

The *Ruach*, the Jews, and the Pentecostal Experience

We need to be people of the Spirit to effectively communicate the gospel to the Jewish community.

BY RAY GANNON

Jesus' ministry to His own Jewish community bore signs of divine energy as He performed miracles to bless His Jewish kinfolk and to signal divine confirmation of His heaven-sent message. Jesus, like Paul, recognized that the Jew requires a sign.

The Torah was received on Sinai 50 days after the Passover exodus (on *Shavuot* or Pentecost) amid the thunderous noise and fiery presence of God. Jewish tradition holds that God spoke in 70 languages on that occasion to indicate the universal intent of His Word. On another Day of Pentecost in a different millennium, 120 Jews in Jerusalem were filled with the Spirit amid a rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire. Heaven's message was presented by a host of tongues to internationally gathered Jewish minds and hearts. Luke made clear the Jewish response was immensely positive.

The earliest Pentecostal Jews were expected to go out with boldness to proclaim the gospel with the assurance that

the gospel to Jewish people requires more than being socially nice, participating in official Jewish-Christian dialogue, financially supporting humanitarian projects of dubious benefit to the Jewish people, or going to the mat in Bible-thumping argumentation over messianic prophecy. Paul's methodology was clear: "My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4,5, NASB).

Along with our evangelistic need to analyze today's varied Jewish worldviews, we need to be people of the Spirit to effectively communicate the gospel to the Jewish community. Statistics prove Pentecostals have a tremendous evangelistic advantage since the Jewish world has been culturally conditioned to be more responsive to a Spirit-filled gospel. A professional study funded by a non-Pentecostal group to evaluate

not fully aware of the cultural conditioning that has prepared them to be so responsive to the demonstration of the *Shechinah*, the classical influences are clear. The Hebrew Bible, the rabbinical writings, and the emphasis in recent centuries on mystical experience alongside traditional Judaism have affected the widespread Jewish thirst for spiritual reality.

The Hebrew Bible taught the Jewish world that the *Ruach* (breath, wind, Spirit) of *Elohim* (God) infused one with life. The same power of the *Ruach-Elohim* could accomplish the supernatural through mortals, bring about ecstatic speech through the Spirit of prophecy, and raise up and divinely equip charismatic leadership. Later rabbinical literature advocated that the Spirit of God came to persons in special circumstances for divine infusion and revelation. The *Ruach* could speak to God's people with regard to the present and provide insight into their future. The *Shechinah* could manifest in external phenomena such as light and loud noise. Importantly, the *Ruach* would rest upon the Messiah as initiation to the spiritual renewal of Israel.

Medieval Jewish mysticism has continued to profoundly impact the Jewish world in overt and covert ways too extensive for our consideration here. Suffice it to note that Jewish mysticism, with its dependence on Gnosticism and occasional similarity to Hinduism, broke with standard Judaism to advocate spiritual experience beyond normal Jewish religious life. Through contact with the Eternal's spiritual emanations, Jewish mysticism taught one could hope to engage in spiritual quests in supernatural realms. Emphases were made on the

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signs, wonders, and miracles would supernaturally confirm their message. This Spirit-orchestrated strategy for Jewish missions has been ideologically accepted in the Assemblies of God throughout its history.

With 18 centuries of Christendom's persecution of Jews always fresh in the thinking of modern Jewry, communicating

American Jewish ministry demonstrated that, while Pentecostals were responsible for 10 percent of Jewish ministry, 80 percent of Jewish believers were Spirit-filled. This suggests that a much broader Pentecostal effort to evangelize Jewish society could yield staggering Kingdom results.

Although most Jewish people today are

eschaton, spiritual warfare, new illumination of Scripture, and the presence of the *Shechinah*. Mystical intensifications of earlier Jewish thought especially influenced western Jewry.

Unfortunately, such Jewish spiritual pursuits have yielded no contact with God, no personal salvation, no infilling of God's Spirit, no sense of the immediacy of the *Shechinah*, and no manifestation of God to His people. Through the spiritually disappointing centuries, Jews have sought to fill their deeply felt psychic vacuums with perceived good works hoping to find soul satisfaction. But in 2003, there is still no peace of mind for Jewish people of any variety apart from a faithful embrace of the Messiah Jesus and the sweet presence of the Holy Spirit.

The early Pentecostal movement expressed solid conviction concerning the pending spiritual regeneration of the Jewish people as witnessed in early publications. Pentecostals believed Paul's "all Israel" would share their Spirit baptism in the *eschaton*. Since the last days had arrived, abundant testimony supported Pentecostal restorationist ideology that it would now become normative for Jewish people to be profoundly impacted by the Pentecostal experience as prelude to the Second Coming. For example, in 1911, W.H. Cossum offered that unbelieving Israel would soon come to faith in Jesus, be spiritually restored, and share in the Pentecostal experience of Spirit baptism to be equipped to fulfill her glorious destiny of functioning as God's corporate agent in the world.¹ The Pentecostal experience would be poured out in greater measure on a fully redeemed and Spirit-inspired Israel than originally given in Acts 2. The Jews would flow in Pentecostal power and experience so rich that successful global redemption would be virtually assured.²

British Pentecostal editor, A.A. Boddy, eagerly recounted dramatic stories of Pentecostal Jewish conversions in *Confidence* to inspire his broad American readership that Jews would come to Pentecostal faith given the proper

demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power.³ In 1913, *Confidence* related the conversion of a young Jewish assistant to the local rabbi who visited a Pentecostal worship service and received a message from God through the Hebrew tongues-speaking of a Gentile. Well-known Pentecostals were named witnesses to the salvation and Spirit baptism of that young Jew that very night.⁴ E.N. Bell's *Word and Witness*,⁵ Boddy's

in a Beverly Hills home group, there was no mistaking the Spirit's mighty rushing into that living room. The three unsaved Jews who formed part of our prayer circle openly wept when they realized that the very God who spoke to Moses on Sinai was gloriously present. They melted before Him. Word soon spread as scores of Jews came to faith there as they witnessed the powerful operation of the Spirit's workings.

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Confidence,⁶ and J.R. Flower's *The Pentecost*,⁷ all afforded ongoing witness to Jewish conversions through the Spirit's giftings and manifestations.

D.W. Kerr, pastor and educator, offered a report for the 1921 *Latter Rain Evangel* of a San Jose Pentecostal healing meeting. Upon witnessing the dramatic healings taking place before his eyes, a Jewish man was seized with conviction that the healings were signs that Jesus was the living Messiah. He later indicated that he could see salvation in Jesus had been his Jewish inheritance all along but that he had only then recognized Christ.⁸

In 1926, Stanley H. Frodsham, long-term editor of *Pentecostal Evangel*, wrote *With Signs Following: The Story of the Latter Day Pentecostal Revival*. He offered a series of Pentecostal episodes involving Jewish people impacted by confrontation with Hebrew tongues to illustrate the Jewish connection to the Pentecostal restoration. Frodsham called on Pentecostals to pray that just as God had given miraculous signs and wonders at the beginning of Israel's historical cycle, so now Israel should experience signs and wonders at the cycle's close.⁹

I remember my first experience with unsaved Jewish people in the midst of a powerful visitation of the Holy Spirit. As I led a dozen Jewish believers in worship

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E N D N O T E S

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4. _____, "Transatlantic Experiences," *Confidence* 6:1 (January 1913): 15.
5. Sarah A. Smith, "Jerusalem, Palestine," *Word and Witness* 9:8 (20 August 1913): 1.
6. Boddy, ed., "A Well-known Missionary on 'Tongues,'" *Confidence* 8:10 (October 1915): 193.
7. Ida F. Sackett, "The Jews Receiving Christ," *The Pentecost* 1:12 (1 November 1909): 1.
8. "Council Jottings," *Latter Rain Evangel* (1 October 1921): 11.
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