

# *Can the Church Really Reach the Jew?*

*The man walked to the front of the church, only spoke to him a few moments and then disappeared. The author never saw him again. But for twenty years, he has never been able to forget that Jewish man's question.*

By Larry Jaffrey, The Chosen People Magazine, January 1992.

A number of years ago a Jewish man (whom I will never forget) attended our Passover Seder. He arrived late to the dinner and asked if he could join us even though he had not made reservations. As we continued through the meal, I noticed this man was deeply moved by what was being shared. At times, in fact, he was in tears. Following the service he came up to me, grabbed my hand, and with tears in his eyes, thanked me for a lovely evening. Then he raised a question that I have never forgotten. "Rev. Jaffrey," he asked, "I am 55 years old and have lived in this area all my life. There are churches everywhere and I know many people who go to church. Why has no one ever told me before that Jesus fulfilled the Passover Lamb?"

I never saw that man again, yet his question has driven me to make the Church see the importance of Jewish evangelism.

## **An Ignored People**

*"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." Romans 10:1*

*"But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!" Romans 11:12*

*"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in." Romans 11:25*

## **Chosen People Ministries (Canada)**

The sad fact is the Church through the ages has either ignored or rejected the teachings of these verses. Often the Church taught that the Jewish people were condemned of God and could not be saved. Today, some are even teaching that the Jewish people do not need to be saved, but rather they are saved under a different covenant.

Even the Evangelical Church today is ignoring Paul's teaching. Can a church which has an extensive missions program but does not support Jewish evangelism really say it is fulfilling God's Great Commission?

Yes, there are reasons why that Jewish man never heard the Gospel. Someone thought that perhaps he wouldn't listen. Another may have thought he/she didn't know enough to witness to a Jewish person. Maybe the Jewish man never heard the Gospel in a context he could relate to as a Jew.

## **Low Expectations**

If your church is located in a community where Jewish people live, do you expect to see any come to faith and join the Church? Most of us would like to see Jewish believers in our churches but we would be surprised if it happened. In fact, if a Jew does join our church, we believe it is an unusual, if not unique, phenomenon.

Why do we have such low expectations? We might trace our lack of expectation to the Apostle Paul's statement, "Israel has experienced a hardening part until the full number of Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25b). It is assumed Paul is saying we should not expect to see many Jewish believers in our churches, if any at all.

What we forget is that at the time Paul wrote these words the Church had a large percentage of Jewish believers. He did not mean the Church would be void of Jewish believers, but rather Israel as a nation would not see Jesus as the Messiah until "the full number of Gentiles" is saved.

One day a pastor friend stopped me and exclaimed, "God answers prayer!" I asked him what happened. He shared that during his quiet time he realized he had not been praying for the Jewish community around his church. He asked the Lord to lead a Jewish person into his life that day. No sooner had he finished praying than there was a knock at his door, there stood a stranger who said, "I'm Jewish and I don't know why I am here, but as I was

walking by this morning something told me I needed to talk with you.”

Yes, God desires to see His people saved. We just need to expect it to happen.

✧ *Pray for the salvation of Jewish friends.*

✧ *Pray God will bring a Jewish friend into your life.*

## Wrong Plan

We may desire and expect Jewish people to be saved, but we go about it the wrong way. First, we believe only someone with a Jewish background can effectively witness to Jewish people. Some of you reading this article may be saying in your heart that you cannot witness to your Jewish friend because you are not Jewish. Again in the Book of Romans Paul shares God’s plan for reaching the Jewish people today -- through the testimony of changed lives.

*“Again I ask: did they (the Jewish people) stumble so as to fall beyond recover? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.”*  
Romans 11:11

As God begins to transform your life (whether you are a Jew or Gentile) your changed life will begin making your Jewish friends envious.

✧ *Pray that God will work in your life in such a way that you are a living testimony of His love and grace.*

Another mistake we make in understanding God’s plan for reaching Jewish people is that we expect the Jewish believer to give up his or her Jewish heritage and culture. By doing so, we are making Christianity and the Church unacceptable to the Jewish community.

Several years ago, I was participating in a missions conference in a large church. I had the opportunity before the evening service to meet a Jewish believer who was one of the members of the missions committee. This woman was thrilled to meet someone involved in Jewish evangelism and we had a great time of fellowship before the service. When I took the pulpit, I made some introductory comments in Hebrew just to identify our ministry as authentically Jewish and reaching Jewish people. As I looked down, I noticed this same woman crying. Thinking I had somehow offended her I sought her out after the service. When I found her, she still had tears in her eyes so I began to apologize. “Larry, don’t apologize,” she wept. “I’m not crying because you offended me.” She said that for the first time in

ten years of knowing Jesus, she had heard something from the pulpit she could identify with as a Jewish woman. She wept because she realized how much of her Jewishness she had suppressed the last ten years. She said she loved the church, loved the people, loved the program, but always felt she had to become a Gentile to fully believe in Jesus and “belong” in the church.

If the Church wants to reach its Jewish neighbors, it will have to make itself understandable to those neighbors. It will have to present Jesus as the Jewish Messiah in a way Jewish people can understand. This may mean changing the Church’s vocabulary using the term Messiah instead of Christ, or teaching Jewish holidays within the church calendar.

Of course, we know that many churches cannot make such changes. But they can support missions like Chosen People Ministries which in turn will effectively reach out to Jewish people around the world.

Still, if more churches emphasized the Jewishness of our faith, Jewish people would see that Christianity is truly Jewish and that non-Jews in the church are “wild olive branches” grafted into a decidedly Jewish root.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### **1. Get your church or fellowship involved in Jewish evangelism.**

- *Teach them the importance of Jewish evangelism.*
- Encourage them to support a ministry doing Jewish evangelism.
- Plan to have a special evangelistic outreach to Jewish people.\*

### **2. Get further training yourself.**

Chosen People Ministries has a three- to six-week program called STEP (Summer Training and Evangelism Program) which is designed as an intensive training and sharing experience. Ask us for more details.

\* Chosen People Ministries can supply materials and speakers to help you in your outreach.