ἔθος (*ethos*) and means the customs of the Jewish people. The customs were known as the הלכה (*halakhah*) which means "the way one lives his life" or "the way one is to walk."

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1. II Chronicles 26.16-19

2. Numbers 16

3. The Noahide commandments were a set of commandments that G-d gave to Noah. Noah was a non-Jew and the laws that G-d gave to him apply to all men. Today these people are referred to as the "Righteous among the Nations or Righteous Gentiles." These commandments are as follows:

- 1) prohibitions against idolatry
- 2) prohibitions against blasphemy
- 3) prohibitions against bloodshed
- 4) prohibitions against sexual sins
- 5) prohibitions against theft
- 6) prohibitions against eating from a living animal (kosher)
- 7) as well as the injunction to establish a legal system

The Tosefta lists these four additions:

- 1) prohibitions against drinking the blood of a living animal
- 2) prohibitions against emasculation
- 3) prohibitions against sorcery
- 4) prohibitions against all magical practices listed in D'varim (Deuteronomy) 18:10-11

4. Shemot (Exodus) 20.10

5. Shemot (Exodus) 12.19 Vayikra (Leviticus) 16.29

6. Acts 15.1-41, 21.25

The halakhah which the Rabbi's imposed upon the G-dfearers is to this day somewhat vague. We do know that there were halakhot attached to them, as this was the charge brought against Paul (Sha'ul) in Acts 16.20-21.

## PAUL (SHA'UL)

We will now take a close look at possibly the most misunderstood person in the scriptures, Paul. Paul was a great man of G-d that was given an almost impossible job, to bring the non-Jews into the fold and direct them in the ways of G-d. For this he would have to fight both Jews and non-Jews alike. The Jewish people wanted to kill him for allowing non-Jews into the kingdom without first converting them and the non-Jew didn't like him because he taught against their false gods and temples. Yet Paul fulfilled his mission and thereby equipped non-Jews with the tools essential to fulfill their destiny in the family of G-d.

Today this group of believers are making a comeback. However, for the most part many non-Jews are at a complete loss as to their identity. Most are drawn toward the Messianic movement which unfortunately, falls far short of the mark that believers should be aiming for.

The Messianic movement has several associations, the largest being the Messianic Jewish Association of America (MJAA). In these associations G-dfearers are considered second rate citizens. According to their laws, Titus would not be allowed to vote at their meeting unless he first converted to Judaism. Only Jews are allowed to vote and make decisions, non-Jews are allowed to voice their opinion but that is as far as their rights go. In my opinion, G-dfearers should consider carefully these organizations before joining or giving their support. Based on their belief concerning the G-dfearer, I believe they have come short of the goal that is to be attained by the teachings found in the scriptures, chiefly that G-dfearers are qualified and capable of spiritual discernment as they are led by the Spirit of G-d. Timothy being a primary example of a G-dfearer not only being able to make spiritual decisions but capable of leading a congregation as well.

The Messianic movement, as a whole,<sup>1</sup> are committing a great sin towards G-d. They violate the primary commandment of combining paganism with the commandments of G-d. Most Messianic groups are simply Christians incorporating a few Jewish symbols and think this is pleasing to G-d. They do not observe the Festivals as G-d has given them to the Jewish people. They change the services and Festivals to incorporate their ideas and the way they think the services and Festivals should be observed.

Christmas, Easter, Valentines Day are all pagan festivals and should be avoided at all costs. The L-rd has given us the Festivals He wants us to observe, who are we to override the decrees of G-d. He says in D'varim (Deuteronomy) 12.29-13.4:

When the L-rd your G-d cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, **'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'** **You shall not worship the L-rd your G-d in that way;** for every abomination to the L-rd which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. **Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.** If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'; which you have not known; 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, **for the L-rd your G-d is testing you to know whether you love the**

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1. There are a very small remnant of Messianic believers that do *Keep* and *Observe* the commandments of G-d as He instructed. This, unfortunately is the exception and not the rule. I do not wish to lump all Messianic's into one group as there are always exceptions. The above statement is for the vast majority of Messianic's, but not all.

***L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul.*** You shall walk after the L-rd your G-d and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. (emphasis mine)

The Bold and Italic phrases are the important parts of these scriptures. First off, we are forbidden to worship G-d in any fashion that the nations worship their gods. The rationale for Christmas and Easter is that it has been *Christianized*. How can you *Christianize* something that you should never have been involved with in the first place. G-d said that we are not to worship Him in that way. He in no way accepts this type of worship or approves of it.

The next verses states that we are to only observe what G-d has commanded. Not only are we to observe His commandments but we are to be careful in doing so. We are not to add to, and this is important, nor are we to take away from them.

G-d says that when we are presented with the option to observe Christmas and Easter He is testing us to see if we love Him with all our heart and soul. Every time we observe these pagan festivals we fail the test. Love is an action. You cannot say you love G-d and do the very things He tells you not to. If you say you love Him and disobey Him you deceive yourself. Enough about Christmas and Easter, these will be covered in another article.

Another movement that's gaining ground is known by several different names. Their basic belief is that non-Jews that are drawn to worship G-d in the way He has set forth are actually part of the Lost Ten Tribes. There is no evidence for this theory. It is completely based on far reaching speculations and should be avoided because it leads G-dfearers away from what G-d has planned for their lives. People can't just start claiming they are descendents of Israel simply because they feel they are.

The ten tribes will return, but for the most part they have been preserved in the tribes of Judah. When the ten tribes were carried away captive, many fled to the southern tribes and there they are preserved. The New Testament mentions several examples of persons from the northern tribes being present some 500 years after they were carried away captive.

They are still present within the Jewish people. For over two thousand years the term "Jews" has represented the descendants of Jacob. Yeshua used the term several times when referring to the entire house of Israel as well as being called the King of the Jews and the King of Israel. Jews and Israel are synonymous terms and mean the same thing. Those that believe the term Jews only refer to those who are descended from Judah simply do not understand the scriptures.

G-dfearers should learn their role in the Kingdom of G-d and walk in it. We are not second rate citizens in the Kingdom. We have a role to play and the Jews have a role to play. Neither role is more important than the other, they are both necessary for the Kingdom to proceed and until the G-dfearers know what G-d expects from them, they will continue to be led astray.

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