

Presenting the Gospel to the Jewish People:

An assessment of what is and a plea for the future

Presented by Susan Perlman, Jews for Jesus October, 2007

I want to tell you about three people and how they came to faith. The first is Marilyn. Marilyn came to a church in Sacramento, California where I was speaking on the topic of the Fall Feasts just a few weeks ago. She approached me at the book table afterwards. "I'm Jewish," said this woman in her late thirties, "and I came to know the Lord over ten years ago when someone like you came to this Baptist church to speak. I was invited by a friend who had been witnessing to me and my husband. Meeting another Jewish person who could articulate her faith in Jesus was what I needed. That meeting was the final step that brought me into the kingdom." Marilyn then went on to tell me about how our missionary met with her regularly for several years in a discipleship role. She appreciated talking with someone who was somewhat like her. Marilyn told me how grateful she was for the many visits from our staff missionary where the word of God was opened up and she grew her faith and her connection with this local congregation, which is still her home congregation.

The second person is Cynthia. Cynthia called me about a month ago and told me her story. She is a Jewish believer who has known the Lord for about a year. She had some questions of a spiritual nature and she thought about where she could get some answers. She reasoned that searching on Google was a good place to start looking for answers. So she went and found Jews for Judaism. She assumed they would be the place to get information. She read through a lot of the material on their web pages including proof text materials as well as their warnings about the missionary groups. Since Jews for

Judaism made many references to Jews for Jesus, she became curious and decided to check out our website. She surfed our site and landed in the apologetics section. Cynthia found the answers challenging. She told me of how she would go back and forth between the two sites to see what each had to say on issues like the resurrection, the virgin birth, atonement and particularly the Messiah. She eventually concluded that the case for Y'shua's messiahship on our website was much more compelling than the case that Jews for Judaism made that Messiah has yet to appear.

Interestingly, she didn't get in touch with our mission agency but instead went to a local church in her area and it was there that she professed her faith in the Messiah. Only now is she beginning to connect with the larger community of Jewish believers in her part of the country. But she searched for the Lord on the Google search engine.

The third person is Andrew. Andrew is the son of a Holocaust survivor. He called us as a brand new believer. He prayed the prayer to receive the Lord on the tag at the end of the film, Survivor Stories. This was five years ago. For some reason, his therapist, an unbeliever, had given him the DVD. He called us with questions and concerns, and was very cagey about meeting with other Jewish believers. Anyway, Ruth Rosen was the one to talk to him back then so when he called our office recently, he asked for her. Andrew had been reading the Bible and sounds like his five-year old faith is solid. He has reached the point of wanting to feel more connected to his Jewish background and to Jewish believers.

Now You might be thinking, Susan, you've missed some other approaches, some methods that have anecdotes of their own. Oh you mean approaches like:

Knocking on the doors of Jewish homes or apartments? Calling Jewish people by surname from the phone book? Sending out evangelical mailings to Jewish homes? Handing out gospel literature? Setting up a book table on local university campuses with significant Jewish enrollments? Walking around those campuses with surveys that have questions tailored for Jewish students? Leasing kiosks in malls in Jewish areas where you can engage with Jewish shoppers? Holding up evangelistic banners on roads and at intersections where they can be read by Jewish motorists? Mailing evangelistic journals by subscription to Jewish seekers? (I think I know of one called ISSUES.)

Evangelistic books and DVDs that are offered to seekers in a variety of ways? Public Bible studies on Jewish oriented themes? Personal one-on-one bible studies in homes? Evangelistic campaigns that employ many of these methods while focusing on a particular community for a short period of time? Public debates between apologetically savvy Jewish believers and traditional rabbis or Jewish community spokespeople? Full-page evangelistic print and broadcast ads with a Jewish theme in major secular media? Eye-catching billboards with slogans to capture the attention of seeking Jews? Letters to the editor in secular publications that raise the issue of Jews and Jesus? Invitations to holiday event sponsored by the local messianic congregation or mission agency?

The weekly messianic congregational services as a place of proclamation? Utilizing stories of Jewish believers from different walks of life in a wide variety of ways? Booths and Chai shops at New Age festivals. Making New Testaments available to Jewish seekers in their mother tongue? Apologetics material on the web? Praying for the salvation of individuals? Delivering holiday baskets to Jewish homes? Chatrooms on the web? Utilizing social networks like MySpace and Facebook? Getting viral with a

Jewish gospel message on YouTube? Messianic music concerts? Dramatic presentations? Use of Messianic prophecy to make the case? The use of end times prophecy to make the case? DVD's shown in private homes that tell the Y'shua story? Lectures by Jewish professionals (doctors, lawyers, etc.) that draw out other Jewish professionals? Humanitarian efforts? Living in community with Jews who do not believe and developing meaningful relationships that lead to decisions for Y'shua? Providing special interfaith programs for Jewish/Gentile couples with an evangelistic edge? Gentile Christians who share their faith with their Jewish friends, college roommates, co-workers, neighbors and acquaintances? Direct revelation from God? Meeting one-on-one at Starbucks. Radio programs? Television programs? Doing interviews with the press where you strategically look for ways to present the gospel to the listening or viewing audience? Dance ministry. Nursing Home ministry. Messianic chalk drawing on the street?

Now I'm sure each of you could offer an anecdote off one of the approaches on the list I just rattled off or from another list you might come up with that could easily use up all our time this morning. But what do these stories really say about effective evangelism among our Jewish people? If we took a vote among us and came up with the three top approaches to use, would we be accurate? I think not.

Our stories are true, but they are anecdotes. And we all have wonderful, encouraging, inspiring anecdotes that illustrate how some Jewish people have come to faith. There is nothing wrong with anecdotes, but they don't help us to quantify the best or most effective approaches, nor do they provide a magic bullet for effective Jewish evangelism.

I am convinced that in our hearts most of us believe we think we know the most effective ways to make Messiah known to our Jewish people. In the same way, we tend to conclude that other methods are not as effective. But to be honest, all that data out there is mostly old and not anything close to comprehensive. Perhaps the largest study done was over twenty years ago by Jews for Jesus¹ (Mitch Glaser and Beverly Jamison put it together) in which the first 1,014 responses were used as the sample. The most common initial attraction to the gospel cited by Jewish believers was through individuals and the most common agent directly influencing spiritual decision was individual as well.

The break down of the figures are in the paper:

Chart 9

INITIAL ATTRACTION TO THE GOSPEL

Persons	468	47%
Search/Quest./Truth	109	11%
Bible	76	8%
Book/Lit.	60	6%
Supernatural Intervention	62	6%
Group	48	5%
Conviction/Holy Spirit	37	4%
Life Crisis	35	3%
Radio/T.V./Movies	25	2%
Curiosity	20	2%
Afterlife/Fear	12	1%
Ideals/Condition of the World	13	1%
No answer	49	4%
	1014	

AGENT THAT HELPED

Persons	620	62%
Group	180	18%
Conviction/Holy Spirit	30	3%
Book/Lit.	31	3%
Bible	27	3%

¹ Jewish Believer Survey, Demographic, Social and Spiritual Profiles of Jews who Believe in Jesus, A statistical report, August 1983, c. Jews for Jesus

Radio/TV/Movies	28	3%
Supernatural Intervention	29	3%
Search/Quest./Truth	11	1%
Life Changes	9	1%
No answer	49	3%
	1014	

Michael Schiffman’s 1987 survey of Messianic Congregations² noted that of 52 congregations that responded to the question on what activities have been most successful in making new contacts and in sharing their faith, more than half of the congregations responded with “friendship” or “holiday celebrations”. Again, the full chart appears in the paper.

Table 40: Activities that have been the most successful in making new contacts and in sharing their faith

Friendships	16	53%
Holiday Celebrations	13	44%
Special Activities	9	30%
Advertising	6	20%
Musical Presentations	6	20%
Literature Distribution	2	7%

Table 41: Outreach methods which the congregation is most comfortable with:

Friendships	17	57%
Holiday celebrations	16	53%
Special Activities	9	30%
Advertising	8	27%
Musical Presentations	6	20%
Literature Distribution	1	3%

Our most recent study was tabulated in 2003 and had the question of “Who most influenced you in coming to faith in Jesus?” Only 660 of the 1183 used in the survey responded to that question. They answered as follows: 290 said they were influenced by a believing Gentile friend and 42 by a believing Jewish friend. 48 by a parent, 10 by a

² Return from Exile, The Re-Emergence of the Messianic Congregational Movement, Michael Shiffman, p. 137.

sibling, 16 by one of their children, 33 by agency and 221 checked off other. More than fifty percent were influenced by a friend and mostly by non-Jewish Christian friends.

I would love to know about other surveys that have been conducted in other countries or among subsets of our people, like Hassidic Jews or post-moderns, or interfaith couples, etc. But I suspect that our market research is just not adequate to draw hard and fast conclusions. I don't think that our agencies or congregations are putting a substantial line item in our budgets for market research, but then would we even know the right questions to ask if we did make this a priority? Apart from comprehensive studies, what are we doing to track our own efforts? What congregations are tracking over time those Jewish visitors who are coming to services and becoming believers? What are the responses to direct mailings into Jewish homes, not just the filling out of coupons or calling an 800 number, but actual decisions that result? How many viable contacts can you get through "cold-calling?" Is it different from neighborhood to neighborhood, city to city, country to country? When a debate is held and there is a significant unsaved Jewish attendance, what follow up apparatus is in place to track the attendees and are we being effective? How effective are surveys? Coffee houses? Certain web sites? And how do we measure what makes these or any other methods effective or not. Some among this group might even say that the questions formulated by the planning committee as a guide in this discussion might not be the right ones to ask.

But let's just say that we could figure out the scientific way to let us know which methods are most effective. And then we could perfect those methods of sharing the gospel. What would that mean to you? What if the particular way that proved "most

effective” was outside your skill set, or something that just really goes against the grain of your personality to do? Does that mean that if you want to be effective, you need to fit yourself into the mold required by that method or approach?

While none of us wants to waste our time and resources, as long as our message is Y’shua, I’m not sure that anything we do to tell people about Him could be a waste. Well, maybe if we spend all our time stuffing tracts into various trash cans hoping that there are Jewish garbage men who will see them, that could literally be considered a waste.

Yet Y’shua said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:32) In context, we see the Y’shua of the crucifixion, the scandalized Y’shua.

We can talk about Y’shua the Rabbi, Y’shua the Righteous One, Y’shua the Redeemer, but we must not forget that His name is one of scandal. He is commonly known in Israel as Yeshu, the acronym for *yemach shemo vezichro*, "May his name and memory be obliterated." We must not shy away from the scandalized Y’shua. Our methods can vary, our materials can be nuanced, but our message must be Y’shua. We can give food to the poor and medical services to sick among our people, but if it’s not done in Y’shua’s name, we’ve done a good thing, but we haven’t lifted Him up. We can beautifully celebrate the Sabbath but in doing so it will only have its full meaning when we lift Him up as Lord of the Sabbath. We can produce the most clever arguments or eloquent words to answer a point of theological minutia, but if He is not lifted up, we have just drawn the attention to ourselves and our abilities.

We not only need to be Y’shua centered in our message, but sometimes we get too sophisticated for our own good. David Brickner put it this way in a recent newsletter,

“We make things more complicated than they need to be. It is easy to become enamored with our apologetics and our fancy methodologies and forget the power of God. People need to know what the gospel is, not necessarily all the reasons why they should believe it. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin, of righteousness and judgment. It is the simple good news of Y’shua’s death, burial and resurrection that is the power of God that changes the hearts of those who believe.”

Let’s stop fooling ourselves into thinking that it is our methods and our strength that convince our Jewish people of the truth of the gospel.

You might think it a mystery how God could use me to win people to Himself, and I might be having the same thoughts about you. And we’d both be right. It is a mystery how God uses any of us to win people’s hearts to Himself. But one thing I’ve noticed. God seems to like courage and he seems to like humility, and those aren’t methods, they are character traits. I’m not sure any of us ought to be satisfied that we’ve got enough courage or humility, much less both. I know I don’t. It took courage and humility for Y’shua to allow himself to be lifted up on that cross, or tree and it still takes courage and humility for us to lift Him up, to talk about our sin, his sacrifice and the narrow road he asks his disciples to follow.

So, whatever our approach, are we willing to take the risk of lifting Y’shua up? I don’t mean, is each of us ready to tell others to take risks that we believe are appropriate; but, is each of us willing before God to humbly accept whatever risks He may ask of us (not the person sitting next to us) in order that our people might be drawn to Jesus? Do we have enough courage ourselves to be able to pass on some boldness and enthusiasm to

others? Do we have enough humility to encourage others when they don't do things the way we would?

Will we encourage one another to lift Him up in diverse ways that various ones are suited for according to our diverse gifts, personalities and opportunities? Or will we dismiss one another's approach as too old (passé) or too new (if it isn't broke don't fix it) and discourage anyone who doesn't do things the way we think they ought to be done?

Will we be humble enough to see that God reaches hearts in many different ways, and will we be sensitive to His leading? Or will we fool ourselves into thinking it is our methods and our strengths that win people's hearts?

Will we recognize that God is calling people to Himself and He has not dictated to us the way in which we can be used in His plans to reach our people? Or will we be tempted to call people to ourselves and our own way of doing things?

Maybe the best way for us to be effective is to be committed to encouraging each other to keep a wide variety of approaches but stick to the unvarying message that "if we confess with our mouth that Y'shua is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved."

Conclusion

What can we do to enhance cooperation between mission agencies and messianic congregations when it comes to outreach? We need to begin by believing in the best of one another when it comes to wanting to see our people saved. It means strengthening one another in the equipping and training of believers for the task. It means providing cutting-edge materials that we can share. It means financially supporting the work of evangelism locally and abroad. It means that congregations will send out congregants to

the mission field with joy and mission agencies will rejoice to see Jewish people who come to faith in Y'shua grow in local congregations. It means brainstorming on ways we can do joint outreaches.

And what do we have to offer the next generation when it comes to a vision for reaching out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? Hopefully we have ourselves as an example. We need to be passionate about reaching the lost. We need to see the urgency of the task. We need to be courageous in proclaiming the Good News. We need to be committed to encouraging one another. We need to rejoice in one another's victories and be saddened at our failures. We need to be ready to see the value of using a wide variety of approaches, remembering that if the truth could be spoken by Balaam's ass, God can even use us. If the next generation sees that in us, we will have done well.