

EVANGELIZING THE JEW

Without a shadow of a doubt, Christians are commanded to evangelize, as stated in Matthew 28:19-20. The Great Commission is nonnegotiable. This mission represents the spiritual identity of a Christian. However, the proselytizing of Jews often becomes an issue in Jewish-Christian relations, especially when this evangelization takes place in Israel. There are some who come in “support for Israel” ostensibly to set up a soup kitchen, only to lure members of the Jewish faith to Christianity. One can make the argument that there is a difference between witnessing (emulating the life of Jesus) and proselytizing. A discussion of the matter is warranted, for there seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the theological significance of Jews.

When people hear the phrase “the chosen people” in reference to the Jews, they should ask: “Chosen for what?” The Jewish nation has a three-fold mission rooted in Scripture; covenant, witness and humanity. When God entered a relationship with Abraham (Genesis 17), the covenant was described as everlasting. This covenant has two physical embodiments; the Promised Land and Circumcision. It also requires that we walk humbly in His ways, carrying out the Sinaitic revelation.

We are required to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This relationship offers rewards for observance and punishes for its abandonment. Practically speaking, we are to ensure the continuing existence of the Jewish people as part of our mission of covenant. Our emphasis is on Jewish education, community ties and avoiding intermarriage.

The Jewish people are not concerned only with members of their own faith, but are required to testify about the power of repentance and love as manifested in the redemption of Israel (Isaiah 49:6). It is through the narrative of the Jews that people see God’s hand in history. This is part and parcel of our witness mission to the world.

The message of the Bible is for all people, as stated in Micah 4:2. The Jewish people have a mission to extend God’s love to all. We are called by God to set up society in a way that maximizes the practice of justice and mercy; we are to engage in an unending quest to heal a broken world. A central prayer in Judaism sums it up: to transform the world into the Kingdom of the Almighty, where all flesh will call upon Your name, where all the wicked of the earth will be turned to You.

Doesn't Christian evangelizing of the Jews come in direct conflict with the Jews three-fold mission? Christians see Jews as either people of very special salvific significance, or as people included in one mission to all those who have not accepted Jesus as their Savior. There is a minority within Christianity that believe missionizing the Jews is not part of an authentic Christian witness, since the Jewish people has its own fulfillment in faithfulness to the divine covenant mentioned in Genesis.

When the Church concluded that all one needs to attain salvation is Jesus, without adherence to Torah, it should not be surprising that the Jewish people simply could not go along with that. The Jewish understanding of "salvation" is simply different from that of Christianity.

If Jews and Christians worship the same God, should Christians then try to convince Jews to worship Him in the Christian way? It seems that many within the Church have forgotten the essential Jewishness of their own faith; they tend to place the attempt to evangelize Jews in the same category as missionary efforts among people of other religions or of no religion. To such people, Jews are simply people who cannot be saved unless they come to know Jesus.

As an orthodox Jew who does not believe in the divinity of Jesus, I wish Christians could understand what it means to be obedient members of God's chosen people. This should not detract from the notion that Jesus' life and death is central to the salvation of the Church and their mission to the world. It is my hope that Christians would recognize that their mission of preparing for the coming of the Kingdom of God is shared with the Jewish people, even if Jews do not conceive of this task as the Church does.

To my Jewish brethren in Israel
of the CJCUC organization:
(info@cjuc.com)

Thank you very much for the recent article “**Evangelizing The Jew**” of your monthly newsletter—*Insights*. I understand perfectly your perspective. It was also very thought provoking and stirred up several truths that I would like to express to you from my heart.

As a Christian who deeply appreciates the rich heritage we have received through the Jewish people, I would like to make a few observations for further consideration and even clarification from my perspective.

As I read the Hebrew Scriptures I see that the Covenant God made with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3 & 17:1-14) had three important promises. Briefly stated it was: a Land, a Nation, and a Seed through which all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 22:18). This indeed is an everlasting Covenant. It is still in effect to this very day and will be in the future. Circumcision was the “sign of the Covenant” (Gen. 17:11) that Abraham and his physical descendents bear in their flesh. Consequently, it is indeed true, as stated in your article, “*It is through the narrative of the Jews that people see God’s hand in history. This is part and parcel of our witness mission to the world.*”

There were times in Israel’s national history where this witness shined very brightly. However, it is also a vital part of the equation to recognize that Israel, in the main, failed in her witness of God to the nations. The history, especially in the Kings and Prophets, records the sad story of Israel’s rejection of her mission and consequent dispersion from the Land and as a Nation. There was the Assyrian, Babylonian and finally the Roman dispersion as evident discipline from God. This part of the historic testimony hurts. Even so, it is a haunting reality that must not be dismissed. Until one recognizes this, he could never be oriented in perspective so as to properly evaluate the present reality. This does not eliminate the Jew, for there has always been a remnant to keep the flame alive.

At the very same time, we must admit, Christendom has done no better! Though its light and testimony were bright, especially in its early stages, yet when it submitted to institutionalization and became “the Imperial Church,” all its magnificent testimony was smothered by a cloud of artificial, ritualistic hypocrisy. This “institution,” that only bore the name of “Christ,” actually turned against the Jew. It went so far as to often make the Jew the object of its hatred even to the doorstep of our own generation, leaving behind the ashes of the Holocaust. Most of Christendom still piously resists this reality. They refuse to admit this perspective. However, similar to the history of the Jews, there has always been a remnant of Christians who feared God, respected the Jew and recognized God’s Covenant plan for them.

Now, here we stand together at an amazing climax to the historical record. Israel’s prophets faithfully spoke of Israel’s apostasy, and yet of their eventual amazing Restoration. The Church’s prophets also faithfully spoke of Christendom’s apostasy (Paul, Peter, James, Jude and John), and yet of the true Church’s eventual amazing Rapture out of this world. The apostle Paul revealed to us that at the close of this age of Gentile salvation, God will re-install Israel into its proper Covenant relationship with God (see—Romans 11:1-36).

Jesus called this climax in time “the birth pangs” of a new age (Matt. 24:8 & I Thess. 5:3). He spoke of the Great Tribulation of anguish that will come upon the world. It will be centered right in Israel, and in a Temple that will be in existence at that time.

Now, today, both real Christians and Jews should once again turn their eyes back to Abraham and the amazing Covenant of blessing. We must remember that it was first of all expressed as a blessing to all the world through Isaac at the very occasion he was bound by Abraham to be sacrificed (Gen. 22:18). (Actually, for 4000 years of history, we see the ritual sacrifice of lambs as foreshadowing the basis upon which God will be merciful to the sins of mankind.) And then right there on the hilltop, in that act between Abraham and Isaac, as if transposed before our very eyes, we see Jesus the great, great, great-grandson of Abraham as, “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Abraham, himself, testified by naming that spot “LORD-yir’e.” Moses, as the inspired writer, explained and testified that to the very day he wrote it was said, “In this mount the LORD will appear” (see the Jerusalem Bible, Gen 22: 14). (It is interesting that Abraham had no reservation at all about recognizing that the LORD Himself sometimes appeared as a man—see Gen. 18:1 & 2 as one example.)

The early Church was made up of Jews and was thus considered a sect of Judaism. When the Gentiles heard the beautiful story of the substitutionary death and resurrection of Abraham’s great-grandson, they rejoiced that repentance and remission of sins was available for all. For their sake, primarily, the ritual Law system was set aside (not the moral principles). Now, according to the revelation given to the apostle Paul, the age of Gentile salvation has come to its end. Israel is once again becoming situated in the land as a nation in preparation for the end time struggle. With the return of the Messiah, the Law will be reinstated under the terms of the New Covenant for Israel (Jer. 31:31).

Is it possible that the Jews today are like Jacob’s eleven sons? They at first had sternly rejected Joseph’s dreams of reigning over them, and even went so far as to enact his death and have him sold to the Gentiles. Yet 20 long years later (almost like 20 centuries) they could not recognize this Egyptian, who spoke roughly to them through a translator, until at last he said openly in their own tongue, “I am Joseph, your brother!”

For indeed, “it is through the narrative of the Jew that people see God’s hand in history. This is part and parcel of our witness mission to the world.”

Your very grateful friend, Jack W. Langford
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Postscript: Concerning evangelization, ironic as it may seem—

A Jew is the chief subject of the message!

The Jews gave us the beautiful message!

The Jews themselves first energetically propagated the message!

And the message is “to the Jew first, and then also to the Gentile”!