

The Chosen People

SEPTEMBER 1986

*JEWISH KIDS:
Reaching them,
Raising them.*



**THE SIGN SAYS 'CLOSED,'
BUT THE DOOR IS OPEN**
by Ron Hutchcraft

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The Chosen People

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Children are our legacy for the future. What we teach them and how we teach them determines the future course of the nation. Each generation has a profound effect upon the next one. This principle can be well illustrated in the history of the kings of Israel.

When the Torah was not being read, when it was not being taught to the children, an evil generation developed. However, when the Torah was being taught and an example was set for the children, the future generations did what was right.

The way of godliness, righteousness, and holiness must be taught. It cannot be passed on from generation to generation through heredity. Righteousness and holiness are not in the genetic code of men. Scientists will never be able to isolate a gene called righteousness or a gene called holiness.

Each generation must be told of God's redemptive grace. Each generation must be given examples of God's redemptive grace. Each generation must receive God's redemptive grace.

God's truth is meant to permeate a family structure. It is likewise intended to permeate the social structure of a community. The Lord emphasized this truth to Moses when He said, "These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life" (Dt. 6:1, 2).

Notice that these commands are to be taught. Each generation is responsible to teach the next generation. The responsibility of being a godly parent is to teach your children how to receive God's redemptive grace. Failure to do so results in future generations having no knowledge of God. It results in increased sin, wickedness, and eventual judgment.

God told Moses the importance of teaching children both by word and deed when He said, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Dt. 6:6, 7).

Notice that God emphasized to Moses that the teaching of God's commands was to involve the setting of an example. It was the parent who was to impress God's truth upon the children to talk about the Lord, to actively demonstrate a prayer life, to make sure that God's Word permeated the home.

An important part of our ministry is to disciple new Jewish believers and teach them how to share God's redemptive grace with their children.

I praise God for godly parents who taught me of God's redemptive grace as a child. In this issue of *The Chosen People* you will read of parents who have come to faith and shared that legacy with their children.

Thank you for your prayers and gifts which enable us to carry out this worldwide ministry of sharing the Good News with all Jews everywhere.

In our Messiah,

HAROLD A. SEVENER



raising them, reaching them

Raising them...

Our plans for this issue were at first a little sketchy. An issue on the children of Jewish Christians — children who from some quarters might be viewed as coming of age between two cultures — Jewish and Christian. We even had a catchy, glib title: "The Children of Jewish Christians: Growing Up Absurd?"

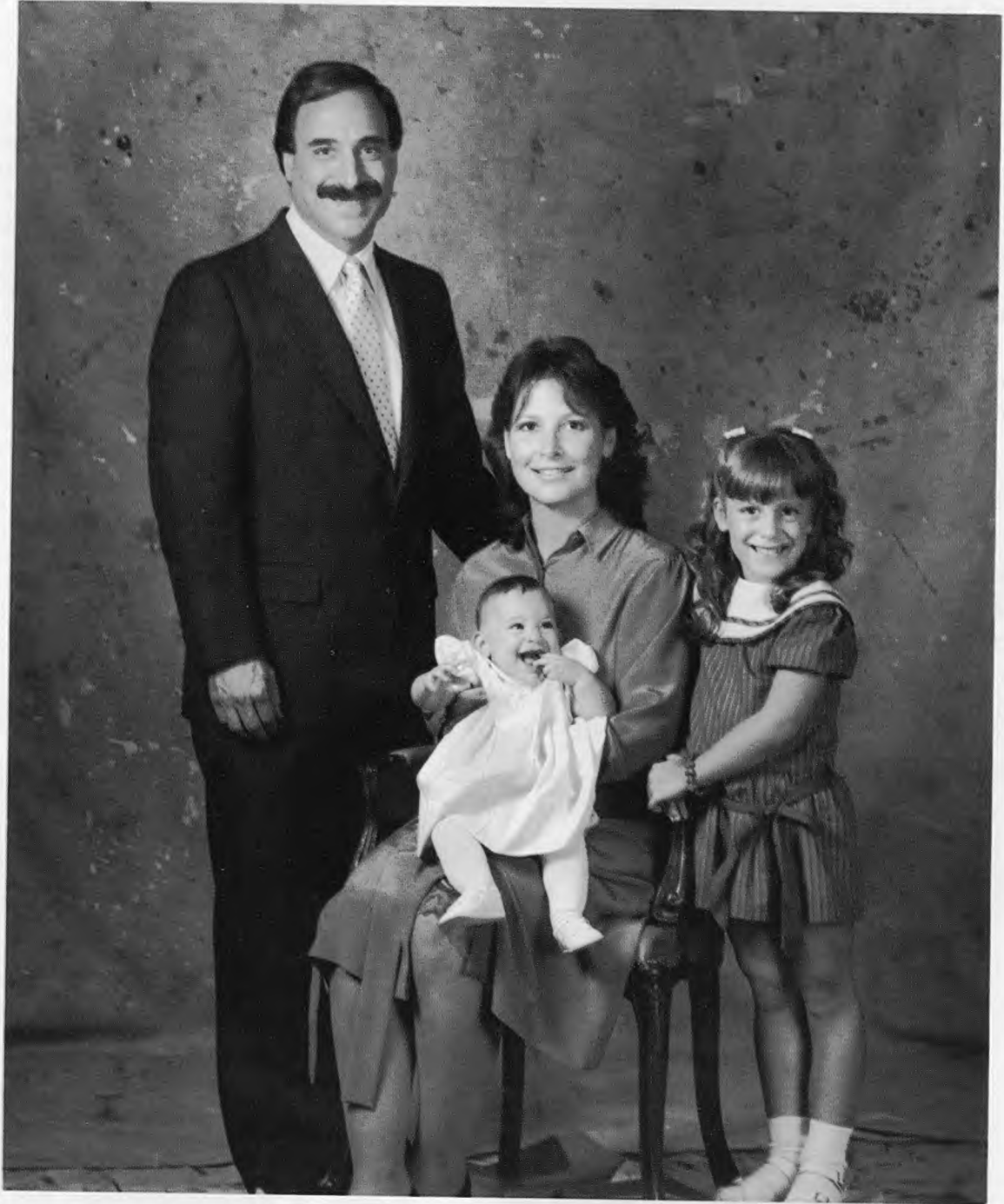
As we began interviewing our missionaries we discovered that their lifestyle was anything *but* glib. Their commitment to raising their children consistent with what they believe may, at this time in history, be a new cultural distinctive within Christianity. But from their words, the fruit of their lives (their children) and the blessing they are experiencing, it is apparent that their lifestyle is beyond mere controversy and much in the Spirit. We hope their testimony inspires you as it inspired us.

Reaching them...

While this issue was in its formative stages, a "chance" meeting brought Ron Hutchcraft, who holds a key position with Youth for Christ, to our attention. Ron's words are primarily directed at teenagers interested in sharing their faith with their Jewish friends. His inspired counsel, however, is valuable to anyone who seeks not merely to *witness*, but to live a lifestyle of love.

Editor





Sometimes we'll all sit around, and my dad will tell us stories of the Holocaust. Rachel, like the rest of us, will cry and laugh at his stories. How can I ignore teaching her what it means to be part of this people?

LARRY FELDMAN
Missionary, W. Orange, NJ

Larry Feldman is congregational leader of Beth Messiah in East Hanover, N.J., and an Area Director for the Northeast Region of Chosen People Ministries. He is the father of two daughters: six-year-old Rachel and six-month-old Rebekah.

We want our children to know that we are Jewish believers in Yeshua. We don't see this as two separate parts of their lives, but rather as one identity.

I know this means that they'll have to sort out some things. For instance, last year Rachel was shocked when she found out that all Jews aren't believers in Messiah. My mother says Rachel will be confused when she's older, but just the opposite is happening. She is growing strong and confident in the Lord and in her sense of being Jewish.

This confidence is one of the most important things this generation of Messianic Jewish parents can give their children. Right now, a lot of Jewish believers, especially those in their twenties and thirties, are awkward about being Jewish believers. They try very hard not to offend their Gentile Christian brothers and sisters, so hard that sometimes they unnecessarily offend their Jewish families. Other times they try so hard not to offend their Jewish families, they aren't completely forthright in their testimony of Messiah's salvation.

There is a better way, and I think raising our children with a right sense of what it means to be Jewish and what

it means to be a believer will change this awkwardness.

Why is it important to me that my children understand they're Jewish? Because as I trace Genesis 12:3; 15:1-6; 17; and Jeremiah 31:35-37, I see that God raised up the Jewish people to be a testimony to His faithfulness. Acts 15 explains that Gentile believers do not have to become Jews in order to follow the Jewish Messiah, implying that Jewish believers do not have to "become" Gentiles. All of this tells me that we shouldn't cast aside our Jewishness.

Last year Rachel was shocked when she found out that all Jews aren't believers in Messiah. She is growing strong and confident in the Lord and in her sense of being Jewish.

The emphasis obviously must come in the home. Deuteronomy 6 says that the home is the best place to teach your children about God. In our home we do this through creating our own "customs." For instance, Friday night dinner with *chalah* (braided bread) and the candles has been a custom in Jewish homes for thousands of years. In our home, we have dinner, we light the candles, and we have the *chalah*. But as we light the candles we give

thanks that Messiah, the Light of the World, has come; as we break the bread we give thanks to Yeshua, the Bread of Life.

FRAN FELDMAN

Fran Feldman, an archaeology graduate from the University of Cincinnati,

Jewishness has a beautiful, rich history and culture, and we want our girls to appreciate this. So as Rachel (and Rebekah, when she is old enough to understand) learns about her heritage, she will not only see the connection between the Bible and the people of the Bible, but she will gain something to pass on to her children.

I can't imagine denying them this tie with their past. My parents went through the Holocaust, and I want my children to understand their history. Sometimes we'll all sit around, and my dad will tell us stories of Europe—what it was like to live in a ghetto or how he almost escaped from a labor camp once. Rachel, like the rest of us, will cry and laugh at his stories. How can I ignore teaching her what it means to be part of this people?

Of course, I know that some Christians fear that we'll pull our children from the Church. But just the opposite is happening: Our Jewish testimony is drawing others to the Lord. My parents are now believers—my whole family is—and they've got strong testimonies even though—or actually *because*—they maintain their Jewish identity.

Why do I identify with being Jewish? It's who I am. Why do I teach my children about Jewish customs? It's my life style and my culture. It's the way I am comfortable expressing my love for God.

MICHAEL RYDELNIK
Missionary, New York, NY

Michael Rydelnik is the congregational leader of The Olive Tree Congregation, Long Island, and the Queens/Long Island Director of ABMJ/Chosen People Ministries. He is the father of two boys: four-year-old Zachary and six-months-old Seth.

Raising our children as Jewish believers is not something I do for show. It's the only choice I have because it is who I am and how I live.

It would be foolish to say that what is important to me is not going to be important to my sons. I identify with the Jewish people. I identify with Israel and I think it's natural that my children will do the same. How can I behave as if these things are important and not pass them on to my children?

Why do I identify with being Jewish? It's who I am. Why do I teach my children about Jewish customs? It's my life style and my culture. I learned Hebrew and celebrated the Jewish holidays before my children were even born. It's the way I am comfortable expressing my love for God and understanding His love for me. I do it as a testimony.

I also believe in Jesus as Messiah and have received Him as my Savior. I teach my children about Him because He is the Truth. He is real to me. They will hear about Him in my words; they will see Him in my actions.

There are three underlying assumptions we use in determining what we teach our children: (1) that Jesus is Messiah and Savior of the world; (2)

that God has made us Jews, it's who we are; and (3) that there is no contradiction between the two; we can readily harmonize these two things that God has done.

Of course we don't follow *all* Jewish traditions or customs just because they are accepted by other Jewish people. Not everything in today's Jewish cul-

This is not an "either-or" situation; that is, either choose Jewishness or choose belief in Jesus. We're not teaching them a religion based on works. We are teaching them an expression of who they are and how they can express their faith in the Savior.

ture is scriptural. The key is always what is good, what is righteous, what teaches and communicates the truth of God.

EVA RYDELNIK

Eva is a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, Azusa Pacific College, and Wheaton Graduate School.

Living in an Orthodox section of Queens means our children are going

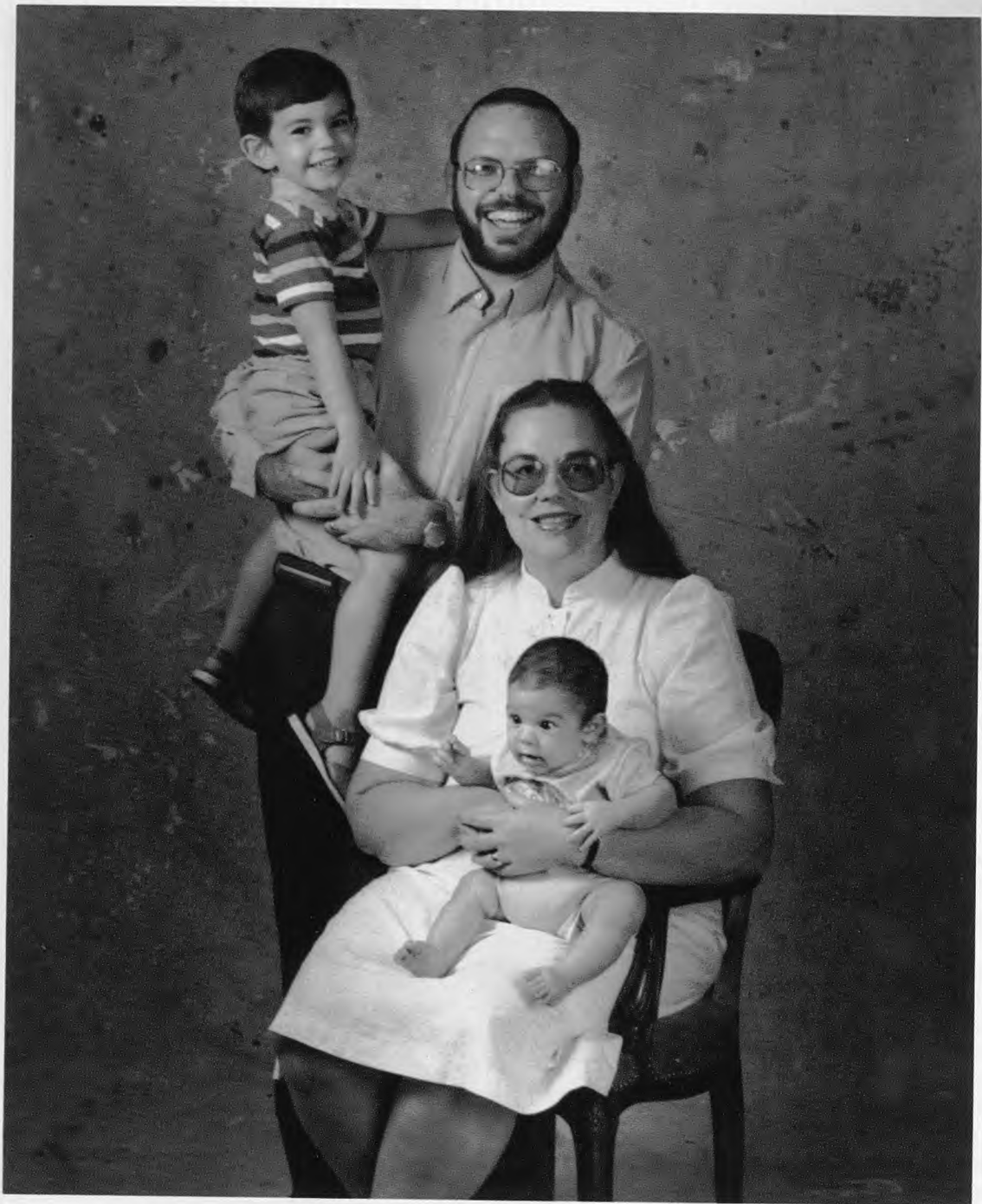
to learn Jewish culture. That's good, because we've always maintained a Jewish identity in our home. But the Jewish identity we've maintained is based on belief in the Jewish Messiah, and this is the kind of Jewishness we want our children to have.

To me, the most important aspect of raising our children as Jews is that if we don't foster their identity as Jewish believers, we would be denying what God has done. God promises that there will always be a righteous remnant (Rom. 9:27; 11:5). There is a remnant of Jews today, that's obvious, and some of that remnant are believers, in fulfillment of God's promise.

I feel that we have a great responsibility to teach our children to maintain their identity as Jews just as much as we do to teach them to be faithful to God's grace in Jesus.

Now I know this can seem arrogant, and I don't want my boys to look at this as a matter of pride. But any differences that make us unique as individual believers can bring arrogance. Some Christians can be arrogant that they witness more than other believers, or that they deny themselves more worldly goods, or even that they have more worldly goods. It is a parent's responsibility to see that children understand that these unique talents and differences are gifts that God gives us to serve Him.

Yes, my children are Jewish believers. This makes them different from Gentile Christians, *but it is not a difference in doctrine or in Scripture. It's a difference in culture, tradition, and heritage.*





I really feel that not teaching my children about their Jewish heritage from day one was a mistake, like robbing them of something special.

JIM REES

Jim Rees is Controller of ABMJ/Chosen People Ministries, working with our headquarters staff. He is the father of two girls: twenty-one-year old Stephanie and thirteen-year-old Jackie.

Every relationship is made up of individuals trying to make it work. In a marriage, there's two people who become one flesh, and into that one flesh they bring a lot of individual traits. When you have children, trying to discover a way to balance all those traits becomes very important.

For Jeanne and I, balancing those traits also means balancing two cultures, each of which is foreign to the other. Jeanne comes from a Jewish background, mine was strictly W.A.S.P. What I've discovered is that by both of us working to achieve a balance, we are, hopefully, able to give the children the best of both.

That doesn't mean we always agree on what the perfect balance is. Trying to raise our children as believers, to prepare them for the predominantly American Gentile culture around them, and to help them appreciate their Jewish heritage can be difficult. But by wanting to be sensitive to each other and by being willing to learn what each person in our family needs, we can make it work. At least for us, it has meant understanding who our children are and what is most important in their lives.

It's like being a fifth grade Sunday school teacher. You prepare your lesson with three or four points you want the children to learn, knowing full

well that not all of them will learn all the points all the time. But on any given week, you prepare all three points, working hard to be certain that they all walk away understanding, at least, the one main point you wanted them to learn.

As parents, sometimes we're trying to get across three or four points. In our home it might be the children's Jewishness, their Gentile ancestry,

When it's all said and done, I don't want them to be comfortable only around other Jews, or only around non-Jews. I want them to be secure in the Messiah, and build balanced lives founded in Him.

and their general being as people. We're committed to finding that balance together. But the one really important thrust, the key that has to fit everything, is their relationship to the Lord.

Yes, I want them to appreciate the fullness of their Jewish heritage. I want them to find the cultural expression that suits them best. But I want them to appreciate themselves in terms of their relationship with the Lord. If they choose to express their Jewishness, or if they choose not to, I don't want that to affect their walk with God.

When it's all said and done, I don't want them to be comfortable only around other Jews, or only around non-Jews. I want them to be secure in the Messiah and build balanced lives founded in Him.

JEANNE REES

Missionary, Katonah, NY

Jeanne Rees is our ABMJ/Chosen People Ministries missionary in Katonah, New York. Best known for her lovely voice, Jeanne recently taught a six-month course on The Jewish Roots of Christianity. She is the mother of two girls: twenty-one-year-old Stephanie and thirteen-year-old Jackie.

I really feel that not teaching my children about their Jewish heritage from day one was a mistake, like robbing them of something special.

At first they got nothing; I wasn't a believer and Jim, though he was saved, wasn't walking with the Lord. We never even thought about giving the girls "religious" training.

Then I was saved and Jim recommitted himself to God. Stephanie made a profession of faith soon after that, and when Jackie was old enough she did, too. I didn't bother to teach them about their heritage because I went along with my friends who told me, "You're saved now, you're free from the Law and free from celebrating Jewish things."

One day I overheard a teaching tape Jim was playing, and in a flash I knew that I should never have been trying to deny or hide my Jewishness. Jesus was Jewish, the Gospels were Jewish,

continued on following page



In a flash I knew that I should never have been trying to deny or hide my Jewishness. Jesus was Jewish, the Gospels were Jewish, and the New Testament was as much the “Jewish Bible” as the Old Testament.

and the New Testament was as much the “Jewish Bible” as the Old Testament. I was free to celebrate my Jewishness.

I read everything I could about the Jewish roots of Christianity. I really started to push the family into trying to learn about Jewishness. Naturally, they all pushed back.

Stephanie refused to accept she was Jewish. When she was fifteen, I told her I wanted her to have a Jewish wedding, and she screamed that she would not. About three years later, after I prayed countless prayers, Stephanie turned around and started to examine her Jewishness. It so happened that she was examining her faith at the same time, and her commitment to both seemed to grow and deepen together.

Now Jackie is going through a similar struggle. She feels that being Jewish, especially our attending a Messianic congregation, makes her too different from the others in her Christian school. One time she complained, “Why can’t we just go to a plain old American church like everyone else?”

Still, if there was another holocaust today, my children might be victims. They need to be prepared by understanding the richness and the suffering of the Jewish people.

If I had any advice to young Messianic Jewish couples, I’d say, “Show your children your faith *and* your heritage. Help them love God through learning about their people. Judaism is more than a religion. It is a people who exist because God called them into being. Accept the obligation, and you will be part of making both the Church and the Jewish people what God wants them to be.”

Jeanne and Jim’s daughter, Stephanie, shares her testimony on page 17.

Leshanah Tovah

The Jewish High Holy Days—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukot—occur next month, and now is the time to begin planning.

Jewish New Year cards, which can be found in most stationery stores, are an appropriate way to let your Jewish friends know you’re thinking of them. You can also extend special greetings during the holidays by saying “Happy New Year” or “Leshanah Tovah.”

But the most significant way to show your love to the Jewish people—now and all year long—is to pray for their salvation and for the work of reaching Jewish people for Messiah.

Right now your ABMJ/Chosen People missionaries are making preparations to hold special High Holy Day services. These services celebrate the biblical feasts by highlighting the Author of these feasts, the Messiah, and making known His message.

By sending a gift now you can have a part in this special outreach. Today, right now, a gift will reach many Jewish people who don’t come to Bible studies or meetings any other time of the year.

This year, say Happy New Year in a way that counts for eternity.

**ABMJ/CHOSEN PEOPLE MINISTRIES
BOX 2000, ORANGEBURG, NY 10962**

I promise to pray for ABMJ missionaries and for the salvation of the Jewish people.

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raising them, reaching them

Don't assume every Jewish heart is closed to the Messiah. You might be the one to flip that "closed" sign around to "open."



**The Sign Says
"Closed" But the
Door is Open**

I met Ron Hutchcraft, New York Area Director of Youth for Christ/Campus Life, at a recent banquet for the "Christian Overcomers," a ministry to handicapped adults. Ron happened to be the guest speaker, and my wife and I were eager to hear him as fans of his daily broadcast "A Word with You."

After Ron's challenging address, I made my way to the front to thank him for his ministry. I was pleasantly surprised to find that Ron was a subscriber to THE CHOSEN PEOPLE magazine and a supporter of Jewish missions. "My wife and I are first fruits people," he confessed, giving to Jewish missions early in the year every year. Ron even went as far as to say that had the Lord not placed him in a ministry to youth, his next choice would have been Jewish missions.

As a 21 year veteran of student and family work as the former Executive Vice President of Youth for Christ/USA and as one "who loveth our nation," the Jewish people, I extended an invitation to Ron to write for this special issue.

Editor

by Ron Hutchcraft

We were wall-to-wall in the barber shop ... everyone had apparently gotten the haircut urge at the same time. I could understand why the owner flipped the "open" sign over to "closed" even though closing time was a few minutes off. The barbers had more than enough customers to carry them past closing time!

Moments later, a well-dressed man appeared at the door, glanced at the sign, and frowned. He was already headed for his car when the owner stuck his head out the door and announced, "Hey, Charlie — we're not closed for *you!* Come on in!" Sure, the sign said "closed"... but, for the right person, the door was open.



It's not only stores that put out signs that say they're closed — people do it too. They send us signals that they do not want to hear any God-talk from us, especially if it has to do with Jesus. Many a Christian young person has daily contact with Jewish friends. They can talk about sports scores, science tests, tough teachers, school food, music . . . but never Jesus. Although no one comes out and says it, a Christian teenager assumes his Jewish friend has put out the "closed to Christ" sign.

But just like that overpopulated barber shop, the door *is* open for the right person.

An understanding and caring Christian can flip the "closed" sign over to "open."

Where Your Jewish Friends Are Coming From

The "right person" is willing to walk a mile in his Jewish friend's shoes. If he does, he will begin to understand how much they have in common . . . and how they are different. Armed with that understanding, a caring Christian can flip that "closed" sign over to "open."

Like most kids these days, Jewish teenagers are under heavy pressure to achieve. Centuries of fighting for racial survival have made achieving even more important to the Jewish family. The best way to guard against being persecuted is to be in a leadership position. Mom and Dad instill in their children a strong sense of specialness. You need that when your people have been attacked so viciously for so long.

Sometimes that sense of specialness can come across negatively. It may seem arrogant or self-centered — sometimes, it can turn into that.

But when you understand its roots in surviving persecution, the drive of a Jewish friend takes on a new look.

That pressure to achieve is a heavy burden for your Jewish friend. He is carrying the load of a lot of expectations . . . the bleachers are filled with family members cheering you on to be a winner. Failure can be devastating; your self-worth is dependent on doing well; depression is always nearby; "don't measure up" feelings can bring you down.

Added to that pressure, are the haunting insecurities that can go with being Jewish in a Gentile majority. History teaches you to expect rejection, not acceptance. Often, you're just not quite sure where you really stand with people.

So, like any other teenager, a Jewish friend needs someone who will love him unconditionally, accept him no matter how he acts, whether he succeeds or fails. That's what opens the door.

The Jewish religion has not changed much outwardly, but inside something has been lost. Passover and Bar Mitzvahs are still important, but many Jewish families are missing the "supernatural factor." The celebration and holy days are more like cultural glue than times with God in many cases. Today many of your Jewish friends are often more secular than their parents or grandparents.

That holiday encounter with David and his dad gave us a peek inside some common Jewish feelings about Christians. If you are going to be a Christian who gets past the "closed" sign, you must understand where your Jewish friends think *you* are coming from.

When you have grown up around "Christian," you understand the differences between Catholic, Protestant, Mormon, etc. When you grow up Jewish, Christian is usually one big category. That means that anything anyone has ever done in the name of Christianity may be connected with your faith.

Centuries ago, for example, the Roman Catholic Church wrote the word "deicide" into their Church doctrines — that is, the murder of God. They held the Jewish people responsible for the death of Christ. As a result of that, Jews have been attacked verbally and physically for being "Christ-killers." That's why David's father feared for his life

Jesus did not die because of Jewish sin or Roman sin . . . He died because of *all* our sins. In that sense, you and I killed Christ as much as anyone on earth.

during Christian holy seasons. Brutal persecution has been justified over the centuries on the basis of punishing the Jews for the death of Christ.

You may say, "I don't feel that way." If you understand the Bible, you can't. Christ gave up His life to pay for our sins. Jesus did not die because of Jewish sin or Roman sin . . . He died because of *all* our sins. In that sense, you and I killed Christ as much as anyone on earth.

The problem is that "Christians" have a pretty bad track record in their treatment of Jews. Many have expressed official anti-Semitism. Great persecutions have been carried out in the name of Christianity — Nazi Germany claimed to be a "Christian" nation.

Is it any wonder that your Jewish friend may wonder how you, as a

Christian, *really* feel about him? Sure, you are decent toward him, but that's what society dictates right now. It takes a lot of time, a lot of loving actions to demonstrate how much you value him. If he seems distant, aloof, "stuck up," realize that he has centuries of reasons for being guarded about Christian friendship.

A Jewish friend may think, too, that you are only interested in him because you want to "convert" him. Seeing this as a matter of two religions, he may interpret your witness as an implied putdown of his religion . . . a "mine is better than yours, so join mine" feeling. Remember, his religion is what has held the Jewish nation together for over 4,000 years . . . he cannot separate his Jewish religion from his Jewish identity. That's why a teenager who trusted Christ a few years ago asked right after that commitment, "Am I still Jewish?"

With the Messiah now in his life, he is, in fact, *more Jewish than ever*. But when you have thought for a lifetime that "Christian" is the opposite of "Jew," it's hard to open up to Christ.

Consequently, a Jewish teenager has little feeling of closeness to God. He has, like all of us, a gaping spiritual hole in his heart — one which he will try unsuccessfully to fill with grades, positions, friends, a good college, partying. If he meets someone who has a deep *personal* relationship with God, he will notice the difference. Many Jewish people are, in fact, curious about this Jesus they have been told so little about. It is risky for them to investigate Jesus — but they would like to. If they don't do it while they're young, they probably never will. If a Jewish teenager knows someone who is *really* Christian — and he feels safe trusting that person — he will want to check out Jesus.

That's what has happened with my daughter Lisa's good friend, Barb. After two years of band experiences, yearbook work, and



boyfriend talks together, Barb has reached out toward Lisa's faith. She told her on a recent drive across town, "I want you to tell me more about what you believe."

Where Your Jewish Friends Think You're Coming From

Something happened after our junior high son Doug took David on the church youth group outing. The only "religious" moment of the day was when the sponsor led a prayer for safe travel on the bus. But that was too much for David. "I'm Jewish, and we don't do that." It was pretty quiet after that — for months to come. David didn't call anymore.

Hannukah rolled around, and Doug asked, "Dad, what can I do to reach out to David?" We buzzed over to one of my favorite haunts, the local candy store. They were selling chocolate dreidels, candy versions of a popular Hannukah toy. It was clever and relatively inexpensive — we bought it, and dropped it off at David's house with a seasonal card. No big deal... at least to us.

The next day David and his dad were at our front door. David was there to be with Doug — for the first time in a long time — and his dad was there to say thanks. The dreidel was for David, but his *dad* expressed the appreciation of the whole family.

"You don't know how much this means," he said. "When I was a boy in Brooklyn, there were two times of the year when all of us Jewish boys didn't go out — Christmas and Easter." Now his eyes were growing misty. "Those were the Christian seasons... and they always beat us up. Now you come to us with this dreidel to remember Hannukah..." His voice trailed off. He didn't have to say anymore, but we understood how far a chocolate dreidel had gone towards building a bridge.

So much of where your Jewish friend thinks you, as a Christian, are coming from is based on *history*. His experiences with you as a friend are *today*. Your respect, acceptance, and

love will send him a message very different from the "Christian" rejection of history. Over a period of time, you will have the opportunity to redefine the word Christian for him. And, for the first time, he may be looking into the face of Jesus the Messiah.

Bridges You Can Cross to Your Jewish Friends

The Apostle Paul was a Jew who spent most of his life carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles. But his heart ached for God's chosen people to meet their Messiah. "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers... the people of Israel" (Romans 9:2, 3). Anyone who shares the heart of Jesus will ache for the Jews they know.

Paul said the good news about Jesus is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes — first for the Jew..." (Rom. 1:16). Because we think we see a "closed" sign on the heart of our Jewish friend, we often make the Gospel last for the Jew. He is the last one we tell.

If God has trusted you, as a Christian, with Jewish friends, you have a wonderful privilege and a great responsibility. Each Jewish person you know is one of His chosen people, a relative of Jesus, the "apple of God's eye" (Deut. 32:10). You are richer as a person for that friendship.

Your responsibility is to get close enough to love him for Christ's sake, to give him at least one clear look at Jesus in his lifetime. In order to do that, you will have to take advantage of *four bridges* into his life.

Bridge number one is *an understanding of how much we have in common*. As a Christian, you have based your life on a Jewish book (Luke is the only non-Jewish writer in the Bible), lived your life by Jewish laws, and staked your life on the Jewish Messiah. All the twelve disciples were Jews, along with

almost all of the early believers. You owe a tremendous personal debt to the Jews. If you explain that to your Jewish friend, he may be amazed — as our friends have been — that a Christian loves the same roots he does.

The second bridge to a Jewish friend is *a respect for Jewish heritage*. The simplest way to express that is to remember their holy days and celebrations in appropriate ways. Seasonal cards, holiday gifts, accepting an invitation to a bar or bat mitzvah, visiting a Jewish service, planting a tree in Israel in memory of a departed loved one... expressions such as these say, "I care about what you care about."

Because we think we see a "closed" sign on the heart of our Jewish friend, we often make the Gospel last for the Jew.

Thirdly, "closed" may become "open" if you maintain *an emphasis on relationship rather than religion*. As spiritual conversations develop with my daughter's Jewish friends, they invariably refer to her commitment as "your religion." She patiently, repeatedly stops them and reminds them that "it's not my religion — it's a personal relationship with Jesus." When a Jew says yes to Christ, he is not joining another religion or converting to Christianity. Jesus did not come to start another religion... He came to *complete* Judaism. He said, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come... to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

The fourth bridge is *a lifestyle of love*. That is the one witness against which *there is no argument*. A friend can dispute your beliefs, argue your

logic, even stump you with a question—but he cannot argue with your unconditional love. Paul has been a special burden on our Lisa's heart for the past three years. She has talked countless hours with him, explaining Christ and his claims to her dear Jewish friend. He has continued to live his self-destructive life of heavy drinking and partying. Paul is not happy — his suicide attempt was enough to tell us that. But whenever the bottom drops out of Paul's life, he appears on our doorstep. He knows where he can unload his deepest feelings, where he will be well fed and treated special... where he will be loved. When Paul meets his Messiah, it will be the love of a Christian friend that provided the bridge.

There are so many walls, so much ugly history, so much suspicion and misconception. You can't hurry a Jewish friend to Christ. Trust takes time... winning the right to be heard takes time... love takes time.

Paul told Lisa in their last long talk, "I think it's coming — but not quite yet." We may never know if Paul finally completes his Jewishness in Christ... until we see him in heaven. It's taking time, but he's getting close.

It's hard for a Jew to open up to Jesus. But without the love of one of Jesus' followers, it's *impossible*. Someone has to sow the seed... stimulate the curiosity... treat him as Jesus would.

Someone has to ignore the sign that says "closed." For the right person the door will be open. If you have read this far, you are probably the right person.

One of Jesus' "relatives" is close to you. Today that Jewish friend may open the door to you. One day he may open it again... to welcome in his Messiah.



Ron Hutchcraft's latest book *Peaceful Living in a Stressful World* is available through Thomas Nelson Publishers.





raising them, reaching them

TESTIMONY OF STEPHANIE REES

Me, Jewish? Not Me.

Stephanie Rees was a nice 15-year-old Christian girl who saw no need to mix Jesus up with anything Jewish. Then her mom, a Jewish believer, began to talk to her about how *she* was Jewish, too. "No way!" Stephanie yelled.

Stephanie Rees is the daughter of Jim and Jeanne Rees (see page nine).

So what makes me Jewish? Why do I use Jewish slang and celebrate the holidays and cry when I listen to good Hebrew music? Why do I recite the blessing on the Sabbath candles, and why do I hope to get married under the *chupah* (wedding canopy)?

Why does a nice girl like me, who considered herself a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant until she was seventeen, now call the Lord of her life Yeshua instead of Jesus? Why? Well, why not?

Easter Never Passover

Maybe the "why not" part of that question is the easiest to answer. I never considered myself Jewish for a lot of reasons. Though Mom was Jewish, Dad was Gentile. We never celebrated Hanukkah and always celebrated Christmas; we had Easter every year but never Passover. I never considered myself Jewish because, basically, I had no way of knowing I *was* Jewish.

Actually, it was a pretty nice way for a ten-year-old to be—just like everyone else.

Then suddenly Mom got saved and Dad recommitted his life to the Lord, and we started to go to an evangelical church. They'd bring my sister Jackie and me to church with them every week, but I didn't really mind it so much.

One day I confided to my mom, "I think I'm half-saved."

I can still see my mother when she replied (my mother never says anything with just words, she talks with her hands and eyes and voice), "Half-saved?" emphasizing each word to show they couldn't possibly go together. "Stephanie, you can't be half-saved. It's like being pregnant. Have

One day I confided to my mom, "I think I'm half-saved." "Half-saved?" my mom replied. "Stephanie, you can't be half-saved. It's like being pregnant. Have you ever seen a woman half-pregnant? You either are or you aren't."

you ever seen a woman half-pregnant? You either are or you aren't"

A few weeks later we had a speaker at church and he really impressed me. I went forward that evening to accept the Lord, and though I acknowledged my sins and accepted His death for them, I didn't really feel saved. I knew that feelings didn't matter, but I expected something more from God.

A couple of weeks later, alone in my

room, I had a deeper encounter with God, one that put everything in place. My life turned around. I was witnessing to all the kids in my fifth grade class and led a number of them to the Lord.

Loved Church

Things continued like that for awhile. I loved church and witnessing and life in general. Then we moved to Westchester. It was only about an hour away from where I had always lived, but it was a big move for me. Here I was in a new school and a new neighborhood with all new kids.

To top it off, something had happened to my mother—she started talking a lot about being Jewish. And she was always talking to me about how I was Jewish, too. Of course both my folks strongly influenced me as Christians and were obviously concerned for my spiritual growth. But it was the Jewish stuff I noticed most because it just didn't seem relevant to my life.

I mean I loved *Fiddler on the Roof* and I enjoyed the Messianic music Mom started singing, but me, *Jewish*? No, not me. I was just like all the kids in my church, and I didn't want to be a Jew.

Of course, now I can look back and see what was happening a lot more clearly. Mom's Jewish heritage was awakening in her, especially as she saw more and more links between her Orthodox Jewish upbringing and her growing faith in Messiah. It was spilling

continued on following page

continued from previous page

over into every part of her life, and she naturally wanted to share it with Dad and Jackie and me.

But Mom, never exactly subdued, was so intense about what was happening to her that the rest of us were absolutely overwhelmed. This brought a lot of friction and fights, sometimes over the silliest things. Like one time she mentioned how much she'd like me to have a Jewish wedding.

I had never been to a Jewish wedding and didn't really understand what made one wedding Jewish and another non-Jewish, but I *knew* I didn't want one.

Ready to Do Battle

"No way!" I yelled. I was really ready to do battle over this. "You cannot make me. I will not have a Jewish wedding. I want a wedding like everyone else's."

It was beside the point that I was only fifteen, that I was not dating anyone, and that marriage was still just a young girl's fantasy.

The wedding fight was only one of a lot of little things that happened between us. I suppose I was hostile for a lot of reasons, including the fact that Mom was so sure and open about her Jewishness. It was pretty foreign to my way of thinking, and with all the other teen questions going on inside of me, I didn't want to be confused about being Jewish.

For the next few years I went on my way. I had as much Christianity as I needed, and despite my mother's attempts, I saw no need to mix Jesus up with anything Jewish.

Lost Gung-ho Fervor

Maybe that says a lot about where I was spiritually, too. I had lost the gung-ho fervor, but I hadn't cast Jesus aside. I went to church and youth group, but there was a kind of numbness to it all.

Then a couple of things happened. First, I started going to a monthly Beth Sar Shalom Bible study Sam Nadler was teaching. Second, I attended a

Messianic Jewish retreat with my mother and saw my first Jewish wedding.

It was a simple ceremony but I was really impressed. At one point I thought, "This isn't so bad. It's different, but somehow special."

I'm not sure if that was a turning point, but I know that something stirred in me that day that I'd never been aware of before.



The whole Bible made so much more sense when I put it into a Jewish context. I was intrigued by what I was learning, interested in what I was seeing about God.

I started to ask questions about the Jewish holidays. How were they celebrated? What did they teach about Messiah? Why had God initiated each of them? What was biblical about them? What was traditional? The more I asked, the more there was to ask. I discovered that most of my answers came not only from my mother and Sam Nadler, but from Scripture.

The whole Bible made so much more sense when I put it into a Jewish context. The Old Testament, all those lists and laws that had bored me before, suddenly fit together with the New Testament.

I was intrigued by what I was learning, interested in what I was seeing about God, and for the first time I recognized something inside of me as

Jewish. Even more than that, I knew I belonged to the Jewish people.

For the past four years I've thrown myself into learning more about the heritage of my people. Yes, now I know they are *my* people. What makes me Jewish? Is it the blood from my mother or the spark from within? Maybe both.

Drawn Me Closer

I know that as I've searched out this heritage, it's drawn me closer to the Jewish Messiah. Where I once muttered I was a Protestant or a Christian (and in both cases what I *really* meant was that I wasn't Jewish), I now refer to myself as a Jewish believer or a Messianic Jew.

What does that mean? It means I'm a Jewish person, by birth and ancestry, who has accepted the Jewish Messiah personally. I believe He died for my sins and was raised from that death into a life where I can join Him.

Accepting my Jewish identity has helped me love and know the Messiah better. Knowing Messiah has helped me love and know my people better, for He is central to their being and their history. He is the One who fulfills the holidays they celebrate and the Bible they read.

Yes, sometimes I seem to have gone overboard. Sometimes I probably *do* go overboard. But it's only because this new-found heritage is so special to me.

A Sense of Identity

It gives me a sense of identity—as a believer I know I fit into the body and Church of God and as a Jew I am fulfilled in the Messiah. For me, being both Jewish and a believer were choices I had to make. I could have ignored Messiah's death and lived without God. I could have ignored my Jewishness and lived without something that has given my life and my faith new meaning.

As for the future, well, only God knows. But in His good time, there's one special thing I'm looking forward to . . . a lovely Jewish wedding.

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