

Approaches to Jewish Evangelism

by Michael Rudolph

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Yeshua commanded his disciples in what has become known as the “Great Commission;” it is recorded in Matthew 28:16-20, which reads:

“So the eleven talmidim went to the hill in the Galil where Yeshua had told them to go. When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him; but some hesitated. Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age.”

“The Great Commission” is synonymous with “evangelism,” which is synonymous with “preaching the Good News of Messiah’s salvation message,” and it seems like ages since I have taught on it. So, I want to teach on it today by reviewing the most commonly employed evangelistic methods, and then exploring another method that, although solidly biblical, is hardly ever used. What is that method, you ask? I’m going to keep you in suspense until I get to it.

There are nine ways that most of us have been taught to minister Yeshua to unbelievers: The first, is giving testimony of our own experience in coming to faith. This is powerfully persuasive, and the Holy Spirit has been known to fall on the unbeliever while the testimony is being shared.

The second method exposes the unbeliever to relevant Scriptures, and seeks to answer his questions as to why the Scriptures are true, and the New Testament and Messiah Yeshua are Jewish. This method of evangelism is taught in some Messianic Jewish institutions of higher learning where it is known as “Jewish apologetics,” and part of it is identifying Messianic prophecies in the *Tanakh*, and then demonstrating their fulfillment in the New Testament.

The third method invites the unbeliever to a Messianic Jewish worship service in the hope that the Jewish environment, the message preached, or something else, will cause him to turn in his thinking and believe. That “something else” has to be the Holy Spirit who must be active in all of these methods for any of them to succeed.

The fourth method presents Jews for Jesus’s “Four Jewish Spiritual Laws.” They are “oldies but goodies” – usually ministered from a small booklet or tract, and are so well thought out, simple, and effective, that I want to spend just a few minutes describing them.

The first “Jewish Spiritual Law” is: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” The Scripture used to justify saying this is Jeremiah 31:2(3), which states:

“From a distance ADONAI appeared to me, [saying,] “I love you with an everlasting love; this is why in my grace I draw you to me.”

And also, Psalms 16:11:

“You make me know the path of life; in your presence is unbounded joy, in your right hand eternal delight. “

It is important to point out that verse numbers in the *Tanakh* as compared to the English Bible are not always the same, because we want the person to whom we are ministering to be able to find the Jeremiah Scripture in his Bible, whichever one it is.

The second “Jewish Spiritual Law” is: “Man is sinful and separated from God, and thus he cannot know and experience God’s Love and Plan for his life.” Explained another way: “Man is continually trying to have an abundant life through his own efforts – good deeds, ethical conduct, philosophy, etc.” The Scripture used to justify saying this is Ecclesiastes 7:20, which reads:

“For there isn’t a righteous person on earth who does [only] good and never sins.”

And also Isaiah 59:1-2:

“ADONAI’s arm is not too short to save, nor is his ear too dull to hear. Rather, it is your own crimes that separate you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he doesn’t hear.”

The third “Jewish Spiritual Law” is: “The Messiah is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know God’s Love and Plan for your life.” The Scripture used to justify saying this is Leviticus 17:11, that says:

“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for yourselves; for it is the blood that makes atonement because of the life.”

And also, Isaiah 53:5-8:

“But he was wounded because of our crimes, crushed because of our sins; the disciplining that makes us whole fell on him, and by his bruises we are healed. We all, like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way; yet ADONAI laid on him the guilt of all of us. Though mistreated, he was submissive- he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to be slaughtered, like a sheep silent before its shearers, he did not open his mouth. After forcible arrest and sentencing, he was taken away; and none of his generation protested his being cut off from the land of the living for the crimes of my people, who deserved the punishment themselves.”

The fourth “Jewish Spiritual Law” is: “We must receive Messiah Yeshua as Savior and LORD by personal invitation.” The Scripture used to justify saying this is Psalms 2:12, which states:

“Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and you perish along the way, when suddenly his anger blazes. How blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

And also John 1:11-13 and 3:5-7 that teach how to receive the Messiah by faith:

“He came to his own homeland, yet his own people did not receive him. But to as many as did receive him, to those who put their trust in his person and power, he gave the right to become children of God, not because of bloodline, physical impulse or human intention, but because of God.”

“Yeshua answered, “Yes, indeed, I tell you that unless a person is born from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. What is born from the flesh is flesh, and what is born from the Spirit is spirit. Stop being amazed at my telling you that you must be born again from above!”

Continuing with the next way that we have been taught to minister Yeshua to Jewish unbelievers, number five is inviting the unbeliever to a small group teaching or discussion. Number six is nurturing a friendship relationship with him and ministering Yeshua to him when the time is right. Number seven is allowing the way we conduct our life to be a witness of our faith. Number eight is serving the unbeliever’s needs and those for whom he/she cares, and number 9 is (of course) praying for the unbeliever’s salvation. All of these are good and effective if done at the direction of the Holy Spirit. Also, we are not to become discouraged if we do not see results. In my own case, for example, the Lord brought quite a few believers across my path before the Holy Spirit zapped me into the Kingdom while the man who was witnessing to me kept talking because he didn’t even know what had happened.

I promised to introduce you to a method of evangelism that is completely biblical but hardly ever used; it is inspired by Romans 1:18 - 21, which I will read to you in its entirety because it is very important:

“What is revealed is God's anger from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth; because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities- both his eternal power and his divine nature- have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse; because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened.”

Verses 19 & 20 of what I just read says that godless and wicked people are without excuse for not knowing God because God’s qualities (His eternal power and divine nature) are clearly seen in “*what He has made.*” “What He has made” is another way of saying His creation. I am assuming that no one here is in the category of being godless and wicked, so I will address the remainder of my remarks to those of us who know Him, but want to minister to friends, associates, and even strangers who do not.

How can Romans 1:19-20 make such a sweeping statement – that everyone, everywhere, can know the truth about God merely by observing His creation? If we were to point to some item of God’s creation that is in plain sight and ask a typical unbeliever to explain how it could have come about without God, he would very likely respond with the Darwinism he had been taught – that it came about from organic compounds in the oceans that combined and, through natural selection, evolved to its present state. Now to me, the logic of that happening is so implausible as to defy imagination, but not to a person who has been taught Darwinism, and that has not yet had a personal encounter with God. Darwin’s theory of evolution as applied to species is a formidable obstacle to the truth of evangelism both as to Yeshua, and as to God’s very existence.

I would fare no better were I to show the unbeliever what the Bible says about God and Yeshua because unbelievers do not believe the Bible either. Now the negative picture I have painted does not mean that I should not try, because (1) it is my obligation under the instruction of Matthew 28:16-20, and (2) the Holy Spirit might anoint my words and make Himself known to the unbeliever in the midst of my witnessing to him or afterwards, and that, of course, will make all the difference. But whether I see it happen or not, I have an obligation to the unbeliever to bring Him the truth of God (including the salvation brought by Yeshua) at every opportunity. Although I cannot predict when God will come to him, I can nevertheless bring him face-to-face with God (including Messiah Yeshua) if he does not know him, by speaking the words of Scripture, and through an effective presentation of God’s creation.

But what is an effective presentation of God’s creation? I previously indicated that unbelievers tend to reject the idea of God’s existence or the “Messiahship” of Yeshua even after being shown God’s creation and challenged to explain by logic how it could have come about without God. To overcome the unbeliever’s skepticism, I recommend not only showing him God’s creation in nature, but also drawing his attention to its goodness and beauty. Ask him: “Do you see beauty in this tree?” “Do you see beauty in this other tree?” “Do you see beauty in all of these trees?” He will probably say “yes,” and I will then ask him: “How come? They are all shaped differently, yet they are all picture-beautiful, and there is nothing about their beauty that has anything to do with their evolutionary survivability.” The reason that the unbeliever will admit to seeing beauty in the trees I show him is because he, being part of God’s creation and having been made in His image, has an instinctive understanding of goodness and beauty. I will then point out to him that there is no logic to beauty, and no evolutionary usefulness to it. Trees are just as functional in adding oxygen to the environment, just as useful to birds nesting, and just as survivable in a forest crowded by other trees, were they ugly instead of beautiful. Darwin’s theory of evolution through natural selection does not explain why the natural world is filled with beauty and why human beings recognize beauty. He may struggle a bit, but I am certain that the truth of this will not be lost on the unbeliever.

Just as an “aside,” we ought not to think that observing God’s creation by intention is only for the unbeliever. The rest of us (who already know Him) want to (and have a need to regularly encounter God our Father and Yeshua our Messiah, and one of the ways to encounter God is to observe and contemplate what God has made – His creation, that God Himself said was very good, and that John 1:1-10 says was made by Yeshua. If you have forgotten the Scripture to which I am referring, I will remind you; it says:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing made had being. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not suppressed it. There was a man sent from God whose name was Yochanan. He came to be a testimony, to bear witness concerning the light; so that through him, everyone might put his trust in God and be faithful to him. He himself was not that light; no, he came to bear witness concerning the light. This was the true light, which gives light to everyone entering the world. He was in the world- the world came to be through him- yet the world did not know him.”

I might add that, at this time in history, most people (Jews especially) do not know him.

You have no doubt noticed that, in speaking of God’s creation, I have associated goodness with beauty, and have shown you how relying on the beauty of God’s creation can impress an unbeliever and bring him to the place of considering the existence and nature of God. Now permit me to get a little technical but still stay on topic:

Genesis 1:1-31 says that God saw, on five of the six days of creation, that what He had made was “good” and, in the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew word used for “good” in all five of the days is “*ki-tov*.” Now although “*tov*” is very often translated as “good,” “good” is not the only possibility and, in fact the word (and concept of) “good” is quite hard to define. What, for example comprises that which is good? The way something looks? The way it feels? The way it tastes? The way it works? When we consult the prestigious Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon¹ for the definition of “*tov*,” we get all of these possibilities: (1) good; (2) pleasing; (3) delightful; (4) delicious; (5) sweet or savory; (6) pure and clean; (7) cheerful; (8) happy; (9) glad; (10) joyful; (11) kind; (12) acceptable; (13) vigorous; (14) excellent; (15) fair; and (16) beautiful. It is this last definition – “beautiful” – that I suggest is a better translation of “*tov*” in Genesis 1:1-31, because then the verses of Genesis read:

On day 1 God created light, and “*God saw that the light was beautiful.*”

On day 2 God separated sky from water, and on day 3 He created land, the seas, grass, plants, fruit trees and seed-bearing fruit, and “*God saw that it was beautiful.*”

On day 4 God created day and night, seasons, days, years, the sun, the moon and the stars, and “*God saw that it was beautiful.*”

On day 5 God created swimming creatures, birds, sea creatures and creeping creatures, all of which could reproduce, and “*God saw that it was beautiful.*”

On day 6 God created other living creatures, livestock, crawling animals, wild beasts, and man, and “*God saw that it was beautiful.*”

¹ New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew & English Lexicon of the Old Testament, pp. 373-376, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers 1979).

Finally, at the end of day 6, just before He rested on the *Shabbat*, “*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very beautiful.*”

Now perhaps you are thinking that substituting “beautiful” for “good” as a translation of “*tov*” is forcing the translation in order to suit the purposes of this message. Well, to show you that it is not, here are three occurrences in Genesis where a derivative of “*tov*” is translated as “beautiful” or “attractive” in the NKJ, NIV, NAS, and yes, even in the Jewish Publication Society’s TNK² translation. In the CJB:

Genesis 24:16: “*The girl was very beautiful,*” The Hebrew word used for “beautiful” is “*tovat.*”

Genesis 26:7: “*After all, she is a beautiful woman.*” The Hebrew word used for “beautiful” is “*ki-tovat.*”

Genesis 6:2: “*.. the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were attractive;*” The Hebrew word used for “attractive” is “*ki-tovat.*”

It is similar in many other Scriptures; for example, in Esther 1:11, the word for “beautiful” is “*ki-tovat.*” In Daniel 1:4, it is “*v’tovei*” in 1 Samuel 9:2 its first occurrence is “*v’tov,*” and further in the verse it is “*tov.*” And in 2 Samuel 11:2 the Hebrew word is “*tovat.*” All of these are variations of the Hebrew word “*tov,*” and all are translated “beautiful.” And if we use it in Psalms 106:1, we get:

Give thanks to ADONAI; for he is beautiful, for his grace continues forever.

Not bad – in fact, beautiful! So, I recommend adding to the other evangelistic methods we may use, the approach of bringing the unbeliever face-to-face with the beauty of God’s creation and asking him: “Who did that?”

² 1985 JPS *Tanakh.*