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What Contribution Are You Making to Jewish Evangelism? JKM

When Outreach Israel Ministries began in 2002-2003, we cast a very large net of thoughts and ideas, about what we believed that God could accomplish through us. In 2004-2005, we discovered that experience can be a very firm teacher, and we found out those things which we could legitimately accomplish and perform, and those things which were clearly not ever going to get off the drawing board. Some things which we were not able to do would simply exhaust our human energies and our budget—but other things we can definitely say that we were supernaturally prohibited from doing, and that the Lord was indeed protecting us from being harmed and demoralized over the long term. Quickly, in the first two to three years of ministry, Outreach Israel developed into an educational ministry producing resources for today's Messianic people.

As circumstances would direct it, the types of materials, which we would be producing for Messianic people, would mainly include things which we—as non-Jewish Believers from an evangelical Protestant background—would have wanted to see, upon us first entering into the Messianic community. In our early years of participating in the Messianic movement (1995-2000), being exposed to the Messianic lifestyle and lifecycle, we made mistakes. A big reason why we made mistakes was because we lacked the information and perspective of someone else having sat down, and having thought deeply enough to thoroughly inform others about what the Messianic movement was all about, some of its unique theological perspectives regarding the Tanach or Old Testament, and how the virtues of our shared Judeo-Protestant heritage can be employed for what God is doing. For much of our ministry life, the audience that we have been serving has primarily

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been non-Jewish Believers whom God has called into the Messianic movement. Using our own gifts, talents, and temperament—we have had to help many of these people become acclimated to the Messianic experience, to their faith heritage in the Scriptures of Israel and in Judaism, and how to best interact with their Christian family and friends who may not see things the way that they do.

When we relocated from Central Florida back to North Texas in 2013, and found ourselves reintegrated into the Messianic Jewish community *and* socially interacting with Messianic Jewish Believers on a regular basis—Outreach Israel Ministries started going through some shifts in its focus. *Was there anything that we were not doing, which we needed to be doing?* If you can believe it, while we emphasize that non-Jewish Believers are truly a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) or Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), grafted-in to the olive tree (Romans 11:16-17)—I had been disturbed for a long time why a ministry called “Outreach Israel” did not contribute more to the original Messianic mission of Jewish outreach, Jewish evangelism, and Israel solidarity. While we definitely knew of the importance of presenting the good news of Israel’s Messiah to our Jewish friends and neighbors, our situational context of getting started in Messianic ministry was to help non-Jewish Believers like ourselves get acclimated to the Messianic movement. Our research and writing was more likely to deal with the post-resurrection era validity of God’s Torah, and responding to errant Christian conclusions about the Law being abolished—than whether or not Yeshua was the prophesied Messiah of Israel. That would be the kind of issue that others could focus on. We had to do everything else...

In 2016 as I was finishing up the commentary *2 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*—and as new doors were opening up for our ministry within Messianic Judaism—I pragmatically recognized that we would not have a “right” to these new opportunities, unless we harnessed our energies to make some important contribution to Jewish outreach and evangelism. Just as we had written extensive analyses on the validity of the Torah, the seventh-day Sabbath, the appointed times, kosher dietary laws, and other aspects of the Messianic lifestyle we believe God is restoring to His people—**what would we need to contribute to in terms of Jewish outreach?** Being a deep thinker and theologically minded, it did not take much for me to figure out what we were supposed to do. The three significant areas which theologically affect Jewish outreach and evangelism involve (1) the Divinity of Yeshua, (2) the Messiahship of Yeshua, and (3) the reliability of the Holy Scriptures. Yet, I can recognize that in the course of my writing, how making a sizeable contribution to these areas of Messianic theology would not be possible without the work which has preceded it.

The modern Messianic movement got started as an outreach of Jewish Believers, to see the Jewish people come to saving faith in Israel’s Messiah. To be sure, there are other things which have taken place since, such as non-Jewish

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Believers entering in and more tangibly embracing their Jewish Roots. There are theological and spiritual issues, which the original leaders could not have anticipated being discussed. *We pray that God raises up the right people to perform the diversity of tasks before us. The original mission of seeing Jewish people come to faith in Israel's Messiah still has not gone away.* And, if you are a part of today's Messianic movement, you have to ask yourself, "What contribution am I making to Jewish evangelism?"

The Salvation-Historical Trajectory

Being a part of today's Messianic movement is not the same experience as being a part of an evangelical Protestant church. An explicit concern of today's Messianic movement is to reach the Jewish people with the good news of Israel's Messiah. So concerned was a figure like the Apostle Paul, for the salvation of his Jewish brethren, that he actually said in Romans 9:3, "For I would pray that I myself were cursed, banished from Messiah for the sake of my people—my own flesh and blood" (TLV). Paul was willing to give up his own salvation, for the salvation of his fellow Jews. Yet today, in far too many evangelical venues, the salvation of the Jewish people is not even something that is on the radar, or sonar, of many spiritual leaders. When the issue of Israel is brought up, perhaps some tacit prayers are offered for the safety and security of those in the Middle East—but it tends to be very removed from some of the urban issues and spiritual challenges facing the Jewish community.

Today's Messianic movement does see men and women of faith return to some of the significant spiritual experiences of the First Century C.E. While Romans chs. 9-11 have frequently been interpreted since the Protestant Reformation, as being an essay on the sovereignty of God—for the Roman Believers, Romans chs. 9-11 were an attempt to try to process why many Jewish people had dismissed Yeshua as Israel's Messiah, why many from the nations at large were receiving Him, and where some of this was proceeding for the long term future. It was absolutely true, that non-Jewish Believers were going to be co-participants in Israel's restoration along with Jewish Believers (Romans 9:24-26). It was also true that many of Paul's Jewish brethren attempted to establish a righteousness of their own, on their own terms (Romans 10:1-3), missing how the point of the Torah or Law of Moses was to reveal one's human's sin and guide them to the Messiah (Romans 10:4). The First Century Jewish community, no different than the Jewish community of today, needed people to declare of this Messiah to them (Romans 10:14-15ff). Yet, as was observed, because of various limitations, this was hardly something easy: "All day long I stretched forth My hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (Romans 10:21, TLV; quoting Isaiah 65:2).

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The warning issued in Romans ch. 11 is that a widescale Jewish dismissal of Yeshua of Nazareth, did not all of a sudden mean that God had dismissed His chosen people: "God has not rejected His people whom He knew beforehand" (Romans 11:2, TLV). The widescale dismissal, of Yeshua by the Jewish people, is that "by their transgression salvation *has come* to the nations, to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11, PME). Far from the nations replacing Israel via a new "Church" entity, non-Jewish Believers were to experience the great blessings of knowing Israel's Messiah—and so by experiencing blessings which they were not directly promised, provoke Jewish non-Believers to Messiah faith. Throughout too much of the history of Christianity, demonstrating the blessings—of knowing Israel's Messiah with the expressed purpose of seeing *Jewish non-Believers provoked to want such blessings—has not been what has been witnessed*. Instead, a great deal of arrogance, misunderstanding, discrimination, persecution, and murder of Jewish people, on the part of many Christians, has been witnessed. The warnings of the wild olive branches being in danger of being cut off from Israel's olive tree (Romans 11:17-21) have not been taken that seriously throughout Christian history.

Today, however, through the advent of the modern Messianic movement—and its specific focus on the salvation of the Jewish people and the restoration of Israel—today's Messianics are very much conscious of how history is moving in a decisive direction: "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). This is something that seemingly involves not only a massive salvation of individual Jewish people (Romans 11:12), but will also involve the return of Israel's Messiah, the defeat His enemies, and His reign over this planet (Romans 11:27; cf. Isaiah 59:20-21; Isaiah 27:9; Jeremiah 31:33-34). The key to this taking place is not waiting around for Bible prophecy to just passively take shape; it is instead the arrival on the scene of a group of non-Jewish Believers called "the fullness of the nations" (Romans 11:25). While a stated mystery, Paul does say in Romans 11:31, "these also have now been disobedient with the result that, because of the mercy shown to you, they also may receive mercy" (TLV). Perhaps this "fullness" is as simple, and complex, as non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah demonstrating the great mercy and grace to God to the Jewish people, who were originally given the Messianic promise.

How can this happen, given how for many Jewish people, the institution known as Christianity is directly responsible for persecuting their ancestors? How do some of the mistakes of past centuries get rectified? And, how do we approach unforeseen or unpredictable challenges in reaching out with the good news to our Jewish friends and neighbors?

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Communicating With Your Jewish Neighbors

Depending on where you live geographically can depend on whether or not you have a large, or a smaller Jewish community, with which you can interact on some significant level. Today's Messianic congregations and synagogues, being certainly setup to spread the good news "to the Jew first" (Romans 1:16), tend to have some kind of relationship—sometimes positive and sometimes strained—with those in the local non-Messianic Jewish community. At times, Messianic congregational leaders can have regular meetings with non-Messianic rabbis, to openly discuss their beliefs and views about Yeshua of Nazareth. More frequently, it is the people in Messianic congregations interacting with people in the local Jewish community that is important. Messianic people may visit local synagogues to attend a special event, they may regularly patronize a Jewish business, and they will certainly visit Jewish restaurants and the kosher section of their local supermarket. This can help interacting with others in the Jewish community, and can help build friendships.

Presenting Jewish people with the good news of Israel's Messiah is something which tends to be completely different than presenting any other people group with the good news. Throughout religious history, the warnings Paul issued in Romans 11 to the non-Jews in Rome have largely not been heeded by Christian people. Far from being vessels of the Messiah's love and grace to His physical brethren, many in institutional Christianity have been perpetrators of great crimes against the Jewish people. But perhaps your ancestors were in the colonies before the American Revolution, and your family line obviously had nothing to do with the pogroms in the Russian Empire, much less the Holocaust. American Protestantism, while not being responsible for physical crimes against the Jewish people, has still been responsible for perpetuating replacement theology, misunderstandings about Judaism and its traditions, and has in various ways promoted social anti-Semitism. A grievous theological error, witnessed far too frequently, has been the errant idea that God's grace is completely absent in the Hebrew Scriptures or Tanach—or worse yet that the God of the "Old Testament" is a being of anger and wrath, and that the God of the "New Testament" is a being of pure love. How Christian people have presented their Jewish neighbors, with the message of Israel's Messiah, has been negatively affected by such ideas.

I remember when reading 1 Corinthians 9:20 a number of years ago, being struck by Paul statement, "To the Jews I became as a Jew. . ." (NASU). Unlike others, who may have errantly thought that "Saul the Jew became Paul the Christian," I never believed that Paul gave up on his Jewish heritage or background. So what did Paul mean by identifying as a "Jew" here? How much, in his First Century identification with various audiences, in presenting them with the good news, involved Paul knowing about an audience, its distinct history,

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philosophy, and unique needs? In the First Century Mediterranean, being a Jew meant much more than having a spiritual and ethnic heritage rooted in Israel's Scriptures—but it meant being under the constant threat of assimilation from Greco-Roman polytheism as a tolerated, but still discriminated, minority. Being a Jew meant being affected by the culture of the times, which went beyond what is seen for us in the Biblical canon.

Today, when you make the effort of wanting to reach out with the good news of Israel's Messiah to your Jewish friends and neighbors—you have to be familiar with much more than just the history of Ancient Israel in the Tanach Scriptures. You have to know about the Jewish struggle in history. And, perhaps even more importantly, **you have to expel great patience and forbearance in establishing a long term friendship with your Jewish neighbor, earning his or her trust.** While your long term objective might be to see your Jewish friend make a profession of faith, forcing him or her to make an on-the-spot "decision for Messiah" is the last thing you want to do. Much of what is practiced, in contemporary evangelism today, is often not going to work with today's Jewish people. Because of the widescale Christian rejection and dismissal of the Jewish people, and Judaism in general—and the false belief that Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah cease being Jewish when receiving Him—you have to demonstrate, over the long term, that you are sincerely interested in becoming a Jewish person's friend, that you are there to help him or her through acts of kindness and service, and that you will discuss your faith in the Messiah only when he or she is ready. For some, this will only take place in the twilight moments of one's life...

We are supposed to be prepared at all times, to testify of our faith and how it has transformed us (1 Peter 3:15), but we also do not want to be insensitive to the needs of those who have actually been severely hurt by claiming Messiah followers over many centuries. Much of today's contemporary Christian religious culture of evangelization has very little to offer Jewish people. While in the First Century C.E., there would be no real issue with calling the Messiah *Iēsous*, the Greek transliteration of *Yeshua* appearing in the Septuagint—calling the Messiah by anything other than *Yeshua*, to today's Jewish people, can invoke a name which people in the past employed in the persecution and murder of their ancestors. When Jewish people are told that they need to "convert" rather than "turn," scenes of ancient injustice and the Spanish Inquisition may be thought as the intention. When Jewish people are told that the Messiah was "crucified," rather than "sacrificed" for their sins—Jewish people being persecuted in the Middle Ages with the sign of the "cross" is what is frequently considered. Some legitimate, alternative terms—than what is commonly witnessed in what we might label "Christianese"—most certainly need to be employed in reaching out to the Jewish community with the good news. Unfortunately, not recognizing

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that a “loaded” word or two, might be the very thing that prevents Jewish people from considering Yeshua of Nazareth as the anticipated Redeemer, **is a huge obstacle to present evangelical Protestant interaction with not only the Jewish community, but even the Messianic movement.**

Christian Impediments to Jewish Outreach

Ideally, when considering any matter of proclaiming the good news of salvation in Israel’s Messiah, we would all like to see the *Shavuot* scene of Acts chs. 2-3 of the Holy Spirit being dramatically poured out, and many thousands turning immediately to faith in Yeshua. Realistically, we are each probably aware of how when proclaiming the good news to close friends or neighbors, that this can be a long, drawn out process. Too many human beings will come up with their own reasons, as to why they do not need to confess their sins and recognize Yeshua as Lord. Many of these reasons will, sadly, involve much of the religious hypocrisy demonstrated by various Christians over the centuries—and people resisting the good news as you have presented it to them, may often have to do with an evaluation of your own sincerity and genuineness of faith. *Are you only looking to chalk up a few more statistics on the people you have seen come to faith*, or are you truly willing to invest, if necessary, many years into the life of a person coming to faith?

Throughout many centuries as a persecuted minority, Roman Catholicism certainly was responsible for forcing populations of Jews to convert on the spot, or face confiscation of their property, imprisonment, expulsion from their homes, or worse. When customary methods, of evangelization used today, are transferred to a Jewish context, many Jewish people can sense echoes of how their ancestors were forced to convert to Christianity on severe threats to their livelihood for certain, and even their very lives. While the temptation among some declaring the good news is quite strong to demand an instant decision, Jews have every reason to be cautious, at least, before making any definitive commitment. Even when there are Jewish people who recognize that illiterate, unsophisticated peasants in Medieval Europe—manipulated by religious and political authorities—were responsible for persecuting their ancestors, and that modern-day Western Protestants are not those same people, **expect a long term “project” when speaking about Yeshua of Nazareth.** Many of today’s Jewish people, interestingly enough, do not necessarily resist the message of Yeshua because of questioning whether or not He fulfilled prophetic passages of the Tanach like Isaiah 53 or inaugurated the Messianic Kingdom—but more basic issues regarding the reliability of Tanach Scripture, our place in the universe, and whether or not there is even a God. These are some admittedly uncharted frontiers on the horizon of Jewish evangelism.

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Perhaps the biggest obstacle that many are unfamiliar with—certainly when non-Jewish Believers present the good news to their Jewish neighbors—is that many Jewish people are looking for a reason to see such people at least give up on them, or even betray them. History is full of examples of where European kingdoms promised to be more tolerant to their Jewish populations, but once there was an economic downturn or some kind of rampant sickness or disease, their Jewish populations were blamed for the problems. Martin Luther, the main initiator of the Protestant Reformation, originally recognized some of the terrible injustices that Catholicism had inflicted among the Jews, and sought to remedy them. Yet, in his frustration with failing to see many German Jews turn to his message, in his later life Luther wrote some absolutely damning things in his *On the Jews and Their Lies*, later used in the propaganda of the Nazi party. Even today, while there are evangelical Protestants who are supportive of the State of Israel, how sincere is their support? Will they stand with their Jewish friends and neighbors, even if it costs them their lives (John 15:13), or is their support tempered by the belief in that supporting Israel they will be accelerating the fulfillment of end-time prophecy? Once the pre-tribulation rapture comes to remove the Christians from the Earth, then the Jews will have to experience the antimessiah/antichrist and beast system all on their own. Supporting Israel because it accelerates the apocalypse, is disingenuous and unbecoming.

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Beyond its stated intention of being a faith community for Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah, is the Messianic movement something intended for *all Believers* in Israel's Messiah—at least at this present stage of its development? On the whole, given some of the complicated dynamics of what it means to reach out with the good news of Israel's Messiah to Jewish people, historical atrocities committed in the past by the institutional Church, needing to have great patience and forbearance when developing relationships with Jewish people, and perhaps most especially **not using certain terms from "Christianese"**—it is fair to say that as things are right now, non-Jewish Believers have to be *specially called* into the Messianic movement. Non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement have to have a true, tangible understanding of what Ruth said to Naomi, "Your people will be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16, TLV). It goes beyond simply recognizing oneself as "grafted-in" (Romans 11:16-17); a non-Jewish Believer in today's Messianic movement must be truly *embedded into* the purposes and mission of Jewish evangelism. This is hardly a one-way street, and will certainly involve a conscious reconnection of one's faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures, and learning to live more like Israel's Messiah and the First Century Believers. But once a substantial amount of basic learning has been completed, actively participating in the mission is vital!

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Many of the non-Jewish Believers you will witness today, who are associating themselves with labels ranging from “Messianic” to “Hebrew Roots,” are not contributing a single thing to Jewish evangelism. Knowing the small size of the Messianic community—even accounting for the presence of “other” sectors—this venue has afforded many the opportunity to “be someone,” and as such you will see a plethora of non-Jewish voices on social media today, who have turned “Hebrew Roots” into something that goes unacceptably beyond expounding upon Believers’ needing to study and implement the teachings of the Tanach into their lives. The independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement of the 2010s gained a reputation for promoting a great deal of division, and being significantly unstable. The main reason, more than any other, is that it has not concerned itself with the Romans 9-11 dilemma of Paul wanting to see non-Jewish Believers channel their spiritual energies toward the salvation of the Jewish people.

What contribution are you making to Jewish evangelism? Perhaps there is a large Jewish community in your city or town, and it will not be too difficult for you to work on developing friendships with your Jewish neighbors—and over time the question of Yeshua of Nazareth will indeed be raised. Perhaps there is not a large Jewish community nearby, and so your contribution to Jewish evangelism might take place more in terms of participating in special events at other locations—or more likely taking a stand in defense of the Jewish people and State of Israel, to various Christians who have little or no understanding of their Jewish Roots. Perhaps your participation might be via some venue on social media. Perhaps you do not know about how you can help facilitate the salvation of Jewish people, as you are still working through what it means for you, individually, to be Messianic.

Yeshua Himself said, “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), and the greatest return any non-Jewish Believer can make for the gift of salvation, **is making sure that one’s Jewish neighbor comes to an eventual recognition of Yeshua as Israel’s Messiah!** As you commit yourself to a Messianic lifestyle involving Torah study, commemoration of the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, the appointed times/*moedim*, do not forget the critical imperative of declaring—even if a bit slowly and tactfully—of the good news to the Jewish people.