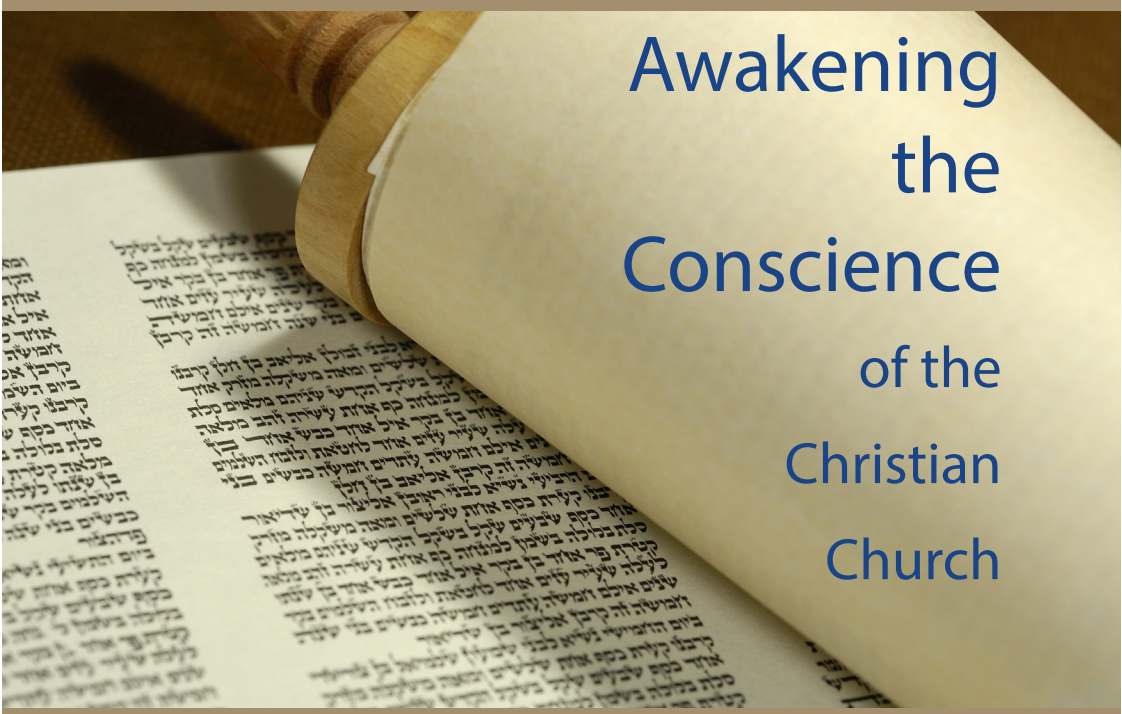


A resource of Christian Witness to Israel (N. America)
to challenge, assist and equip in local Jewish evangelism.

THE AC COURSE



Awakening
the
Conscience
of the
Christian
Church

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

1: THE CHALLENGES TO CONNECTING

1b THE ATHEIST AND THE EVANGELICAL

COMPLETE COURSE OUTLINE

The Biblical Burden for Jewish Mission The Hope throughout History for Jewish Redemption Contemporary Connections for Jewish Salvation

THE BIBLICAL BURDEN

<i>The MOTIVE</i>	<i>Psalm 67</i>	<i>The Praying patriarchs</i>
	<i>Romans 9-11</i>	<i>The Praying apostle</i>
<i>The METHODOLOGY</i>	<i>Isaiah 63</i>	<i>The Longing of the prophet</i>
	<i>Luke 4</i>	<i>The Liberation of The Prophet</i>
<i>The MISSIONOLOGY</i>	<i>2Cor 3&4</i>	<i>The Ministry that is glorious</i>
	<i>Acts 20-22</i>	<i>The Ministry that is blessed</i>
<i>The MANDATE</i>	<i>Psalm 150</i>	<i>The Holy hallelujahs</i>
	<i>Rev 4&5</i>	<i>The Cosmic chorus</i>

THE HOPE OF HISTORY

<i>PROTECTIVE PROVIDENCE</i>	- <i>Past, Present, Future</i>
<i>PIRATES OF PROVIDENCE</i>	- <i>Expulsion and Expansion</i>
<i>REPLACEMENT AND DEFACEMENT</i>	- <i>Forgotten and Forsaken</i>
<i>REFORMATION AND RE-EMBRACEMENT</i>	- <i>The Puritan Hope</i>
<i>The LIE OF THE LAND</i>	- <i>Too much love will kill you</i>
<i>REWRITING THE RAPTURE</i>	- <i>Confusion and correction</i>

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

<i>The CHALLENGES TO CONNECTING</i>	<i>The separated and the assimilated</i>
	<i>The atheist and the evangelical</i>
<i>The FRAGRANCE OF FRIENDSHIP</i>	<i>The aroma of Christ</i>
<i>The WISDOM OF WORDS</i>	<i>(Un)common language</i>
<i>RABBINIC REINTERPRETATIONS</i>	<i>Jewish objections</i>
	<i>Peter and Pentecost</i>

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

1. As you begin each study, pray for the Lord's grace and wisdom.
2. Discipline yourself to set aside one hour for each paper.
3. Keep a personal 'physical' notebook.
4. Begin with the questions and in your own notebook, answer each question in one sentence, prior to engaging in the study.
5. Read through the paper in one sitting, with note-taking.
6. Answer the questions again; this time, a paragraph each.

Feel free to send your answers to me, ask further questions, or simply make appropriate comments.

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CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

1: THE CHALLENGES TO CONNECTING

1b THE ATHEIST AND THE EVANGELICAL

QUESTIONS:

1. Does God believe in atheists? (Ok, that's a rhetorical question!) Dare we talk to atheists about God?
2. What is the normal Jewish agnostic's view of sin and how do we challenge it?
3. It was clear for thousands of years, *'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.'* Who changed this and why?
4. What really is the crux and climax of the narrative in the Jewish Bible (Old Testament / Tenach) and in the New Testament?

1b THE ATHEIST AND THE EVANGELICAL

INTRODUCTION

What happens when an atheist meets an evangelical? Is there any possibility of a connection? What happens when a Jewish atheist (or agnostic) meets a Gentile evangelical? Is the connection going to be even harder to achieve?

Well, truth be told, there isn't much difference between a Jewish and a Gentile atheist. But there are some things we need to hold in mind, as to the context of their unbelief, and the areas in which we would want to make progress in our connection and conversations.

We have been developing our initial thoughts on Contemporary Connections, under two (far too sweeping) general headings of Religious and Non-Religious. We first considered the Observant and Orthodox, and the general nature of our conversations.

There needs to be Tender Logic, Empathy, and Clarity in our communication. We need to understand the fears, and mistrust of Gentiles. We further need to engage the religious Jewish community with Scriptural arguments, sowing the seed of the inadequacy of rabbinic Judaism, and the search for the one thing needful.

However, when we engage in conversation with vast majority of Jewish people we will find them in this second category of agnostic / atheistic (probably around 70-80%), and their Jewishness is largely an ethnic matter. It is all too simplistic a statement, but for most Jewish people belonging is more important than belief.

Furthermore, in the context of 21st century Jewish life in America, there are many things that have brought about the

Jewish mindset of liberalism, relativism, humanism, and a host of other isms, many of which run contrary to the normal Christian mindset. Our history lessons have been partly for the purpose of our gaining an insight into the historical background forming the present context.

Hard fought victories in the realm of freedoms have made them ardent liberals, which with sinning liberty often crosses the line into libertarianism. The loss of a God-concept post second world war, have drawn them largely into a humanistic approach to life, liberty and vain pursuits. Additionally we have already remarked on a Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) approach to life as they seek to save the world and be their own Messiah, or at least save their own world.

The liberal relativism, and the easy acceptance of wide variety of opinions, is similar to Gentile agnosticism / atheism, in that the only thing that is not tolerated is Jesus!

We could continue on with many other 'contexts' but as we have repeatedly said, we are not presenting a cookie-cutter approach, and in many instances of your connectional conversations you are going to have to assume nothing and ask about everything! But let us take up some major themes that need to be discussed with the largely atheistic and often very clever Jewish mind.

There are four 'questions' or areas of questioning that I would hope you would endeavor to raise with tender logic, with your Jewish friends.

- 1. The God Question**
- 2. The Sin Question**
- 3. The Sacrifice Question**
- 4. The Savior / Messiah Question**

In future studies we will talk more about the nature of friendships, and wisdom with words, and some specific 'Jewish objections', but here we want to make sure that our conversation touches, even centers, on major matters of eternal consequence. You might mistakenly think in dealing with an atheist, the last thing you want to talk about is God, but actually it is the first thing. The atheist has defined themselves as a-theistic; they already have declared something about God; that God is dead. So we have every right to engage on that level. And one of our first questions must be – 'What made you an atheist?'

The GOD question

I was at a famous Jewish deli in Delray Beach Florida on the last night of Hannukah, when my colleague Mitch Tepper asked a question of his (then) 94 year old Jewish atheist dad. *'What made you an atheist?'*

(Just as an aside, and I know you want to know - the meal was amazing, and the restaurant being full of Brooklyn accents made me aware that I might be the only Gentile in the room! People sometimes ask me how often I visit Israel. I usually reply, around once a year, but it's called Delray Beach!)

But back to the story. The immediate response to Mitch's loving question of his dad was, *'Don't go there Mitch.'* But Mitch, being Mitch, had to 'go there'. The subsequent response from his dad was, *'Too many bad things in the world, Mitch, like the Holocaust...'*

Your experience may be different but it is likely that the **God question** will raise the Holocaust question. It is therefore imperative if you are a Gentile, that you proceed with care! No trite texts will be appropriate at this point. Instead, this is where you may bring in your knowledge of Jewish history.

That's why we put those two historical lectures out as previous to this (AC Course: Session #3 & #4), so you might be armed to say: God is, God is with them, God is with them in the USA! Protective Providence and even the Pirates of Providence mean that God cannot just die in the 20th century.

We must bring our Jewish friends to acknowledge the miracle of their continuance; and that it was not by their own grit and determination. The miracle is too great for that; their history is too stunning to be the product of their own chutzpah. However creative it may have been!

Miracle means: God. God is, and is with them, even through the fires...

Furthermore when the Holocaust question is raised, they then may consider the Holocaust to be somewhat redemptive. The orthodox may even consider it their Isaiah 53. (Who has suffered like Israel, the Suffering Servant? And they are healed by their own wounds...) There is also an aspect of victim culture that comes into the conversation, as Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel comments, *'It is not that all the victims were Jews. But all the Jews were victims.'*

So you see that even within Jewish atheism, or agnosticism, God is still part of the conversation. It is often the case that he may be tangential rather than central, but he is a reality of Jewish conversation, even that of Jewish atheists! So do not fear to 'go there.' Indeed you must. You may even find, some Jewish atheists will often have their conversations with the Divine, as Tevye did in Fiddler on the Roof. Even though denying his existence, God may yet be blamed for many things, with a 'Why us? Could you not choose someone else?'

Despite being atheist or agnostic, God is still part of the daily

conversation. At least he's there! And being there, we can and must press the issue – *What is your relationship with this God?*

Well, truth be told, its not that great! So then, from the God question we must move on to what has broken the relationship – Sin.

The SIN question

Now for the sake of well-meaning but somewhat naïve Gentile Christians, we need to be aware that the idea of being '*a sinner in the hands of an angry God*' is simply not on the radar for Jewish people. Herein lies a connectional problem. For a Gentile Christian wishing to bring the gospel to Jewish people, the crucial question of a Savior dying for sinners needs to be front and center. But the sin question is not yet front and center for most Jewish people.

The Jewish Bible begins with God, and swiftly moves on to the origin of sin. So too must our conversation with our Jewish friends, even atheistic Jewish friends. But immediately we face a problem. If the concept of God needs some radical clarifying, then also the concept of sin. The God of Scripture, the God of Jewish history, - well, we may be able to bring that narrative into the conversation, but sin? What is that? And your own thoughts on it, may not be the same as the normal liberal Jewish mind.

I heard the story of one of our missionaries who was doing some door to door evangelism. She was met by a young friendly Jewish lady and after some small talk the conversation was steered towards the gospel and sin. The response was very illuminating. The Jewish lady commented, '*Now that I think about it, we really don't talk about sin in the synagogue except at the Day of Atonement*'. Houston we do have a problem!

In Church we would expect the word sin to be regularly mentioned. If not, change your church! There are things you have to confess, confront, repent of etc. and Christians are very familiar with that. But after the Synagogue service you're not going to hear: *'The rabbi had a great sermon and challenged me about sin in my life. I really need a solution.'*

One of my colleagues had a conversation with a rabbi and the question of grace was discussed. The rabbi gave the following answer – again, very insightful: *'Just as if heaven and hell were taken out of the Christian worldview, you would kind of lose the foundation or impetus for obedience, so if grace were put into the Jewish equation, there would be no reason to obey Torah.'*

Wow! Such a sad response, but as we engage in conversations with our Jewish agnostics or atheists we need to know this 'Jewish equation'. No grace, means either no need, or the need is met by personal salvation in obedience to Torah - i.e. works religion. My colleague continued the conversation with the rabbi on matters of propitiation, expiation, and atonement. The stunning response was that following the destruction of the Temple in AD70 they had to come up with a better way. Sacrificial services were replaced by prayer services and why not? (said the rabbi) *'It was just a 'priestly tax' and one that the people had come to resent so when it stopped being about guilt before God, it stopped being necessary.'*

Again, jaw dropping wow! When did it stop being about guilt? And who stopped it being necessary? Rabbinic Judaism, and particularly modernized 'reform' Judaism has a lot to answer for – even from Moses! What would Moishe say? What would Elijah say? Rabbi Eliyahu – remind me what you did to those prophets of Ba'al...?

We might add that if guilt before God has been eradicated by rabbinic reform Judaism, then the next natural stage is Jewish agnosticism, and atheism. That is exactly where we find most Jewish people today.

I've been in the synagogue in Fayetteville Arkansas, when the rabbi told the congregation to *'get in touch with God this Jewish New Year; or at least get in touch with your god. And I know some of you don't believe in God (Yes, this was in the synagogue!), but get it touch with the divine spark within all of us.'*

The God question? The Sin question? – rabbinic Judaism has reinterpreted it all.

All this may come as a great surprise to many Christian Gentiles. But if you approach a Jewish person and in your conversation say, *'Well we're all sinners aren't we?'* you need to realize that the way the Jewish person hears that is: *'this Gentile thinks I'm an terrible person.'* So their response might simply be, *'No, I'm not a 'sinner'. I don't need this. I don't go around doing terrible things.'*

Reform Judaism must take some responsibility for the agnostic and atheistic Jewish mindset as it has all but eradicated personal responsibility and condemnation. The yetzer hatov (good inclination) and yetzer hara (evil inclination) approach to human actions, means that the little angel or the little devil on our shoulder is the one who makes us do things. It's really not our fault.

'Of course I shouldn't listen to that little bad guy with the pitchfork, and mostly I don't. But you can't condemn me to hell for a few slips?' This is so far removed from any Christian understanding of original sin; or a Genesis understanding also for that matter!

So our conversational strategy should be to teach about sin, biblically, and even sociologically. Godless atheistic regimes are usually the most immoral. To which we might get the response – *but so are Christian ones! Wasn't Hitler a Christian?*

Well, I'm glad you asked that question, so I may answer no! Hitler was born into the Roman Catholic church, but he was a practicing devil worshipper, as were many of the top brass in Naziism. And since you asked about the Hitler question, let me bring in again, the sin question - Can we call Hitler a sinner, or did he just listen too much to the yetzer hara?

What is sin? What is the moral 'law'? And how do you fare before a Holy God? This is where we need to steer the conversation. When they say they are not a sinner, you can say, *'Have you ever lied. How are you on the 10 commandments?'*

It's very Biblical to approach to do it this way, as it points directly to the wrong things done, or the good left undone. This displays our having *'fallen short'*. Particular failures need to be exposed (or self-exposed), in order to teach a simple lesson on the reality of sin and being a sinner.

Without at this point openly bringing your Jewish friend to Christian gospel ideas, the strategy, with tender logic, is to bring the God question and the sin question into the conversation, and so make the person aware that they have *'fallen short'*, and are truly sinners in the hands of God – who from our next 'question' we want to make clear is a holy God.

Jewish believer of an earlier generation, Jacob Jocz, states the point very clearly, *'Underneath the cross man stands in the position of crisis asking for grace; under the scrolls of the Law man stands in a position of self-assertion, giving his best.'*

Bringing the Jewish atheist even to an agnostic position, and

bringing the agnostic to a self aware position, this would be progress! In our conversations we must press the realities of God and sin. God is. And sin also is! The solution? Well, let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start.

THE SACRIFICE question

Of course, when in conversation with your agnostic friend, the process, and progress I am suggesting here may not happen in one conversation! (Or it might!) Yet, progress should be sought. Biblically, or sociologically, it will come down to the question of putting to right, the inclination to wrong. If we have sinned and fallen short; and are sinners in the hands of a God to whom we must one day give an account, then who can stand?

Can we take a look at the Jewish Bible, and consider the story of Genesis? (It makes a lot more sense than humanistic answers to the mess of the world!) If you can agree to meet again for a coffee and open the Bible at Genesis 1-3, wouldn't that be wonderful progress!

Speaking generally also, it is always good to ask questions of our Jewish friends. They will have an answer. So you might remind them of that old story they heard about a Garden called Eden, and Adam & Eve's expulsion for bad behavior. Yes, he listen to that 'hara' – but not his own little devil, it was the top guy Adam had to deal with! But do you remember that rest of the story? God 'covered' them, and sent them off with a promise of Someone who would crush that bad guy.

Why did God make an animal skin for Adam and Eve – was it going to be cold east of Eden? Isn't it interesting that as part of God's expulsion package, was a promise that *something would be done about the problem, but for now, here is a covering. And by the way, an animal had to die to give you that.*

That would make for an interesting coffee visit!

Then from that you could introduce the fact that for thousands of years your Jewish ancestors had to approach God (as a holy God), by means of substitutionary sacrifices. In fact there's a whole book about that called Leviticus which could be summed up: *'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sin.'* (Hebrews 9:22, Leviticus 17:11)

The Sacrifice question must be raised, as it is the very question the Jewish fisherman Peter raised when he spoke on the Day of Pentecost.

(We shall look at this very passage as the conclusion to this course – see paper entitled 'Peter and Pentecost'.)

Then while your conversations are on the question of sacrifice, it would be a good connect to bring up the subject of the greatest festival (apart from Shabbat). Indeed maybe you could ask the question: *What do you believe is the greatest Jewish festival?* I would expect the answer to be Passover? – and if it isn't, well then steer the question around to it! Haha.

Many things died through the divine plagues, and indeed the most awful was the death of the first born, that secured the release of the captives. However it was the death of the lamb that enabled the pass-over.

Passover is a great event in the Jewish calendar, but its real significance is missed. The broken matzah, and sprinkled wine (yes, the finger is dipped into the wine glass and droplets put on the plate for each of the plagues); the pierced and striped unleavened bread; the bitter herbs and wine that gladdens the heart are eaten and drunk in solemn, yet joyful remembrance that God passed over because of blood, He and brought salvation.

Now wouldn't that be another interesting topic for our next coffee visit - what really does Passover mean? Why is the matzah pierced and striped? Why is the middle matzah broken and hidden, and called The Afikomen? Doesn't afikomen' mean, 'He who is coming again'? Well, I would love to be a fly on the wall, when you're having those conversations with your Jewish friend!

The SAVIOR / MESSIAH question

Jacob Jocz: *'The whole idea of salvation in the Christian sense is foreign to Judaism... Judaism knows no conversion in the Johannine or Pauline sense.'*

They're not thinking about getting saved. Indeed, *'Getting saved'* is not really an expression that's used in Judaism. But it was! Think of those Jewish disciples, and authors of the gospels. Matiyahu and Jacov, Johanan, Shimon and Sha'ul. Yes, this was a Jewish question then, but why not today? Why not today? - because someone has rewritten the script.

Depending on your available time and the nature of your communications, your tender logic must draw you into some deeper questions. If God is holy (as the Jewish Bible seems to suggest!) and all of us are sinners (and the Jewish Bible and human history seems to confirm that) and since God, for thousands of years demanded a substitute and since God promised to Adam one who would crush it and promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaiah... and so forth to provide a lamb and since that Jewish maverick wilderness prophet Johanan saw a maverick rabbi Yeshua, and boldly said, *'Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world'* ... and since... and since...

Well, we could go on. Time forbids. But what a narrative to tell our Jewish friends who will have never heard such a story

from rabbinic and reform Judaism. Bring them to the Jewish Jesus. The God question, sin question, sacrifice question, salvation question. I would love to hear your progress in sowing those seeds with your Jewish friends!

However, as we engage in a tender, trusting, progressive conversations, we need to bear in mind that Jewish people don't become believers in Jesus because they're just overwhelmed by the sheer fulfillment of prophecy. They are not struck dumb by the evidence that is intellectually overwhelming. There is sin and unbelief, blindness, and hardness.

Only by the grace of God do the scales fall from their eyes. But in the proclamation of the good news of Jesus as the true fulfillment of the Jewish prophets and by telling forth the Story of grace-filled substitutionary redemption, we may find their hearts strangely warmed asking us as the Jewish crowds asked Peter at Pentecost: *'What must we do to be saved?'*

Conclusion

One final thought for now. As you make progress, and as your friend makes progress you may come up against the great fear: 'If I believe in Jesus, am I no longer Jewish?'

We need to declare clearly that we do not believe in ethnic cleansing and the New Testament and history is full of 'Jewish believers in Jesus!' Jewish people do not need to be 'cleansed' of their ethnicity, only their sin! We maintain that it is the most Jewish thing ever for an ethnic Jew to believe in their 'born under the law' Jewish Messiah Jesus.

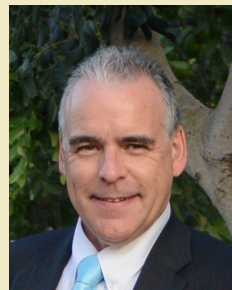
He is the solution to the sin question, the sacrifice question, for he is Savior; He is God. Lead your Jewish friend along that path by divine grace to repent and believe the gospel.

The Messiah will welcome them home with arms of love!

WHO ARE WE? WHAT DO WE DO?

DIRECTOR: STEPHEN ATKINSON

As **Director of Ministry** and 35 years of preaching experience, Stephen has been engaging with churches on behalf of CWI since 2004. With a Biblical mandate, historical reasoning, and present day missionary urgency, Stephen makes the case that every Church must have Jewish mission on its agenda!



MISSIONARY: MITCH TEPPER

As a **Jewish believer** Mitch has the apostle's burden for his own 'kindred after the flesh'. A graduate of Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, his Scriptural knowledge and personal passion drive him in his street evangelism, one on one relationships, and household bible studies, with the singular purpose of 'Telling Jewish people about Jesus'.



International Mission to Jewish People

Internationally we have been sharing Jesus with Jewish people for almost 180 years. Today we have missionaries in the USA, UK, Israel, France, Holland, Hungary, Australia, all faithfully witnessing to Jewish communities across the world.



CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO ISRAEL (N America)

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