

Discovering a Heart for God's Chosen People

First of all, let me let you in on a little secret: I'm not Jewish, nor is any of my family Jewish. I'm an English-Irish-born, small-town American who was raised in the Catholic Church and who now calls himself a born-again Christian.

So, why would somebody like me be writing a story extolling the virtues of Jewish culture and history and Messianic Jews? That's a very good question, and one I would love to address.

About a year ago, I was hired as an editor for *Charisma* magazine in Lake Mary, Fla. After a career mainly as a sports writer and editor, I was thrilled to finally be serving the Lord at a place where I knew He wanted me to be. I've always wanted to use my talents for God, and He finally placed me in this position in His timing, when He was ready. I'm grateful to be here, and it's a great place to work.

A couple months later, I was put in charge of four different websites for our *Charisma* brand. Lo and behold, Standing With Israel happened to be one of them. Now, I can honestly say that I haven't even known very many Jewish people in my lifetime. I had a friend that became a Messianic Jew back in my early college days, and she introduced me, however much on a limited basis, to Judaism through her family.

Jennifer wound up getting married and moving away, and I have not seen her for more than 25 years.

Since then, I'll admit that my exposure to the Jewish faith has been severely limited. Of course, I knew about the Jewish holy days of Yom Kippur and the season of Hanukkah. Most of what I knew was gained through movies like *The Jazz Singer* (the later edition with Neil Diamond) and the comedy *Keeping the Faith* with Ben Stiller and Edward Norton. Somehow, I

didn't believe that last one was very indicative of the Jewish faith, but it was a funny movie nonetheless.

Now I am familiar with Shavuot, Tu B'Av, Yom HasShoah, Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut, and the celebrations that go along with them.

When I took over our Standing With Israel site for , my perspective on Israel began to change drastically. At first I knew it was going to be very awkward trying to land aggregate partners for the site and perhaps getting people to write for us. As it turned out, I was right.

Eventually, however, through emails and phone calls, I began to get comfortable with the site and with the Jewish and Messianic Jewish audience that we serve. In fact, I've not only begun to learn more about the Jewish culture and the tremendous courage of the Jewish people, but I have also begun to fashion some tremendous friendships with both Orthodox Jews and Messianic Jews.

Jonathan Feldstein, the director of Heart to Heart, has become one of those friends. He is an Orthodox Jew who writes a weekly column for us, and our friendship was cemented when he came to the Orlando area in May and we had lunch. That was a bit awkward because we didn't have any places with kosher food within a 20-mile radius, but Jonathan eased the tension by going to a restaurant with me and ordering a fruit salad-type dish. (Lesson No. 1 for me in my cultural diversity!)

Jonathan and I talked candidly about each other's culture and about life in general. It resulted in an invitation to come to Israel in January. More on that in a minute.

And then there's Chaim Goldberg, a Messianic Jew who is the director of media for Maoz Israel's website. Chaim also writes a weekly column for us. I've spoken with him on the phone (directly from Israel!) and we've emailed back and forth. Not only is Chaim a talented writer that puts out great blog

posts, but he's a good person, from what I've gotten to know about him.

He and I have become friends without meeting, but I hope to meet him someday. He's got a real heart for God and a heart for winning souls, so I know he's a blessing to his audience.

I also have had the privilege of speaking and dealing with author Grant Berry, who cheerleads the Messianic movement and is a monthly columnist for us. I have yet to met Messiah's Mandate's Ron Cantor, but we too have become friends through Facebook, and I love the heart he has for both the Jewish and Christian communities.

Now, I'm not saying that I'm going to be referring to Jesus as Yeshua from now on. I still hold true to my Christian beliefs and proclaim that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior and that He died for me on the cross. I try to live every day by Romans 5:17, which says, "For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life by One, Jesus Christ."

But I know that the Jews are God's chosen people, and we should never-ever-take that for granted. Genesis 12:3 says, in God's words to Abram, "I will bless those who bless you [the nation of Israel], and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

It has always amazed me how Israelis have stayed so calm in the face of so much hatred toward them. They are well aware of the fact that there are probably thousands of missiles pointed at them from every direction, but from what I've been told, Israelis refuse to live their lives in fear. Jonathan told me they just go about their lives because they don't want to give credence to the enemy and allow them to impact their lives like that. I applaud Israelis for that.

We as Christians know (and should believe) that God will

protect His people from such harm, and we should be in prayer for the people of Israel daily.

As I said before, Jonathan has invited me to come to Israel in January. I would love to be able to visit the Holy Land, for sure, and to bask in the warmth and hearth of the hearts of the people of Israel, as well as see all of the history. I would love to see the birthplace of my Savior, too.

I'm not certain I'll have the time or finances to go there, however. Raising a family in America these days—as it is everywhere—is very challenging financially. Jonathan says it will take about \$700, so I'll have to do some heavy-duty lobbying with my wife.

For now, I'll stay connected with Israel and its people through my work with Standing With Israel.

We are always looking for fresh perspectives from people who live in Israel, so if you have an interesting story to tell, please write to me at @. I would love to hear from you.

God bless, and Shabbat Shalom!

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