

My Conversion Story,

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, Sh'hecheyanu, V'Kiyemanu, V'Higianu LaZman HaZeh. (Praised are You, the Eternal One our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.)

Shalom Alechiem b'Shem Yeshua HaMashiach. (Peace be unto you in the name of Yeshua the Messiah)

Hello, my name is Phil Ortega and I'm a Sephardic Jewish convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints!

Every time I'm asked to give a talk about my conversion, I think... how do I put it into words? How do I express the most sacred personal moment in a way someone else would understand? Do I talk about the emotion? Do I talk about the logic? What do I say?

I've had the privilege of speaking at baptisms and I tell the story of Nicodemus in John chapter 3. Let me share a little of this story with you.

Now for those of you who don't know, Nicodemus was a ruler among the Jews. He told Jesus that he had to be a man of God. So Nicodemus, acknowledged the divine nature of the Mashiach.

When Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again Nicodemus was bewildered! Jesus explained that He was talking about being born spiritually. He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." John 3:4-6

On Saturday, July 14, 2007 I was baptized and hands were laid upon my head so that I would receive the Holy Spirit! This day was the first day of the rest of my life. I was not the perfect convert that many who know me would lead you to believe. I was a man who as a child could not get enough scripture. I devoured it as though my very self would cease to exist without it daily in my life. My study was like sweet music that drew me daily to its side. I was also a young man that knew that I was to tell the world who God was and that he loved each and every one of us immensely.

You see I grew up in a Messianic Jewish Home from an ancestry of being Sephardic or if you will Spanish Jew. So I grew up knowing that Yeshua is the Mashiach! He is Yeshua Ben Abba, son of our loving Father in heaven. I also grew up knowing that as a Jew I was fulfilled. So how could I not tell the world that the God of our fathers is a God that wishes for our return to Him?

So you ask, how did I come to join the church? A garden when planted needs nurturing and we as children need guiding. I have studied and prayed much because no one seemed to be able to answer my questions. As is our Jewish tradition we ask questions. And sometime we are told to please stop asking so many questions! I am one who can spend hours talking about my Father in Heaven and spend the same amount of time asking questions! Ask my wife!

Yes my wife. She is a woman of faith and patience. She grew up a member of the church and is a returned missionary. So, not only did I find a righteous woman I found a soldier of the restored Gospel. When we started our relationship I told her in no uncertain words, "I want you to know that I will not be joining your church!"

So with that in mind, thanks to her, we had countless missionaries in our home!

I was in my glory however talking about my Father and His ways. For 6 years we had missionaries in our home. I love to cook and my dear Sara used this talent of mine, as she would say, for the benefit of these poor starving young men! I must say that I loved spending time with these young men of God.

I remember time after time, I would be asked to set a date and I would say no, not yet but thank you for asking! It became apparent that I should either decide to or not to be baptized.

Study is a prerequisite for understanding the truth and it is always the truth that will set you free.

Recently my 17 year old nephew made a post on Facebook. He said, "The binds of time is the metronome to God's song. His creation is a symphony that plays night and day. Although they often hit the wrong notes, there will come a time when the measures that hold the intro will come to pass... and the song will enter in to the measures of a perfect and eternal melody. It's His favorite song, because you're contributing a melody to it. And the way you love Him and call upon Him rings a pitch in His ears so perfect chills run down His spine. Every step you take in His name creates a beat that His heart beats to. The price He paid to get front row tickets to your love song that you sing to Him was well worth it to Him. He is Love, and in love with you. He said that you are worth it. So call upon Him tonight and ring that pitch He longs for." Ah, out of the mouth of babes!

You and I are the notes and He is the Master. I have always believed that in order to know without a doubt, one must study and search for oneself. I have heard so many recite scripture that never existed or tell biblical stories that never happened. So with that, I decided to study the Book of Mormon and once and for all prove it wrong.

A young missionary came into my life around this time and as we got to know him I realized that he was different. He was hungry for the truth and for acceptance. Our area was his first area and I will be happy in another writing to share with you our first meeting. I am sure he would tell you that he was intimidated to say the least! My dear Jordan, how Sara and I pray for you daily!

It was through this young missionary that I saw the true nature of God and the reason for the Book of Mormon. Being a former Military person I spent many a day studying maps. All of us understand the necessity for perfect harmony among the scriptures. So I studied to find that harmony. In a discussion with this young missionary and his companion, it hit me. What if I studied the scriptures as if they were a map! Scripture is a companion and a guide to us so this all made sense. I began to realize that many of the questions I had were answered!

All of us who have spent any amount of time in the woods understand the use of a topographical map. What I found was that the scriptures became a perfect topographical map with each part becoming

another overlay all of which to lead us back to our Father in Heaven, the G_d of Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), the G_d of the Jew.

On the morning of May 15th 2007, I told my wife I was ready to be baptized. As she shares today, she wasn't sure that I was ready so she prayed. She said to me, "If we do this it is all or nothing!" I agreed. During her prayer D & C section 4 verse 3 was impressed on her which says, "Therefore if ye have the desires to serve God ye are called to the work" Thus, a new chapter of my life began.

The Sunday following my Baptism I was ordained into the Aaronic Priesthood and called to teach Sunday school! What a joy! I was then asked from time to time, to substitute teaching Seminary and Gospel Doctrine. Three months later I was ordained into the Melchizedek Priesthood and called to be the Branch Mission Leader! No, I was not released as a Sunday School Teacher and, I taught Gospel Doctrine and Seminary more and more. As I continued to grow and answered all of my callings, I heard the phrase, "Born in the covenant." What seemed confusing to me was that I was not included in that description. But I was a Jew, a covenant people, the first chosen of God. Then I thought, well let me study what is meant by this phrase.

Born in the covenant of Avraham! What does it really mean?

The Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. God made promises to Abraham that required nothing of Abraham. Genesis 15:18-21 describes a part of the Abrahamic Covenant, specifically dealing with the dimensions of the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants and there are more! The actual Covenant is found in Genesis 12:1-3 and the ceremony recorded in Genesis 15 indicate the unconditional nature of the covenant.

I have pondered on the statement, "Born in the Covenant". I was told for as long as I can remember that I was born in the covenant. Then I joined the church and was told that I wasn't born in the covenant. I kind of breathed a sigh of relief! I would be careful of this blessing as it could become a curse. You see scripture tells us in Luke 12:48, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required..." Was I off the hook? What does this mean to you? We are Jews who are born in the Covenant. It is the covenant made with Avraham! Because we are Jew who have been redeemed, much is required of us.

You see conversion does not begin and end with baptism it is an ongoing process. God gave us the blueprint of perfection. That is through His son Yeshua Ha'Meschia. We are converted each and every day as we travel along the narrow path. We are children who have found their way and are now tasked to help our brother.

I was a child of God from the day that I was born and will be until the day that I go home! We can't learn the precepts of conversion without understanding the foundations given us as Jews and Mormons such as of the Torah (First 5 books of the Old Testament), the books of the Prophets, the books of Poetry (Tenach) and the New Covenant (B'rit Chadasha) and the Book of Mormon.

We are told in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." I ask you to Study and Pray.

I testify to you that you are reading this today for a purpose and that purpose is to hear the voice of Yahovah in your heart and mind. That His glory is seen all around us in this world, if we only open ourselves to His guiding spirit (Ruach Hako'desh). I testify to you that Jesus Christ was the perfect sacrificial lamb who was offered up for you and I so we could return to Yahovah... and He lives today!

I testify to you, we have a living prophet on the earth today as in olden times because our God promised us that He would never leave us nor forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5) And I testify to you that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the true church of Yahovah with Yeshua Ha'Meschia at the head.

How do I know? I know because I feel Him and I hear Him!

The Psalmist said in Chapter 121

1 I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. 2 My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. 3 He will not suffer thy afoot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. 4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. 6 The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. 8 The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. Psalms 121