

Thoughts on Discipleship Introducing the CHAIM Discipleship Guide - LCJE-NA 2000
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It is not my purpose in this segment to give a full missiological paper on discipling new Jewish believers. Rather, I will present to you some of my concerns and observations, then I will give you an overview of the discipleship guide I have written, and then I will open the floor for discussion so that we can become better aware of what others have done and what are the needs that are not being met.

Jesus said: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 24:18-20). From the beginning Jesus' Great Commission charged the New Covenant Community to carry out both evangelism *and* discipleship. In fact, one could argue that discipleship was the very *essence* of the charge. Evangelism was simply the first part of the discipleship process. How much this differs from the "altar call" mentality of much of our evangelism today which primarily looks for a "decision to accept Messiah" and often essentially ends there!

I suspect you agree with the premise that discipleship is not an option – it is an imperative. We here also all realize that discipling someone from a Jewish background is different from discipling someone from a Gentile background – read the account from Moishe Rosen in my introduction should you have any lingering doubts!

Any missionary will tell you that there are unique issues that need to be dealt with when individuals from the group he is reaching are discipled. If a culture has a problem with overt idolatry, issues related to that sin will need to be addressed. The Holy Spirit recognized this and inspired Paul to write concerning food sacrificed to idols¹. Likewise, the books of Romans, Hebrews and Galatians all deal very specifically with issues pertaining to discipleship of especially Jewish, but also Gentile, Christians in that day, and our day as well.

What are the central concerns which must be addressed when it comes to discipling new Jewish believers in Jesus? What cultural pressures will come upon a new Jewish Christian, from both the unbelieving community and the believing community?

Jews who come to faith in Jesus come from a different culture than that of the North American Gentile world². The Willowbank Report on Gospel and Culture, put out by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, defines culture as follows:

"Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful, and normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.), and of institutions that express these beliefs, values, and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, families, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.), which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, and continuity."³

Jewish people, though diverse, have different beliefs, holidays, values, musical styles, customs, foods, institutions, vocabulary, etc. Jewish identity directly relates to the idea of believing in Jesus. Simply put, a Jew cannot believe in Jesus and still be Jewish, according to the common Jewish understanding. This means, of course, that there are tremendous pressures placed upon the new Jewish believers to do one of four things. First, there is the temptation to return to Judaism and to reject New Covenant faith. Second, a new Jewish believer may reject all vestiges of Jewish identity and become culturally assimilated into the Gentile church world. Third, he may adopt a syncretistic form of Messianic expression which seeks to satisfy Jewish concerns through keeping aspects of Jewish expression not compatible with a New Covenant faith. Fourth, he may be tempted to become chauvinistically Jewish, and even anti-Gentile, in an attempt to prove to the Jewish world that he has not become a Gentile.

This situation has not been helped by the fact that the church, by and large, has failed to adequately address the issue of how a Jewish believer should maintain a Jewish cultural identity and also be faithful to the New Covenant faith. In fact, the church has often failed to deal with Jewish culture and has sometimes sought to repress it. Many times Jewish believers have been required to give up being Jewish altogether. How unfortunate that at one time Jewish Christians were required to swear: "I renounce absolutely everything Jewish, every law, rite and custom".⁴ We do not formally require such an oath today, but often in effect we enforce it. I am aware of a new Jewish believer who was informed by his church elders that he could no longer celebrate any Jewish holidays in his home now that he is a Christian. This brother dutifully obeyed, even though his church celebrated Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and other such extra-biblical holidays! Imagine how you would have felt if you had been asked to give up Christmas, Easter, the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving as a brand new believer in Christ. You may have been willing to do it, but you probably wouldn't have liked it. You would have alienated your family, brought unnecessary conflicts to your home, and erected obstacles to your witness.

This matter is extremely important if we consider the prime cultural value within the Jewish community: the preservation of the community. Whatever being Jewish may be, the overwhelming majority of Jewish people will affirm "I was born a Jew, I'll die a Jew." The external pressures on the Jewish people have necessitated a strong commitment to Jewish survival, and becoming a Christian is seen as a threat to that survival. A Jew who believes in Jesus is considered a "meshummad," one who has destroyed himself spiritually. He is viewed as being a traitor to the Jewish community and to the six million Jews who died for their heritage. In this context you must see how important it is for Jewish believers to maintain a Jewish identity. Belief in Jesus must be presented at least as no threat to Jewish survival. Better still if it were to be seen as preserving Jewish identity!

Clearly there are aspects of Jewish cultural and religious life which are simply incompatible with New Covenant Faith, just as there are elements of Western culture and church tradition which are also incompatible, though we hate to admit it. Yet, cultures needn't be destroyed – they can be recycled and brought into submission to the Messiah. This must be considered when discipling the new Jewish believer. Discipleship means submitting all areas of life to the Lordship of Jesus, including one's personal and cultural identity. Discipleship doesn't destroy personal and cultural identity – it reshapes one's identity to conform to the image of Messiah.

The CHAIM Discipleship Guide

If you take a look at the guide I have been making available to pastors I would like to highlight several sections.

First of all, pastors often have little understanding that there are any special needs or concerns that Jewish believers may have. I was granted permission to reprint a little of Moishe Rosen's experience in order to give a memorable example of some of the misunderstanding a new Jewish believer may have. The first time I read this I very literally fell on the floor laughing uncontrollably, an experience I must confess I have several times a year. I seem to be able to achieve this without even going to Toronto, and while retaining Presbyterian ordination!

I next addressed the need for special attention to discipleship, which I essentially reiterated in the first part of this brief presentation.

Next I addressed the legitimacy of a Jewish believer maintaining a distinctly Jewish life-style. Understand that I needed to approach this from the point of view of a theology that has some very specific understandings about the nature of New Covenant worship. Presbyterian and Reformed folk have something called the regulative principle of worship. It came about in the historical setting of the Reformation. After the true doctrine of salvation through faith alone had been established, it was understood that there was a need to go further in bringing back the church to its biblical basis. The matter of worship needed to be addressed. There were clearly elements in the Roman Catholic church which were idolatrous, such as worshiping the bread of communion, called the "adoration of the host." The issue of what constitutes acceptable worship needed to be addressed. I believe we still need to consider these things in our Jewish ministry circles, by the way, and too little serious critical thought has been done in this area. Out of the concern for reforming New Covenant worship came two basic solutions: the Lutheran version of the Regulative Principle, and the Reformed version of the Regulative Principle. The Lutheran view says that whatever is not forbidden by scripture is allowed in worship. The Reformed view says that whatever is not expressly commanded by scripture is not allowed in worship. Let me give an example. Can one light candles as a ritual part of a worship service? Lutherans say that nothing forbids it. Reformed say that nothing commands it, so we must not bind worshipers to participate in something God has not commanded them to do. Now, I don't want to argue here the relative merits of these two expressions. I don't believe either adequately answers all the questions that need to be answered. But you can begin to see the problem as far as a Jewish believer is concerned. What do you do with Mosaic practices? Some, such as animal sacrifice, would clearly be ruled out under the New Covenant because the final sacrifice has come. This is the teaching of the Book of Hebrews. Others, such as the singing of Psalms, are mentioned again in the New Covenant scriptures. But there is a whole area in between to address, such as kosher laws, holidays, etc. You can read the section in the discipleship Guide to see how I have presented these things to the Reformed Presbyterian constituency in order for them to recognize the legitimacy of Jewish believers enjoying Jewish identity in a New Covenant context. In the next section I've given some practical pointers and addressed some specific scenarios. I won't restate these things here for the sake of brevity, but you have them in the booklet.

Then I include a section on common objections. You may find some of my answers helpful as you addresses these issues, and I think some of my answers perhaps give a different slant than you might be used to.

Finally, I provide a check list section which goes over various areas and how the new believer is coming along in these areas. You might also find this useful, though you now doubt will want to modify it according to your particular theological concerns.

Finally, there is a brief bibliography.

Let me conclude with a few thoughts of my own regarding what still needs to be done, and the I would like to open the floor for you to share any information about what you are doing, or what is in the works, or what you feel still needs to be done.

My remarks as to what still needs to be done must necessarily reflect my own theological convictions. I don't apologize for them. I have thought these things through for many years at some depth. I hope I am open to reason and that I am always willing to reconsider any particular point and change anything out of accord with scripture.

I believe much more work needs to be done in several areas. First I would like to see a series of inductive Bible studies developed which are specifically geared to helping new Jewish believers grow in their faith. Second, I believe there is a need for a Jewish oriented systematic theology written on a simple level which would be accessible to new believers. Such a work would need to include an explanation of the various denominations in the church and also the varieties of Messianic Judaism. There would need to be, naturally, clear exposition and biblical support given for specific New Covenant doctrines, but done in a way sensitive to the point of view of New Jewish believers. The Jews for Jesus Growth book is a good first attempt, but I think we need something much deeper written in this area. Finally, pastors need to be educated and trained in this area and specific structures within churches need to be developed which can help accomplish the end of discipling Jewish believers. I have been involved in leading several Messianic chavurot. I believe a Jewish oriented home group is one way of accomplishing the discipleship of Jewish believers within the local church.

I would now like to open the floor for comment and discussion. Thank you for your attention.

1. See 1 Corinthians chapter 8

2. If you have any doubt about that, you only need watch several episodes of the television program "Northern Exposure" and observe the struggles of Joel Fleischman, a New York Jewish doctor and the only Jew in town!

3. Willowbank Report, page 7

4. See Rausch, David A. A Legacy of Hatred, Moody Press 1984, page 24.