

The Real Reason Jews Take Offense at the Invitation to 'Become a Christian'

I first visited Israel in 1976.

I had responded to a small ad in the back of a magazine that said, "Wanted: Christian clergy to visit Israel. Only \$600, from New York City."

It was sponsored by the Jewish Agency for Israel, an operative outreach for the World Zionist Organization, and the price was right.

It was 28 years after Israel had become a nation and three years after the Yom Kippur War of 1973 when Israel was surprised by an attack by a coalition of forces from Syria and Egypt, while the Jews were in their synagogues acknowledging their sins as a nation. Within three days, however, Israeli forces had pushed the Syrians back to the pre-war ceasefire lines.

All conflict finally ended 240 days later, with Israel gaining even more land in the Golan Heights from Syria and Gaza from Egypt. By 1976, the nation seemed fairly safe and peaceful.

The Jewish Agency set the daily agenda. About 20 American clergies traveled by bus to various national and religious sites during the day and were given various briefings by government and civic leaders. A Jewish rabbi traveled with us and invited dialog as we traveled. I remember how he seemed more knowledgeable of Christian history and theology than we clergy were of Jewish history and theology.

On several evenings, back at our hotel, we were presented lectures by various academicians on Hebrew history and modern

Israeli successes. Again, I was unaware of much of Jewish history and persecution over the centuries—much of it caused by “Christians” and “in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” At first, the lectures were interesting, but then I felt defensive—all right, self-righteous. After all, I had not personally discriminated against Jews—I barely knew any, nor had I done or said those despicable things.

Slowly, I began to realize how objectionable to many Jews such words as *church*, *Christian*, *conversion* or even Jesus’ name had become. Even in Bible college, I don’t remember being taught much about the horrors of the Jewish Holocaust. But these people had either lived through these terrible times or had relatives who had died in these atrocities.

These events were not 12th-century crusader stories to be read about in history classes. These were the events of family history for them. It is understandable how their views of Christians and Christianity were shaped by these realities.

—Jews were often killed indiscriminately by the “Christian” Crusaders, while they pursued their commission by Rome to drive “the infidel Muslims” from the Holy Land.

—During the Spanish Inquisition (14th and 15th centuries) many Jews were killed because they would not convert to Christianity, as demanded by the official church.

—For centuries, generations of children in Western nations were taught anti-Semitic attitudes by their own parents, teachers and even church leaders. Most Christians smugly called all Jews “the Christ-killers.”

—The Protestant Reformation did not “reform” those attitudes. Martin Luther himself wrote and taught against Jews with deep animosity. Unfortunately, it was common for the times.

—The Nazi Holocaust was birthed and nurtured in a nation that was nominally “Christian,” while most nations (sadly,

including the United States) did nothing to stop the actual slaughter of the millions of Jewish people and other outcasts of society.

Given these failures of Christian history*, it is understandable why the idea of “becoming a Christian” is viewed by many Jews as a betrayal or renouncement of their own ethnic origin, culture and history.

Accordingly, many of those seeking to communicate God’s love to today’s Jewish people refer to themselves as “Messianic” rather than “Christian” and use the literal Hebrew equivalent of Jesus’ name, *Yeshua*, to overcome the corruption of His name throughout history and its negative use and meaning in modern Jewish culture. After all, Jesus is first of all the Jewish Messiah and then the gentiles’ Savior (Rom. 1:16).

The apostle Paul urges us to do “good work—to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile” (Rom. 2:16). While the standard of living in modern Israel is relatively good for the majority, approximately 21% of Israelis (mostly immigrants and certain Arab communities) were recently found to be living under the poverty line—more than in countries such as Mexico, Turkey and Chile.

I have frequently given to , “a benevolence outreach of Maoz Israel Ministries, established to meet the needs of hurting believers in Israel.” I invite you to review their mission and ministries and donate as often as you can.

Also, to better understand the cultural clash modern Jews and Christians often experience, you might want to read the personal testimony of Ron Cantor, “Leave Me Alone, I’m Jewish.” At his blog site, you can read the first two chapters free. Ron is the CEO of Tikkun International, “a global family of Messianic congregations, ministries, and leaders dedicated to the restoration of Israel and the church.” I have come to really appreciate his ministries and insights.

Finally, you will never fully understand and appreciate Jewish people, Israel or the modern Messianic miracle without visiting Israel. I recommend that you review the exceptional, pastoral-led tour opportunities through InspirationTours/Israel or the ones conducted by Ron Cantor, where you can be introduced to the rebirthed Messianic movement in Israel.

*Insights are drawn from Jack Hayford's "Reaching His Chosen People," *Ministries Today* (March/April 2001): 20-21. {eo}

*Ordained to the ministry in 1969, **Gary Curtis** is a graduate of LIFE Bible College at Los Angeles (soon to become Life Pacific University at San Dimas, California). He has taken graduate courses at Trinity College in Deerfield, Illinois, and Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. Gary served as part of the pastoral staff of The Church on The Way, the First Foursquare Church of Van Nuys, California, for 27 years (1988-2015); and served for the last 13 years as the vice president of Life on The Way Communications Inc., the church's not-for-profit media outreach. Now retired, Gary and his wife have been married for 50 years and live in Southern California. They have two married daughters and five grandchildren.*