Why all the fuss? by David Brickner, executive director

“Why do you insist on calling yourselves Jews for Jesus? Why not just call yourselves Christians?” I can’t count how many times my kinsmen who don’t see Jesus as a Jewish possibility have asked this question. But I also hear the question from Christians. Perhaps you have even wondered about it yourself. After all, we’re all one in Christ. Doesn’t the Bible teach that there is “neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female?” Why all the fuss?

Some may see the importance we place on our Jewish identity as overweening pride in our ethnicity, an attitude of superiority that has no place in the body of Christ. I believe it is appropriate for various people groups to value their heritage and family background, and that such appreciation really does not amount to feelings of superiority. But I would add, this is not the basis for “the fuss.” I actually believe our insistence on our Jewish identity is rooted and grounded in the plan of God for all people. I really want you to think with me about the theological and missiological importance of this controversial issue.

When God called Abraham into a covenant relationship, He promised that His covenant would be eternal—and He clearly stated that Abraham and his descendants would be the means by which all the families of the earth would be blessed. God accomplished this by giving both the Scriptures and the Word made flesh—our Messiah Jesus—through the Jewish people. But He gave something else through the Jewish people—hope. Our continued existence in the face of repeated attempts by those who would destroy us is incontrovertible evidence of God’s faithfulness. If God is faithful to preserve the Jewish people, then all people can trust His unbroken promise-keeping power. God staked His very reputation on the continuation of the Jewish people.

But though the Jewish people have brought blessing to the world, the majority of Abraham’s descendants have not yet received for themselves the fulfillment of God’s greatest blessing—Jesus. This was a vexing problem for the early church. The Apostle Paul took three whole chapters in his letter to the church in Rome to explain how this unbelief was part of God’s continuing plan and promise of blessing for all. Paul expressed love for his Jewish people, passion to see them saved, and spelled out the reasons for their specialness:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the (continued on page 2)

Can you believe in Jesus and still be Jewish . . . ?

In this edition
March 2014

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(continued from page 1) glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. (Romans 9: 3–5)

Paul identified himself and all other Jews who believed in Jesus as “a remnant” (Romans 11:5). A remnant is a small, remaining amount. If you can’t see it, it isn’t a remnant. In Paul’s day, this visible, tangible body of Jews for Jesus was evidence of God’s faithfulness to bring Jewish people to salvation through Christ—as it still is today. This remnant of Jews who believe in Jesus continues to confirm God’s plan to bring salvation to the nation of Israel and the entire world. That is one good reason for “all the fuss.”

Just imagine if there were no Jews who believe in Jesus today. What would that say about whether God’s plans, purposes and promises are still good and true—not just for Jews, but also for the blessing of the entire world? But God has preserved the remnant of Jews who believe in Jesus to this day. God has not forgotten we are Jews, and neither should we. We are part of His worldwide missions strategy.

You see, if God intends to bless all people through the Jewish people, and if the ultimate state of blessedness for Jews and everyone else comes through faith in Jesus Christ, then it must be part of God’s plan to keep bringing the gospel to the Jewish people until the day of their salvation. That is why Paul persisted in his passion for their salvation, even though he was an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was convinced that great blessing lay in seeing his own people come to Christ, and he argued intensely that this was also the mission of the entire church. No matter how many other interests and strategies Paul had, the salvation of the Jewish people remained a priority. And if the church believes what Paul penned back then, Jewish evangelism is still a very important part of the mission of the entire church now.

**God staked His very reputation on the continuation of the Jewish people.**

That is where Jews for Jesus comes in. Direct Jewish evangelism is our number one priority. We also do our best to keep this priority as a vital and vibrant part of the mission of the church. But we are all up against a big problem. The main argument against Jesus in the Jewish community today is that Jews who believe in Jesus can no longer be considered Jews. Therefore, if all Jews believed in Jesus there would no longer be any Jewish people—kind of like a spiritual holocaust. Of course this is false; in fact it is a lie from the pit of hell. And, as with many lies, those who believe it are caught up in circular reasoning: if a Jew believes in Jesus they are told they can’t be considered a Jew any longer; therefore, believing in Jesus threatens Jewish existence. This creates a false and self-perpetuating dichotomy that is still accepted and promulgated to this day.

Back in the early days of Jews for Jesus, that belief seemed to be universally held within the Jewish community: you can’t be Jewish and believe in Jesus. By the grace of God we have challenged and chipped away at this falsehood by being visible, vulnerable and available to demonstrate that Jews can be for Jesus. In a recent Pew survey of Jewish practice in America, 34% of those surveyed said a person can be Jewish even if he or she believes Jesus was the Messiah. That is an encouraging change over these 40 years. Yet it indicates that 66% still believe the lie.

Why do we have to call ourselves Jews? Because it is literally part of our calling to demonstrate that one can be Jewish and believe in Jesus. If you have the occasion to share Jesus with a friend and they tell you, “That’s nice for you, but I’m Jewish and Jews don’t believe in Jesus,” I hope you will feel comfortable pointing them to Jews for Jesus as evidence to the contrary. Why not let us help you present that evidence to them? Ask us to be in touch with your Jewish friends. After all, we exist to make the Messiahship of Jesus an unavoidable issue to our Jewish people worldwide. We and other Jesus-believing Jews are proof positive that God’s plans are still in place for Jews and for the entire world. Now that is a fuss worth making, don’t you think?

1. j4j.co/pewji
prayer prompts

Please pray for:

- the testimony of Jewish believers in Jesus to draw attention to God’s promise-keeping power and faithfulness

- Purim events happening in our branches this month, that Jewish seekers will come and consider the gospel

- preparations for next month’s “Christ in the Passover” tours and last-minute openings to be filled

- the ongoing work of our missionary “somewhere in Belarus” and the continued testimony of two new Jewish believers there: Anatoly and his wife

- salvation for Éva in Budapest, for Gábor and Zsuzsa (elsewhere in Hungary), for the woman, her son and her daughter who “adopted” Oded and Bimini in Israel, and for David, the unorthodox Orthodox rabbi, as well as Inge in Switzerland

- God’s blessings on the Turnil family as they labor for the gospel in Paris, and for the deSouza family as they prepare to join them

- Rebekah Rood’s continuing care for Leelle and other children and youth she ministers to through our New York branch and Camp Gilgal, helping to raise the next generation of Jews for Jesus

online extras

The expanded edition of our newsletter at j4j.co/extras314 gives you:

- David Brickner’s thoughts on the year that Purim coincided with Good Friday

- fun facts about Hadassah

- So What: turn our stories into encouragement for your life and witness

- hyperlinks that take you to staff pages of several missionaries featured in this edition

This month’s Jewish calendar: Be sure to wish your Jewish friends a Happy Purim, which begins at sundown on March 15! Purim celebrates the story recorded in the book of Esther. It’s traditional to read the “whole megillah” (scroll) of Esther, eat three-cornered pastries known as hamantaschen, or “Haman’s hats,” and have the children dress up as various characters from the story for plays or parades. It’s a joyous time of celebrating God’s watchcare over His people, Israel.

Hello, Israel

Have you ever heard of a Jewish women’s volunteer organization called Hadassah? It’s one of the largest Jewish international organizations in the world. Use our online extras link to find out what it is, how it started and what it has to do with Purim.

IT REALLY HAPPENED...

This month’s banner photo: Dina Markova (right) from our Essen branch giving one-on-one Bible instruction.
Anatoly's new life. He told me he had begun the Jewish New Year, but Hashanah service at this our last visit, he went to the Rosh there was Anatoly! It seems that after some one called my name. I turned and

"I recently went to see the leader of a missionary in Switzerland. But that is potentially a lot of Jewish people for one missionary! Almost all the Jews I have met are strongly attached to their Jewish identity, yet they are also strongly atheist. They may not be comfortable with the idea of Jews believing in Jesus, but several have been willing to talk, unlike most rabbis and Orthodox Jews I meet."

"So imagine my surprise when an Orthodox rabbi phoned me expressing his desire to meet. Initially, I didn't believe him. 'You are a rabbi?' I queried. 'Yes,' he repeated. 'So you must be a liberal rabbi?' 'No, an Orthodox rabbi,' he replied. 'I suppose you have a particular synagogue?' 'No, I am the rabbi of a well-known Orthodox synagogue near X.' "And why are you calling me?" I asked. His answer was even more surprising."

"I am concerned that Jews believing in Jesus should be represented in Jewish forums. Dialogue amongst Jews should involve the whole range of Jewish beliefs and tendencies." He explained that he'd been Orthodox in the past, but only because he was pressured to go. Finally, he left with his wife and children and settled, first in the USA and then in Switzerland.

"David was carrying a book about Jesus by a Jew called Constantin Brunner, who wrote in Germany in the 1920s. My excitement at discovering a Jew writing favorably about Jesus faded as David explained that Brunner's 'Jesus' was a supreme spiritual being and mystic. This was how David saw Jesus, and he, too, had come to believe in Brunner's translation of that famous Jewish Scripture and prayer, the Shema. Brunner substituted the word 'being' for Lord: 'Hear O Israel, Being is our god, Being is one.'"

"I was shocked and surprised, having never heard this rendering of the Shema until that day, yet having heard that phrase just a couple of hours earlier. Before meeting Rabbi David, I had visited Inge, a colorful and spirited 91-year-old who has been married, divorced and widowed three times. She is a secular Jew from Vienna, and as we talked she explained that 'Being is our god.' But both want to talk further. Inge travels extensively and is only occasionally in Switzerland. Amazingly, David has invited me to meet his congregation and so we are due to see one another again soon. Again, this is quite a surprising opportunity. Please pray for wisdom for me, and that the Spirit of God would convict Inge and David of sin, judgment and salvation in Christ."

**not their real names**

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**New Community**

"Our missionary and his wife "somewhere in Belarus"

" moving any closer to faith. After a while, we stopped meeting. It's been about a year since our last visit."

"I was invited to speak at two Lutheran churches in a small country town 168 miles east of Budapest—rarely would I expect to find any Jewish people in such a setting. So I was amazed when a most unexpected thing happened—three as yet unbelieving Jewish people came to the church meetings, including the president and vice president of a synagogue, and a Jewish lady who traveled all the way from Budapest to hear Jews for Jesus. With the synagogue leaders, Gábor* and Zsuza,* I only had the chance for a short polite conversation, but they happily received our literature. Eva,* however, was an old friend of the pastor and we had a meal with her and spoke heart-to-heart. She received our Survivor Stories DVD. Please pray for these precious people who came to hear about the Jewish Messiah.

"The son was in the kitchen, but apparently he was listening too, because he came to correct something his sister had said about the Bible. We commented on his knowledge of the Bible. He explained that he'd been Orthodox in the past, but only because he was pressured into it. We got to share with him as well. We began a wonderful relationship with all three of them. The mother assured us she is adopting her. We know she wants to cook a big meal for us next time we come! Please pray for salvation for this woman and her two grown children."

"I am concerned that Jews believing in Jesus should be represented in Jewish forums. Dialogue amongst Jews should involve the whole range of Jewish beliefs and tendencies. He again reiterated his desire to meet me. I told him that I would be delighted and would call back shortly. He sounded genuine, but I really wasn't sure. I then checked via the Internet and confirmed his phone number, email and other details. Indeed, I had been speaking to the rabbi of a well-known synagogue. Rabbi David* expressed no indication of personal interest in Jesus, but, in my experience, those representing the media or organizations rarely contact us unless there is an element of personal interest."

"We met a week later in a café. Rabbi David looked uneasy in his black suit. He had removed his wide-rimmed black hat and was sporting a Kippa (skullcap). He had pushed his payot (side-locks) behind his ears and was glancing nervously at the people seated at the tables around us. He ordered a coffee and, as he sipped it, explained half apologetically that he would not usually take this milk, as it wasn't kosher. In fact, he was officially in town to buy kosher milk for his wife!"

"He had been a rabbi in Israel and a teacher in a yeshiva, but he began to develop unorthodox views about God which had alarmed his colleagues. Some had suggested he could stay on as long as his teaching and practice remained Orthodox and his thoughts remained hidden. Others said he should go. Finally, he left with his wife and children and settled, first in the USA and then in Switzerland."

"David was carrying a book about Jesus by a Jew called Constantin Brunner, who wrote in Germany in the 1920s. My excitement at discovering a Jew writing favorably about Jesus faded as David explained that Brunner's 'Jesus' was a supreme spiritual being and mystic. This was how David saw Jesus, and he, too, had come to believe in Brunner's translation of that famous Jewish Scripture and prayer, the Shema. Brunner substituted the word 'being' for Lord: 'Hear O Israel, Being is our god, Being is one.'"
I’ve served with Jews for Jesus for more than twelve years and have encountered a plethora of worldviews. Recently, I’ve been reflecting on how words like “faith,” “hope” and “love” mean something different to different people depending on their worldview. For example, unbelievers often use the word “faith” synonymously with “religious tradition” or even “religious opinion.” “Hope” is often used to express “a best wish.” “Love” describes a special romantic feeling (ever heard of the song, “You’ve lost that loving feeling,” by the Righteous Brothers?).

But God speaks to us very differently about faith, hope and love. In the Bible, faith has the force of trust in something that is true, hope is a forward-looking assurance of a promise to be fulfilled, and love is sacrificial and committed. The differences in definitions have to do with the source and object of faith, hope and love. From a biblical perspective, these three things originated with, and should be directed back to, God and His Messiah.

Most Jewish people I’ve encountered are ambivalent about the concept of the Messiah. Some doubt that a Messiah will come and feel anything one might say about “God” and “Messiah” is just a matter of opinion. Others think of the Messiah as a “best wish” kind of a hope, while a minority has an expectation grounded in God’s Word and His promise that Messiah will indeed come (though He may tarry). In any case, the popular contemporary rabbinic view is that Messiah is not a personal Savior, but a golden age of peace and justice. Hope for a place in the world to come is regarded as a best wish, or perhaps just one’s opinion.

Allen is a Jewish man I have occasional ministry to. He struggles with the concept of placing his faith in a Messianic Savior. When we first met, he admired the teaching of Yeshua, but found it difficult to believe He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He expressed the opinion that this world is hell and the world to come will be a greatly desirable relief from earthly suffering. Yet, the hope and peace he yearned for were ambiguous and elusive. Personal life struggles have been opening Allen’s heart to Yeshua. He’s starting to see the gospel as more than an optional opinion and has been grappling with it as something that might be real and true. Last year he came to our Purim event and shared that he knew something would have to change in his heart in order for him to know God. Allen is still searching, but is getting closer to the truth. Please pray for him to find true faith, hope and love in the Messiah, and that through Jesus, he will witness supernatural transformation in his family.

Over and over, the amazing depth and truth of the Scriptures stand firm in the face of changing attitudes, morals, and yes, even definitions. God hasn’t changed, and His message is the same as ever. He consistently offers us His abiding love and a sure hope as we trust in Him with our lives and eternity:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

(Romans 5:1-5)

Thank you for helping us share that timeless message of faith, hope and love!

Karl has been leading our work in Montreal since 2005. He and his wife Kristen are currently making plans to move their family to Paris, where they will be a tremendous asset to the Turnils (see page 6). Learn more about Karl at jewsforjesus.org/karl-desouza
The French do not wear T-shirts. What I mean is, the T-shirt isn’t considered a means of fashion or expression—especially not a shirt that announces a religious opinion such as “Jews for Jesus.” Religion has no place in French society, or at least not in public. Reason is god and the secular state the religion. People are expected to keep religious beliefs personal and mostly hidden. Should students, in their classrooms, wear a small cross or Star of David, they are asked to cover them beneath their shirts—just as the Muslim head covering is forbidden in schools. Religious women are denied the right to insist on being treated by women doctors. Government employees are not to wear any distinctively religious apparel whatsoever while in its employ.

This legal and cultural construct can be a challenge for those of us committed to raising a visible testimony on the streets of Paris. However, our countercultural clothing can also help us connect with some who are not used to showing their colors. Jewish people are often impressed that we defy the rules by wearing Jews for Jesus shirts. The fact that we are willing to identify publicly as Jews often overpowers whatever later objections they might have to the “for Jesus” part.

It is this that allowed for a unique opportunity. Every year the Jewish community tries to come out and take a stand for Israel on “Yom Yerushalayim” (Jerusalem Day). Sometimes it doesn’t work out so well. Either the government denies permission for the event on public grounds for the aforementioned reasons, or those who dislike Israel and the Jewish people picket or block the path. Last year there was a near riot.

This year the community decided to privatize (or rent out) a park, hire security and make it an invitation-only event for approximately 2,000 Jewish people.

Every year Jews for Jesus has asked to be part of the Jerusalem Day celebration and has been denied. But surprisingly, this year we were granted the right to attend and to put up a Jews for Jesus stand! We set up our stand between the Jewish Humanists and the Jewish Ecologists, and behind us was a religious Jewish bookstand!

Well, one of our volunteers said, “I’ll come and help, but I won’t wear a T-shirt. I’m just glad we got invited—I don’t want to provoke anyone!”

While we were there, a representative of the Jewish radio station asked if I wanted to sign up for a raffle. I usually don’t do that, but it was a chance to chat, so I did. As I was filling out my information, they asked me to do a radio interview, so I had an impromptu opportunity to share the gospel with an audience of some 30,000 listeners.

Another fun surprise occurred with a DJ who was going from stand to stand, remarking with funny quips and informal spiels on the various displays. When he got to our stand, I didn’t quite know what to expect. I introduced myself and tried to start a conversation, but he did not want to interact with me. Then he said loudly into the microphone, “Jews for Jesus—again! They don’t seem to go away and they’ve been around for years, so you might as well come by and get into a debate with them—well worth it!”

Breaking cultural mores can be difficult, but it can certainly prove to be fruitful here in France. Postscript: a few days later, I received a call from the Jewish radio station “live” on the air to announce that I was the “lucky winner” of the raffle!

Joshua Turnil leads our work in Paris. In addition to being a gifted evangelist, Joshua is a talented musician. For more about Joshua, go to jewsforjesus.org/joshua-turnil
Leelle was preparing for her bat mitzvah—a rite of passage for Jewish girls, usually at twelve years of age (the male counterpart is called bar mitzvah at thirteen). It is the first time that a Jewish person is called to read from the Torah scroll in Hebrew in front of their community, and is not only a huge landmark but also a great honor.

Leelle was getting Hebrew tutoring through her congregation, but time was tight so her parents (both Jewish believers in Jesus) reached out to me for a little bit of extra help.** Like many parents of preteens, they were growing concerned about their daughter’s spiritual well-being. It felt as though she was growing less open to their influence, again, not uncommon at that age. So at her parents’ suggestion, Leelle and I began to meet. Leelle had only been minimally involved with our camp program so this was an unexpected opportunity.

Helping kids prepare for their bar/bat mitzvahs is part of Jews for Jesus Children and Youth Ministry, but Leelle was my first student. She needed to understand how to “own” the process of becoming a bat mitzvah. She also needed to decide whether she would take hold of the process and, in effect, become part of her Messianic Jewish community because she wanted to, and not just because her parents wanted her to.

As I began to meet with Leelle, we were able to talk about many things that would affect her decision: peer pressure at school, boys, how to want a healthy relationship with your parents, and how to articulate where you stand in your faith. All the while we were rehearsing and practicing her Torah portion, Haftarah portion, and the corresponding blessings.

Leelle hadn’t ever considered that she could read the Bible on her own to learn about God for herself. We worked together to help her learn, not just her assigned portions, but also the needed tools for understanding what she is reading and how to apply the Bible to her life. Leelle has a relationship with Yeshua and desires a deepening in that relationship, but she didn’t know how to talk about it without feeling like she was just parroting the words of her parents. She also wasn’t sure how to share where she was at in her spiritual process . . . especially since she knew that she still needs to grow in her faith. Our times together allowed for a lot of discipleship and I had the privilege of seeing her grow over the course of our sessions.

Finally, the day of Leelle’s bat mitzvah came. She was nervous. Her parents were nervous. I was nervous! But it was exciting to be able to see Leelle demonstrate all of her hard work to her friends and family and to hear her talk about her Scripture portion in a thoughtful way. In front of everyone, including some of her estranged unbelieving relatives, Leelle owned her faith in Jesus within the context of her Jewish traditions. She had been able to find her own words to express who Yeshua is in her life, and how she sees herself fitting into His bigger plan. She testified to Yeshua’s work of purification and of God’s hand in her life. She showed that Jesus is important to her, and she showed that being Jewish is important to her.

I am so glad that we were able to connect and I am excited to continue meeting with Leelle going forward. My own bat mitzvah was the occasion God gave me to take ownership of my faith and to see Him set the trajectory for my life. I look forward to continue including bar/bat mitzvah preparation in my ministry and I am excited for opportunities to come.

Rebekah is part of our Children and Youth Ministry in New York City, where her husband Sam also serves on our missionary staff. Find out more about Rebekah at jewsforjesus.org/rebekah-rood

*All staff that participate in our Camp Gilgal programs have camp names. Rebekah’s reflects her loyalty to her favorite baseball team.

**Our ministry ethics spell out that we only reach out to people under eighteen with parental consent.