

Never Again: Concentration Camp Tour Motivates Messianic Jew

When I was 19, I moved to Israel to join the army. I came with intense Zionism and a deep sense of responsibility to protect my people.

Since I am Jewish, it only made sense, and when I landed on Israeli soil I had only one thing in mind—drafting into the Israeli Defense Forces. After arriving and getting settled, the army finally called me up. The months of basic training felt like nothing compared to the fire inside of me.

During training we learned many things: Zionism, Israeli politics, Judaism, and Hebrew—and we also learned about the Holocaust. This had a particular influence on my unit as most of them were great-grandchildren of survivors. Our commanders emphasized to us: “Never Again!” or, in Hebrew: *LeOlam Lo!*

Shortly after basic training we became “official” soldiers in the IDF, and to do so we had swear into the army. During this special ceremony we swore to “Never Again!” allow such horrors to befall our people. We understood that our training allowed us to make sure that the Jewish people would remain forever safe in our homeland. It was a powerful moment for us as we stood with our guns and swore that “Never Again!” would an enemy annihilate the nation of Israel.

Reminiscing about it now makes that day since I completed my service and was released—nearly two years ago—seem like a very distant memory for me. But all of my training and service came back to me recently when we pulled up to the courtyard at Dachau in Germany.

A long pathway dotted with sturdy, tall trees welcomed us. The

silence of the place was eerie as we started walking down the gravel road. Each step drawing closer to the gates ahead, the tour guide didn't say a word and the only sound was that of our footsteps against the stony ground. It was hot and the sun seemed relentless, as the heat of summer should have faded by then, but instead it felt like a cruel punishment on such a long day.

Arbeit macht frei, "work for freedom" sprung into my head as the gate became visible. I didn't know German, but I knew what the sign said. They made us study it in basic training. Work for freedom. What a distortion. Freedom meaning death. Work to death ... work to freedom.

It was the first time I had ever entered the snare of a Nazi death camp. The tour guide stopped us just before entering the gate; she explained that Dachau was the first concentration camp ever built by the Nazis, and it was to be used as an example camp. It was known to be especially brutal.

For me, the tour was personally moving. Being Jewish myself, I was painfully affected by the thought that thousands—if not millions—of my people were tortured, neglected and murdered inside these very walls. Our guide explained to us the cruelties my people endured. The reality of everyday life was unbearable to comprehend. Here, my people died, simply because they, like me, were Jews. The tour led us around the entire campus—from the fields where prisoners endured harsh labor, to the barricades, to the processing offices, and then to the showers.

Later in our tour, the guide brought us to a long narrow corridor. She explained to us that these chambers were used for torture by the SS guards. She turned her attention towards the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis and explained how several Christian pastors were also victims and died at the hands of Nazi torture. Amongst the millions of prisoners, three barracks towards the back of the camp were reserved only for

Christians: those that stood strong in their faith and refused to align themselves with the monstrous beliefs of the Nazis.

The hall was long and cold. The only noise heard was the sound of our breathing. Looking down the hall you could see small rays of sun blasting through the tiny windows on the doors, proving that perhaps there still can be light in the darkest of places. We walked down the hall together, trying to comprehend what had taken place in these cells.

We were in the torture chambers.

The hall was cold and rooms held their own demons. The chamber seemed to go on forever—so many rooms, so many horrible acts committed here. The hall just kept going and going to what felt like the length an entire football field. I stopped and peeked through each door to the rooms inside. Each room was entirely empty, cold, and the paint was peeling off the walls. The windows had large black shades that had been pulled back to let the sun in, but when prisoners were in these rooms I am sure it was entirely black.

Each room brought with it a new spirit of evil and each room seemed to get darker and darker, letting in little to no light. I felt like I couldn't go on any longer imagining what had happened in these torture closets. I wanted to scream, run out, and find the sun light I had complained about earlier. I felt the darkness consuming me. Jews, Christians, politicians, scientists, professors, fathers, brothers, *humans* were all kept here under the worse conditions that are still incomprehensible to us.

The last door on the right side of the corridor had light shining through the small window. It was guiding me to the end. As I reached the end I looked into the window where the light was coming from. There in the middle of the room, on a small table, arms spread out and legs bound, was a small

crucifix of Jesus Christ. On his head was etched the words "King of the Jews."

The sight took my breath away. I grew up as a Messianic Jew, believing in Jesus—or, as I grew up calling him, Yeshua—as my Messiah. I stood there for a very long time contemplating the meaning of this moment. The Nazis attempted to eliminate the King of the Jews from the face of the earth by eliminating his people, his family—his flesh and blood—and attempting to silence those who stood tall in faith of Him. I take it as a great responsibility, being a Jew and one who believes in Messiah Yeshua, to never forget all those that died in these chambers. Both my spiritual brothers and sisters as well as my physical brothers and sisters.

As we left the chambers I took off my backpack and pulled out my Israeli flag and my unit patch that I earned serving in the IDF. It was only just a couple of short years ago that I swore into the ranks of the army. I swore that nothing like what I just saw would ever happen again. During the ceremony I chose to swear in on both the Old Testament and the New Testament, combining the heritage of my fathers with the faith of my redemption. That day, I stood with an Israeli flag in hand and swore once again: "Never Again!" I affirmed that "Never Again!" would my people be led to the slaughter.

Messianic Jews also have the duty of never allowing the name of the Messiah Yeshua to be defamed in such a horrible way. As the Jews were being led to the gas chambers or to the mass graves, the Messiah was not *merely* mourning their suffering, rather He was suffering *with* them. The fact that some of His followers allowed, or even encouraged this to happen, has left a dark black stain on the name of Jesus in the eyes of the wider Jewish people. As a Messianic Jewish believer, I'm also strongly connected to my duty to assure that the stain is taken from the name of Jesus and that it become known that He was suffering with the Jewish people, not causing it.

Messiah came for all of humanity. He came to save us, redeem us and give us the message of the kingdom of God. We do not always hear stories of Jews and Christians being slaughtered next to each other during the Holocaust. We sometimes forget about the faithful Christians who raised their voices in protest against the murder of the Jews, and against the evils of Hitler and his minions. But they were there. We were all together, and Christ was also with us, suffering right alongside us.

Today, the Christian voice for Israel is stronger than ever. Evangelicals are some of the loudest voices for pro-Israel advocacy. The Christian voices lost in the Holocaust are resurrecting in our day. As Jews and Christians, let us join our voices together and ensure that something as atrocious as the Holocaust will *never again* happen. May we, as the people of God, followers of Jesus our Messiah, take this stance together and raise this cry in unison: never again. {eo}

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