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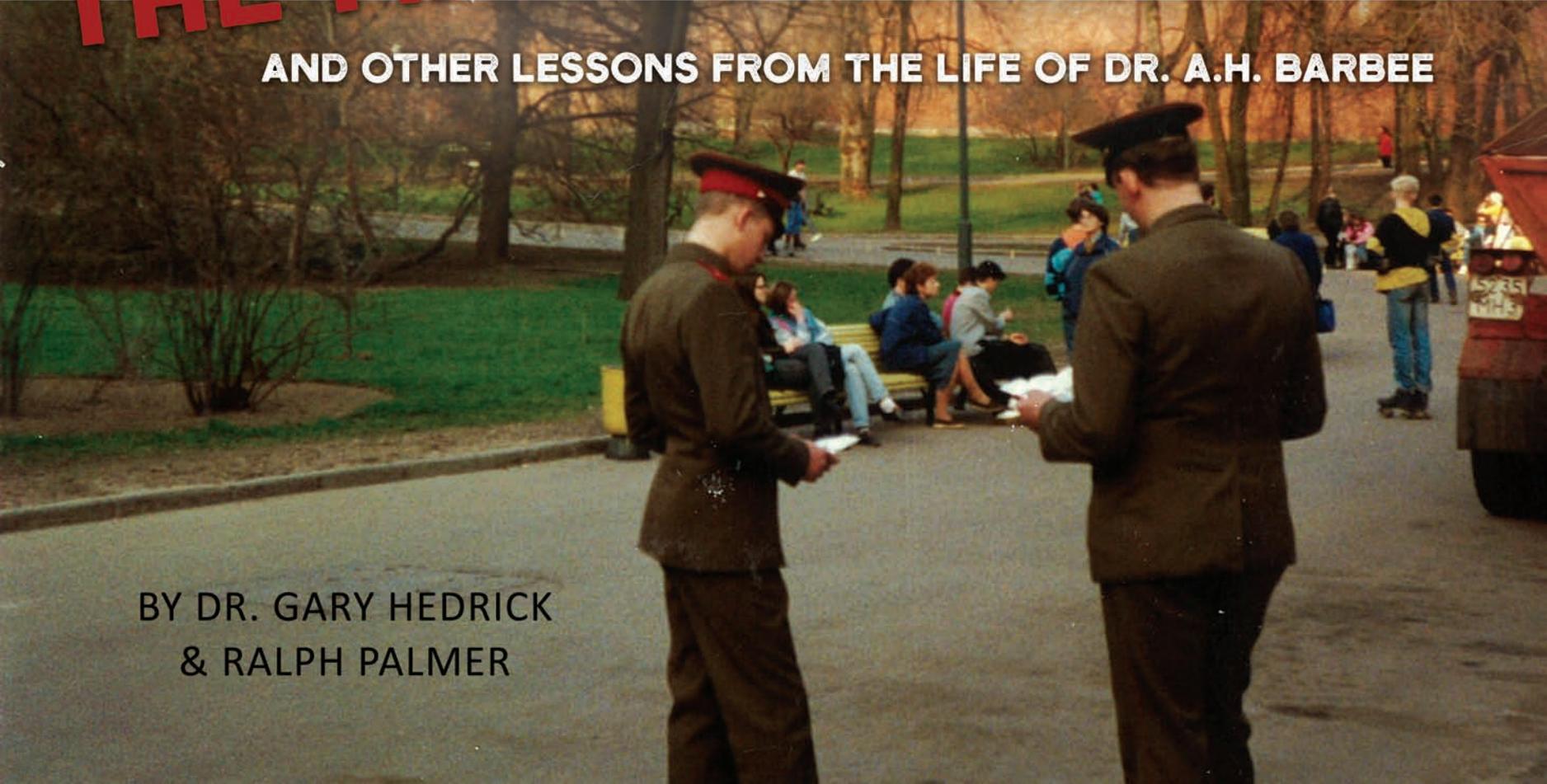
Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.



THE MAY DAY MIRACLE

AND OTHER LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF DR. A.H. BARBEE



BY DR. GARY HEDRICK
& RALPH PALMER

Dr. A.H. Barbee, long-time pastor, conference speaker, and former Associate Director of CJF Ministries in the 1980s and 90s, passed away in January 2017 at the age of 78. He had been in failing health for a number of years. Many of our longtime friends will remember Al for his infectious smile, his accomplished piano-playing, and his faithful service here at the ministry. We will never forget his passion for the Word of God, a passion that was reflected in his teaching, radio broadcasts, and prolific writing.

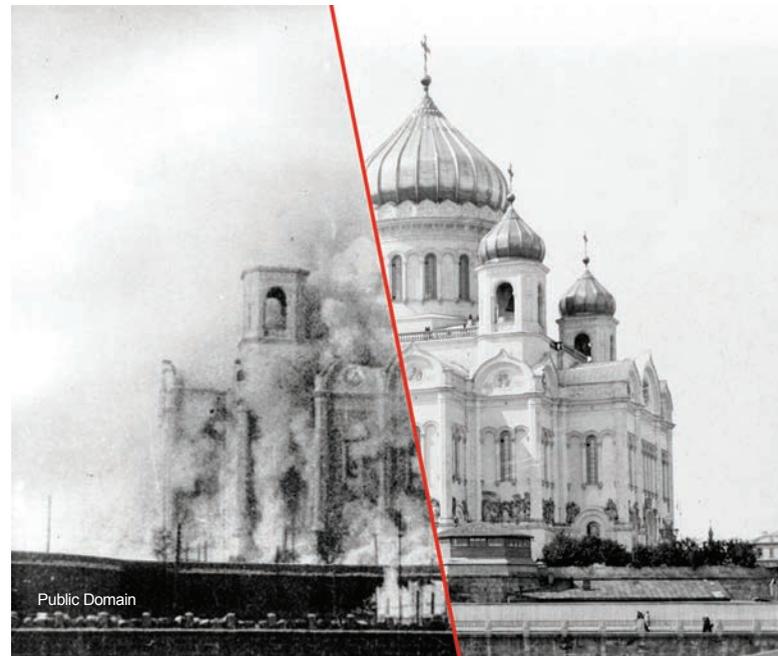
Others, however, may remember him best for his “Bibles for Russia” campaigns in the early 1990s. For nearly 70 years, millions had been trapped behind the “Iron Curtain” of atheistic communism and were denied free access to God’s Word. When a crack finally appeared in that “Curtain” in 1990, Brother Barbee was ready to act.

Religious Life Under Communism

Imagine it’s the middle of the night. You and your family are jolted awake by someone pounding on your front door. You exchange anxious glances, wondering what you should do. You know that believing friends and neighbors have already been taken away by the KGB (Soviet secret police) in late-night raids. Later, during “interrogations,” some had been tortured for their faith; others were never seen again. Now you wonder if they’ve come for you. You’re not sure it’s safe to open the door. You take comfort from the fact that only a few hours earlier, you had the foresight to place the family Bible in a new hiding place under some loose boards in the barn behind your house. So that’s one Bible they won’t be burning! But the pounding on the door is getting louder. You urge your frightened loved ones to rely upon the Lord, and then move to answer the door.¹

Unfortunately, such scenarios were all too familiar in the days of the Soviet Union (USSR). Although religious liberty was officially guaranteed by the Soviet constitution, that promise was nothing more than an empty shell. Lenin, and his successor, Josef Stalin, had organized programs to eradicate all religion from Soviet life. Their first target was the wealthy Russian Orthodox Church. Leading priests and nuns were arrested, tortured, and sometimes killed, and church assets were seized. Hundreds of church buildings were destroyed and their land confiscated by the state. Such was the fate of the magnificent Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow. The cathedral had been built in the late 1800s by Czar Alexander II as an act of thanksgiving to God for Russia’s victory over Napoleon. The communists first stripped the gold from its dome and then, in 1931, dynamited the cathedral to make way for the new “Palace of Soviets” planned by Stalin. The design boasted a Nebuchadnezzar-like statue of Lenin on top. But the “palace” was never built. World War II loomed on the horizon and construction materials had to be allocated for wartime purposes.²

After the communists had marginalized the Orthodox Church, the state went after smaller religious groups and their leaders, like the family described above. A few religious activities were allowed, but they first had to be approved and then they had to be conducted within church walls.³ Activities like catechism classes, religious schools, study groups, Sunday schools, and religious publications were all banned.



Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow and its demolition in 1931.

Public confession of faith was not allowed; neither was public criticism of the government—any kind of criticism. Paul Kengor describes the fate of one woman who dared to voice her frustration. He writes “. . . a defiant Tanya Khodkevich, the poet, bravely captured the despair of believers:

You can pray *freely*
But just so God alone can hear”⁴

That’s hardly the vicious criticism of government and politicians we see in America today! But for writing these two lines, Khodkevich was reportedly sentenced to *ten years* in the gulag—five years for each line. Another man apparently received a similar sentence for merely telling his two children not to use red pencils. Since red was the color associated with the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, his comments were viewed as traitorous.⁵ Imagine the chilling effect the threat of such imprisonment might have on your own words and faith practices. And think what courage it would take to stand for the truth of God’s Word in the face of such evil opposition—especially as it dragged on year after year.

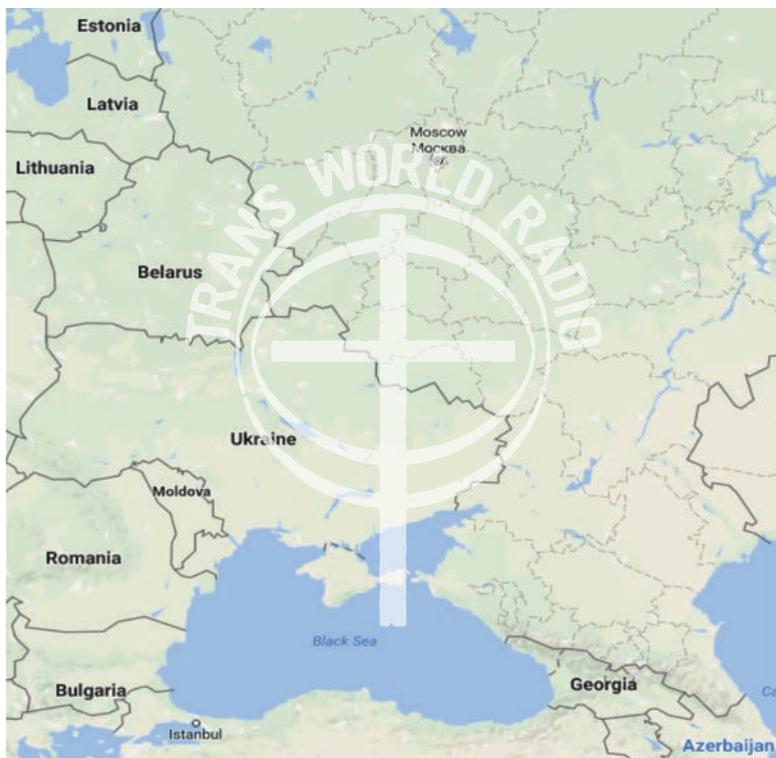
Messianic Perspectives®

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Although foreign believers were aware of the situation in the USSR, few had the means to do anything about it. Some like Brother Andrew began smuggling Bibles into Eastern Europe in the 1950s while others, like CJF Ministries (known as the Christian Jew Foundation in those days), began broadcasting shortwave radio programs into Russia and Eastern Europe over Trans World Radio and other outlets in the 1960s.



Roughly the coverage area of CJF Ministries' broadcast over Trans World Radio into the heart of the pre-1990 Soviet Union. CJFM sponsored the program for nearly 35 years.

CJFM's outreach via Trans World Radio blanketed much of the Soviet Union, but specifically targeted Russia. Our Russian speaker on those programs was Nickolai "Nick" Leonovich and his messages were forceful and effective. We didn't know it at the time, but we learned later that believers all over the Soviet Union were gathering secretly every week to listen to our program—and to other Western programming, as well—on their short-wave radios. Eventually the time came when Soviet propaganda could no longer disguise the truth or overcome the stark realities of everyday life for the average Soviet citizen. There were food shortages, housing was woefully inadequate, alcoholism was rampant, medical care was rationed mostly to influential party members, only one in seven families owned their own cars, and most of all, the people in general were starved for meaning in their lives.

Many could endure the oppression no longer. In the mid-1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev began loosening the government's grip on its people with his programs of *glasnost*⁶ and *perestroika*.⁷ In 1989, after the Germans tore down the concrete wall that separated East and West Berlin, there seemed to be no stopping the freedom train in the Soviet Union. People began flooding to churches. And in September 1990, the Soviet legislature overwhelmingly passed the Freedom of Conscience Act, guaranteeing citizens the right to speak openly about God and the Bible—for the first time in seven decades! Foreign and domestic evangelistic activities were also now expressly permitted.

“Reach Russian Jews Now”—1991

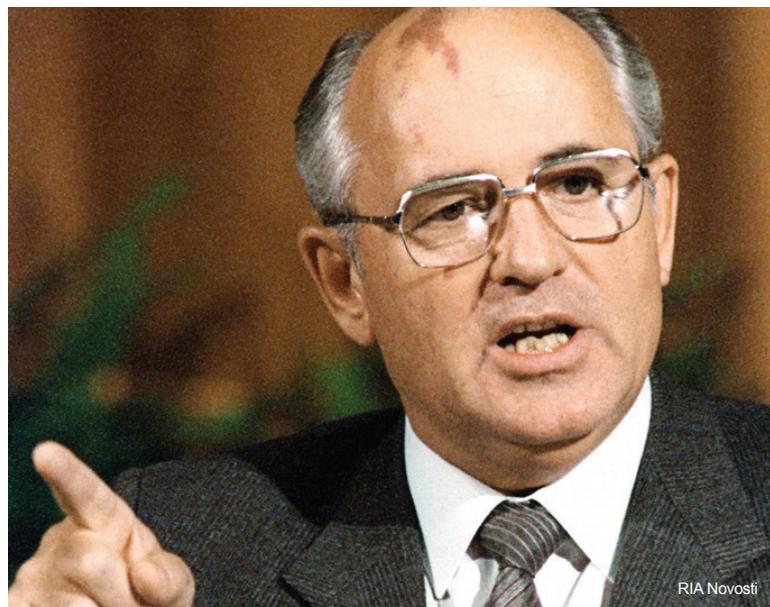
Seemingly almost overnight, God had opened a door of opportunity and Dr. Barbee was eager to take advantage of it. He shared his vision with Gary Hedrick and Charles Halff; and with their blessing, he immediately began organizing a campaign to ship Bibles to Russia. For three decades, we had been broadcasting into the region over Trans World Radio. Now, through Bro. Barbee's efforts, we could put thousands of New Testaments into Soviet Jewish (and Gentile) hands, and do it *legally*. No one knew how long this opportunity would exist, so time was of the essence.⁸

Gary and Bro. Barbee quickly began enlisting supporters to help finance the printing and distribution of several thousand Russian and Russian/Hebrew Bibles. Gary wrote a fundraising letter to CJFM supporters and their response was overwhelming.

Coordinating this effort, however, was no easy task since printing had to be done overseas to avoid exorbitant international shipping costs. Beginning in early 1991, Bibles were printed by our contacts in England and Finland and sent to Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine for distribution. In April of that same year, Dr. Barbee himself went to oversee the distribution effort. He was overwhelmed by the spiritual hunger he saw. He was told that Bibles in Ukraine (if they were even available) often cost as much as a week's wages—far beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. Thanks to our supporters, we could give the New Testaments away free of charge.

In Kiev, when the word got out that Brother Barbee was giving away Bibles, both hotel workers and fellow guests started appearing at his hotel room door. It was gratifying to see those who were so spiritually starved receive the Bread of Life. Often, these Bible recipients would hold up a finger or two indicating they'd like a second or third copy for a friend or loved one. Dr. Barbee was happy to accommodate them and later said that spiritual hunger in those countries was greater than any he had witnessed in his 30 years of ministry.

Bro. Barbee returned to the United States with his heart overflowing with praise and gratitude. God had answered our prayers and the effort had been more successful than any of us had dared to believe it would be! Another vision began to take shape in Al's heart and mind.



Mikhail Gorbachev, chairman of the Supreme Soviet and last president of the Soviet Union.

“Bibles For Russia”—April/May 1992

What Bro. Barbee saw on the Russian outreach trip in 1991 motivated him to do even more. He began planning a “Bibles for Russia” tour, inviting CJFM friends and supporters to accompany him to Russia and Ukraine in the spring of 1992. The Soviet Union had been officially dissolved five months earlier; and now, as a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Russia’s new head of state was Boris Yeltsin.



Boris Yeltsin, first post-Soviet president of Russia.
He was succeeded by Vladimir Putin.

Despite some fear and trepidation about traveling into the heart of the former “Evil Empire,” as President Reagan had dubbed the USSR nine years earlier, 19 brave believers (25 including staff) signed up to accompany Dr. Barbee on that trip to see sites and hand out Bibles. They arrived in Moscow in mid-April. Under the old Soviet system, the communists always threw a big bash on May Day, so Al had arranged the schedule so the CJFM tour group would be in Red Square for the first May Day celebration under the new regime. Two members of that tour group were Ray and Betty Long—Gary Hedrick’s aunt and uncle from South Carolina.



CJFM “Bibles For Russia” team, 1992.

Brother Barbee later reported that “our 1992 trip brought us into contact with thousands more who could hardly wait to receive a copy of God’s Word. On the streets, in places of business, at historic sites, outside subway stations, and on speeding metro trains—people everywhere gladly accepted a Gospel tract or a New Testament.”⁹

Gary’s aunt and uncle later recounted one experience they had while standing on a street corner handing out tracts and New Testaments. They were approached by two serious-looking men dressed in military uniforms. The men didn’t speak English, so Ray and Betty tried to communicate with them through gestures—and finally they realized that these two Russian soldiers were asking for Bibles for themselves! Those greenhorn Americans had visions of possibly ending up in a salt mine in Siberia, when in fact it was another opportunity to plant more Gospel “seeds”!

Brother Barbee also didn’t miss the opportunity to share the Gospel with Russia’s Jewish community. He and his team visited Moscow’s Central Synagogue just before the beginning of Shabbat, April 30, 1992. They found a few Jewish people gathered outside waiting for the rabbi to unlock the synagogue. Shabbat services, however, had been canceled because of communist-planned May Day demonstrations. According to the rabbi, who soon arrived and spoke some English, the Jewish community of Moscow had benefited from the new freedoms. They had more freedom to meet, study, and pray; but many synagogue members had already left for Israel. Civil liberties had unfortunately also emboldened anti-Semites to express open hostility toward the Jewish community. There in front of the synagogue, Bro. Barbee wisely chose to take a more “soft” approach rather than engaging in a public debate with the rabbi. He recognized that these Jewish people waiting outside their synagogue feared an attack on the building or even on themselves. So, our CJFM team tactfully and quietly held out the brochures and Bibles, and handed them over to those who wanted them.

Most of the women took the materials. A few of the men, however, refused the literature and angrily tore up the pamphlets our team had given to some of the ladies.¹⁰ The rabbi declined the New Testament Bro. Barbee offered him. Al was saddened, of course, but not discouraged by the reaction of the Jewish people at the synagogue. As he often reminded us, Jewish ministry is a special calling, requiring commitment and perseverance, and much prayer. The situation is much the same today. We have to be sensitive when we approach Jewish people with the Good News of Yeshua. We want them to understand these two important points:

- We are not trying to “convert” Jewish people from one religion to another. Yeshua himself was Jewish; His early followers were Jewish; and the first Messianic (Jewish-Christian) congregation was in Jerusalem. Historic, biblical Christianity is a continuation and completion, rather than a contradiction, of the ancient Jewish faith.
- Jewish people can embrace Yeshua of Nazareth as Messiah and Savior and still be Jewish; in fact, many times they tell us they feel even *more* Jewish after trusting Yeshua than they did before!

There in front of the Moscow synagogue, our folks recognized that this was a difficult time for these Jewish congregants. They feared the possibility of impending persecution (and it wouldn’t have been the first time!). So, the last thing Al and the team wanted to do was add to their anxiety. Nonetheless, our team members were gratified to know that some of the materials found their way into the hands of those who wanted them. Only eternity will reveal the results of their efforts that day.

The May Day Miracle

Something miraculous happened in Moscow on May 1, 1992. Bro. Barbee had planned to take the team to Red Square so they could hand out tracts and New Testaments. They had known in advance that (due to their earlier efforts in other parts of Russia) their supply of materials would be depleted by the time they reached Moscow. So Gary and Charles had arranged for a delivery service to meet Bro. Barbee in Red Square on that day with a fresh supply of materials. However, the delivery truck didn't show up! We didn't have cell phones in those days, so whenever Al needed to call back to the States he had to find a pay phone and try to dial overseas from there. Unfortunately, many pay phones in Moscow didn't work for international calls. Some didn't work at all! It was very frustrating.

So, there were Bro. Barbee and our CJFM team members in a bustling, crowded Red Square, within view of the Kremlin, on May Day—with no Bibles or tracts to hand out. Al asked his people to pray for the Lord's intervention while he strolled around the square and assessed the situation. The intervention he had in mind was for the delivery truck to show up; however, God had another, better idea.

As Al (accompanied by one of his men) made his way through the crowded square, he noticed a group of people speaking with some Russian soldiers near the Kremlin Wall. As he got closer, he could hear that they were speaking English. It sounded like they were requesting permission to hand out Christian materials in Red Square—and that got Al's attention!

Bro. Barbee suffered from a painful and crippling defect in one of his hips (a congenital condition) and hobbled around with the help of a cane. But when he heard those people speaking English, he hurried as quickly as he could to intercept the two men who appeared to be leading the group.

"Are you Americans?" Al asked when he got their attention.

"Yes," one of them replied.

"Did we hear that you got permission to hand out Bibles in Red Square today?"

"Yes," the man replied. "We just got permission."

Bro. Barbee was elated and excited. He said, "We're believers with CJF Ministries in Texas. We have a team of 25 people with us. God put it in our hearts to hand out Bibles in Red Square today, but our delivery truck never showed up. We were about to get back on our bus and leave, very disappointed. But then we saw you guys. Would you mind if we helped you hand out your Bibles?"

The two men were exuberant. They responded in unison, "Absolutely!"

Al later learned that the two men were a father and son. The son was Scott Temple, an official with the Assemblies of God denomination. His father was a businessman from Virginia—a vice president with F.W. Woolworth, in fact—who had decided to come along on the trip.

Scott and his father had raised funds to purchase more than 16,000 Russian New Testaments, complete Russian Bibles, tracts, and a special Russian evangelistic edition of Josh McDowell's *More Than a Carpenter* which included the Gospel of John. It was more than a ton of materials sitting in the back of a truck parked at the Kremlin Wall.

Scott later recalled, "Thus began the most memorable day of my life."

A Divine Appointment

Are you getting the picture, dear reader? Scott and his dad were there with their small contingency of people and a ton of literature to give out in Red Square. Bro. Barbee and his team were there with plenty of manpower (and woman power!) but no materials to give out. So, God in Heaven arranged a divine appointment and brought those two men—Scott and Al—together that day in Red Square. The two groups teamed up and had a blessed time together as they spent several hours distributing those materials and witnessing to anyone who could speak English. Russian soldiers, policemen, and even some communist protestors accepted Bibles and other materials.



Brother Al Barbee with Scott Temple in front of a truck filled with Russian New Testaments and other materials.

We have no way of knowing, on this side of Heaven, what the true and long-term results of this massive effort were. Thousands of seeds were planted and God himself tells us that His Word doesn't return to Him void (Isa. 55:11); so, we believe many of those seeds sprouted and bore fruit in the lives of precious Russian people. We can say with certainty that the chances of these two groups from America meeting each other randomly that day in Red Square were infinitesimally small. Realistically, from a purely human standpoint, it was a virtual impossibility. But God knew what He was doing. He made the arrangements and all Bro. Barbee had to do was be obedient and follow the Spirit's leading.

This is what Scott later called "the May Day Miracle." And now you know why! Once their work was done that day in Red Square, the two groups exchanged contact information and then returned to their hotels for a well-deserved night's rest.

Recently, at a Temple family get-together in Virginia, one of the grandchildren asked Scott's dad this question: "If there was one day in your life you could live over, what day would it be?"

Scott Temple and his dad quickly exchanged glances. They both knew what his answer was going to be. He replied, "May Day of 1992."

Meanwhile, Back in Moscow

The team eventually connected with CJFM's own shipment of Bibles and on their last day in Moscow, the group gave out 7,500 New Testaments in just a couple of hours. A few days later, in Kiev, Ukraine, the team handed out thousands of Bibles, and in St. Petersburg, Russia, they gave away 12,500 New Testaments at a rate of 130 per minute! Can you imagine what such activity would look like on the streets of America? In total, the 1992 "Bibles for Russia" tour group gave out 25,000 New Testaments and other evangelistic literature.

In Kiev, the CJFM group connected with a small group of Jewish believers and provided them with a stockpile of Messianic literature to use in reaching out to the Jewish community in their city. They were very grateful for the help. Today, 25 years later, there's a thriving Messianic congregation in Kiev with several hundred people attending weekly services. The pastor graciously took the time to give us a tour of the downtown area the last time we were there.

After the 1992 tour, Brother Barbee said, "I am always thrilled by what people who have a mind to work can do. Critical, cynical people never get anything worthwhile done. Christians with hearts set on working together (and with God) can plant the Gospel seed, water the spiritual soil with their prayers and tears, and, through the eyes of faith, see a great harvest."¹¹

"Bibles For Russia"—1993

The 1992 tour had been so successful that Dr. Barbee decided to organize another "Bibles for Russia" tour for October 1993. The political situation was quickly becoming unstable, however, and the new Russian Parliament (prompted by the Russian Orthodox Church) had threatened to amend the "Freedom of Conscience Act." Time was running out. Nevertheless, as long as the door remained open to travel and evangelism, Dr. Barbee was determined to go. A tour group was formed.

The day before his departure, Bro. Barbee received a phone call warning him that delivery of the Bibles to Moscow might be delayed because of the political instability. The communists were threatening to overthrow Boris Yeltsin. Dr. Barbee and the group went anyway. And sure enough, the Bibles were not at the designated location when they arrived in Russia. However, at 10:30 p.m. that same night, there was a knock at Al's hotel room door. To his amazement, it was a truck driver telling him that he had a delivery of 625 boxes of Bibles (10,000 in all) and he needed to know where to put them.

They tried to arrange storage downstairs, and even tried to negotiate space in the hotel's baggage area. When neither of these options worked out, Al hired porters to carry the boxes to his small, 14th-floor hotel room. Three hours later, at 1:30 in the morning, all the boxes had finally been delivered, stacked neatly from floor to ceiling all over the room. Exhausted, Bro. Barbee collapsed onto his bed, the only open space in the entire room.

For the next two days, the "Bibles for Russia" team carried down the 625 boxes, box by box, book by book, to the bus stop and metro station a half block from the hotel. Dr. Barbee later recounted how team members who couldn't lift the heavy boxes of books "worked in the 'Bible room' unpacking books, loading them onto baggage carts or putting them in travel bags. Others delivered them to team members who gave them out to the spiritually hungry people of Russia. We placed God's Word in the hands of

thousands of Muscovites; we know the Holy Spirit planted the seed of truth in their hearts. As seed-planters we claim the promise found in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 3: 'some plant, some water . . . God giveth the increase.'"¹²

Not all the Bibles on that trip were given to people on the street. The group was invited to tour a children's hospital where care was provided for about 135 children, up to the age of 15. Team members visited each child and presented them with candy and a stuffed animal, while hospital staff—Jewish and Gentile—were each given a Russian language New Testament.

Not long after that rewarding October tour, the Russian government clamped down on civil and religious liberties and no more "Bibles for Russia" tours were possible. That door had finally closed—but not before CJFM had taken advantage of the amazing opportunity that existed for those few, short years. Tens of thousands of Russian-language Bibles and other materials had poured into Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Uncounted lives were touched and no one can even begin to guess how many people came to know Yeshua as Messiah and Savior as a result—all largely due to the vision and leadership of our friend and colleague, Dr. A.H. Barbee.

Conclusion

Many of us will never have the opportunity to do something so public, so historic and seemingly momentous on behalf of the Kingdom of God, as what Al Barbee did during his years of ministry. Nevertheless, there is always something we can do. We can use our time, talents, and treasure to advance God's Kingdom.

Above all, when the Lord opens a door, be ready and willing to walk through it. Don't hesitate. Be obedient. That's the takeaway here. Whatever the challenge or opportunity, we need to say to the Lord, as Dr. Barbee did, "Here am I! Send me!" (Isa. 6:8b).

Let none hear you idly saying,
"There is nothing I can do,"
While the multitudes are dying
And the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly;
Let His work your pleasure be.
Answer quickly when He calls you,
"Here am I. Send me, send me!"

"Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling"
by Daniel March



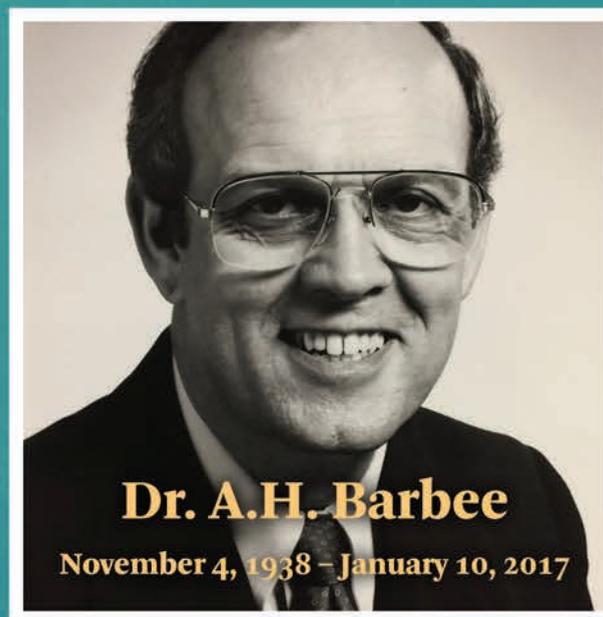
*Dr. Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.*



*Ralph Palmer was
former director of
missionary activities at
CJF Ministries.*



Alfred H. Barbee was born on a farm in Southern Illinois and grew up in a Christian family with one sister. He pursued a Christian education, earning a Master's degree in theology (ThM), and pastoring several churches in Ohio and elsewhere. He was granted an honorary Doctor of Divinity (DD) in recognition of his many gifts and devotion to the Kingdom of God. Bro. Barbee was indeed a gifted speaker, radio preacher, and prolific writer as well as an accomplished pianist. He was on CJFM's staff twice—first for several years in the early 1970s and a second time in the 1980s and 90s. He was well traveled and spoke hundreds of times at conferences all over North America. He also led study tours to a number of foreign countries, including England, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Israel, Jamaica, Jordan, Russia, and Switzerland.



Shortly after returning to CJFM in 1984 (after a nine-year stint as senior pastor of a church on the east coast), Bro. Barbee earned a PhD in human resource development from Union Institute and University in Cincinnati. His doctoral dissertation was later condensed into a 120-page book entitled, *It Shouldn't Hurt So Much to Be a Pastor*. It was based largely on his own experiences as a pastor and is still available on Amazon.com. Several denominations incorporated his findings into their own policies relating to clergy care. Bro. Barbee put his own principles into practice, taking the time to get involved personally and help one particularly troubled congregation to heal. He brought them to the place where they began to grow again—both spiritually and numerically.

During his more than 10 years with CJF Ministries, Al shared the broadcast microphone, wrote many articles for the ministry's bimonthly paper, penned numerous books and booklets, conducted weekly chapel services for staff members, and led our "Bibles for Russia" campaigns. He also worked closely with Ralph Palmer, CJFM's director of missionary activities (and founder Charles Half's "right-hand man"). Bro. Barbee embraced Ralph warmly as the brother he had always wanted. The two men remained steadfast friends throughout their adult lives, even when their work led them in different directions. Today, 25 years later, Ralph still treasures the beautiful Faberge eggs his "brother" brought him as a souvenir from St. Petersburg, Russia.

More recently, until the time of his passing, Bro. Barbee served as pastor of Christ Chapel in Ravenna, Ohio. He is survived by Elisabeth, his wife of more than 50 years, their three children, and (at last count) six grandchildren. Their two daughters are teachers in Christian schools and their son is a practicing attorney.

We are indebted to Ralph Palmer for supplying much of this biographical information about his lifelong friend.

¹ Such events were all too real under communist rule in Ukraine. Author Evelyn Puerto tells the true story of the persecution of Pastor Alexei Brynza and his family in *Beyond the Rapids* (available on Amazon).

² In February 1990, the Orthodox Church received permission from the Soviet government to rebuild the cathedral on the same spot, using the same architectural plans. Donations poured in from ordinary citizens and the rebuilt cathedral was dedicated on August 19, 2000. CJFM staff members had the privilege of visiting the cathedral in 2012 after our Israel conference in Moscow. That year was also the 200th anniversary of the defeat of Napoleon.

³ Unfortunately, in 2016, Vladimir Putin signed the "Anti-Terrorism" law which reinstated many of the Soviet-era restrictions on religious liberty. The new law prohibits people from sharing their faith openly. They cannot preach or pray outside of the church walls and foreign missionaries are banned from speaking at churches without permission from Russian authorities. Recently, an evangelical missionary in Russia was arrested for conducting a Bible study in his home.

⁴ Paul Kengor, "Religious Repression and Religious Freedom in Russia: The Roles of Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan in Ending the Soviet War on Religion," <http://visionandvalues.org/docs/abused/Kengor.pdf>, accessed September 9, 2017.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Glasnost* is the Russian word for "publicity" and used in this context referred to a new, transparent political process after 70 years of Soviet oligarchs ruling from behind closed doors.

⁷ *Perestroika* is the Russian word for "restructuring." Gorbachev coined the term to refer to his reorganization of the old Soviet political structure. His policies ultimately (and perhaps by design) led to the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the founding of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

⁸ As it turned out, the window of opportunity wasn't open for long. In 1991, the Soviet Union changed its policy to allow missionary activity. In 1992, the window was wide open—and we responded. But in 1993, the window began to close again with Putin's rise to power. So, Dr. Barbee had clear foresight and was right to move quickly.

⁹ *Message of the Christian Jew*, September-October, 1992, p. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 4.

¹² *Message of the Christian Jew*, March-April, 1994, p. 6.

How Do We Know Our Faith is True? Look at the Evidence

by Eric Chabot

Jesus calls His followers to “make disciples of the nations” (Matt. 28:19). Christians who want to obey Him must care about the evidence for Christianity. Here’s why.

When we reach out to a lost and needy world, we’re bound to meet people from a variety of spiritual backgrounds. Many of them are incredibly sincere about their faith. Unfortunately, sincerity is no test for truth. Many people have been sincerely wrong about many things.

So, for example, if a Mormon and an (orthodox) Christian asked each other, “How do you know your faith is true?” both of them might pin their answers on their religious experience. Mormons say their certainty comes through the heart confirming what is already true in the mind. Christians might say it’s the internal witness of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. The two sound awfully similar, don’t they?

So how do we know our faith is true? Before we go there, let’s look at what some of the major world religions say about Jesus Christ:

Five Views of Jesus

Orthodox Christianity/Messianic Judaism: Jesus is both God and man. Jesus is an uncreated being (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-17), the Jewish Messiah as foretold in the Jewish Scriptures, and the second person of the Godhead, equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 1:1; Colossians 1:15-19; Philippians 2:5-11).

Other religions contradict this view.

Islam/Traditional Judaism say that Jesus was man, but certainly not God. Traditional Judaism says Jesus is not the Jewish Messiah as foretold in the Jewish Scriptures. He may be regarded as a prophet or teacher, but not divine. Islam agrees, based on its teachings in the Qur’an, which was written six hundred years after Christ. Islam also says Jesus was never crucified, and therefore never risen from the dead.

Mormonism claims to be founded on divine revelation. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church, claimed to have received personal revelation from God on the basis of two visions, in 1820 and 1823. The Mormon claim is that Jesus is a created being.

The Watchtower Society/Jehovah Witnesses agree with Mormonism in that Jesus is not God, but is a created being instead.

Buddhism/Hinduism are not monotheistic faiths, meaning they either don’t believe in God, or they take a polytheistic (many gods) view. That alone makes them extremely different from Christianity. Buddhism teaches that Jesus was an enlightened man, but not God. Hinduism typically says that Jesus was a good teacher and perhaps an incarnation of Brahman, who is an impersonal, supreme being. He is one of 330 million-plus personal manifestations of the one impersonal ultimate.

Making the Choice

There are certainly similarities among these faiths. They all believe there's such a thing as truth, right and wrong, and a spiritual purpose for life. Most believe there is a God and that we can somehow commune with Him.

However, they all have glaring differences regarding Jesus. They also differ on what God is really like, the afterlife, the nature of mankind, the chief problem mankind faces, and how to solve that problem for now and for eternity.

After examining the differences in these faiths, a book called *Life's Most Important Questions*, by John P. Newport, sums up the issue nicely:

No sane person tries to accept as authoritative revelation from God all writings which are self-declared to be such. However eager we may be for harmony and tolerance, we cannot be intellectually honest unless we face the fact that there is a real contradiction between conflicting truth claims. As we reflect on how we are created in the image of God, we need to remember that we are creatures of both will and mind, of faith and reason. We are called to think as well as act and feel; therefore our faith will always have a rational element to it.

Why Christians Actually Do Use Evidence

So then, how can we know which faith to believe? How can we explain it to others? We really have to go with what the evidence tells us.

Frankly, when Christians say, "What we believe is a matter of faith and not evidence," they sound inconsistent. After all, they expect other belief systems to put forth evidence and good reasons. If a Jehovah's Witness or Mormon came to your doorstep, wouldn't you ask them why anyone should believe what they are telling you? Wouldn't you reject their faith if they couldn't give you good reasons? I assume so. Christians shouldn't scorn those who demand the same of us.

Historical research tells us the apostle Paul wrote his famous statement about Jesus' resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 not long after the death of Jesus.

The Qur'an tells us He neither died nor rose again—but it was written about six centuries later. Which one would you rather trust as the one that's telling the straight story? Historians prefer earlier evidence. The choice here is clear.

Mormonism and the Watchtower Society (Jehovah's Witnesses) also contradict the Christian claim, but they came *much* later, in the 1800s. What evidence do they have that paints a better picture of Jesus than the Bible did?

Of course, I'm only scratching the surface here. There are libraries full of more things we could talk about regarding evidence for faith. I'm convinced it all lines up solidly in favor of Christianity, but that's not my main point here. My main point is that if we want to obey Jesus and share His message, we need to be able to explain why people should believe in Him, rather than believing in some other religion—or even atheism. We really can't do that without having reasons and evidence for our own faith.

—*How Do We Know Our Faith is True? Look at the Evidence* by Eric Chabot was adapted with permission from Eric's blog ThinkApologetics.com.

Eric Chabot has been a CJF Ministries staff member since 2005 and heads up our apologetics outreach in concert with Ratio Christi at Ohio State University. For more information about Eric's work in Ohio, see his webpage at ThinkApologetics.com. He invites our readers to address apologetics-related questions to EricC@cjfm.org.



Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *We recently heard a “Hebrew Roots” teacher say (based on Mark 1:16-18) that Peter and Andrew abruptly left their fishing nets and followed Jesus because they recognized that He was wearing the robe of a rabbi. This guy made a big deal about the fact that none of the commentaries mention this—of course, because the commentators are Gentiles! My problem is that I don’t see anything to support this in Scripture. Do you?*

ANSWER: No, I don’t. But before we get into that, let me first commend you for taking the “Berean” approach and subjecting all teachings to the test of Scripture (Acts 17:10-11). The Bible is the best yardstick to help us determine if a teaching measures up or not.

The “Hebrew Roots” (HR) movement is quite diverse and includes a broad spectrum of ministries and teachers. It’s generally seen as a subset of the broader Messianic (Jewish-Christian) movement, although mainstream Messianics by definition recognize the Jewish roots of the historic Christian faith and do quite a bit of teaching on that topic themselves. HR teachers make it more of an emphasis and sometimes take it to extremes. Some fringe HR groups make claims like:

- The Lord should only be called by His Hebrew names (like Yahweh or Yeshua). A few of them even say that it’s heresy to call Him “Jesus” because (they claim) it’s a Greek word that comes from the name of the Greek god Zeus (*Gee-Zeus*). They’re wrong.
- Much of the NT was originally written in Hebrew, not Greek (Hebrew primacy). Again, they’re wrong. The NT incorporates Hebrew/Aramaic sources, of course, but the final manuscripts were codified in Koine Greek.
- Salvation purely by grace is heresy. They insist that NT believers can curry favor with God by keeping the Mosaic Law to one extent or another. Wrong yet again.
- Certain parts of the NT (like Galatians and its admonitions about misguided legalism) may not be inspired. They suggest that these passages should be interpreted through some leader’s personal theological grid. Still wrong.
- HR teachers have a more accurate understanding of Scripture than mainstream Messianics or evangelicals in general. They may not come right out and say this, but it’s strongly implied in some HR circles—and it’s wrong.

- We shouldn’t worship on Sunday. We should only worship on Shabbat (Saturday). Wrong again. So, at least they’re consistent!

Other HR groups are more evangelical or Messianic and don’t make such outlandish claims. CJF Ministries is a Messianic (Jewish-Christian) ministry and some people might consider us an HR group because we teach that biblical, historical Christianity is essentially Jewish and has its roots in first-century Israel. As long as we’re not grouped with the extremists, we don’t mind that label.

Now let’s get back to your question about the passage in Mark. We agree that reading the Bible through a Messianic (Jewish-Christian, historical-grammatical) grid often helps us “unlock” the meaning of difficult passages. But as we just saw, it’s a problem when the extremists resort to manufacturing “insights” that have no basis in fact. This is one of those cases. Yes, of course, Yeshua (Jesus) was known as a “rabbi” (which simply denotes a Jewish teacher or scholar; see Matthew 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5, 11:21, etc.). But to say that these Galilean fishermen dropped everything and followed Him because He was wearing a rabbi’s robe is silly. Priests (the Sanhedrin) wore special clothes, but there’s no evidence of any special garb for rabbis. There were many rabbis all over Israel—each of whom would have also been wearing a rabbi’s robe, if there were such a thing. Many ancient rabbis actively recruited followers (*talmidim*), so Peter and Andrew would have been dropping their nets and heading off with some rabbi at least two or three times a week. They wouldn’t have gotten any work done! Not only that, but wasn’t Yeshua himself critical of ostentatious displays by religious leaders who sought to draw attention to themselves by what they wore? He said, “*But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments*” (Matt. 23:5).

It’s unlikely, then, that Yeshua’s clothing identified Him as a rabbi. Otherwise, when He rebuked the religious leaders for wearing special apparel to draw attention to themselves, they may well have retorted, “Hey, look who’s talking!”

So, what attracted Peter and Andrew that day at the Sea of Galilee? Remember what we always say when we’re interpreting Scripture: if you have a question about something in the text, the answer is almost always found somewhere in the immediate context.

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Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



A Tug Within

Michelle Beadle, CJFM Southeast representative (New Orleans), praises the Lord that, so far this year, 13 people prayed with her to receive Jesus as their Redeemer and Savior. As exciting as it is to lead someone to salvation, Michelle writes that it is also exciting to plant seeds. While preparing for a recent trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to attend a cousin's wedding, she felt a prompting to take along a published copy of her Bible study series on Messianic Prophecy. She wondered who the recipient would be. Perhaps someone in her family? But the Lord had another plan. On the airplane, Michelle and the woman sitting next to her started talking. The conversation got deeper once the woman asked and heard what Michelle's occupation is. She seemed intrigued as they spoke at length about Jesus and what she believes about Him, adhering solely to a New Age philosophy. Michelle then told her about the Bible study series she had written on Messianic Prophecy. The woman offered to buy it and have Michelle mail it to her. However, Michelle had the copy on the plane with her and gave it to the woman, excited at the opportunity to sow seeds in someone's life. When they deplaned, the woman was so excited at their encounter that she brought her sister over to meet Michelle. Michelle was so glad that she listened to the tug within to take the study with her. She writes, "I hope you will pray with me that the seeds that were planted will take root in her heart and that she will come to know Yeshua as her Lord and Redeemer."

Unity in Yeshua

CJFM representative Pastor Yossi Ovadia, Kehilat Haderech (The Way) Messianic Congregation (Israel), praises God for blessing him and his congregation with a beautiful new facility. Now that the bulk of the building project has been completed, they are planning the Young Adults' Compound. At one of their meetings, *Kehilat Haderech* hosted 50 Arab believers from a congregation in Bethlehem. They worshiped, prayed, and studied the Word during their joint fellowship and then dined together, building new relationships. The following month, *Kehilat Haderech* joined the annual celebration of all the Galilean congregations (both Jewish and Arab) in the Lavi forest. Of these two events, Pastor Yossi writes: "This example of unity is second to none, and can be found only in Yeshua, who in His flesh broke down the middle wall of partition." He also asks for the spiritual growth of three congregation members who were baptized in the Sea of Galilee; healing for those struggling with various illnesses, and for God to bless their evangelistic outreaches into the community.

A Brief Encounter

CJFM Northeast representative (New Jersey) Diann Parkas, recently had a friendly conversation with "Sara," an Ethiopian woman, as they were standing in line at a local produce market. At first they talked about groceries and cooking, but then the topics progressed to their children, colleges, and travel. Sara was in line ahead of Diann and was checking out when Diann realized that she would most likely never see her again. She offered up a silent prayer for an opportunity to plant a Gospel seed. Since they had been talking about traveling, Diann told Sara, "You know, the biggest trip of all is coming up!" Sara looked puzzled but curious so Diann told her, "When we die, we are all going somewhere!" She then asked Sara, "Do you know where you're going?" Diann proceeded to explain that she knew where she was going because she had learned from the Bible that by trusting in the sacrificial death of Jesus as the payment for her sins, she is forgiven and can look forward to eternity with God. Sara said she was going to think about that! Please pray that this brief encounter would bear fruit.

From Death to Birth

Richard Hill, CJFM representative (Las Vegas) and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation, presided at a funeral for "B," who was a friend and a veteran and buried next to a veteran who was killed in the terrorist attack at a concert in Las Vegas. As Rich boldly proclaimed the Gospel message, nine members of B's family prayed and received Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Two of these individuals were B's granddaughters. Rich writes: "In 17 years of ministering and working for CJFM in Las Vegas, we have led 1,161 souls (including 63 Jewish people) to the Lord. Praise God for using us to His Glory!"

A Permanent Shelter

Rich, his wife Oanh, and their children were invited to help out at a prayer tent set up at UMC Hospital following the terrorist attack in Las Vegas. Family members, or friends of those who were attacked, could receive free water, food, and clothing. "Lisa," one of Oanh's friends, asked what she could do to help. Oanh invited her to join them. As they were sitting in the prayer tent, Oanh went through the Scriptures to show Lisa the truth about Jesus. Realizing who Jesus really is, Lisa prayed with Oanh to receive Him as her Lord and Savior. What was meant as a temporary shelter became a permanent salvation shelter for Lisa. Please pray for Lisa's spiritual growth and the salvation of her family.

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In this instance, your answer is a few verses farther down: *And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes* (Mark 1:22). People were attracted to Yeshua not because of what He was wearing, but because of His words. When He spoke, His words were on fire with divine authority and power! He was, after all, the eternal Son of God in human form. That was the source of His magnetic appeal. Ironically, it's also why the religious powers-that-be despised Him.

In the Messianic movement, we should remain on guard against pseudo-teachers who pull imagined “insights” out of their hat to create the impression that they’re experts in interpreting the Bible. However, let’s not throw out the baby with the bathwater here. There are excellent and well-trained Messianic preachers, teachers, and scholars out there whose ministries are a blessing to many of us—and who don’t have to make silly or sensational claims to keep our attention! Many of our finest evangelical universities and seminaries—more than I can take the time to mention here—have Messianic professors on staff who teach from a Messianic perspective.

If you ever find yourself in a situation like this again, maybe you should just raise your hand during the question-and-answer time and ask, very humbly but deliberately, “Excuse me, but would you mind showing us where we can find that in the Bible?” Any preacher or teacher who would be offended by that question is in the wrong business!



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