
Shalom!

How to Approach Our Jewish Friends with the Gospel

Clifford Goldstein

There's an old Jewish saying to the effect that one who doesn't give his son an education, "raises a thief." This idea reflects the centuries-old emphasis that Jews have placed on education, which is why they continue to be one of the mostly highly educated groups in the world. Therefore, on many college and university campuses, one is likely to find lots of Jews.

The question, then, is, How do we witness to them?

As Adventists, we should have more success in reaching Jews than any other denomination has had. The Sabbath, the sanctuary, the health message, our unique eschatology, all give us special advantages. After all, we have always considered ourselves "spiritual Jews," too. We therefore should be able to effectively reach Jewish people. There are, however, a few important guidelines that need to be considered before a person attempts to witness to the Jews. This article outlines them.

Reaching Out

First of all, you don't have to be Jewish to reach Jews. Most Jews in the Adventist Church today were brought in by non-Jews. It was a Hungarian immigrant who first reached me. Another Jew was reached by a South American who barely spoke English. F. C. Gilbert, one of the pioneers in the Jewish work in North America, was reached by an Adventist family in New England. J. M. Hoffman, another leader, was reached by a black woman.

Indeed, to reach Jews you don't have to be Jewish; in fact, in many ways, it's an advantage not to be, simply because a Jew is less likely to be hostile to a non-Jew who

believes in Jesus than to a Jew who believes in Him.

Nevertheless, in witnessing to Jews, you must understand that many Jewish people are secular, believing neither in the Bible, or inspiration, or in many cases even God. This must be kept in mind when talking to them. Don't assume that they all know Hebrew, have the torah memorized, keep the Sabbath, and don't eat unclean foods (I grew up on ham sandwiches, fried shrimp, and squid). You can't lead them to believe in Jesus if they don't even believe in Moses. More than one Adventist has heard these words from Jewish friends, "Why, you're a better Jew than I am." And though in recent years many Jews have been turning back to their faith, especially among the young, college-aged ones on public college campuses, your Jewish contacts will tend to be secular, agnostic, even atheist.

Whatever the person's spiritual inclinations, you should show an interest in Jews and Jewish customs. Ask them questions, even if they know nothing. This will disarm prejudice, showing that you are really interested in them. If they happen to be religious, you can learn things that might enrich your faith.

It would be great if you could read some Jewish literature in order to learn what the Jews are interested in.

Never initiate a religious conversation with a Jewish friend (he will think you are trying to convert him) and, unless he brings up the subject, never talk about religion in front of his family or friends. Years ago, a young Jewish woman who had taken a Jewish Bible course from the Adventists had

written to request baptism. Shortly thereafter an Adventist minister came knocking on the door. When the mother (who knew nothing about her daughter's intentions) opened the door, the first thing the minister said was, "You have no idea how excited I am that your daughter wants to be baptized into the Adventist Church!" He probably had no idea how "excited" the mother was too. If, when talking to a Jewish friend, the subject of religion comes up, don't appear preachy. Be humble and be willing to listen to his views, no matter what they may be. Say something like, "Well, I certainly respect your views, even if I see things a bit differently." Don't argue with them. Jews are experts at debating.

Tact and Sympathy

If you get on the topic of Jesus, you must be especially tactful. Avoid emphatic statements like, "Jesus is the Messiah." Instead, humbly, meekly, stress that it is your belief from study, prayer, and experience that Jesus fulfills the prophecies concerning the Hebrew Messiah.

Don't make statement like "You Jews" or "That Jewess," which can be seen as derogatory, depending on the tone of your voice. Phrases like "the Jewish people" or "the Jewish man" are much safer. Never say "He jewed the man down." Also, avoid Jewish jokes and stereotypes, such as "the rich Jews." First of all, many Jews are not rich, and second, such stereotypes have tended to lead toward persecution.

One point is crucial. Show sympathy for the sufferings of Jews. Years ago, in an Adventist church in Michigan, I gave a talk about work for the Jews. Afterward an

older church member came up to me and said, "You know, I feel sorry for what you Jews have suffered—but you brought it all upon yourselves!"

You must be sensitive to Jewish history. You can't begin to understand the modern Jew or where he is coming from, no matter how secular he is, unless you understand how he relates to his past, especially the seminal event in Jewish history: the Holocaust.

Inevitably, if your friend is a secular Jew, he will ask the question: "Where was God during the Holocaust?" Though there is no easy answer to this question, a number of years ago, in the magazine I edit for the Jews, I wrote an article titled, "The Real Story of the Jews." What I did was turn the tables on the whole argument, stressing that it was only a miracle of God that there were any Jews around for Hitler to kill. "According to all historical, cultural, social, and military theories," I wrote, "the Jews should have vanished thousands of years ago, nothing remaining but a few cracked tablets unearthed out of the desert sands." I tried to explain that the mere existence of the Jews, after being driven from their nation twice, provided one of the strongest evidences of the existence of God. If you believe it, say that every Jew you meet increases your faith in God and the promises of the Bible.

A History of Survival

For centuries, the rabbis taught that 613 commandments were binding upon the Jews. After the Holocaust, philosopher Emil Fackenheim had added the 614th: survival. Whether it is a devout orthodox Jew stoning cars that drive through his Jerusalem neighborhood on Sabbath, or a New York Yuppie Jew shucking oysters in a Manhattan disco on Yom Kippur, all Jews have solemnly vowed in their hearts to never again allow themselves to be victims of genocide. "Failure to appreciate fully

the intensity of this Jewish conviction," wrote Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, "portends failure to understand either the contemporary Jew or his faith."

Directly linked to the Holocaust is the nation of Israel. Jewish myopia comes not from pride, not from hatred of the Arabs, nor from some pan-Zionist conspiracy. Instead, Jews help Israel because, with the stench of six million dead, they don't want to see millions more killed, which is what would happen if Israel lost a war.

After centuries of wandering, exile, and persecution, culminating in the Holocaust, Jews see in Israel a symbol of their determination not only to survive, but to survive as Jews and masters of their own fate instead of obsequious vassals trembling under the whims of whichever despot has decided to oppress them. Thus, because Jews see Israel as a symbol of survival, they see animosity toward Israel as animosity toward them. Whether or not this sentiment is justifiable is not important. What matters is that here is a soul to reach for Jesus. You're not there to win a political argument but to show the love of Jesus. For this reason, no matter how you feel about the Jews on the West Bank, or the settlement of Soviets Jews there, don't criticize Israel or its leaders. This doesn't mean giving knee-jerk support to everything Israel does. It simply means that this is a very sensitive area, and it would be better to say nothing at all than to alienate Jews by speaking harshly about Israel or its policies.

It's important to understand, too, that the Jew never wants to forsake his identity. It's a mystery, hard to fathom, but after thousands of years, Jews, whether devout or secular, have some sort of "mystical" (for lack of a better word) attachment to their Jewish identity. They don't want to lose it, ever. One time, at a camp meeting, after I gave my testimony, a dear old woman, meaning well, came up to me, shook my hand, and

said: "Congratulations on becoming a Gentile!"

Take the opposite approach, explaining that if a Jewish person accepts Jesus, he is strengthening his Jewish identity, not weakening it. I once got in an argument with a Jew who told me that because I believed in Jesus I was no longer Jewish. "Well," I answered, "if Jesus wasn't the Messiah then I suppose you're right—I'm not a Jew. But if He is the Jewish Messiah, and I believe in Him, who then is the real Jew?"

In seminars I give on witnessing to Jews, I often warn about certain buzz words, such as "convert" (use instead, *a new heart*), "Christ" (say *Messiah* or *Yeshua*), "cross" (*place of atonement*), "Saviour" (*Redeemer*), etc. Avoid as much as possible the topic of the Trinity, unless you are really prepared biblically.

One of the greatest barriers to Jewish acceptance of Jesus has been the church's persecution of the Jews. Thousands have faced forced conversions or death. Jews have had the good news preached to them for centuries, often with a sword hung over their head. More than any other group of people, Jews need to see the good news lived in the life of Christians, more than they need to hear it preached to them. This point can't be stressed enough. Don't talk to your Jewish friend about love—live it.

For years, I had been bitter against Christianity for this very reason, even to the point of heckling an itinerant minister who preached on the campus lawn at the University of Florida. Later, while living in Israel, I met a group of Christians who showed me unconditional love, so much that I finally had to admit that I couldn't justifiably judge all of Christianity by the works of some barbarians, not when there were Christians like these around.

This is why the book of Daniel is such a good place to begin study

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least in part by the recognition and support of their community) in their desire and ability to serve the church and the wider world with their varied gifts.

The ordination of women is a step toward wholeness and justice in a church bearing witness to a God who has both male and female qualities. With a ministry including both men and women, the church will be expressing God-given ideals of equality and gender-inclusiveness. As a result, men and women of the world will be attracted to join us. The history of the ordination of women in other Christian communions suggests that it is bad management of the ordination decision rather than the decision itself that creates tensions in churches. The church's maturity and commitment to unity are the most significant factors in determining the success or failure of the decision.

whatever services and exercise whatever roles the church deems necessary to fulfil its mission.

In ordaining women, the church would be moving away from scriptural ideals and therefore away from a position where God can use it effectively. To ordain women is to encourage the erosion of other convictions that may also be seen as culturally determined like the distinction between clean and unclean meats, the sanctity of marriage, even the Sabbath. The ordination of women will open the way for the acceptance of unbiblical positions on other questionable issues like divorce and homosexuality. The history of women's ordination suggests that ordaining women has created disunity and schism in those churches that have adopted the practice.

Conclusion

Now the questions are all out and we are faced with continuing decisions relating to all of them. In 1989, the church's Annual Council of the General Conference Committee considered the subject of women's ordination again. To avoid the dangers of "disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the church," the world representatives decided not to recommend the ordination of women to the General Conference session due to meet in July 1990. Instead, the committee allowed that theologically trained women, ordained as elders and authorized by their divisions, might perform in their own churches all the tasks performed by ordained ministers. It recommended that "those who have, without regard to gender, been recognized as commissioned ministers or licensed ministers may perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned." The Annual Council also recorded a list of "thirty significant concerns" on matters other than ordination expressed by women at the 1989 meeting of the Role of Women Commission.

These issues are complex; the discussion is likely to continue. The dilemma it raises challenges all Seventh-day Adventists to know their God, their church, and themselves.

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When the early Christian church also faced a divisive issue without the benefit of a clear scriptural directive, the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) reached a decision, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that allowed the gospel to forcefully move forward. God's Holy Spirit will again guide in resolving this dilemma and help us carry out together the global mission Christ entrusted to all His followers. — *The Editors*

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with Jews, if they agree. First, it can give them the intellectual evidence that God exists because of the way the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 have been fulfilled. Daniel 7, in my case, was especially powerful, for the study of the identity of the little horn helped answer many questions I had about Christianity. "If this is the religion of God, why then did they persecute the Jews?" Once I studied those prophecies, however, things became much clearer to me. It really helped me to understand that this persecution was from a power that God specifically condemns. Then,

when I studied the book of Revelation, and saw this same power depicted in the "Christian" Bible, the effect was powerful.

Use Publications

As you begin to study with Jewish people, don't be quick to give them Ellen White's books. While we love her writings, there are concepts and statements in them that Jews may misunderstand

in their initial contacts with us. Later you will find opportunities to share her insight with them.

Other literature, however, is available. *Shabbat Shalom* is the church's outreach magazine for the Jews. Coming out quarterly, this journal is designed to present articles on topics in which Jews are interested, and then, as much as possible, in a way not to offend them, give the principles of truth. It's a low-key approach, but it seems to be working, because the Jews are reading it. If you have a Jewish friend who is willing to listen, talk, and exchange ideas, then

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this magazine is perfect. If you don't feel that your Jewish friends are ready for it, you could order it for yourself, and then give them individual articles that you might think they would enjoy. (To order: Send \$4.95 to *Shabbat Shalom*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring MD 20904.) Also, at this same address, you can request information about a packet, including tapes, on "How to Witness to Jews."

When approaching your Jewish friends, remember that they can be won to Jesus just like anyone else. The Holy Spirit is wooing them too. But it is important to be aware of their sensitivities. If you can learn how not to offend them, then you will have great opportunities. Patience, tact, sensitivity, and love will do more for them than all the arguments and proof texts combined.

Jewish people can be—and are being won—to various Christian denominations. Let's win them to the best.

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Creationists . . .

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2. "Evolution is a change in the genetic composition of populations." T. Dobzhansky, *Genetics and the Origin of Species*, 3rd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 16.

3. E.g., see E. G. Zimmerman, "Temporal Genetic Variation in a Population of the Pocket Gopher, *Geomys Bursarius*," *Genetica* 76:153-159 (1988).

4. G. G. L. Miklos and B. John, "From Genome to Phenotype", pp. 263-282 in Campbell and Day, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 263-282.

5. E.g., F. J. Ayala, *Molecular Evolution* (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer, 1976).

6. "It is doubtful if anyone would have ever felt any need to resist the notion of evolution if all it implied was that the exact chemical constitution of haemoglobin gradually changed over the ages." C. H. Waddington, *The Evolution of an Evolutionist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1975), p. iv.

7. C. A. Lemen and P. W. Freeman, "The Genus: A Macro-evolutionary Problem," *Evolution* 38:1219-1237, (1984).

8. E.g., W. Arthur, *Mechanisms of Morphological Evolution* (New York: Wiley, 1984).

9. R. K. Wayne, "Cranial Morphology of Domestic and Wild Canids: The Influence of Development on Morphological Change," *Evolution* 40:243-261, (1986).

10. E. Mayr, *Populations, Species, and Evolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1970). See also L. P. Lester and R. G. Bohlin, *The Natural Limits to Biological Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

11. One relatively recent idea is the possibility of mutations being non-random (e.g., see J. Cairns, J. Overbaugh, and S. Miller, "The Origin of Mutants," *Nature* 335:142-145 [1988]). Another recent idea is the possibility of trans-specific gene transfer (e.g., see L. Jeppson, "A Possible Mechanism in Convergent Evolution," *Paleobiology* 12:80-88 (1986).

12. S. Ohno, *Evolution by Gene Duplication* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1970).

13. G. Z. Opadia-Kaddima, "How the Slot Machine Led Biologists Astray," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 124:127-135 (1987).

14. E.g., see chapter 5 in Lester and Bohlin, *op. cit.*

15. E.g., "The fossil record contains so many morphological gaps between what might be regarded as ancestral and descendant species that it gives the impression of discontinuity rather than evolutionary continuity." A. Hoffman, *Arguments on Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 8. See also Chapter 8 in M. Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1985).

16. N. Eldredge and S. J. Gould, "Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism," in T. J. M. Schopf, ed., *Models of Paleobiology* (San Francisco, CA: Freeman, Cooper & Co., 1972), pp. 82-115.

17. A statement to this effect, made by an author who disagrees with my conclusions, can be found in the following source: E. C. Olson, "The Problem of Missing Links: Today and Yesterday," *Quarterly Review of Biology* 56: 446 (1981). The possibility of large-scale mutations seems necessary if evolution is true, but both experimental evidence and our present understanding of genetic mechanisms seem to preclude such a possibility.

18. M. Denton, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-192.

19. E.g., A. Hoffman, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

20. Exodus 20:11; see also Genesis 1, 2 and Exodus 31:17.

21. Isaiah 65:45; Matthew 10:29; Romans 8:20-22; Revelation 20:14; 21:4.

22. F. Van Dyke, "Theological Problems in Theistic Evolution," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 39:11-18 (1986).

23. Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 5:12; 8:19-23.

24. G. Z. Opadia-Kaddima, *op. cit.*

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