



JACOB'S LADDER

Communicating with God's people

Now, More Than Ever STAND WITH THE JEWS



If you study the Scriptures, you have to realize that the whole history of faith in the one true God revolves around the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The wonderful stories of Moses, Joshua, David and Daniel are stories from the history of the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. Every treasure that people of genuine faith have, including our Messiah Jesus, comes to us by way of the Jews.

Even the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders was used by God to fulfill God's plan. God promised to Abraham that "his seed" would bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3). The Apostle Paul recognized that the blessing of the Messiah came to the nations (gentiles) through Israel's rejection (Romans 11).

When the church began, the Jewish people were still clearly in God's plan. The church was composed of all kinds of people, including the Jews.

But in 70 A.D., Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. Just as God had predicted the dispersion of the Jews in the Old Testament, Jesus predicted their dispersion in the New Testament (Luke 21:20-24). As the center of faith shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch and later to Rome, more and more non-Jews took over the leadership of the church.

By the third and fourth centuries, people were asking the question, "Can a Jew believe in Jesus?" From that time forward, the history of Christianity is not very flattering when viewed through Jewish eyes. Forced baptisms, vile accusations, stereotyping, persecutions, expulsion and death were often the means by which the official church and many Christians dealt with the sons and daughters of Jacob. This sad history produced mistrust and suspicion and remains today as a huge obstacle in Jewish-Christian relationship.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christians rediscovered their love and appreciation for the Jewish people. Church leaders saw that God had a place for the nation of Israel that was not only historic but was current and future. Long before Israel became a state, theologians began to teach that God would bring Israel back to their land prior to the return of Christ to the earth.

The worst holocaust in the history of the Jews, the Nazi extermination, occurred just prior to the establishment of Israel as a nation in 1948. The attempt to destroy the Jews accelerated the growth of the nation. Jews from everywhere – Europe, Russia, Ethiopia came back to their ancient land.

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Not only did Jews rediscover their land, many discovered their Messiah. In the 1970's I worked as an evangelist and church planter among the Jewish people along with Roy Schwarcz and Larry Jaffrey. In those days, I felt like I knew most of the Jewish Christians in the United States. Since then, thousands of Jewish people have come to faith and hundreds of congregations for these believers have been planted. This has been exciting to witness.

Another turnaround has taken place among Jews and Christians. The animosity that existed between the two groups is being eroded. Jewish leaders are recognizing that evangelical Christians are not their enemies. *National Review's* Rod Dreher says evangelicals who hold a "divine right" viewpoint support Israel with an "uncritical fervor that exceeds that of even some American Jews." Orthodox Rabbi Daniel Lapin in an article posted on *National Review Online*, says American Jews are "waking up" to Christian support. In particular, Michael Medved and Dennis Prager are speaking out on behalf of evangelicals ("A Jew Defends Evangelical Christians" by Dennis Prager, *The Israel Report*, October 2002).

I believe that God is bridging the divide. I believe that God is doing what He said He would do. He is a covenant-keeping God and He is showing His power and faithfulness to do what He promised. Yet, even within the Christian community in America, there are those who do not believe that the modern state of Israel is related to God's sovereign plan for history. Preterist Gary North has boasted that he has a book already in his computer for when "Israel gets pushed into the sea, or converted to

Christ." Lutheran Don Matzat has said, "The present-day nation of Israel is no more involved in God's plans for the future than is France, England, Germany, the United States, etc. The teaching of the New Testament is very clear – Jesus fulfilled everything pertaining to Israel and formed the New Israel."

Even a number of dispensationalists today say that there is a restored nation of Israel in God's plan for the future, but there is no reason to think that the current nation of Israel is necessarily prophetically significant. Current president of Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. Mark Bailey said, "Is that what is happening today? I can't say for sure. It is the first time in 2,500 years, though, that you have this kind of constitution of people in the land, but I don't *know* what that means. This may be the prelude to end-time events, but I think we're presumptuous if we try to give it meaning beyond that. It *may be*, that's all we can say."

It is not surprising, in light of his view of the present state of Israel, that Dr. Bailey recommends Christians not support Israel politically.

I also see increased hatred for the Jewish people on the rise. From Europe to Iran to secular America, anti-Semitism is increasing every day.

As Christians, we must not only support the Jewish people but Israel as well. We must emphatically believe the Word of God and believe God's promises to His people. We must continue to rebuild bridges and show the Jewish people true Christianity and the real Jesus. Now more than ever, we must stand with the Jews!

John Bell, President



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If I Believe in Jesus, I Will No Longer Be Jewish!

Dealing with this concern is one of the most emotionally taxing issues that a Jewish person must confront in order to come to faith. Typically, Jewish religious leaders will make this argument:

...Many people, Christians and some Jews as well, erroneously believe that just as one can be Black and Christian, just as one can be Oriental and Christian, one can also be Jewish and Christian. It is not true. The Jews are not a race. There is no genetic code passed from either mother or father to the child that makes that child a Jew. Even if all, or some, of the genetic code in a child could be proved to be of Jewish origin, that would not make the child a Jew. Jewish law determines who is a Jew, and Jewish law is quite clear. If a person's mother is a Jew, and that person has not converted to another faith, then that person will be considered fully Jewish, so long as that person wishes to identify solely as a Jew. Although one cannot convert to become a member of a race, for example one cannot convert to become an Oriental or an African-American, one who converts to Judaism does, indeed, become fully a Jew. Similarly, if one converts from Judaism to another faith, one is no longer a Jew. (www.whatjewsbelieve.org by Rabbi Stuart Federow)

While this argument sounds reasonable from a religious standpoint it fails to consider what the Bible teaches. The faith of the Jewish people as well as the faith of a Christian is not a matter of religion, it is a matter of relationship to the living God. Christians are defined as those who believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel. Christians come from two different backgrounds. They are Jewish or they are Gentile.

A Jewish person does not become a Gentile when he becomes a believer. Rather, he is a Jewish person who believes that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel and has received

Him. A Jewish believer in Jesus is a true Jew according to Paul in Romans 2:28-29. Paul never considered himself to be anything but a Jew after he believed in Jesus (Acts 22:3; Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5).

The rabbis have made themselves the interpreters of the Law but time and time again they have missed what God was teaching in His Torah (Isaiah 29:9-14; Ezek. 34:1-16). If Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel, then it is the rabbis who are failing to receive their Messiah. The question that needs to be asked and answered is whether or not Jesus meets the qualifications of the Messiah as foretold in Scripture. If He does, then there is nothing more Jewish in the world than believing in Him.

When a Jewish person believes that Jesus is his Messiah, he does not change his physical identity (Rom. 11:1; Acts. 26:6-7). The only thing that changes is his relationship to God. He is now related to Him through the Messiah of Israel. A Jewish person who accepts Jesus is not changing his religion. He is following a messianic tradition of biblical Judaism rather than the rabbinical thinking of talmudic Judaism. A Jewish person who believes in Jesus has NOT "converted" from being Jewish, but rather has "converted" from being a sinner to one whose sins are forgiven. He has "converted" from sin!

Many Christians will emphasize that there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile) in the Body of Christ; both are one (Gal.3:28). But the nature of this oneness is spiritual. Jewish and Gentile believers are one in the Spirit, and thus they are part of the one Body of the Messiah. But Galatians 3:28 also speaks of male and female, slave and freeman as being one in Christ. Even though they are one in the Messiah, they still retain their physical distinctions (cf Eph. 5:22-33; 6:6-9; Col. 3:18-25; I Peter 3:1-7). Therefore, while those in the Church are one in the Messiah, physical distinctions are not erased!

-Roy Schwarcz

A SYNAGOGUE IS NOT THE TEMPLE

Previously we discussed the various theories on where the Temple was located on the Temple Mount. We also touched upon the different views the Jewish people have on rebuilding the Temple. If you didn't have a chance to read these articles earlier, they are posted on our website at: www.middleeastministries.org/Prophecy.htm.

In this issue, we are going to take a brief look at the history of the synagogue and answer the question, "Do Jewish people offer sacrifices today?"

"The Jews are about ready to offer sacrifices!" So read a headline of a newsletter article sent out by a leading prophecy speaker in 1981. The writer went on to write that the Great Synagogue being built in Jerusalem at the time was going to be used to reinstate the sacrificial system. In the years since, I have driven by the Great Synagogue many times and have not seen any evidence of animal sacrifices. What the writer was revealing was his ignorance of Judaism and Jewish history.

The first interesting fact about a synagogue is the name itself and its first mention as a place of worship in the Bible. The word "synagogue" is derived from the Greek word "synagōgē" meaning a gathering of people for religious or secular purposes. While the word is found over 200 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX), it was not used to designate a place of worship. The first time in our Bible where "synagōgē" designates a place of worship is in the New Testament. While some in Judaism hold

that the institution of the synagogue was given by Moses in the oral traditions, most scholars believe the synagogue developed as an institution during the Babylonian exile.

The Babylonian exile created a unique problem for the Jewish people. The Temple had been destroyed; therefore there was no place to perform Temple sacrifice and worship. Even if there were a Temple, many of the people were exiled making it too far to travel to Jerusalem. Scholars today say, in part to rationalize Judaism without a Temple, that the institution of Temple worship had served its course and God was ushering in a new way of worship.

All this formalism, primitive in character, changed when the many thousands of captive Jews had been driven by Nebuchadnezzar into Exile in Babylonia in 586 B.C.E. It was in adversity in a foreign land that the synagogue came into being, evolving primarily from practical considerations. The exiles, far from the Temple which lay in ruins in Jerusalem, desperately wished to maintain the continuity of their religious life in Babylonia. But since they could no longer offer sacrifices in their own sanctuary nor were permitted to build a new one in Captivity, only prayer was left to serve their religious needs: 'so will we render for bullocks the offering of our own lips.' In this manner, the institution of

congregational prayer was first established. (The Book of Jewish Knowledge -1964)

According to many, this movement from the centrality of a formal Temple worship which was empty and soulless to prayer and a more earnest questioning of religious values began with the prophets, Isaiah and Amos. *"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats (Isaiah 1:11). "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings (Amos 5:21-22).*

The synagogue soon became the central place for learning and prayer which replaced the need for animal sacrifices. The first century Jewish philosopher Philo wrote: "though the worshipers bring nothing else, in bringing themselves they offer the best sacrifices, the full and truly perfect oblation of noble living, as they honor with hymns and thanksgivings their Benefactor and Savior-God."

Soon there were synagogues wherever there was a Jewish community. Even after the Temple was rebuilt, the institution of the synagogue flourished. The Talmud states there were 394 synagogues in Jerusalem alone during the time of Herod's Temple. Some

believe there may have even been a synagogue or two on the Temple Mount. It may have been in one of those synagogues where Mary and Joseph found Jesus “sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). The synagogue was the place people gathered to discuss the scriptures and the teachings of the rabbis.

The Temple still had a powerful emotional effect through its festival ceremonies, but it was the synagogue that functioned as the religious center for the Jewish people. The rabbis (Pharisees) were increasing in their influence while the priests (Sadducees) were declining in their influence over the religious life of the Jewish community.

The synagogue also provided the right atmosphere for a visiting teacher to come and discuss issues and teach the scriptures. Jesus often went to a synagogue to teach. Paul, whenever he went to a new city, would first go to the synagogue to share his faith. It provided the natural environment for sharing new ideas. Sadly, the synagogue also created a mindset that rejected the Gospel. The foundation of the Gospel message is that sin has separated us from God and a sacrifice is required to reestablish that broken relationship. The synagogue, with its institutions, taught that sacrifices are not as important as prayer, good deeds, and knowledge (understanding the teachings of the rabbis). This was Paul's heartache when he wrote, “*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God*

for Israel is that they may be saved.

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:1-3).

Though the destruction of the Temple had an impact on Judaism, it was not catastrophic because of the institution of the synagogue. It became much easier for the Jewish scholars to say that God wanted his people to be a people of prayer, good deeds and knowledge rather than be participants in an antiquated sacrificial system. The synagogue also provided the glue that held the Jewish community together as it was scattered around the world after 70 AD.

Today, the synagogue is the center of activity for every religious Jewish community. The desire of Jewish people for a rebuilt Temple varies among different groups. The Orthodox believe the Temple must be rebuilt and the sacrificial system reinstated. The more moderate Jews (Conservative) believe the Temple may be rebuilt but it will not include animal sacrifices. Finally, the liberal Jews (Reform and Reconstructionists) believe the Temple is totally unnecessary. To emphasize this position, they call their synagogues temples to indicate that the synagogue has replaced the Temple.

Do Jewish people offer sacrifices today? Not animal sacrifices, but sacrifices of prayer, good deeds, and learning.

The synagogue has been an instrument to preserve the Jewish people. Is it

possible that God may use it to bring His people back to Himself in these Last Days? **A recent survey of Israelis reveals that 40 percent have been seeking God in a more meaningful way.** They no longer find their hope in a strong military or in political solutions - all have failed. Add to this the popular view in the world-at-large that the Jews do not have a legitimate right to the Land. The Israelis are beginning to realize their only source for a legitimate right to live in Israel is the Bible, not the teachings of the rabbis or a U.N. resolution. The prophet Hosea wrote: “*For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days” (Hosea 3:4-5).* It will be interesting to see if God uses the same institution that Jesus and Paul used to bring the Good News to Israel again. Remember, 144,000 Jewish men will be sealed for ministry during the Tribulation. Where do they come from? How do they come to believe in Jesus as Messiah after the Church has been raptured? The synagogue may be the answer.

Let Paul's prayer be ours: “*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved” (Romans 10:1).*

-Larry Jaffrey

Tours that Make a Difference

Most tours to Israel are a race to see how many sights the group can visit in the allotted time. We call it “running where Jesus walked.” There is little or no opportunity provided to learn of modern day Israel and the people of the land.

Our “Light to Israel Tours” strive to make the experience different and at the same time to make a difference in the land as a result of our being there.

Last summer our team painted a home for teens. Not only did we paint, but we had the privilege of interacting with the teens and



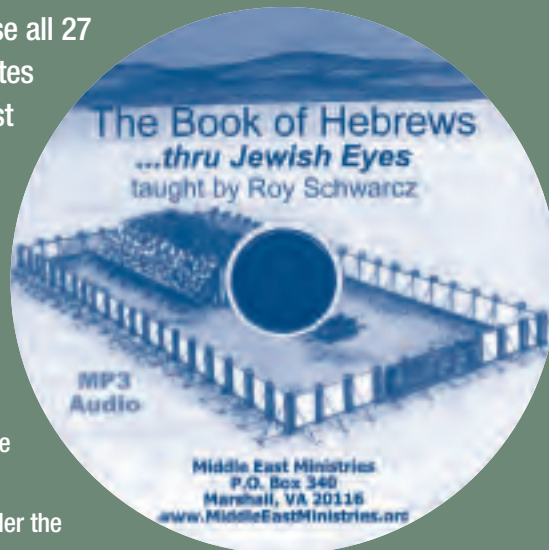
houseparents, including eating with them. The impact our team made was tremendous. But the story didn't end there.

In December, many of those same team members, with the help of their congregation, collected gifts for the teens living in the home. They sent those gifts with one of the team members who was returning to Israel for a short visit. Imagine the surprise expressed by the teens when they realized the gifts came from the same group who had earlier painted their house.

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