hen her daughter was born, she had the same dreams as every mother. From ponytails to wedding dress, she could envision it all. She would raise her daughter to be a lovely bride and capable wife and be rewarded one day with—grandkids!

All her hopes came crashing down when her daughter started having fits. Not the toddler kind of fits that everyone eventually outgrows. These were wild—supernaturally violent fits. No man would want her daughter now. And if she had any other children—no one would want to be associated with them either. As far as everyone else was concerned, they were cursed by the gods.

Then one day, she heard a rumor that a man with an unknown god’s power was traveling nearby...
performing incredible miracles. It wasn’t a god her people worshipped, but she didn’t care. Clearly, her gods were incapable or uninterested in her affliction.

“Sir, my daughter needs your help!” she said, both pleading and excited when she finally found him.

The man ignored her and kept walking.

She repeated herself, each time a little louder, thinking perhaps he hadn’t heard her.

Still, he acted as if she wasn’t there. The only response she received was annoyed glances from those walking alongside the man.

“I should be more specific; perhaps he thinks I’m simply begging for money.”

“My daughter is suffering terribly from an evil power,” she tried.

When one of the bystanders finally spoke, it wasn’t to her, it was to him. “Send her away already—she’s disturbing everyone.”

When she persisted, the man finally addressed her, “I’m not here to help your people; I’m only here for mine.”

How it Started

It’s worth Christians taking a moment to process that if you were not Jewish when Yeshua died—or when the Holy Spirit came down on Pentecost—you weren’t invited to the party. All the disciples Yeshua called to follow Him were direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The thousands of new believers added to the Kingdom the day the Holy Spirit came down, were exclusively Jews, many of whom were visiting Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Shavuot (First Fruits).

What Christians today often consider to be burdensome rules from the Law were simply a way of life for Yeshua and His followers. After three years of the disciples traveling with Yeshua, and even after the Holy Spirit arrived, nothing changed in their behavior as Jews. They continued to go to the synagogue and Temple. They never desired to be “free” to eat unclean food and did not begin meeting on Sunday—as Sunday is a workday in Israel to this day. Yeshua never heard the name “Jesus” while on earth. His mother Miriam was never called Mary, and Yeshua’s brother Jacob wasn’t called James until King James translated the Bible over 1,000 years later. They did not celebrate Easter, Christmas, or Lent. They did not start a new religion.

Then the World Flipped

The mission to reach the lost sheep of the House of Israel was clear to Yeshua’s followers—until the world turned on its head. In a supernaturally coordinated effort, God set up a meeting between Cornelius and the Apostle Simon Peter (see Acts 10). Cornelius was a centurion, who, like the other Gentiles who had approached Yeshua, identified the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When an angel appeared to Cornelius, he explained it was Cornelius’ devout prayers and generosity towards the Jewish people that resulted in the visitation. He would be the first non-Jew invited into the New Covenant.

Simon Peter was a rambunctious loudmouth who always seemed to be willing to push the limits of what was permitted. This made him a great candidate for doing something that seemed crazy to the Jewish mind—offering the Jewish New Covenant to an “unclean human”—a Gentile. So right before Cornelius’ messengers arrived where he was staying in Jaffa. God gave Simon a difficult vision and showed him heaven’s perspective of the true status of non-Jews.

Upon arriving at Cornelius’ house, he [Simon Peter] addressed the people there saying, “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?” (Acts 10:28-29)

The story goes on to tell how Simon Peter, upon hearing of Cornelius’ angelic visitation, shares the story of Yeshua and is shocked when the Holy Spirit comes down on the people in the room. Simon promptly recognizes God has “changed the rules”—at least as far as he had understood them—and has them all partake in the Jewish spiritual cleansing practice of immersion. Consequently, Simon receives fierce opposition from other Jewish believers until he shares the supernatural way in which the entire event happened, and they, too, are in awe that the God of Israel is now accepting other nations into His fold.

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.” (Acts 11:18)

What follows are years of heated discussions about how the Jews’ New Covenant applied to these Gentiles. Believers from among the Pharisees (yes, they existed; see Acts 15:5) insisted on circumcision and adherence to the Law of Moses in order to partake of the New Covenant. But Simon Peter, Paul, and Barnabas—who continued to adhere to the Jewish practices themselves—shared proof of God’s acceptance of the Gentiles when they merely embraced the New Covenant by faith. Subsequently, the Jewish leaders agreed on some fundamental points and sent instructions regarding morality and generosity for non-Jews who wanted in on the Covenant.

Years pass and large numbers of Gentiles all over the Roman Empire accept this message of salvation and forgiveness of sins through Yeshua, the Son of the one true God. Those people gained the name “Christians”—the Greek word for “little anointed ones” (followers of the Anointed One). But the learned Jewish Apostles who brought the New Covenant message to the nations were only there in the beginning. When the Roman empire crushed Jerusalem, many Jewish believers were killed. Those who were scattered were so few in comparison to the number of Christians that much of the Church’s doctrine was developed independently of Jewish understanding. With the Scriptures written in large, heavy, and expensive scrolls, many of these Christians would only have access to parts of Scripture. Few ever saw even half of the Bible as we know it today.

As generations passed, and the message of the Savior continued to spread, letters circulated widely, but their context as having been written by Jews was all but forgotten. Without Jewish input, the Gentile belief in Yeshua, which became known as Christianity, went through dark times. It became institutionalized with a mixture of pagan culture, idolatry, and a hierarchy which would make up the rules as they went.

Where Jews knew better than to create idols to worship, Christians with their Gentile background of paganism, erected and prayed to statues. And where Christians from many nations had once been grateful to be included in God’s New Covenant with His chosen Israel, they now fancied themselves to be the new people of God!

Thankfully, in the last century, much of the error has been shaken off. Even today, however, you can find remnants of this approach as New Testament Bibles are printed without the “less relevant” Old Testament. It is also not uncommon
Christians objected by which some was the fierceness of the airing of this channel; what surprised everyone was the firestorm because of the April atrocities committed in the name of Yeshua. This question recently set off a firestorm because of the April launch of a TV station in Israel which for the first time ever, obtained licensing to air shows in Hebrew and Arabic about Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah. No one was surprised when influential Jews in Israel opposed the airing of this channel; what surprised everyone was the fierceness by which some Christians objected to this channel airing. I wanted to understand their reasoning before I responded, but as I watched all the arguments go back and forth, I realized many of the areas of disagreement were nuanced and weren’t addressing the central issue. And so, the question I raise in this article is whether a TV channel should exist in Israel or whether one theological approach when witnessing is better than another, but rather, fundamentally, should the message of the New Testament be shared with the Jewish people? Should Jews be told about the New Covenant display an incredible ignorance of the source of their own salvation. Remember, Yeshua said, “Salvation is from the Jews.”

Hijacked Covenant

Imagine inviting people over to your home—a home that has been passed down for generations in your family, with beautiful jewels, vases, paintings, and furniture. Upon entry, your guests are awed by the beauty of your home—they have never seen anything like it and ask before they dare touch any item. They return often, bringing friends. Soon they know your place well enough to show off everything without your guidance. Your original guests bring more friends, and those friends bring their friends—some of the newer ones barely nod your way. It feels odd, but it’s still wonderful to see the joy on people’s faces as they go through your home and marvel at its wonder. People are so mesmerized they come by the droves to take pictures in front of your now-famous home. Some even begin moving into the neighborhood just so they can be close and visit more often.

Then one day you come home, and your house is full of people—friends of friends of friends—and none of them recognize you. You try to go in the door, but people near the front door look you up and down and decide, you don’t look like you belong in a neighborhood like this. They won’t let you in. Then on second thought, one of them offers, maybe if you changed your clothes to look more like them ...they’ll let you enter to enjoy their house. As you stand in the yard considering your options, someone slides the window open on the second floor and tosses several of your oldest clay vases out the window—just like you, those vases didn’t fit their motif. Only if you can imagine the feeling of this scenario can you begin to grasp what it’s like to be a Jewish believer in Yeshua and watch Christians indulge in the blessings of our covenant and then try to ban us and our people from having access to that very covenant.

I wonder what the Apostle Paul would have thought if he had known that the descendants of those Gentiles whom he risked his life to reach with the message of Yeshua would shut the Kingdom out for his own people? For the very people of which he said:

My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers, and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Yeshua! —if that would save them. (Romans 9:2-3)

You could argue that Christians should not try to convert Jews to Christianity. May I add, it’s entirely unnecessary and even counterproductive! Christians are grafted into the Jewish New Covenant; Jews aren’t grafted into a Christian covenant. Jews who abandon their Jewish heritage for a Gentile-type Christian life may enjoy the benefits of forgiveness of sins and eternal life, but will miss out on the unique calling God has bestowed on Israel.

You could argue that Christians should study the uniqueness of the Jewish people before they run off trying to witness to them in the same way they would approach any other people group. You could even argue that Christians have a lot of bridge-building to do because of centuries of atrocities committed in the name of Yeshua (see “The Church History They Don’t Teach You” in this issue for more details).

But when God is the one doing the rescuing, He gets to make His own rules. And His plan was to take in the Jewish people and, through them, save the world. He knew they would reject Yeshua and He used that rejection to reach the nations. Now, it is the Christians’ turn to demonstrate their gratitude by both carrying Israel as a burden of prayer and provoking them to jealousy.

This provocation won’t happen by merely backing Israel politically and apologizing for Church history, or worse, declaring Israel already had a Covenant, and doesn’t need another one. Rather, it will happen when Jews observe the changed lives of Gentiles and their intimacy with the Ancient of Days, and discover it is all made possible through a New Covenant God offered the Jews first.
Last year a Christian ministry posted a video on Facebook showing a preacher walking down a main street in Jerusalem declaring the Gospel. The street happened to border what is arguably the most religious Orthodox Jewish community in the world. He used a Bluetooth mic with a speaker hanging from his belt and a cameraman following behind to capture “the action.”

“Furious Jews threatened to stone us for preaching the Gospel,” and, “angry men, teenagers and even the IDF tried to stop them but essentially had no legal leverage,” the text above the video post read. I’ll set aside the obvious—that any loud person walking down a street happens to get on peoples’ nerves even if he’s selling ice cream. But this man wasn’t selling ice cream. He was selling Christianity.

Had this preacher taken time to study what Jews have endured from Christianity for nearly 2000 years, he would have more appropriately come humbly, begging for forgiveness from the Jewish people rather than declaring that Jews need to convert—or else.

Today when Jews explain why they don’t believe in Yeshua—the list begins, but doesn’t end, with the Holocaust, the Crusaders and the Inquisition. For a Jewish believing community there may be no more stark message than the text above the video post.

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Emperor Constantine who ruled from c. 306-337, became a Christian, absorbing the growing hatred toward Jews from his advisor, Eusebius. His position of power allowed him to act on the animosity the Church Fathers had for the Jews. He forbade mixed marriages, decreed a separation between Easter and the “dirty” Jewish Passover. Conversion of a Jew to Christianity was always encouraged, though the conversion of a Christian to Judaism was punishable by death.

By the end of the 4th Century, hatred of the Jewish people was in full bloom.

John Chrysostom, (c. 347-407) the renown theologian preached, “Eight Sermons against the Jews” in which he derided, after a long list of crude insults, that for the Jews there is “no expiation possible, no indulgence, no pardon.” He declared that, in accordance with the sentiments of the saints, he hated both the synagogue and the Jews, as demons dwelled in both. Chrysostom’s sermons were written down verbatim by his audience and subsequently circulated throughout the Christian world. These sermons are considered to be the turning point in the history of Christian anti-Judaism.

During World War II, the Nazi Party in Germany used Chrysostom’s work in an attempt to legitimize the Holocaust in the eyes of German and Austrian citizens. In his early life, he wanted to convert Jews to Lutheranism (Protestant Christianity). His early writings express empathy towards Jews who had been badgered and forced to become Christians by Catholic authorities:

“If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian. They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property.”

Yet in his later years, Luther himself would tire of the Jews’ continued rejection, and wrote that Jews were “full of the devil’s faces... which they swallow in like wine.”

He argued that Jewish synagogues and schools should be set on fire, their prayer books destroyed, rabbis forbidden to preach, homes burned, and property and money confiscated. “These poisonous envenomed worms should be drafted into forced labor or expelled for all time.” And concluded, “We are at fault in not slaying them.”

In his book The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, William L. Shirer wrote:

“It is difficult to understand the behavior of most German Protestants in the first Nazi years unless one is aware of two things: their history and the influence of Martin Luther. The great founder of Protestantism was both a passionate anti-Semite and a ferocious believer in absolute obedience to political authority. He wanted Germany rid of the Jews. Luther’s advice was literally followed four centuries later by Hitler, Goring and Himmler.”

England - The Crusades

The end of the 11th century saw the rise of the Crusaders—essentially the militant wing of the Church. They were on a mission to conquer the Muslim-occupied land of Israel for Christianity. But on the long road to the Holy Land, Crusaders found it in the public interest to round up and lock Jewish families in their synagogues, burning them alive. Some accounts record the Crusaders marching around the burning synagogues singing worship hymns.

At times, burning Jews and their possessions was sometimes seen as a waste. So the Crusaders would sell captured Jews as slaves and take their possessions. Some Jews were converted by force to Christianity. Many chose to die rather than join the idol-worshipping Church. Still others who were selectively left alive committed suicide fearing the horrors awaiting them.

The attacks found public support as false stories of Jewish depravity were spread. The murder of a 12-year-old English boy in 1144 generated a new wave of anti-Jewish sentiment. The attacks found public support as false stories of Jewish depravity were spread. The murder of a 12-year-old English boy in 1144 generated a new wave of anti-Jewish sentiment.

Spain - The Inquisition

The Spanish Inquisition is remembered even today for its brutality and thoroughness. Few people know this, but of the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in Spain in the Middle Ages, the majority converted to Christianity as a result of violent persecution, known as pogroms in the late 14th century.

There were few things the hierarchy and the common people agreed upon; the need to convert Jews to Christianity, however, was one of those few things. So, in the summer of 1391, a public mob had gathered outside the Jewish community in Valencia demanding that all Jews convert. A riot broke out. Of the 2500 Jews present, 200 were converted on the spot; the rest were murdered. The city of Seville was next with 4000 Jews murdered. Similar riots continued across Spain.

Jews who converted were known as “converts,” but those who continued to secretly practice their Jewish faith were called “Marranos” (twins). To make sure these conversions, or “new Christians,” stayed true to their new faith, the Catholic monarchs established the Holy Office of the Inquisition in 1481. Their role included the standard duty of purging the fakers by torture or execution.

Russia - The Pogroms

If it’s possible to rate on a scale, the Russian Orthodox Church (which separated from the Roman Catholic Church in the 11th century) was perhaps the most consistently hostile to the Jews who lived among them. Of course, the first option was always conversion to Orthodox Christianity. Though having rejected that, Jews were rarely allowed to live in or near the rest of the Russian people. This resulted in highly isolated Jewish communities. Despite the segregation and discrimination, Jews excelled in every part of society where they were allowed to participate, including education.

However, while Europe entered the Reformations and Renaissance, Russian rulers bore down on their Jewish citizens. In 1791, Catherine the Great drew a circle to Portugal but were soon expelled. Others escaped across the sea to South America. According to DNA tests today, Modern Spanish and Portuguese have an average 20% Jewish ancestry DNA! In Latin America, the figure is even higher: 23%, where many Marranos fled. This gives a scientific window into the massive number of Spanish Jews who were forced to convert and were absorbed into the Christian population.

*The American Journal of Human Genetics
around an area in Russia, and ordered all Jews to live only there. Five million Jews who were scattered all over Russia were forced to leave behind everything and move to this area called the Pale of Settlement. Still, the hate festered and mobs of rioters led by Church leaders would invade the Pale and attack the Jewish shtetls (villages), killing, raping and stealing. During the period 1880-1920 these pogroms were rampant and over two million Jews fled Russia. Some 50,000 of them landed in Israel and became the early pioneers who built the infrastructure for what would become the State of Israel. Ari Sorko-Ram’s mother fled Russia during this time, as well. The boat she was on attempted to dock in Israel but was denied entry. Eventually sailing from France, she ended up in the United States. She wouldn’t live to see it, but the youngest son of her seven children, Ari, would eventually immigrate to Israel. He would fulfill her dream of planting the family roots in their ancestral land, and would become one of the pioneers of the Messianic movement in modern Israel.

In conclusion, it is very important to remember that by no means did all who called themselves Christians despise the Jewish people. In addition, Christians—and Christianity—have come a long way since the Dark Ages. Since the birth of modern Protestant denominations—the ones who have walked out their faith based on the Word of God, not church doctrine—have shown, by far, the most love for the Jewish people. However, if you know what to look for, you can still find an anti-Jew residue in modern church ideology. And entire denominations still exist that exclude and even shun Israel’s place in God’s plan.

Most significantly, however, Israel is still reeling from this history. Wounds of thousands of years don’t heal overnight. If anything can be said about Jews who did not recognize the gift of Yeshua, it is that out of devotion to the God of Israel they rightly rejected the idolatrous and heretical religion that was being forced on them. While the Lord had always planned to use the Jews to reach the world and the world to, in turn, reach Israel, it is clear the enemy had its own plans. First, in order for God’s plan to succeed, Israel had to exist! Exterminating Israel from the earth would render God’s word void; as such you will find this evil pattern repeat itself throughout history even before the dawn of Christianity. Second, knowing the Church’s calling to provoke Israel to jealousy (Romans 11:14), what better way to render that calling void than to make the mere mention of the Church a stench in the nostrils of Israel? These facts don’t change the truth that Jews need Yeshua for the same forgiveness of sins as anyone else who desires to be reconciled with the Father. But it does mean this is a history that won’t be overcome with a smile and a handshake. It will take intentional humility, compassion and patience to rebuild bridges based on love and trust—not with the demand of “conversion” but for sheer gratitude towards the people who brought the knowledge of God to the world. Today, though Israelis still consider Christianity taboo and even dangerous, they do recognize the change in overall attitude and even use the term Evangelical to differentiate between the traditional Church and “born-again Christians” who love Israel. It’s not a complete healing but it is a good first step towards the plan God had from the beginning.

Shalom from Jerusalem!

I (Shani), recently found a letter my grandfather, Gordon Lindsay, wrote to his supporters in 1966 about Israel.

In it he explained two things that were wildly out of the box for the thinking of the day: 1) The Jews have given us so much, it’s time we did something for them in return; and 2) We must reach the Jewish people with a “Messianic message.”

His first idea seems to have found overwhelming traction these days. I can’t count how many organizations thrive on the message of “blessing Israel.” The second idea, however, has proven much more difficult to fulfill. There’s a lot of water under that bridge, and so many terms such as “mission,” “Gospel,” “crusade,” and even “Christ” carry with them centuries of cruel baggage.

Many Jews will never listen to the full Message of Life because they can’t get past the first few words.

Maoz has been in Israel for over 40 years, and we have dedicated our lives to helping Israelis see the truth of the Jewish Messiah. Reaching them requires much patience, prayer—and creativity.

Church history should not shame today’s Christians into silence today. If anything, it should drive Christians even more to right the wrongs committed by their predecessors and give the New Covenant back to the Jewish people.

This is the very thing you are doing when you support the work of Maoz in Israel.

Every gift you give and every prayer you pray is pushing back and helping to wash the stain history has left on us.

The Gentile church tried to go it alone the first time—what if we tried to do it together this time?

Your Fellow Servants in the Kingdom,

Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

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