

Messianic Jews: 'The Most Hated People on Earth'

A few years ago, I was asked to produce a short-film for the Negev Tourism Office. Specifically, they wanted me to help them make a video advertisement promoting all the sites and attractions in the Israeli desert.

Why did they come to me? Because I'm a Messianic Jew, and they wanted the video to target Christian tourists around the world. They needed someone who spoke "Christianese," who would know how to market what they were selling to a specific audience.

I remember arriving at the bus station in Beersheva to meet the crew I'd be working with on the film. Someone from the tourism office was there to pick me up, and I was a bit surprised to see they sent an orthodox woman. I could tell by the way she was dressed that she was religious.

She couldn't have been more welcoming, and she was so excited to take me around to all of the historical sites that would be featured in the video.

After a couple hours in the car together, visiting everything from Abraham's well to various war memorials, we had become chatty and seemed to be enjoying one another's company.

I got up the courage to ask her how she felt about this project we were working on, and specifically how she felt about working with a Jew who believed in Yeshua.

Her answer rings in my ear to this day.

"Chaim," she said, "some Israelis hate the religious. Some hate the secular. But everyone hates you."

The Most Hated People on Earth

My friend and colleague Ron Cantor has a book called *Messianic Jews: The Most Hated People on Earth*. The title has always amused me. But here I was, experiencing just that.

This woman was being very honest with me, telling me how people really feel.

Just this week, former Israel Defense Forces Chief Gabi Ashkenazi gave a rare interview, where he was asked what the greatest threat to Israel is. His response: "Internal divisions over Judaism."

I guarantee you, he wasn't thinking of Messianic Jews. He was thinking of the ultra-orthodox versus the more "secular," or mainstream, Israeli Jews.

But as polarized as those two sides are, there is nothing that unites them quicker than their mutual disdain for Jews who believe in Jesus. To both groups, Messianic Jews are considered missionaries (a very dirty word in Israel), trying to destroy Judaism and force Jews to abandon their faith and become Christians. We are the new Hitler, but instead of sending them to gas chambers, we're trying to steal their souls.

You think I'm exaggerating?

The chief rabbi of the city of Ashdod staged a rally outside a Messianic Jewish congregation in 2010 and said those exact words. "Hitlers!" he called us. I should know—I was there, and I was nearly attacked by the angry crowd. Were it not for the police officer who escorted me away, the footage I shot of the inflammatory rally would never have been shown on Israeli national television.

"Leave Us Alone!"

Modern-day Israel sprang to life after the darkest period in our people's history. The Holocaust was a human catastrophe

unparalleled in its horror. The Jewish people had been driven from their homes by the Nazis. And now, at the end of it all, they finally had a home of their own—their biblical, historical homeland, no less. They were safe in Israel. They could finally rebuild the Jewish nation after two millennia in exile.

Most Jews just want to be left alone. They've been fighting Arabs, literally, since the day of Israel's declared independence. Wars and intifadas and terrorism never cease. The last thing Israeli Jews want to deal with are fellow Israeli Jews trying to convince them that Yeshua (the perceived "Christian God") is actually their Jewish Messiah.

They just want to be left alone, in peace.

Thus, the conflict for Messianic Jews. We are compelled, and in fact commanded, to share our faith in love. And yet we know our friends and family here in Israel are so loathe to hear such "Good News."

Pray for Us

Moving to Israel has been the greatest challenge of my life. It means being thousands of miles away from my loved ones; trying to adjust to a new culture and learn a new language; trying to navigate new government bureaucracies, from the driver's license office to the tax authority; trying to make new friends and fit in with a new community; trying to find a good job with my limited Hebrew; trying to survive the summer heat of the Middle East; and trying not to give in to fear when war and terrorism rage around you.

The list of challenges are endless.

But the greatest challenge by far has been realizing what an alien I am among my own people—realizing how much ignorance there is about the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments; realizing how much hostility there is to the very mention of

the name Yeshua; realizing how ostracized I am, even in the midst of the most ostracized group on earth ... the Jews.

When looking at it through the eyes of men, we, the Messianic Jews, are in fact the most hated people on earth. The anti-Semites hate us for being Jewish. The Jews hate us for preaching an unfamiliar form of Judaism.

But when looking at it through the eyes of God, we are actually quite the opposite. We are, in fact, the most loved and blessed people on earth. We are twice chosen—chosen to be a part of the special tribe known as the Jews, whom God set apart for a special relationship, and chosen again to have our eyes opened to the truth of God's salvation in the form of Yeshua.

While so many stumble around in blindness and darkness and angst, we have our fulfillment, we have our forgiveness and we have our Yeshua!

So don't feel sorry for us, we Israeli Messianic Jews. But please, do join us in prayer.

We need you stand with us as we persevere to share the gospel with the miraculously reborn nation of Israel. That is God's heart. That is our collective privilege. And so we carry on ...

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