

OUT OF THE MIXED MULTITUDE

A Devotional Meditation on Beha'alotcha (In Your Going Up)

Numbers 8:1-12:16; Zechariah 2:10-4:7; Ephesians 2:1-22 Philippians 3:17-21;
Revelation 5:9-10, 7:1-15, 13:5-8, 21:10-13

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It's been nearly three centuries since my family came to North Carolina from the island of Jura in southwest Scotland. Jura was part of the ancient kingdom of Dál Riata, the realm of the Gaelic people called Scoti. Dál Riata came into existence in the fifth century, at about the same time a Celtic chieftain named Arthur was fighting the Saxon invaders of Britain. The Scoti of Dál Riata fought against both the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons, as well as the Picts and Vikings. Eventually, they merged with the Picts to create the kingdom of Alba, which became known as Scotland.

There is a serene sense of wholeness in knowing that I am part of a people whose existence extends back 1,600 years. But then, what exactly does it mean to be Scottish? There is no such thing as Scottish nationality; Scotland hasn't been an independent nation since the Acts of Union in 1707 that merged England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland into Great Britain. There isn't even a unique Scottish ethnicity since the Scots coalesced from several people groups, including the Gaels, Picts, Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, and Normans. Many more have enriched the Scottish people over the centuries, including Humza Yousaf, the current First Minister of Scotland, who is the son of Pakistani immigrants.



Many leaders of the Scottish nation have been of foreign origin, but their identity is unquestionably Scottish. The latest is First Minister Humza Yousaf, son of Pakistani immigrants. Scottish Government photo, March 29, 2023, [via Flickr](#).

So who really is Scottish? How does one become Scottish? Does it really matter?

When we ask questions like this, we realize that identities of peoples are more fluid than we think. Not, of course, the identity of individuals as men and women; that's something our Creator has woven into the fabric of our physical bodies. Yet the concrete identity of male and female speaks to the importance of identity at all levels. Without a sense of identity, we are adrift in a constantly moving sea of humanity. With identity, we have an anchor to keep us grounded and a rudder to steer us.

This is true even if we can legitimately claim multiple identities. For example, I am a Scottish-American, but I am also a Southerner born in Florida, raised in Alabama, and having lived in Texas, Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. My spiritual identity is Christian, which might be further defined as Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Messianic, and Hebraic. These are the identities I can claim among different peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations.

I cannot legitimately claim identity as German, Japanese, Lakota, Greek Orthodox, or Jewish. Much though I admire them all, I would be an imposter if I claimed to be one of them. Therefore, I rejoice in the identities our Creator has imparted to me, and in the

diverse identities He has shepherded across the pastures of time and space in the story of humanity. Almost all of them, like my Scottish kin, have existed for only a brief portion of the millennia spanned by our collective story, yet our Redeemer promises that all – past, present, and future – shall praise Him in the end, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals. For You were slain, and by Your blood You redeemed for God those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them for our God a kingdom and *kohanim* [priests], and they shall reign upon the earth.”

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Revelation 5:9-10, 7:10 TLV

The thought of that great cloud of worshipping witnesses should stir our imaginations and lift our hearts. For a moment, at least. Then we get lost in the magnitude of it. We simply can't envision such a multitude, and when we try, it probably scares us – just like a little child gets scared when lost among a crowd of people. That lost child doesn't have an anchor in the vast crowd, and after a time of wandering in search of someone or something familiar, her anxiety will get the best of her.

I think that's what happened to the mixed multitude who complained loudly about the grace and provision God showed to the Hebrews they followed into the wilderness with Moses. The Almighty gave them just as much manna as He gave to Israel's tribes, but they chose to look on the bread of heaven as a common thing. Paul warns us about such people:

For many walk who are enemies of the cross of Messiah—I have often told you about them, and now I am even weeping as I tell you. Their end is destruction—their god is their belly and their glory is in their shame. They set their minds on earthly things.

Philippians 3:18-19 TLV

Paul's warning is about people who never truly belong to the Body of Messiah, or, as he says in another place, the Commonwealth of Israel. They never find their ultimate identity, but, like that mixed multitude, remain on the edge of the camp, never integrated into the part of the Body made especially for them, as our God promises:

God settles the lonely in a home. He leads prisoners out to prosperity. But the rebellious live in a parched land.

Psalms 68:7(6) TLV

Moses writes about the order of the camp of Israel, with each tribe and clan and family in its assigned place. When the nation marched out, they didn't do so as an unorganized mob, but by camp and tribe. Even the different camps, under the command of Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan, respectively, set out in order according to the tribes assigned to them. So, also, the Levites set out in the order of their families, according to the work they were assigned in the Tabernacle. That means every man, woman, and child among the Hebrew nation knew their place, and they knew their place because they knew their identity with the Covenant people of God.

The mixed multitude didn't have a distinct identity, and that's what led to their rebellious cravings. It didn't have to be that way. The Torah includes provisions for

welcoming foreigners into the nation, as we see afterward when foreigners like Ruth became Hebrews. Ezekiel gives us a clue about the identity these foreigners would have within Israel when he prophesies about the Messianic Kingdom:

You are to divide this land for yourselves to the tribes of Israel. So you are to divide it by lot for an inheritance for you and for the outsiders who dwell among you, whoever bears children among you. They will be to you like the native-born of *Bnei-Yisrael* [children of Israel]; they will be allotted an inheritance along with you among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the outsider lives, there you will give him his inheritance.” It is a declaration of *ADONAI*.

Ezekiel 47:21-23 TLV

There are echoes of Ezekiel’s prophecy in Revelation. The first comes when we hear of the chosen witnesses at the end of the age coming from each of Israel’s tribes. Another is in the description of the New Jerusalem, the twelve gates of which are named for the tribes. Do we all become members of a tribe, or do the tribes encompass the nations of our present identities? We shall know the answer in time. For now, it’s enough to know that our ultimate identity is as citizens of the Covenant Kingdom of Israel. Citizens partake fully in the blessings, responsibilities, trials, and judgments of the nation. Companions, fellow-travelers, and strangers do not. That’s why the apostles went to great lengths to explain the new identity Gentile followers of Messiah Yeshua gain among God’s Covenant People, as One New Man alongside the native born whose Jewish-Hebrew identity carries the testimony of God’s redemption. That testimony embraces all who want to leave the mixed multitude and find their place in His camp.