



Communicating
the
Beauty of
Y'shua

to the Jewish People

The cover art is a scan of a painting by Hebrew Christian artist Marilyn Ramsdale. The graphic can be found on the Jews for Jesus website at <http://www.jews-for-jesus.org/>.

Communicating the Beauty of Y'shua¹ to the Jewish People

Stan Telchin is a Messianic Jew, also known as a Hebrew Christian. He came to faith in Jesus late in life and then wrote a book about his conversion called *Betrayed!*. The book is of no little interest to the Christian who wonders how one witnesses to a Jewish person about Christ. In the book he records this conversation between a Christian pastor and a Jewish person:

“Tell me, young man,” the pastor said, “what do you think of Jesus?”

“To tell you the truth, I don’t.”

“You don’t what?”

“Think of Jesus.”

“Why is that?”

“Because I’m Jewish.”

Pause. “Do you think Jesus could be the Messiah?”

“No, I don’t!”

“Why not?”

“I told you, I’m Jewish.”

“Tell me, have you ever read the New Testament?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Have you ever read the Old Testament?”

“No, not really.”

“Well, young man, let me see if I understand you. You have never read the Old Testament. You have never read the New Testament. But you are convinced that Jesus is not the Messiah. Is that right?”

“Right!”

“You certainly form definite conclusions on no evidence, don’t you?”³

¹ For many Hebrew Christians, this Hebrew form of the name Jesus has become the preferred way of referring to the Lord and Savior who came to save Jew and Gentile alike.

I strongly doubt that Mr. Telchin was offering this conversation as a kind of *God's Great Exchange* for Jews, but he does remark that during the time he was studying about Jesus and trying to form conclusions about who he was, this conversation "hit him in the gut." Also, much in this conversation reflects very common experiences among evangelists to the Jewish people. It is the prayer of this writer that it also offers some initial insight to the reader, serving as a fitting introduction to this paper's focus: communicating the gospel message to today's Jew.

According to a recent report prepared for the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, the last century has seen the slow disintegration of the "ghetto," and the last several decades in particular have seen the exodus of the Jewish population out of the inner-city and into the suburbs. The result is that more Jewish people than ever before are being separated from the big synagogues and thrust out into the communities of the evangelical churches.³ This fact certainly offers both opportunity and imperative to the Christian church, including our own synod. The United States boasts the largest concentration of Jewish people of any nation on earth, including the state of Israel, so this is a matter that American Christianity needs to face up to.

Of course, as with outreach to any ethnic group with its own customs and culture, there are difficulties in the task of carrying the gospel to the Jewish people. Not the least of these tasks is simply answering the question, "To whom exactly are we carrying this message," that is, "Who is a Jew?" That may seem like a silly question, but even the Jewish people themselves will tell you it is not. Moishe Rosen, founder of the Hebrew Christian, para-church organization, Jews for Jesus, stated the problem this way, "Ask any four Jewish people who or what a Jew is, and you

² Stan Telchin, *Betrayed!*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books), 1997, pp. 61-62.

³ "Christian Witness to the Jewish People," No. 7 in the Lausanne Occasional Papers series, delivered to the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism meeting in Pattaya, Thailand, June 16-27, 1980, pp. 7-8.

are likely to get five different answers.”⁴ Most Christians assume that if they want to prepare for witnessing to a Jewish person they know, they should really first concern themselves with learning the basic tenets of Judaism. Now, that in and of itself can prove to be quite a difficulty, but we will look at the diverse entity that is modern Judaism in just a moment. For now the reader should be aware that you can’t assume that all Jewish people practice Judaism. Most studies have concluded that less than half of American Jews have any connection at all to a synagogue or temple. Many either belong to various non-Christian cults or have no religious affiliation whatsoever.⁵ Erwin Kolb, author of the Judaism installation in Concordia’s *How to Respond* series, cites the results of a recent Gallup poll which found that the average American Jew is markedly less concerned with religious matters in general than an average American at large.⁶ And although there are a few limited trends that have arisen in recent years that have attempted to move the Jewish population back to their people’s religious heritage, the greater trend still seems to be Jewish secularization and assimilation.⁷

To illustrate the point, we once again call on Mr. Telchin, who during his spiritual struggle finally boiled down the issue into five questions that he felt he had to resolve before he settled the question about Jesus Christ for himself:

1. Do I believe that God really exists?
2. Do I believe that the Jewish Bible (The Tanach) is the divinely inspired word of God?
3. Does this Bible prophesy about a coming Messiah?
4. Is Jesus the Messiah?
5. If he is, what does that do to me?⁸

⁴ Moishe and Ceil Rosen, *Share the New Life with a Jew*, (Moody Press: Chicago) 1980, p. 14.

⁵ Bruce J. Lieske, *Harvest Waiting: Reaching Out to the Jewish People*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House) 1995, p. 23.

⁶ Dr. Erwin J. Kolb, *How to Respond to Judaism*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House) 1990, p. 7.

⁷ Lausanne, p. 9.

⁸ Telchin, p. 47.

Most Christians would probably ^{have} expected his questions to have started at number four, yet for the American Jew—even one who grew up in a “religious” family like Stan Telchin’s—these are questions that often remained not only unanswered, but unasked.

Now for a question that is difficult for anyone to answer: What do those of the Judaistic faith believe? Dr. Kolb warns that this question can be answered about Judaism about as specifically as it can be answered about the 2000 Christian denominations of the world.^d The problem is more than just denominational, however; it is really philosophical. “Modern Jewish scholars persistently maintain that Judaism has no dogmas and that the stress is not on orthodoxy but ‘orthopraxy’—the living out of a moral life.”¹⁰ That may sound like a scholarly cop out to the Christian ear, but, on the other hand, the claim that one is going to heaven because he believes what is right even though he sometimes fails to act on those beliefs sounds even more like a cop out to the Jewish ear.

That’s certainly not to say that there are no dogmas in Judaism; it’s just that even dogmas that are almost “universally” accepted are variously interpreted, and this is a matter of very little concern to a religion that has such a pragmatic mindset. Among those things that are universally accepted is the closest thing Judaism has to a creed, the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD, our God; the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4). Considering that this is one of the few beliefs that can be considered “core” to Judaism, it is little wonder that it is widely held among the Jewish people that the Christian faith is tritheistic.

Probably the next most widely held set of beliefs is the 13 principles of the Jewish faith set down by the Medieval Talmudist, Maimonides. These principles are 1) God’s existence; 2) God’s

Unity; 3) God's Spirituality; 4) God's Eternity; 5) God alone must be worshipped; 6) the Prophets are true; 7) Moses is the Chief of the Prophets; 8) the Divinity of the Torah; 9) the Torah is eternal and unchangeable; 10) God's omniscience; 11) reward and punishment; 12) the coming of the Messiah; 13) the resurrection of the dead.¹¹ One must remember, however, that these principles were never accepted in any official way by Judaism, and, as was mentioned before, they are *variously interpreted!*

The various interpretations of Judaistic thought can, nonetheless, be broken down into some basic denominations. Probably the most well-known of the three basic denominations is Orthodox Judaism, even though it is the smallest portion of American Judaism (approximately twenty percent). Orthodox Judaism is the most conservative of the three, holding closest to the tenets of traditional Judaism, including prayer three times a day, holding to the 613 commandments they find in the Torah (this includes the Kosher dietary laws), separate sections in the synagogue for men and women, worship that is conducted in the Hebrew language alone, and the covering of the head at all times. Hasidic Jews are a subgroup of Orthodox Judaism and are analogous to the pietistic movement in Lutheranism, emphasizing a heartfelt joy in the practice of their religion.

The next largest portion of Judaism in America (about 30 percent) is Reform Judaism, which is rationalistic and humanistic in its outlook. Unlike Orthodox Judaism, the Reform branch does not accept the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) as the inspired and inerrant word of God. They believe in a continuing revelation and the adaptation of the customs of the past to fit the civilization of the present. They worship in temples (not synagogues), accept as binding only

⁹ Kolb, p. 13.

¹⁰ Lieske, p. 24.

¹¹ Adapted from Lieske, p. 25.

those parts of the Torah that they consider to be moral law, worship in English with instruments and occasionally organs, and even allow woman rabbis. Reform groups are often marked by a very deep conviction for the promotion of social programs and fair treatment for minorities.

Finally there is the largest group, which makes up approximately one half of all Jews who claim formal association with a Jewish congregation, Conservative Judaism. Conservative Judaism arose out of the conflict between the Orthodox and the Reform group around the turn of the century. They are essentially a compromise between the two, considering Reform Judaism's break with tradition a betrayal of their heritage, yet shunning the incompatibilities of Orthodox Judaism with modern lifestyles. They hold to most of the dietary laws, yet also dabble in new forms of worship. The Bar Mitvah (basically a Jewish confirmation, if you don't mind the historic irony in a statement like that) is still celebrated with fervor, yet so is the Bat Mitvah, the young girl's equivalent to the Bar Mitvah.

Probably the most important lesson a person can learn from this kind of a summary of Jewish belief is not to take anything for granted. Moishe Rosen even finds it necessary to stress that one cannot even take for granted that a Jew believes God exists.¹² However, there are a couple of things in the "what to say" category that would impact most people you meet who practice Judaism.

For one, the Christian can remember these pointed words from Rabbi Hillel Silver as applying to any branch of Judaism: "The key Protestant doctrine of Justification by Faith alone, and not through good works, *finds no place in Judaism*" (emphasis added).¹³ Rabbi Singer, who leads a project called Outreach Judaism, published a series of audio tapes called *Let's Get Biblical!*, designed for the purpose of winning back those Jews who were being wooed by Jewish

missionaries. One of those tapes, “Sin and Atonement,” found an enemy in Jews for Jesus, who refuted its points on their website. Rabbi Singer, clearly upset at these “unbiblical” attacks on Judaistic theology, published his own website which included this section on atonement before God:

Refutation V

Ezekiel condemns the doctrine of vicarious atonement

The prophet Ezekiel warned against Christendom's central doctrine that an innocent human being can die for the sins of the wicked.

Throughout the 18th chapter, Ezekiel warned his people that this erroneous teaching that a righteous man could die for another man's sins was contrary to the will of God. The way for the sinful man to come right by God is to turn away from his rebellious ways, repent, and thereby the penitent is assured complete forgiveness. Throughout Ezekiel's uplifting sermon on the forgiveness of sin, blood sacrifices are never mentioned. Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-23 reads:

The word of the Lord came to me, saying: "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers eat sour

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Another area you're likely to find universal disagreement with biblical teachings is in the doctrine of man. Judaism teaches that man has a free will because he was created in the image of God. The closest thing you'll find to the idea of original sin is *theyetzer hara*, an evil inclination within man that leads him astray. Nonetheless, it is both within a person's power and of utmost necessity to bring himself back to God in repentance when he has sinned, and in that way to achieve self-redemption.¹⁵

The most important part of learning how to witness to Jewish people, however, does not fall under the category of “what to say”—the gospel is the power of God to change hearts, and

¹² Moishe and Ceil Rosen, pp. 18-19.

¹³ Quoted from Kolb, p. 15.

¹⁴ Rabbi Tovia Singer, “Outreach Judaism Responds to Jews for Jesus” (<http://www.outreachjudaism.org/response.html>).

this part of evangelism every Christian knows. More important and more difficult to training for Jewish evangelism is learning *how* to say it.” That may seem like a truism for all forms of cross-cultural evangelism, but American Jews present a unique problem: rather than having no frame of reference in which to process the Christian faith, they have a two-thousand-year-old filter of bad feelings through which they hear everything the Christian says. That filter has a tendency to take any communicated thought and add onto it the misunderstandings between the Jew and Gentile Christians of the first few centuries after Christ; then to fold in the anti-Semitic language of various “Christian” church leaders (including the very Christian Dr. Martin Luther who once advised in a sermon to burn down Jewish homes), then to surround it in the hatred they have heard behind names like “Christ killer” and “kike,” which they themselves have been called; then to mix into all of that the persecutions of the Crusades, the Medieval Inquisition, the pogroms (organized riots against the Jews) of Europe and Russia, the cross-burnings of the KKK, and even the Nazi holocaust. Considering these facts which loom large in the Jewish consciousness, it is no wonder that the Christian must be careful about what he or she says to Jewish acquaintances.

Nonetheless, sharing the gospel is necessary and urgent, so the following list of pointers which have been compiled from various Jewish evangelists is offered in the hope of being an assistance with the lines of Christian-Jewish communications.

1. *Don't assume knowledge of or even keen interest in Judaism.* Moishe Rosen speaks of a recent article in which a rabbi stated that most Jews are interested in the pragmatic value of belonging to a synagogue rather than the religious implications.¹⁶
2. *Be patient.* Remember all the obstacles a Jewish person has to face even in listening to you.
3. *Don't let a fear of being inadequate in your knowledge of Scripture stand in your way.* Even those Jews who have been religiously trained are likely to have learned mostly about the Talmud, as well as Jewish history and culture.¹⁷

¹⁵ Lieske, p. 25.

¹⁶ Moishe and Ceil Rosen, pp. 17-18.

4. *Be prepared to establish such basics as the Bible being the word of God.* Usually we would quote self-authenticating passages from Scripture, but Jews for Jesus emphasizes the importance of expressing the Bible's impact in your own life, the Bible's uniqueness in history, how its prophecies have proven true, and how archaeology continues to prove its validity as a historic document.¹⁸
5. *As in all evangelism, try not to major in minors.* In their biographical treatment of the Jews for Jesus movement, Moishe Rosen and William Proctor wrote this about the Jewish hecklers they had met in their street preaching: "Jewish hecklers are like Jews in practically every other field of endeavor. They always want to be the best. Their heckling is not usually vicious. They do it for sport."¹⁹
6. *Witness as a friend.* In his book of Jewish evangelism tips, Moishe Rosen says this even more strongly, "*Witness Only to Friends.*"²⁰ Since the first person who witnessed to Moishe himself was a stranger, that seems like going a bit far. However, considering the history that Jews and Christians have together, it shouldn't be surprising that Jewish people you encounter are suspicious of your motives until you display interest in them as a person.
7. *Speak the gospel with both testaments.* See Appendix A for some suggestions.
8. *Be prepared with a number of Old Testament prophecies that are fulfilled in the New Testament.* See Appendix B for a brief list.
9. *Be sensitive to confusing or offensive terminology.* See Appendix C.
10. *Be aware that to the average Jewish person, "Gentile" = "Christian" and "Christian" = "Gentile."*

That last one deserves a more extended treatment because it goes to the very core of Jewish evangelism. Lamenting the rejection he suffered at the hands of people who had been his friends before he became a believer, Stan Telchin came to this realization:

The Jewish community is able to understand and accept the fact that there are Orthodox Jews, Conservative Jews, Reconstructionist Jews, Humanistic Jews, Agnostic Jews, Atheistic Jews—even Gay Jews. No matter how they all feel about God, they are still Jews. But somehow Messianic Jews, those Jews who believe in God and also believe that Jesus is the Messiah, are different. For them the welcome mat is pulled away.²¹

¹⁷ Lieske, p. 23.

¹⁸ Moishe and Ceil Rosen, pp. 53-54.

¹⁹ Moishe Rosen and William Proctor, *Jews for Jesus*, (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company), 1974, p. 45.

²⁰ Moishe and Ceil Rosen, p. 40.

²¹ Telchin, p. 113.

The welcome mat, as it were, has even been pulled away on an official, legal level. Most people are aware that there is a law on the books in the state of Israel that guarantees citizenship for any Jew that comes to the Holy Land to live (the Law of Return, as it is called). Not as many people realize that the one exception to that law is a Jew who has received the Christian faith. Justice Menachem Elon of the Israeli Supreme Court wrote that such Jews “do not belong to the Jewish nation. . . .those who believe in Jesus are in fact Christian.”²² Dr. Kolb points out one fact that probably could have been listed among those dogmas that are common to all kinds of Judaism: “One thing remained a strong element in Judaism: it was anti-Jesus. Judaism clearly taught that Jesus of Nazareth was *not* the Messiah.”²³ A treatment here of the kind of emotional turmoil this “baggage” that comes with the gospel message in the Jewish mind would be unfair and impossible, but even touching on it stresses the importance of being a friend to those Jews with whom the gospel is shared—and practicing great patience as the gospel seed takes root amidst so many obstacles.

Probably the saddest part of Jewish evangelism is how little it is done—especially when one takes into account the reasons why some denominations choose not to do it. Dr. Kolb surveyed fifty major denominations in the US to gather information about their outreach to the Jewish people. Half of the denominations he contacted responded to his inquiry. Only a few of the more evangelical and conservative congregations had any sort of organized outreach activities. The rest espoused what he called a “schizophrenic,” two-covenant theory that based the salvation of the Jews on their heritage as Abraham’s children.²⁴ The One who is The Only Way, the Truth, and the Life is being lost to the people that the Apostle Paul prayed for in such earnest (Rom.

²² Quoted in Kolb, pp. 11-12.

²³ Kolb, p. 14.

²⁴ *Ob. cit.*, p. 6.

10:1), those for whom he wished that he himself would be cut off (Rom. 9:3), all that they might come to the faith which was intended for them first, and then for the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16).

Ironically, it seems that the dividing wall which Christ tore down to bring the Gentiles to the Jews has been erected again by Gentile and Jew alike. Yet Jesus remains Savior of all and the spread of his gospel message remains the primary purpose of his church on earth. May God grant that his kingdom come to all nations, both Jew and Gentile.

Appendices

Appendix A—Speaking the Gospel with Both Testaments

(Adapted from Kolb, p. 27)

- A. All have sinned and need atonement with God—Eccl. 7:20; Is. 63:6; Ps. 14:2-3; Rom. 3:23.
- B. The result of sin is death—Is. 59:1-2; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23a.
- C. God removes sin by sacrifice—Lev. 17:11*; Is. 53:3-8; John 1:29; Rom. 6:23b.
- D. God takes away sin and changes the heart—Ps. 51:7-13; Gal. 2:15-16; Gal. 5:22-23.
- E. Salvation is received by faith—Gen. 15:6; 1 Kings 18:21; Gal. 3:6-7.

* Because it seems to be a common misconception that this passage, which is really just explaining the reason why God does not want the Israelites to drink blood, establishes the principle that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22), be sure not to misuse it. It does help to establish the general mode of God’s operation, along with the rest of the Mosaic law.

Appendix B—Fulfilled Prophecies

(Adapted from lists found in Kolb on pp. 27-28 and in Lieske on pp. 31-32)

Old Testament	Prophecy	New Testament
Genesis 3:15	Seed of the Woman	Galatians 4:4
Genesis 12:1-3	Covenant of Abraham	Romans 9:4-5
Genesis 49:10	Tribe of Judah	Matthew 1
Deut. 18:15-19	Prophet like Moses	Acts 3:22-23
Isaiah 7:14	Born of a virgin	Matthew 1:18-20
Micah 5:2	Born in Bethlehem	Matthew 2:1-6
Jer. 31:31-34	New Covenant	Hebrews 8:1-13
Isaiah 53	Death for our forgiveness	Christ’s crucifixion
Jonah 1:17-2:10	Resurrection	Mt. 12:39-40; 16:4, 21
Genesis 9:26	Descendent of Shem	Mt 1:1-17
Is 9:6	Birth of a Savior	Lk 1:26-35
Is 11:1-10	Descendent of Jesse	Rom 15:8-12
Is 53	The suffering servant	Phil 2:5-11
Is 61:1	Messiah brings good news	Lk 4:16-21
Ezek 34:15,23-24	Son of God and David	John 10:27-30
Zech 9:9	Messiah enters on donkey	Mt 21:1-11
Mal 3:1-4	Messiah comes to temple	Mt 11:2-10

Appendices

Appendix C—Offensive Terminology

Some of these suggestions may seem almost arbitrary, but the use of some terms that may seem harmless to us may close the lines of communication to the Jewish person who often finds some of the things we say in passing very demeaning and indicative of our lack of concern and understanding for them as people. The following story told by Moishe Rosen serves to illustrate this point.

A zealous Christian once tried to talk to her Jewish neighbor. Her speech was effusive and filled with devotional adjectives. In describing what the Saviour had done for her, she kept referring to “our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ.” In exasperation, the Jewish woman finally said, “Let’s get one thing straight. To you, he’s ‘our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ,’ but to me, he’s not! He’s yours, not mine; don’t include me in the ‘our.’ Second, he’s not blessed as far as I’m concerned. Even your people use his name as a swear word, and he’s not brought anything but anguish to the Jews. Third, he’s not ‘Lord’ to me. We Jews believe in one Lord, and it’s not Jesus. Fourth, he’s not ‘Christ’ to me. If I really believed in my own Jewish religion, I would believe that the Christ is still to come, and you believe that he already came. To me, he’s simply ‘Jesus!’”

From Kolb, p. 27:

Instead of...	Say...
Christ	Messiah
Jew	Jewish person
Convert	Jewish believer
Old Testament	The Tanach or Hebrew Bible
Church	Congregation
Yahweh or Jehovah	The Lord or God

Dr. Kolb also suggests you may want to use Jesus’ Hebrew name, Yeshua (Y’shua).

Mr. Rosen also offers these *caveat*’s: 1) Never criticize Jewish community leaders, even if your Jewish friend does so freely—in fact, it’s probably best to openly defend such men.²⁵ 2) Don’t talk in terms of “you Jews.” Like all people, Jews preferred to be treated as individuals, not as a race. It’s better to use the third person, “the Jewish people,” etc.²⁶

²⁵ Moishe and Ceil Rosen, p. 27

²⁶ *Ob. cit.*, p. 24

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