

Working Better Together in Germany

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Introduction

Touching the lives of Jewish people in Germany with the Messiah in the last 25 years has been challenging, once in a while frustrating but always rewarding. There are usually no quick results in Jewish missions but hopefully lasting fruit.

Since spiritual growth and maturity is not measurable by human categories, we can rest in the knowledge: what we labored without pride and success-obsession will be valued according to His measurements.

My following short analysis is a reflection on some of the issues I face in my specific ministry context. Hopefully some of the aspects may be helpful to spark strategic considerations for common ministry goals in Germany.

FLASHBACK

"Russian Rush" - Renewed Jewish life in Germany

The Jewish Synagogues in Germany with a membership of about 15.000 in 1950 (1989: 30.000 Today: 110.000) were challenged in the years 1990-2004 by the influx of about 220.000 Jews leaving the former Soviet Union to arrive for a better and safer life in Germany.

80.000 Jewish people were eventually integrated as "religious" Jews into the about 108 mostly orthodox Synagogues. The challenges for the Jewish community concerning those newcomers were threefold:

Cultural

sound of the new language

obstacle of the historically caused ambivalent feelings in Germany about "the Russians"

Religious

determination of true halachic Jews among the many mixed marriage background families

teaching of the ABC of Jewish life and identity

Economical

85% of the Russian Jewish immigrants live on social welfare since they couldn't be integrated in society due to their advanced age

Challenges for Jewish believers in Jesus

We as EDI - Evangeliumsdienst für Israel (Gospel Ministry to Israel), an independent ministry within the Lutheran Church of Wuerttemberg/Stuttgart - were supporting a variety of projects of Messianic Believers and Arab speaking Christians in Israel since 1971. Around 1992 we were challenged by a historical turnaround: God was sending a notable number of his chosen people into the country that previously murdered more than 6.000.000 of them. In Germany there are today 800% more Jewish people than 1950, about 250.000. The seventh largest Diaspora group worldwide.

Light to the Nations

Obviously the time of the Diaspora has not come to an end yet.

That is supported by the fact that with those Russian Jewish immigrants there also came some Jewish believers in Jesus, who began prophetically challenging their own people on German soil with the claim of Messiah to be the saviour of his people Israel.

Furthermore they also became a light to the German nation itself, fulfilling Isaiah's call: "*It is not enough that you are merely my servant to raise up the tribes of Ya'akov and restore the offspring of Isra'el. I will also make you a light to the nations, so my salvation can spread to the ends of the earth*" (Isaiah 49:6).¹

Rough Reactions

It takes light to make darkness visible. Ephesians 5:13 states: "But everything exposed to the light is revealed clearly for what it is."

The Synagogue - i.e. the community of religious Jewish people in Germany² rejected the mission of Jewish believers in Jesus to "turn Jews to Christianity". "After being robbed of our bodies during the Shoa", they argued, "we are now robbed of our souls." *Judenmission* ("evangelizing Jews") has been viewed as a destruction of Jewish identity and life, as a second holocaust. An argument that weighs heavy in the post-Shoa context of Germany and has the potential of frightening everyone. The rabbis were in real fear that their congregations might be robbed of members they just acquired. They saw Jewish life at stake. *Judenmission* for them was a No-go.

The **Protestant Church** in Germany ("Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland" - EKD) is the umbrella organization of mostly Lutheran and Reformed Churches in the different federal states of Germany. The EKD represents publically what Protestants in Germany believe in and stand for and relates directly to the German federal government in Berlin.

The EKD and many church bodies in the different states in Germany supported the Synagogue in their view: *Judenmission* in a post-Shoa Germany is forbidden. No evangelism among Jews. They stick to a dualistic and schismatic religious worldview that categorises Judaism and Christianity into two separate entities. This view is supported by Two-Covenant theology.³

FACING CURRENT CHALLENGES

Today, after 25 years, the arguments against *Judenmission* have not changed. The Synagogue and the Church support each other in their view that there is a "natural" existence of two religions, Judaism and Christianity. The existence of Messianic Judaism or *Jesus Judaism*⁴ doesn't fit their dualistic religious view.

¹The challenge for Jewish believers in Jesus serving in the diaspora is resounding in Acts 13:47: "*For that is what ADONAI has ordered us to do: 'I have set you as a light for the Goyim, to be for deliverance to the ends of the earth.'*" Messianic Jews and congregation have been supported by EDI and some other members of LCJE working in Germany.

²They are represented by the "Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland"; www.zentralratjuden.de

³http://www.edi-online.de/phocadownload/Kirchentag_2015/10_DEKT_2014_Praesidium_Beschluss_Judenmission.pdf;
http://www.edi-online.de/phocadownload/Kirchentag_2015/02_Erklaerungen_ELKWUE_1988_1992_2000.pdf

⁴ This term I have coined anew in this paper may be more concise and challenging than *Messianic Judaism*.

What can we do as LCJE organisations?

Relax spiritually

God is in control. He can and will take the "stoniness" (Stern) away from his people Israel, individually and as a whole nation. That "hardening of heart" led some of them to a self-mandated enslavement to the tradition of the sages of Judaism. He knows when and how he will "lift the veil". Since God is in control we can trust him. We shouldn't rush and run but rather rest and reorientate. We should keep on praying for a wise understanding of His ways and open eyes for open doors.

Relate openly

In Germany we need to relate to the **Protestant Church** in Germany. They are aware of Jesus Judaism and have started to discuss issues with them. Since the "official church" is the key connection to the synagogue, we need to continue explaining:

1. That the witness of Jesus the Messiah to Jewish people is one of the foremost duties of Jesus Judaism and
2. That Jesus Judaism does not convert Jews into Christians
3. That Christians will support Jewish believers in Jesus in their task in various ways.

In relation to the **Synagogue** - if we will get into contact with them - we need to explain that we do not **reject** Judaism - neither theologically nor existentially - but rather **respect**, learning to understand and value Judaism as a means by what God has been preserving his chosen people for centuries, especially throughout their painful way throughout Europe. We even may campaign for Jesus Judaism to be valued as one of the denominations within Judaism. Our attitude should be not to "polarize to anger" but to "provoke to jealousy".

In relation to **Jesus Judaism** and their congregations we need to value their potential - not only to reach out to the larger Jewish community - but also to be the link between the Synagogue and the Protestant Church. The *trialogue* between Synagogue, Jesus Judaism and the Protestant Church should be encouraged.

In addition to that: believers of the war-generation and of the first and second post-war-generation find peace in solving their unresolved family history regarding Jewish people during the Holocaust by talking and praying with a Messianic Jew. By this true reconciliation can take place!

I hope and pray there will be a time coming where Jewish believers in Jesus and the Synagogue will be involved in a "inner-Jewish dialogue" about the Messiah Jesus of Nazareth. Without the participation of the Church. Like in the very beginning of the "Jesus movement" when there were only synagogues and yet no "churches".

Jewish tourists in Germany

The number of Israeli tourists to Berlin is at the highest rate among all tourists visiting this city. The Israeli families visiting the Black Forest is ever increasing in recent years.⁵

What could we in Germany give them in addition to our attractive countryside and excellent shopping deals? There must be more than just cheap "Milky Pudding".

How can we reach them with the love of their Messiah Jesus?

⁵<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4351449,00.html>; <http://www.badische-zeitung.de/ortenaubereich/schwarzwald-boomt-bei-urlaubern-aus-israel--78289897.html>;