

~PROSELYTE (413)

[Hebrew, *ger*, Greek, *pro-se'ly-tos*]

- Active In Proselytizing
- Proselytizing By Force
- Proselytes Became Christians
- Good News Spread Among The Gentiles

- A convert, that is, one who embraced Judaism, getting circumcised, if a male.
- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you traverse sea and dry land to make one **proselyte**, and when he becomes one you make him a subject for Gehenna twice as much so as yourselves. (**Matthew 23:15**) Footnote
- The **Greek** word *pro-se'ly-tos*, **proselyte**, is used in both the **Septuagint** and the **Christian Greek Scriptures**.
- For more than 19 centuries Yehowah dealt with a special, select people, the family of Abraham and his seed, primarily the nation of Israel. Yet it was possible for a non-Hebrew or a non-Israelite who desired to serve Yehowah according to the requirements of true worship to do so.
- However, he would have to convert to true religion, that is, become a **proselyte**. The Mosaic Law made specific provisions for a person of non-Israelite origin dwelling in Israel.
- Such an **alien resident** could become a full worshiper of Yehowah, being circumcised, if a male, in acknowledgment of his acceptance of true worship.
- And in case an alien resident resides as an alien with you and he will actually celebrate the Passover to Yehowah, let there be a circumcising of every male of his. First then he may come near to celebrate it, and he must become like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised man may eat of it. (**Exodus 12:48**)
- One Law is to exist for the native and for the alien resident who is residing as an alien in your midst. (**Exodus 12:49**)

- A **proselyte** was responsible to obey all of the Law, and he was to be treated by natural Jews as a brother.
- And in case an alien resident resides with you as an alien in your land, you must not mistreat him. (**Leviticus 19:33**)
- The alien resident who resides as an alien with you should become to you like a native of yours, and you must love him as yourself, for you became alien residents in the land of Egypt. I am Yehowah your God. (**Leviticus 19:34**)
- One judicial decision should hold good for you. The alien resident should prove to be the same as the native, because I am Yehowah your God. (**Leviticus 24:22**)
- Moreover, I bear witness again to every man getting circumcised that he is under obligation to perform the whole Law. (**Galatians 5:3**)
- The **Hebrew** word *ger*, rendered, **alien resident**, **stranger**, **KJ**, does not always signify such a religious convert.
- And he began to say to Abram; You may know for sure that your seed will become an **alien resident** in a land not theirs, and they will have to serve them, and these will certainly afflict them for four hundred years. (**Genesis 15:13**)
- Later she bore a son and he called his name Gershom, because, he said; An **alien resident** I have come to be in a foreign land. (**Exodus 2:22**)
- O you the hope of Israel, the Savior of him in the time of distress, why do you become like an **alien resident** in the land, and like a traveler that has turned aside to spend the night? (**Jeremiah 14:8**)
- But in more than 70 instances where the translators of the **Septuagint** possibly believed that it did, they rendered it by the **Greek** *pro-se'ly-tos*.

See Also ALIEN RESIDENT

- Throughout Israelite history non-Jews became **proselytes**, in effect saying about the Jews what Moabitess Ruth said to Naomi; Your people will be my people, and your God my God.
- And Ruth proceeded to say; Do not plead with me to abandon you, to turn back from accompanying you, for where you go I shall go, and where you spend the night I shall spend the night. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. (**Ruth 1:16**)
- And Rahab the prostitute and the household of her father and all who belonged to her, Joshua preserved alive, and she dwells in the midst of Israel down to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent out to spy on Jericho. (**Joshua 6:25**)
- Salmon became father to Boaz by Rahab. Boaz became father to Obed by Ruth. Obed became father to Jesse. (**Matthew 1:5**)
- Solomon's prayer at the inauguration of the temple reflected God's open and generous spirit toward those of many nations who might want to serve Him as **proselytes**.
- And also to the foreigner, who is no part of your people Israel and who actually comes from a distant land by reason of your name. (**1 Kings 8:41**)
- For they shall hear of your great name and of your strong hand and of your stretched-out arm, and he actually comes and prays toward this house. (**1 Kings 8:42**)
- May you yourself listen from the heavens, your established place of dwelling, and you must do according to all that for which the foreigner calls to you, in order, that all the peoples of the earth may get to know your name so as to fear you the same as your people Israel do, and so as to know that your name itself has been called upon this house that I have built. (**1 Kings 8:43**)
- Non-Jews mentioned by name who evidently became **proselytes** included Doeg the Edomite.
- Now one of Saul's servants was there on that day, detained before Yehowah, and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the principal one of the shepherds that belonged to Saul. (**1 Samuel**

21:7)

- **Uriah the Hittite**
- **Then David sent and inquired about the woman and someone said; Is this not Bath-sheba the daughter of Eliam the wife of Uriah the Hittite? (2 Samuel 11:3)**
- **At this Uriah said to David; The Ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping on the face of the field, and I, shall I go into my own house to eat and drink and to lie down with my wife? As you are living and as your soul is living, I shall not do this thing! (2 Samuel 11:11)**
- **Ebed-melech the Ethiopian**
- **And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a man who was a eunuch and who was in the house of the king, got to hear that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern, and the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin. (Jeremiah 38:7)**
- **So Ebed-melech went out of the house of the king and spoke to the king, saying; (Jeremiah 38:8)**
- **O my lord the king, these men have done bad in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have thrown into the cistern, so that he will die where he is because of the famine. For there is no bread anymore in the city. (Jeremiah 38:9)**
- **Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying; Take in your charge from this place thirty men, and you must get Jeremiah the prophet up out of the cistern before he dies. (Jeremiah 38:10)**
- **Accordingly Ebed-melech took the men in his charge and went into the house of the king to beneath the treasury and took from there worn-out rags and worn-out pieces of cloth and let them down to Jeremiah into the cistern by means of the ropes. (Jeremiah 38:11)**
- **Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah; Put, please, the worn-out rags and the pieces of cloth under your armpits beneath the ropes. Jeremiah now did so. (Jeremiah 38:12)**

- Finally they drew out Jeremiah by means of the ropes and brought him up out of the cistern. And Jeremiah continued to dwell in the Courtyard of the Guard. (**Jeremiah 38:13**)
- When the Jews in Mordecai's time received permission to stand and defend themselves, many of the peoples of the land were declaring themselves Jews.
- And in all the different jurisdictional districts and in all the different cities wherever the word of the king and his Law were reaching there were rejoicing and exultation for the Jews, a banquet and a good day, and many of the peoples of the land were declaring themselves Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen upon them. (**Esther 8:17**)
- The **Septuagint** reads: **And many of the Gentiles were circumcised, and became Jews.** **Bagster**

•• **Active In Proselytizing**

- As a result of the Babylonian exile Judaism became widespread. Jews of the Dispersion came into contact with pagans of many nations. The establishment of synagogues and the availability of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Greek language made it easier for persons throughout the Roman world to learn of the Jewish religion.
- Ancient writers such as Horace and Seneca testified that numerous persons in various lands joined themselves to the Jews, thus becoming **proselytes**. Josephus reported that Jews in Syrian Antioch were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of Greeks, and these they had in some measure incorporated with themselves. [**The Jewish War, VII, 45, iii, 3**]
- The **Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible** points out that the Jews in Rome exhibited such an aggressive spirit of **proselytism** that they were charged with seeking to infect the Romans with their cult, and the government expelled the chief propagandists from the city in **139 B.C.** [**Edited by G. Buttrick, 1962, Vol. 3, p. 925**]
- This charge, of course, may have been unfounded or exaggerated, perhaps being politically motivated or due to some racial or religious prejudice.

- Nevertheless, Jesus himself said about the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees.
- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you traverse sea and dry land to make one **proselyte**, and when he becomes one you make him a subject for Gehenna twice as much so as yourselves. (**Matthew 23:15**)

•• Proselytizing By Force

- Not all the Jewish **proselytes** were won over by peaceful means. Historian Josephus related that, when John Hyrcanus I conquered the Idumeans, which was in about **125 B.C.E.**, he told the people that they could stay in their country only if they submitted to circumcision, thus forcing them to become proselytes. [**Jewish Antiquities, XIII, 257,258, ix, 1**]
- Aristobulus, the son of John Hyrcanus, did the same with the Ituraeans. [**XIII, 318, xi, 3**] Later, Jews under Alexander Jannaeus demolished Pella because the inhabitants refused to become proselytes. [**XIII, 397, xv, 4**] Political considerations, rather than missionary zeal, were undoubtedly the basis for such deeds.

•• Proselytes Became Christians

- The record in the **Christian Greek Scriptures** indicates that some of the circumcised Jewish **proselytes** were sincere in their worship of Yehowah. The crowd from many lands who heard Peter on the day of Pentecost **33 C.E.** and became Christians was made up of both Jews and **proselytes**.
- And Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya, which is toward Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and **proselytes**. (**Acts of Apostles 2:10**)
- The **proselytes** from other lands had journeyed to Jerusalem in obedience to Yehowah's law. Similarly, the Ethiopian eunuch whom Philip baptized had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was reading God's Word as he traveled homeward.
- With that he rose and went, and, look! An Ethiopian eunuch, a man in power under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, and who was over all her treasure. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship. (**Acts of Apostles 8:27**)

- But he was returning and was sitting in his chariot and reading aloud the prophet Isaiah. ([Acts of Apostles 8:28](#))
- So the spirit said to Philip; Approach and join yourself to this chariot. ([Acts of Apostles 8:29](#))
- Philip ran alongside and heard him reading aloud Isaiah the prophet, and he said; Do you actually know what you are reading? ([Acts of Apostles 8:30](#))
- He said; Really, how could I ever do so, unless someone guided me? And he entreated Philip to get on and sit down with him. ([Acts of Apostles 8:31](#))
- Now the passage of Scripture that he was reading aloud was this; As a sheep he was brought to the slaughter, and as a lamb that is voiceless before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ([Acts of Apostles 8:32](#))
- During his humiliation the judgment was taken away from him. Who will tell the details of his generation? Because his life is taken away from the earth. ([Acts of Apostles 8:33](#))
- In answer the eunuch said to Philip; I beg you, About whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about some other man? ([Acts of Apostles 8:34](#))
- Philip opened his mouth and, starting with this Scripture, he declared to him the Good News about Jesus. ([Acts of Apostles 8:35](#))
- Now as they were going over the road, they came to a certain body of water, and the eunuch said; Look! A body of water, what prevents me from getting baptized? ([Acts of Apostles 8:36](#))
- With that he commanded the chariot to halt, and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ([Acts of Apostles 8:38](#))
- He must have been a eunuch in the sense of court official, for had he been castrated he could not have become a **proselyte**.
- No man castrated by crushing the testicles or having his male member cut off may come into the congregation of Yehowah.

(Deuteronomy 23:1)

- In the early days of the Christian congregation Nicolaus, a **proselyte** of Antioch, was appointed to special duties in connection with the distribution of food, being a man full of spirit and wisdom.
- So the twelve called the multitude of the disciples to them and said; It is not pleasing for us to leave the word of God to distribute food to tables. (**Acts of Apostles 6:2**)
- So, brothers, search out for yourselves seven certified men from among you, full of spirit and wisdom, that we may appoint them over this necessary business. (**Acts of Apostles 6:3**)
- But we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. (**Acts of Apostles 6:4**)
- And the thing spoken was pleasing to the whole multitude, and they selected Stephen, a man full of faith and Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenas and **Nicolaus**, a **proselyte** of Antioch. (**Acts of Apostles 6:5**)
- And they placed them before the apostles, and, after having prayed, these laid their hands upon them. (**Acts of Apostles 6:6**)

See Also ETHIOPIA, ETHIOPIAN

.. Good News Spread Among The Gentiles

- Until **36 C.E.** the Christian message was directed solely to Jews, to Gentiles who had become circumcised Jewish **proselytes**, and to Samaritans. The Italian Cornelius is described as a devout man and one fearing God who made many gifts of mercy to the people and made supplication to God continually. But he was **not a Jewish proselyte**, for he was an uncircumcised Gentile.
- Now in Caesarea there was a certain man named Cornelius, an army officer of the Italian band, as it was called. (**Acts of Apostles 10:1**)
- A devout man and one fearing God together with all his household, and he made many gifts of mercy to the people and made supplication to God continually. (**Acts of Apostles 10:2**)

- Now a certain army officers slave, who was dear to him, was ailing and was about to pass away. (Luke 7:2)
- When he heard about Jesus, he sent forth older men of the Jews to him to ask him to come and bring his slave safely through. (Luke 7:3)
- Then those that came up to Jesus began to entreat him earnestly, saying; He is worthy of your conferring this upon him. (Luke 7:4)
- For he loves our nation and he himself built the synagogue for us. (Luke 7:5)
- So Jesus started off with them. But when he was not far from the house, the army officer had already sent friends to say to him; Sir, do not bother, for I am not fit to have you come in under my roof. (Luke 7:6)
- For that reason I did not consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. (Luke 7:7)
- For I too am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this one; Be on your way! And he is on his way. And to another; Come! And he comes. And to my slave; Do this! And he does it. (Luke 7:8)
- Well, when Jesus heard these things he marveled at him, and he turned to the crowd following him and said; I tell you, not even in Israel have I found so great a faith. (Luke 7:9)
- And those that had been sent, on getting back to the house, found the slave in good health. (Luke 7:10)
- When once the door was opened to the Gentiles, active Christian missionary work expanded. Nevertheless, Paul often preached first to the Jews and **proselytes** in cities to which he traveled. Paul had great love for his Jewish brothers and a desire that they might be saved.
- For I could wish that I myself were separated as the cursed one from the Christ in behalf of my brothers, my relatives according to the flesh. (Romans 9:3)
- Brothers, the goodwill of my heart and my supplication to God for them are, indeed, for their salvation. (Romans 10:1)

- Moreover, the Jews and **proselytes** were the logical ones to approach first, for they knew of Yehowah and his laws and were looking for the Messiah.
- Their background enabled those among them with good hearts to recognize Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of their hopes. These could form a strong nucleus for a congregation and could, in turn, teach the Gentiles, who knew nothing about Yehowah and his Word.