

# WHY WOULD A JEW WANT TO BELIEVE IN JESUS?

by Mottel Baleston

MOTTEL BALESTON – HOW I MET MESSIAH!



If you're reading this, at some point you've come across the growing trend of a few brave souls within our Jewish community willing to say two things you rarely ever heard more than 50 years ago:

1. "I'm Jewish and I believe that Yeshua/Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah"
2. "I'm proud to be Jewish and didn't stop being Jewish when I came to believe in Jesus"

Or, perhaps you came across the online video on YouTube/Facebook that is a short 5 minute excerpt of my telling what moved me to investigate the claims of Jesus. With over 2 million YouTube & Facebook views, it's generating thousands of comments, with some imagining that I'm not actually Jewish, or others saying that I'm too Jewish, or that all of what I believe appears in those 5 minutes, etc.

First off, that 5 minute video was edited down from over 40 minutes where I spoke off the cuff about how a nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn came to believe that Yeshua, whom the world knows as Jesus, is our Jewish Messiah. So no, it's not my complete statement, there wasn't even a script, but Eitan, the Israeli fellow who edited it did a great job in keeping my 'spiel' down to just 5 minutes. He left in some parts and cut out many more. Maybe he'll make "the Director's cut" available!

So, to clarify, I want to offer some historical perspective from my experience growing up in the New York City Jewish community, with all 4 of my Grandparents born in traditional Jewish homes in eastern Europe. So, that speaks to one objection: suspicion that I'm not Jewish. Please don't try that 'bubbe-miser' on the Mohel who visited my parent's apartment in Flatbush, Brooklyn, eight days after I was born!

Here's the main point: There have always been Jewish people who were attracted to Jesus. Anyone who actually reads the words that Jesus spoke will find that he spoke traditional Jewish wisdom from the Torah. But in my New York Jewish community, if you said you liked what Jesus taught, the reaction would be very hostile. If you asked why they were so opposed, the older people would tell you of the violent persecution they suffered in Europe by people who wore crosses and went to church. Yes, I know that's true, I grew up seeing the many Holocaust survivors in my neighborhood with numbers on their arms. The teacher in my "after school" Jewish education class was a Holocaust survivor, and at age 11 as I studied it made a strong impression on me. Even before the Shoah, there were those like my Grandparents who suffered through the Pogroms in eastern Europe.

Because of that suffering, and linking Christians with it, you would not dare say that you were an admirer of Jesus.

Absolutely lost in all this is a simple fact: Jesus was a Jew who taught people to do exactly the opposite of what those who persecuted us did. It's like someone hijacked his name, or did an "Identity Theft" of Jesus, stole his I.D. and his drivers license and is doing things with that stolen identity that are exactly the opposite of everything he would ever do!

One of the most vivid memories I have from my childhood is sitting alongside my Grandfather in Synagogue and watching him pray and daven for what seemed like hours to my young self. It was an old Shul in Brooklyn, and he hushed my questions during the service. Afterward, when I asked him why we were there, he simply said in his Yiddish accented English

“Because we’re Jews”. Well, that answer didn’t satisfy so I asked again. He said something along the lines of “To have our sins forgiven, to be righteous”. I pretended I understood that, but really I didn’t.

It was not until I was older and saw one of my college age Jewish friends get pulled into an eastern religion cult, while another became involved in Orthodox Judaism, that the questions I had became real. They each took me to their meetings in New York City. The friend who was now following a Guru from India said I could find truth, and here’s what I had to do:

1. Dress all in white
2. Shave my head
3. Eat only vegetarian foods
4. Face India when I pray
5. Pray in the Sanskrit language

The friend who was now following an Orthodox Rabbi said I should do this to know truth:

1. Dress all in black
2. Grow a full beard and payot (sidecurls)
3. Eat only kosher foods
4. Face Jerusalem when I pray
5. Pray in the Hebrew language

It seemed to me that if there was a truth out there, the truth about God, that it would be a universal truth. If God were God, it should not matter where I faced, what I ate or how I dressed. It seemed that all the cultural rules were designed to be boundaries for group identification, rather than a path to find God.

I had just about given up the “search for truth” when I realized that I had not dared to examine the claims of the most famous Jew who had ever lived, Jesus of Nazareth. In my youth it had been easy to disregard those claims, as the only kids in my New York public elementary school who believed in Jesus were Italian and attended the Catholic church, and since I was Jewish, that meant that Jesus was out of the question. On the two days a week I left school early to go to the Jewish school for Bar Mitzvah preparation the kids there prided ourselves that we would never fall for ‘that Jesus business’. But now, in my 20’s, I sensed that I had too smugly dismissed the idea of Jesus.

So, to be fair I determined to find out more about this Jewish Jesus and decided to read the New Testament to understand if it had anything to do with my Jewish people. I had been warned that it was a book that was against the Jews, and so with surprise I read the very first sentence in this forbidden book: "this is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham". So, in the very first sentence of the “Christian” New Testament there are three people mentioned, and they are all Jewish! As I continued in the book of Matthew I came to see that it was a Jewish story, set in a Jewish country, written by Jewish writers about a Jewish man who claimed to be not only the Messiah of Israel but the Savior of all the world. Everything I read about Rabbi Jesus was attractive.

Most importantly, the prophecies in the Jewish Bible point to a Messiah who would be born of a virgin in the same town where King David was born, Bethlehem. It says Messiah will die as an atonement for sin, and that after his death the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. All these were true of Messiah Jesus and were fulfilled precisely.

I did not set out to convert away from being Jewish, and in fact I never have. I have embraced Jesus as my Jewish Messiah and my atonement, and many thousands of others who love their Jewish heritage have done the same thing. My wife is a Jewish believer in Messiah, and we value our heritage. As Messianic Jews we stand with the State of Israel, with our people, and most importantly, with our Messiah.

Mottel Baleston

Ministry website: [www.MessiahNJ.org](http://www.MessiahNJ.org)