



Caspari Center NEWS

June 2016

From the CEO

Elisabeth E. Levy



Dear Partners and Supporters of the Caspari Center

Here at the Caspari Center in Jerusalem we have just finished another “Jesus the Jew” course. For ten days, participants from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Taiwan, together with some locals, were exposed to the Jewish roots of our faith and the framework and setting of the first Jewish believers in Yeshua. As one participant put it: “I had never thought about the fact that the Son and Messiah sitting to the right of God, the Father, is a Jew.”

As we are witnessing a new wave of anti-Semitism in many countries, it is more important than ever to stand up and say, “Never again.” Courses such as “Jesus the Jew” are reminders for all of us to not forget where our faith has its roots.

Thank you for all your support and prayers for the Caspari Center. May the God of Israel bless you from Jerusalem.



Jewish Roots Versus Contextualization

Messianic Jews sometimes criticize Christians who tolerate symbols such as Christmas trees and Easter eggs in their celebrations—symbols that are originally from pagan religions. On the other hand, some Christians find it difficult to understand why they should care about the Jewishness of Jesus; after all, Jesus came to identify with every nation and the message of salvation in the Bible is very universal. Each of these groups has a point, and they seem difficult to reconcile with each other.

Originally, Christianity was a Jewish thing—Jesus and the disciples didn’t found a new religion. The first followers of Jesus were Jews. Even Paul, who is called the apostle to the Gentiles, always went to synagogues to reach out to the Jews first. When he preached to Gentiles, they were in most cases “God-fearers”: Gentiles who hung around the synagogues to hear about the God of Israel. Based on Acts 21, Paul seems to have been a Torah-observant Jew himself, even though he preached very passionately about freedom for the Gentiles and also about the Jews being saved by faith and faith alone. The apostolic council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) decided

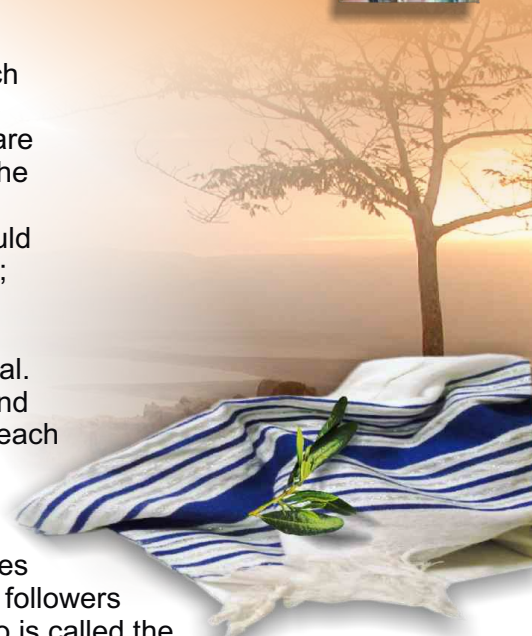
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One of the reasons faith in Jesus the Jew spread so quickly in the ancient world was indeed its adaptability to different circumstances and cultures. We hear this new, ground-breaking attitude in Paul’s words, where he describes how he “contextualizes himself” for the sake of the gospel:

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law. . . . (1 Cor 9:19–23)

Thoughts from the Staff

Sanna Erelä
Project Coordinator



Contextualization takes place when the gospel meets a culture. When we preach the gospel, there are always at least three contexts present: the biblical context of the message, the context of the preacher, and the context of the hearer. We cannot ignore this if we want to reach people with the gospel. Without contextualization, people will not connect to Jesus in a way that moves their hearts. Faith will feel foreign; churches will never feel rooted in the culture and people will not see the gospel really winning. This is true on every mission field—in Muslim countries, in Israel, and also in post-Christian Europe or the USA!

During the first centuries AD, Jewish believers became a minority in a Gentile-dominated church. Due to many historical reasons, some anti-Jewish ideas became rooted in the church, which was largely alienated from its Jewish origins. This has resulted in a situation where the original meaning of Scripture is often lost. In a post-modern world everyone has their own story, and in the name of contextualization you can impose on the Bible almost any idea you like. The church is “drifting” and needs to connect again with her roots, to strive to study them—regardless of the almost-2,000-year gap between the writings and us! In this process, the church desperately needs the Jewish part of the body.

There will always be a tension between contextualization and the Jewishness of the gospel, but both of them are needed. At its best, this tension can be creative and bring glory to the Lord!

“How Did Germany Treat You, Alec?”

Alec Goldberg
Israel Director



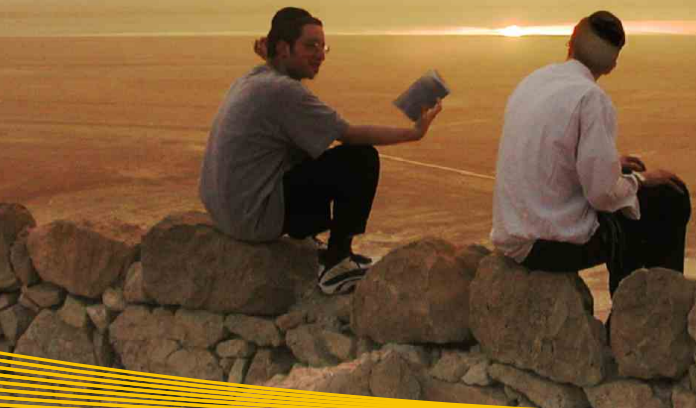
That question was the opening of a casual email from a colleague the other day. Just a little over a week after Yom ha-Shoah—the day when Israel remembers the victims of the Holocaust—I was tempted to answer by writing something like, “Way better than it treated my people a few decades ago.” I was there as a guest speaker at a bi-annual national conference of Messianic Jews sponsored by Evangeliumdienst für Israel (EDI), one of Caspari Center’s partners. And one of my strongest positive impressions from this trip was the substantial number of Germans who are members of local Messianic Jewish congregations and also attended the conference. Most of them are good and sincere friends of the Jewish people, and a few have a Jewish spouse; but the important thing is that these dear German brothers and sisters in the faith are full of love for my Jewish people. There is something very redeeming about that fact in view of 20th century history.

I had many other positive experiences during that visit. One was the forum with six participants—three congregational leaders and three members of local congregations—who were each asked to answer certain questions about the Messianic Jewish movement in Germany. Among the needs that were mentioned almost unanimously was theological education—something that this Caspari Center staff worker could not but rejoice over. I am also thankful for the story a girl from Berlin told me about an Iranian family that came to Germany as refugees and became believers in Jesus. I am hearing many stories of this kind from my European friends, but the unique thing about that particular family is that after becoming disillusioned with Islam and choosing Jesus, they decided to join a Messianic Jewish congregation. Why? Because, they said, it all started with the Jews!

... resolving the identity crisis that every Jesus-believing Jew faces sooner or later.

But my best memory has to do with a certain development I observed inside the Messianic Jewish movement in Germany. Two years ago, during my previous visit, my Jewish brothers and sisters in that nation who participated in the conference were full of excitement over their Jewishness and everything that goes with it—the *kippah* and *tallit* (prayer shawl), kashrut, the traditional Shabbat liturgy, Jewish songs, and rabbinical commentaries.

The Shabbat message, delivered by a recognized leader in the movement, was on the calling of Messianic Jews in Germany and the world, and was delivered with a lot of excitement about the unique role we, the Jews, have in the body of Messiah. I fully shared in that excitement, but still had a feeling that something was lacking.



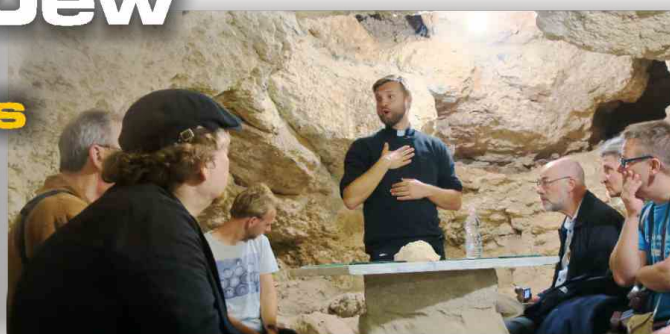
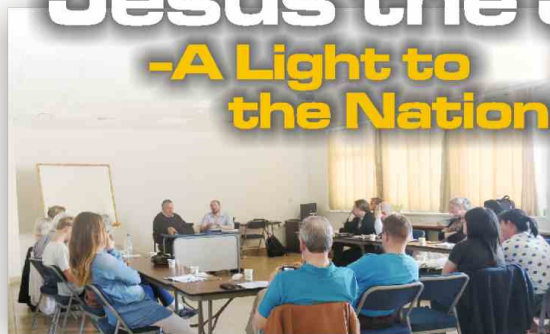
This year the same leader spoke on Shabbat morning, and his message was different. Without denying the importance of Jewish identity, he stated unequivocally that over the years the German Messianic movement has shifted focus from Yeshua himself, his love, and the unity of his body to Jewish tradition and identity, and therefore there is an urgent need to restore the right priorities. I could hardly contain myself from yelling “Amen” right when he said that, but instead spoke to him in private after the service and thanked him for the message.

To me that was a sign both of growing maturity, resolving the identity crisis that every Jesus-believing Jew faces sooner or later, and of hope for the Messianic movement in Germany.

Ministry Update

Jesus the Jew

-A Light to the Nations



In April we had our latest “Jesus the Jew—A Light to the Nations” course here at Caspari Center. This was a 10-day course for theologians, pastors, missionaries, and other Christians in ministry.

When God chose to become one of us, he did so in the specific cultural, social, economic, and political context of first-century Israel, making the study of this particular situation a necessary prerequisite for understanding theology in any other framework.

Through this course we wanted to understand what the gospel meant in its original context so we can present it clearly in our contemporary context. Afterward it was very encouraging to read the feedbacks from participants.

Here are some quotes:

- ***“Peak life experience.”***
- ***“It was wonderful and it gave such a great diversity of thoughts. It is not easy questions that we have been dealing with, for example the political conflict and being a Messianic Jew. And we have not been served easy answers. I hope I can bring the good thoughts into my own context.”***
- ***“I am ready to recommend it to my Swedish brothers!”***

We at the Caspari Center hope to see you at our next course, April 23 to May 4, 2018.

media review

Caspari Center publishes a weekly review of material from the Israeli press documenting attitudes toward Messianic Jews, the mission, and the Christian faith. To receive the Media Review free of charge by email, sign up at our website, www.caspari.com.

Anti-Missionary Activity

Zman Ma'ale, April 7, 2016

Ma'ale Adumim's city rabbi, Rabbi Yehoshua Katz, wrote an open letter to the public in response to various forms of missionary material recently distributed in the city, and wishing to alert the public that “those behind the distribution are no more than deceivers whose ulterior motive is to lead innocent or ignorant people astray.”

Archaeology

Israel Hayom; Haaretz, April 20, 2016

Twelve-year-old Neshama Spielman, on an outing with her family at the Temple Mount Sifting Project in Jerusalem's Emek Tzurim, found a 3,200-year-old Egyptian amulet four years ago, which archaeologists have now determined bears the name of Pharaoh Thutmose III. “Celebrating Passover this year will be extra meaningful to me,” she said.



Devotional Thoughts

Michelle Van Loon
US Administrator

Found By God's Mercy

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." (Luke 18:10–13)

Imagine the scene Jesus described in this parable. A man bowed under the weight of his own failures enters a large, welcoming courtyard. Perhaps he's young—in the prime of his life—but today he is moving like an old, arthritic man carrying an invisible weight. As he nears his destination, the tears he's been fighting to hold inside spill down his face.

He begins to sob and can move no further. He reaches out in prayer as if he's grabbing a lifeline, and then, as he looks at his outstretched hand, he begins weeping anew. In a sudden, stabbing movement, he balls his hand into a fist and brings it sharply to his chest. He repeats the motion again and again . . . left fist, right fist, left fist. It is an action typically reserved for women mourners in his culture, a visceral, deeply physical response to his shattered heart.

But another man, bold and proud, standing at the front of the courtyard, cannot ignore the unwelcome sinner raising such a ruckus. This spotless man is used to performing his spiritual life as if he's on stage in order to receive the applause of others. Now, suddenly, the spotlight is off of him. He doesn't like it one bit. When he glances over his shoulder at the cause for the disruption, you can see a look of annoyance flicker across his face before he composes himself. He's a professional, after all.

This religious leader wants everyone in that courtyard to know there is a right way to express oneself before God, and the howling mess of a man behind him is simply not doing it right. The leader throws his shoulders back as if he's giving a lesson in the Right Way to Pray. You can see his face tilt upwards, his hands cupped upwards just so. He continues his oration aimed at heaven, but the other man's cries for God's help are impossible to ignore.

In a final attempt to regain the attention of the crowd, the religious leader whirls around. He flicks his wrist like he's aiming a cannon at the weeping man, firing a dismissive gesture toward him. It says, "Look away. He can't show you the way to God. I can."

He then turns back to his perfectly-crafted memorized words. The crowd's attention is back on him as he prays.

Almost everyone's attention in the crowd, that is. The weeping man, prostrate on the dusty ground, offers from his heart the words God longs to hear from each one of us looking to restore our relationship with him: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."



Prayer Requests *Please pray for . . .*

- *The participation of students from MF, the Norwegian School of Theology, in the next spring course.*
- *The Jews and the Messianic movement in Europe.*
- *God's direction in our work.*
- *Peace in Jerusalem, Israel, and the whole Middle East.*



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"Equipping His people for works of service, so that the body of Messiah may be built up" Ephesians 4:12

If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to caspari@caspari.com or visit our website, www.caspari.com.
You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.