

Orthodox Jew: An Israeli Perspective on GOD TV Broadcasting Controversy in Israel

A storm of controversy was ignited in Israel earlier this year when GOD TV announced plans to broadcast in Hebrew, dedicated to taking the gospel of Jesus “into the homes and lives and hearts of the Jewish people.”

This past week, Israel’s government body responsible for licensing TV stations withdrew that license for not honestly disclosing in its application what the new channel’s agenda was, but that it was welcome to submit a new application that accurately depicts the nature of its programming. This was followed by the HOT Cable network announcing that it would not submit a new application for the GOD TV station.

It’s probably confusing for many Christians to understand what’s going on, and why it’s controversial in Israel. It’s understood that Jesus is everything to a committed Christian. Most born-again believers would say that one can’t convert Jews; it’s an act of the Holy Spirit. But why not share the gospel in Israel, in Hebrew?

Most Christians don’t have an in-depth understanding of Judaism, the Jewish experience or the opportunity to fellowship with Jews personally. The church today is largely unaware of its own history of persecution of Jews and how that’s played out.

Because there’s a lack of understanding of history, of Jews and Judaism, there’s a lack of understanding as to where mainstream Jews are on this issue or why. With few exceptions, there’s no way for the average Christian to understand the

Jewish response, reaction or frame of reference.

I pray that this will provide insight and create dialogue rather than add to the sometimes-polarizing voices of people who advocate, "I am right, and *they* are wrong."

How Did We Get Here?

In its original video announcement, GOD TV CEO Ward Simpson said they have "been given government permission to broadcast the gospel of Jesus Christ—Yeshua the Messiah—in Israel on cable TV, in the Hebrew language. Never before, as far as we know in the history of the world, has this ever been done."

The controversy of Simpson's video announcement, considered by Israelis and affirmed by him to be openly proselytizing was exacerbated by its rapid removal from public access. Then a clarifying video was released that didn't really change things. Government ministers and state TV licensing authorities investigated and held multiple hearings.

Most believe that GOD TV would have never filed with Israeli state authorities to open a TV station to proselytize Jews overtly. And if they had, it's unlikely that they would have gotten approval. Therefore, going public with a statement stating this openly seems to have been in direct contradiction to their application, as was affirmed this week.

Whether deceitful or an oversight, one reason this issue has blown up is that it is the first time to broadcast Christian content in Israel, in Hebrew. Doing so with the stated purpose of proselytizing all 9 million Israelis, including children, is against the law.

Why Am I Writing?

I write from the perspective of an Orthodox Israeli Jew, having spent most of my adult life building bridges between Christians and Jews, in awe and appreciation of the vast

change of the attitudes of many Christians and their genuine support and love for Israel and the Jewish people. I don't take this for granted, and always try to honor, respect and reciprocate my love and support. Their support is especially noteworthy given centuries of anti-Semitic horrors, even murder, in the name of "the church."

The restoration of Jewish sovereignty in Israel, has provoked Christians to realize that this is not coincidence, but the fulfillment of God's promises, and therefore spiritually significant to them as well. Israel has brought Jews and Christians into relationship, but it's a relationship that brings baggage and lack of understanding on both sides. In addition to being significant biblically, Israel is a refuge, protecting Jews from physical and spiritual threats.

I try in all my relationships with Christians to be honest and sincere. Among many close friends and acquaintances, I have had no shortage of intense and sometimes awkward theological conversations. The intent is never to be controversial or disrespectful but to engage in dialogue to bring us closer.

I believe, as do many Christian friends and other Jews who actively engage with Christians, that we have far more in common than divides us, even if some of those things that divide us are quite significant.

It's in that context of honest dialogue and respect that I write to discuss this issue and its implications. I pray that my friends understand that, and not-yet friends will receive it in that spirit.

Expanding the Conversation

One of the blessings of living in Israel is that there are a number of Christians and ministries here genuinely building bridges with Israel and the Jewish people. There's been a growing awareness among Israeli Jews that these are our friends, and they are truly here in sincere fellowship. It

leads to healthy and dialogues, relationships and breaking down of barriers.

I am profoundly grateful and blessed to be in dialogue with many Jewish and Christian friends about this. I wish to share some of what I have gleaned, both adapted and in their voices with permission, as if you are a fly on my wall, anonymously and respectfully. I pray it opens eyes and hearts rather than closing doors.

So, what do we have to discuss?

Love or Hate

There's a fundamental difference between Jews and Christians as to the nature of Jesus and one's path to salvation. Without getting into theological details, what's viewed as an act of love among Christians to share their faith is considered hateful, even spiritual genocide, among Jews. Even in the original GOD TV announcement, it was noted that doing so can be "offensive."

Some Christians and Jews understand this about one another and can co-exist with the differences. For others, this is polarizing and just underscores preconceived notions, setting back efforts of those actively engaged in building bridges.

Can a relationship exist where one's act of love is received as an offensive attack?

Stay tuned for part 2 of "Understanding the Israeli Perspective on GOD TV Broadcasting in Israel."

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has become a respected bridge between Jews and Christians and serves as president of the Genesis 123 Foundation. He writes regularly on major Christian websites about Israel and shares experiences of

*living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He can be reached at
FirstPersonIsrael@.*