

JEWS FOR JESUS

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An Open Letter to the Family of Jewish Believers in Jesus Part II

by David Brickner, Executive Director

This is the second installment in a three-part series based on challenges the book of Hebrews made to Jewish believers of the first century. That wonderful New Testament epistle applies to Gentile as well as Jewish believers, and so, I hope, will my twenty-first century reflections. Last month's article presented two admonitions: to love Y'shua and to love His Body, the Church. Following are two more admonitions that address matters of current concern in the Messianic community.

RESIST THE LURE OF TRIUMPHALISM

When Jewish people become followers of Jesus we face several problems. Most commonly, there is stress and in some cases estrangement from unbelieving family members. But there are other problems that are far less obvious. For example, there's the pedestal problem: the new Jewish believer is immediately given a place of prominence in the local church simply because he or she happens to have been born Jewish. Suddenly, this baby believer is sought out as an expert in the Old Testament. Many well-meaning Christians mistakenly think that all Jews are thoroughly conversant with the Hebrew Bible. Most Jewish believers know that this is not the case, and many are keenly aware of their own lack of biblical knowledge. Yet it can be very embarrassing to admit that lack. It can also be difficult for a new and spiritually immature believer to resist the flattery of Christian friends. Some of us have been tempted to think higher of ourselves than we ought to, despite the clear admonition of the Scriptures (Romans 12:3).

This danger applies, not only to new Jewish believers, but also to some that have been in the faith long enough to know better. God has placed a special love for Jewish people in the hearts of many Christians, and as a result we



Messianic Jews are at times treated to a place of honor in the Body of Christ. Some have begun to believe that we actually deserve it. In fact, there are those who are calling for the restoration of Jewish believers to a place of leadership over the Church, just as it was in the first century. This is wrongheaded triumphalism, and some Christians have added their endorsement to it.

God has been doing something wonderful in bringing greater numbers of Jewish people to Jesus in modern times, and the Church should give glory to God by acknowledging and affirming this work of grace. However, the Church needs leaders who by piety and strength of godly conviction show the way forward for the rest of Christ's followers. Whether one is Jewish or Gentile has no bearing on that piety and godly conviction.

Ours is a small and relatively immature movement within the Body of Christ, one that has not yet led the way in growth or unity. And while some in our ranks are unusually bright and gifted, as a whole we are not particularly exemplary in scholarship or sanctification. The fact is, we haven't been doing such a good job leading ourselves, let alone anyone else. And though I'm embarrassed to admit it, there may be a subtle racism in the notion that Jewish believers should be given prominence within the Body of Christ.

Unless or until we Messianic Jews are qualified to lead, we should not expect or accept leadership or prominence in the church—and we certainly should not seek it on the basis of our ethnicity or even historic precedent (Proverbs 27:2).

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RESIST THE LURE OF RABBINIC JUDAISM

The demographics of the Messianic movement reflect those of the wider Jewish community, which means most were raised in fairly secular Jewish homes. Many Jewish believers learn more about what it means to be Jewish after coming to faith in Jesus—which leads to an altogether appropriate appreciation for their Jewish heritage. However, some want to make up for lost time by becoming “more Jewish,” and that is when Jewish believers become vulnerable to a different kind of temptation.

The mature Jewish believer recognizes that Jewish religious leaders, particularly rabbis, are going to deny our identity as Jews unless we deny certain things about Jesus, or agree to keep silent about them. That recognition serves as a warning not to seek their affirmation because it comes at a cost we can't pay. Yet some in our Messianic movement remain uncertain about the relationship of Jewish believers to rabbinic Judaism.

It is understandable that Jewish believers want to be “authentically” Jewish while still following Jesus. But what does that actually mean? Who is to say what it means to be authentic in one's Jewish identity? The rabbis have pronounced themselves the trustees and guardians of what is authentically Jewish. It stands to reason that anyone who is working out his or her Jewish identity will be drawn to rabbinic teaching. Some of the teaching and tradition is good and wise. However, the rabbis are

inherently opposed to our faith in Jesus and hostile to our desire to tell other Jews about Him. Do we really want to look to their standards to validate whether or not we are authentically Jewish?

Validation can be a big problem for Jewish believers. Where do we look for it? It is easy to fall prey to our own pride and desire for acceptance from our fellow Jews—and often we don't see those things for what they are. Pride is especially hard to pinpoint when it is hiding behind more noble qualities such as piety or zeal for God.

Some Messianic Jews are teaching that it is incumbent on all Jewish believers to observe the Law of Moses and to worship exclusively in Messianic congregations. They would agree that we are saved by grace through faith in Messiah Jesus. However, they would add that Jewish believers who want to fulfill their destiny as Messianic Jews must continue to be a part of the Jewish community, which means living a “Torah-observant” lifestyle, a lifestyle that can only really be lived out in the context of a community of Messianic Jews. I have heard of instances where, failing to find a Messianic congregation in the area, some Jewish believers have chosen to attend a synagogue rather than a church. This is a form of neo-Galatianism, pure and simple (Galatians 3:2-3).

There is nothing wrong with celebrating the biblical feasts, or following certain rabbinical traditions, but we can do so only to the extent

that we do not contradict the clear teaching of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament. And part of that New Testament teaching is that, in Messiah, we are fully free to practice these things or not as a matter of choice and conscience.

To declare rabbinical teachings and traditions obligatory in any way for the follower of Jesus, or to seek acceptance as Jews at the expense of our forthright identification with Christ puts us on a slippery slope toward spiritual disaster. It has caused many people to separate from brothers and sisters in the Church, and eventually from Christ Himself.

The Messianic Jews of the first century faced similar temptations under more dire circumstances. They were subject to Roman persecution for refusing to pay homage to Caesar. They had only to return to the synagogue to be granted immunity for not participating in this forced idolatry. However, they would only be accepted in the synagogue if they did not speak of their faith in Jesus.

The author of Hebrews admonished them: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Hebrews 13:12-13).

To bear the reproach of the Messiah is a badge of honor, not of shame. Are we willing to bear that reproach, even if it means going “outside the camp” of what the rabbis consider authentically Jewish?

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**WE EXIST TO MAKE THE MESSIAHSHIP OF JESUS
AN UNAVOIDABLE ISSUE TO OUR JEWISH PEOPLE WORLDWIDE.**



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THAT'S JUST MOISHE...



Prayer Prompters

Please pray for:

- ★ a humble spirit throughout the Body of Christ that will counter the temptation to triumphalism, be it among Jews or Gentiles (p. 1, 2)
- ★ a deep understanding of God's grace and a willingness to suffer "outside the camp" for Jewish believers who are tempted to seek approval or identity from those who do not know Jesus (p. 1, 2)
- ★ the New York City Summer Witnessing Campaign going on this month: for physical and spiritual fortitude for campaigners and stewards, for the sensing of God's glory in the midst of rejection, and for divine appointments with Jews and Gentiles who are ready to hear and receive the gospel
- ★ next month's Behold Your God campaign in Berlin, Germany that the testimony of Jews and Germans proclaiming Christ together will break down barriers and open many hearts to the gospel (p. 7)
- ★ a clear understanding and commitment to Jesus for Mr. G, and that he will grow in the Lord (p. 8)
- ★ Yuval to contact our Tel Aviv branch in Israel and come to saving faith; continued ministry to and salvation for Noah (p. 8)
- ★ grace and strength for new Jewish believer Irina in Germany, and salvation for her husband and son (p. 8)

Happy Fourth of July!

We are grateful for our freedom and to be living in a country where we can worship and speak openly about God. But even as we celebrate our freedom, every "Independence Day" we remember our utter dependence on God. We are so thankful that God has used the prayers and support of friends like you to help us proclaim the gospel freely, to the "Jew first and also to the Greek." Thank you, thank you!

P.S. Enclosed please find our "Happy Fourth of July" broadside. It's one of many tracts we are distributing in New York this summer.

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Jesus is our rabbi as well as our Savior and Lord. He freely interacted with the teaching of the rabbis. Where He was in agreement with them, He said so. But when He was at odds with the rabbis, He clearly spoke out. The crowds recognized that Jesus taught with authority and not as the scribes (the

rabbis) of the first century (Matthew 7:29). Shouldn't those of us who claim Jesus as our authority give Him the honor and obedience He so rightly deserves?

I have confidence that we Jewish believers in Jesus will eventually find our way through these problems and

yes, even become an example to the rest of the Body of Christ. It is with this sense of optimism that I look forward to the next edition of the Newsletter and the final three admonitions:

- Resist the lure of assimilation
- Proclaim the gospel
- Proclaim the return of Messiah. ✠✠✠

Campaign Reflections



Our month-long Annual New York City Summer Witnessing Campaign begins July 1. In order to help you pray for this month's campaigners, we thought we'd share reflections from a couple of veteran campaigners. These articles share a vulnerable side of our missionaries that we don't always portray, because we are not looking to throw a "poor us" pity party. We do want you to pray, though, and to be able to imagine yourselves out there with us.

Troubler of Israel

By Stephen Katz, Washington, D.C. branch leader



Conflict is part of everyday life when you are a missionary. I've often thought of Elijah as a role model, and when things seem rough, I've found myself thinking, "It would be nice to be accepted by the Jewish community. It's no fun getting hassled all the time and being perceived as an enemy. But such is the life of a 'troubler of Israel' like Elijah."

And that is my conviction—that my people need to hear the gospel. And while I don't enjoy rejection, it is to be expected and endured in order to reach those who do want to hear. But that doesn't mean we are immune to all the emotions that can well up when we experience hostility.

Last summer, our branch hosted the Washington, D.C. "Behold Your God" campaign. The media picked up the story and amplified our gospel shout. We were featured in around 60 newspaper articles and on six television broadcasts as well as seven radio shows. The story went national and even international as two Israeli newspapers ran articles. God truly allowed us to fulfill our mission statement of "making the Messiahship of Jesus an unavoidable issue to our Jewish people" in D.C. There was a buzz around town about Jews believing in Jesus.

All this exposure didn't come without a price. It was our daily experience to

be yelled at, ridiculed and scorned. Several of our campaigners were spit upon. Tears were not uncommon. The excitement of turning Washington, D.C. on its head for Jesus was accompanied by the deep sting of continual rejection—not merely of us, but of Jesus—which over time became a constant, soulful ache.

While this kind of hostility may have been new to our volunteers, it wasn't new to me. Over 15 years of ministry in this field, I have developed a pretty thick skin. So I was—and perhaps still am—caught off guard by my own feelings of anger and sadness. Anger at those who lead our people astray through misinformation, prejudice and fear. Anger at my people for not knowing what their own Bible says, for refusing to consider Jesus because of cultural bias and an uncritical acceptance that if the rabbis say Jesus is not the Messiah, it must be true.

Someone once said that if you repeat something often enough people will believe it. We see this in action and read it in the media. "Jews don't believe in Jesus!" "You deceive people!" "Missionaries are dangerous!" "Jesus is *not* the Messiah!" These statements have been repeated so frequently for so long that most Jewish people accept them as facts. And it makes me profoundly sad that so many of my people are lost because they will not allow themselves to consider Jesus.

As I said, none of this is new to me. But during our campaign I began to feel beleaguered by the waves of opposition and rejection that swept over me. Maybe it was the sheer volume of it. I am still wrestling with some of these feelings. So I think back to one of my role models.

After a sensational demonstration of the power of God and a great victory on Mt. Carmel, Elijah fled to the desert, battling feelings of fear and despair. He felt like he was the only faithful Israelite, while all the others had rejected God's covenant. Self-pitying and depressed, he prayed that he might die, in essence telling God, "I have had enough. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

The troubler of Israel, the mighty rebel—Elijah—was ready to end it all. Ready to give up. But God came to him in a whisper and let him know that there were others who still followed the truth, who had not succumbed to the lie of Baal. By this amazingly personal touch of God, Elijah received strength. He continued on in his God-given purpose as a proclaimer of truth and a confronter of lies.

Our experience is not unique. Elijah and Jeremiah knew it. All the prophets and apostles knew it. Paul knew it, and was able to say, "We commend ourselves as ministers of God: in great endurance; in much

patience, in tribulations, in needs and distresses; by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; genuine, . . . beaten, as chastened, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing . . ." (from 2 Corinthians 6:4-10).

We've not suffered to the degree of these Bible heroes, but we

do need to be lifted up. Please pray for all of us Jews for Jesus missionaries, who at various times experience an emotional response to those whom we want to reach with the gospel. Pray that we will be diligent and engaged in proclaiming the gospel—the more so when we are feeling hurt. And pray that we, too, will hear the

whisper of God, reassuring and strengthening us.

Ed: It is important to mention that street evangelism is only one part of our outreach. Our missionaries are not facing this kind of rejection all day, every day, all year round. But it is part and parcel of the work we do, and particularly during witnessing campaigns.

Campaigns, Conflict and Being Co-Heirs

By Lynn McCoy, Washington, D.C. missionary



"You're not anymore," my friend insisted over a long distance call. She was reminding me that I was not as physically able to do what I could do when I began my ministry with Jews for Jesus. "That was 17 years ago," she continued to chide. To tell the truth, I felt a little depressed when I got off the phone with my friend.

She was right; after all, I hadn't been on a full campaign for many years. Still, I actually felt better than I had in years; I'd been "working out" to prepare for our month-long "Behold Your God" campaign in D.C. I knew it was going to be a major physical challenge, but I had done all that I knew to do to prepare my body.

Nevertheless, I sensed that with all my busyness, I hadn't done all that was possible to fortify something more important—my spirit. And

so three days away from our campaign, I was praying that God would prepare me spiritually for what I was about to encounter.

That same morning I turned on the radio to a sermon that was nearly over—but I don't think it was an accident I tuned in at the moment. The preacher was talking about Stephen's stoning, from Acts 7. The final point was that in the midst of his suffering, Stephen saw the glory of God. I don't know who the preacher was, but he assured his listeners that when we are being persecuted for our faith, we are actually in the midst of God's glory, sharing in His suffering. I tucked that message away in my heart, grateful that God heard my desire to prepare spiritually for our outreach.

The first week of our campaign, my team was sent out to Farragut North to hand out our broadsides to the lunchtime crowd. This is the heart of D.C.'s business district. Many people who passed by hurled insults at my teammate and me.

I was tempted to answer back harshly at one particularly disgusting remark, but was aware that God's glory was present. From that moment on, I offered a "God bless you" to every vile remark, knowing that God would bless me with the presence of His glory. I prayed for those who cursed me, as Stephen had prayed that God would not hold the sin of his persecutors against them. In the midst of the yelling, the nasty comments, and the occasional attempt to knock the tracts from my hand, I felt the presence of God very powerfully on the street corner that day.

The following week my team was sent to the Wheaton metro station, in the heart of the Orthodox Jewish community. I stationed my teammate at one side, and I went to the other. After 15 minutes I went back to check on my teammate, and found her in tears. I asked her what was wrong, and she told me she was having a difficult time with one particular man who was harassing her. She pointed him out as he waited for his ride. I offered to switch places with her, as my side was a bit milder.



Why we Campaign

Sure it's hard but we also have a lot of fun and fellowship with one another. And best of all, God always brings us people who are really interested in hearing what we have to say.



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Within minutes of switching, the same man that harassed my teammate came back to harass me. He asked, "Just tell me, why are you doing this?"

"Because I believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, and I think that every Jew ought to consider Him," I replied. The man started to curse at me, but I asked him anyway, "How do you *know* that He is not the Messiah?" "Because He didn't bring peace," he screamed at the top of his lungs.

At this point a woman wearing a very prominently displayed cross, screamed out as she passed, "You should be

ashamed yourself, telling Jews about Jesus." "God bless you," I called back. Immediately another woman tore up a tract and threw it at my face. Again I offered her a blessing. All this happened in an instant, so I turned to the man and said, "He does bring peace. He brought peace to me, and He can bring peace to you. Can you honestly say that your beliefs right now are bringing you peace?" He couldn't answer—he wasn't very peaceful, and he knew it. He looked embarrassed, and I told him I would be praying for him to know the truth. It continued like that for another hour,

but I have to say I really felt the joy of Lord in the midst of those encounters.

After each sortie (tract passing expedition) I felt my age. My feet hurt, my knees were swollen and my back ached, but I was blessed. Each time I went out on the street, each time I was insulted for the cause of Christ, I felt the glory of God's presence. Because each time I was reminded that I am a co-heir with Him, sharing in His persecution, and therefore I could also share in His glory (Romans 8:16-18).



THE BYG* PIC

*Behold Your God

BEHOLD YOUR GOD BERLIN!

From August 3-27, Jews for Jesus in Germany will conduct our "Behold Your God" campaign in Berlin. Every day, for nearly an entire month, a team of 25-30 men and women will take to the streets three times a day to hand out

literature, talk with inquirers and gather the names and addresses of those who want to know more about Jesus.

Though we've conducted campaigns like this in many cities around the world over the past few years, the Berlin campaign promises to be unique. If you can imagine, half the team will be Jews for Jesus, the other half will be Germans for Jesus. As far as we know, this will be the first time in history that Jews and Germans will be proclaiming the gospel in a high profile manner TOGETHER.

When our people see us proclaiming the gospel together, many will understand that something exceptional is taking place. What a testimony this will be about the reality of God's love, and the reconciling power of the cross.

Normally we would wait until next month to publish this, along with a reminder bookmark/prayer card. We will give you the prayer card next month, but we know that some of you

will want to be praying as final preparations are being made. So, please pray as we make plans!

Pray for the team to come together. Jewish believers from Germany, Russia, Ukraine, the U.S., the U.K. and Israel have already asked to take part. Pray that we'll have the right mix of people, both Jews and Germans.

Pray that God will open many hearts as we hand out the tracts, call people on the phone, go door-to-door and do everything else we can think of doing in order to fill Berlin with the sound of the Good News.

Pray that we'll win the hearts of German Christians to the cause of Jewish evangelism.

And . . .

Pray that all Germany will be impacted by the sight of Jews and Germans proclaiming the gospel together!

TEST YOUR YIDDISHKEIT*

*Jewishness or Jewish culture

A TWO-PART RIDDLE:



You hate it in the subway,



but pay to do it at a spa;



it embarrasses you during a presentation or job interview,



but you're proud of it at the gym.

OK, so that was pretty easy, but now, part two: do you know the Yiddish word for sweat? Is it:

- A. *shvitz* B. *schmooze* C. *shavuot*

ANSWER:

If you answered A, mazel tov, stop *shvitzing*, you got it right. If you answered B, you got the Jewish word for chatting (also known as *kibdizing*), which is a lot more fun than *shvitzing*, unless you're in a sauna with your buddies, in which case *shmoozing* and *shvitzing* go together. If you answered C, did you READ last month's Newsletter?

New York

Bruce Rapp reports, “Several months ago I met a Christian woman (Ms. V) who is friends with a Jewish man (Mr. G). In fact, they had been dating and even discussing marriage. Ms. V explained to Mr. G that she could not in good conscience marry someone who is not a believer in Jesus. Mr. G agreed to meet with me for a four-week Bible study to see just who this Jesus is that Ms. V feels so strongly about. We have long since finished our four-week series and Mr. G wanted to continue meeting to study and try to figure out who Jesus really is.

“Recently I spoke at a church in Long Island, and though I had invited Ms. V and Mr. G to join me, I was surprised when they actually entered the church. They had driven over two hours to get there! Mr. G was focused intently on the Passover presentation and even took notes.

“At the end of my message, the pastor led the church in a communion service. As the plate and cups were being passed, I explained to Mr. G what this meant. I was surprised when he took a piece of the matzo and a cup as they came by. I asked if he understood what he was doing. He replied, ‘Yes, by taking these things I am saying that I believe, and that I want Jesus to be in me.’ I looked at Ms. V (who was sitting on the other side of him) and my jaw dropped.

“After the service we didn’t get much time to talk, but please keep Mr. G in prayer as we continue to meet, that he will have his own growing faith in Jesus, apart from his friendship with Ms. V.”

Susan Mendelson reports, “A young Israeli student (from Hebrew University), Yuval, was visiting in New York and stopped by our office.

He said he had some questions about us for coursework that he’s doing. Yuval was very kind and seemed curious. He said he would contact our office in Tel Aviv when he gets back to Israel. Please pray for Yuval to receive the Messiah, Y’shua.”

Bits from the



BRANCHES

Boston

Garrett Smith reports, “We had great fun doing an outreach at the Boston Marathon. We had a crew of 25 people handing out tracts and talking to people about the Lord. We gave out over 7,000 broadside tracts. One Jewish man, Noah, e-mailed us afterward, thanking us for encouraging people to seek a more

spiritual life, though he was quick to add that he didn’t agree with everything in our message. Mostly, he couldn’t understand how we could think Jesus was the only way. I was blessed to get the e-mail, and excited about responding. When we hand out tracts on the streets, we are giving people an opportunity to interact with the gospel. Most Jewish people rarely have that opportunity. Pray that Noah will continue to engage with me on the subject of Jesus.”

Germany

Dina Markova reports, “I knocked on the door of a flat with a German name on it. A woman opened the door and I explained that I was with Jews for Jesus. Then I asked if she knew where I could find Jewish families to invite to our Shabbat Bible studies. The woman smiled, introduced herself as Valentina, and invited me to come in. As I came in, I saw another woman sitting in the room and drinking tea. ‘This is Irina,’ Valentina said. ‘She is Jewish and she is from Ukraine. Please have some tea with us.’

“I introduced myself to Irina and asked if I could talk to her about an important issue for the Jewish people. ‘What do you want to talk to me about?’ she asked. ‘About what you think of the Messiah of Israel—what do you think about Y’shua?’ ‘But we were just talking about Him!’ Irina exclaimed.

“I had a wonderful opportunity to share the gospel from a Jewish perspective and at the end of our conversation she prayed the sinner’s prayer with me. I thank the Lord for this soul! Please pray that Irina’s husband and son would also come to know the Lord, and that Irina would find a congregation of believers in Germany where she could grow spiritually.”