

## ***"But I Don't Believe in You!"***

### ***How a Jew Introduced Himself to Jesus***

By David Agron, Ph.D.

I was startled! Why had I spoken such strange words? I had just finished sitting up straight and blurting out, "But I don't believe in you!" That was my answer to what I knew Jesus had just spoken to me. Wow! Jesus is real! I did not want Jesus to be real. Perhaps the one thing I had learned most clearly from my Jewish upbringing was that Jews are not supposed to believe in Jesus. I had been taught that He did not exist. And yet, that night, I knew that He was real. He was right there with me.

Most American Jews are not very religious. We tend to have a strong sense of our ethnic identity, but also tend to be rather unclear about our religious beliefs. We are willing to tolerate various doctrinal beliefs in the synagogue. If a Jew does not accept the teachings of the Rabbis, it is not a problem. If he does not believe the Bible, it is normally acceptable. If he does not really believe in God, it does not bother much of the Jewish community. But if he believes that Jesus is the Messiah, he is crazy and he is a traitor.

I grew up in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Oak Ridge claims to have the highest number of Ph.D.s per capita in the nation. My ethnic identity was Jewish, but perhaps my religious beliefs were not. I did not believe in the existence of anything except the physical world. I looked down on people who believed in the supernatural. People who believed that "junk" were superstitious and stupid. But I -- I was so wise.... My attitude toward religious Christians could be summarized in the following words: "You say you have experienced something, but I know you haven't, because *I* haven't." Now tell me, what's wrong with that reasoning? Is it just remotely possible that there may be some things in the world with which I have had no experience? I thought I was so smart, but "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

During my last year of elementary school, I spent several months preparing for my Bar Mitzvah. For years I had been attending Hebrew School two afternoons each week and on Sunday mornings. Now, like my brothers before me, I went to study for my Bar Mitzvah. In a few short months, I made up for years of goofing off in Hebrew School. I learned a system of musical notations for singing my portion from the Prophets. I learned to lead the Friday evening and Saturday morning synagogue services. I prepared my Bar Mitzvah speech.

Looking back, I feel that my experience of Judaism was more cultural than religious and more mechanical than spiritual. The attitude absorbed by osmosis from the other Jewish people around me seemed to be, "God, if He even exists, is vague and far off, and who can know about Him.... But, whatever you do or believe, do NOT be a traitor to your people. Do not believe in Jesus." It was Jewishness, not the God of Judaism, which was so important.

My high school years did not seem untypical. I had some very good and interesting

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teachers. I had braces. I developed skills in driving, math, guitar and swimming. I also grew my hair long and partied until I was twenty years old. But the most important event to have occurred in my high school years was an unpleasant date.

My entire belief system changed in one night. I did not suspect that I was about to spend an uncomfortable evening having my worldview adjusted. Karen was supposed to meet me at a coffee house. She arrived quite late. As she told me about her involvement in the occult, I began to experience strange things. I remember her telling me that she wanted to drive my Dad's car. I had not ever allowed someone else drive my Dad's car, and certainly refused to permit that girl to drive it. So she caused me to hallucinate! I could not drive. I learned that night that there is more than a physical world. I had not yet decided if there might be a God, but I immediately knew that there *was* a supernatural. Never again would I be a dogmatic secularist.

So, what about Judaism? I had no reason to assume that Judaism could answer the new questions I was asking. All my life growing up in the synagogue, I had not seen God do anything for anyone. Furthermore, I did not know anyone in the synagogue who suggested he or she had seen any supernatural reality. I wondered if the Eastern religions, philosophy or the occult might have an answer.

A year or two later, I left home and went to college. There I took classes in Philosophy, went to seminars offered by strange religious groups, read about cults, played with tarot cards and wondered about God and the supernatural. However, neither Jewishness nor Christianity aroused my interest. Perhaps I assumed that I knew enough about Judaism and Christianity to know that there was nothing there for me. But the fact that *I* had not seen anyone experience God did not mean that *no one else* had such experience.

During my first quarter of university I met a real Christian. Like most Jews, I did not know the difference between a Christian and a Gentile. We considered all of the people who celebrated Christmas (or who were not of another religion) to be Christians. After all, the normal way to become Jewish is to be born into a Jewish family. I assumed that anyone born into a Christian family was Christian. Then I met a girl who was different. She told me about Jesus. No one else ever had. She was bold enough to come up to me, a stranger, and witness to me. I took her out on a date one time. All she talked about was Jesus. (Now I think that that sounds like a fun date, but I had different ideas back then.) We went to a cheap "pizza and beer joint." I ordered a beer and she ordered a glass of water. She continued witnessing and I continuously argued with her. I told her that I would probably never call her again. I doubt she was very disappointed. That night, after the date, I "decided" there was a God. (Now that I have more experience hearing from God, I understand that that "decision" was more than the workings of my mind. It was a moment of revelation from the Holy Spirit.)

During the next year, several other bold strangers witnessed to me. One day, a young woman spoke with me while I was waiting in line to get into the school cafeteria. She read a few verses from the book of Revelation and explained them. I had never heard these words before because they were from the New Testament. The last verse was Revelation 3:20: "Look, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him." The conversation went something like this:

David, Jesus is real and he wants to come into your life, but he will not force His way in. He doesn't break the door down. He just knocks. He asks permission. David, do you want to open the door of your heart and ask Jesus to come into your life?

"No! I don't believe in that junk. I'm Jewish," I answered. That was easy to tell *her*. But what does one say when *God Himself* issues the same invitation?

I found myself alone one Saturday night and deeply "under conviction." I did not know anything about conviction, the Holy Spirit, or what was happening to me, but I was feeling troubled about my life. I began writing a poem addressed to God. Each verse began with profanity. Something about my life was not right. The conviction deepened until, suddenly, my attitude changed. Though my question was not completely articulated, I quit shaking my fist at God and asked, "Are you there? Can you help me?"

Then something unthinkable happened. God spoke. The voice was not in my ears. It seemed to come from deep within, but it was a loud and powerful voice. He said, "Look, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him." Those were the same words that that girl had read to me from the New Testament book of Revelation. But I do not mean that I simply remembered these words from the prior conversation. I do not mean that I merely thought about these words. I mean *God spoke them*. The voice was not aloud, but, at the same time, it was very loud. The voice in my heart was so loud and clear that I sat up straight and blurted out, "But I don't believe in you!" So who was I talking to? Someone in whom I did not believe?

I had a problem. If God was saying those words, then that suggested Jesus was God. I didn't want to follow Jesus. I didn't want to stop smoking marijuana or chasing girls and I certainly did not want to tell my parents that I believed in Jesus. So I just sat there and didn't answer. Then a thought came to me, "It doesn't really matter whether you want to believe or not. What matters is, whether Jesus real? If He is real then there is not really any reasonable thing to do apart from asking Him to come in to my life." I do not know whether that thought came from God or just from my own mind, but it did make sense. Therefore, I said aloud, "Jesus, I ask you to come into my life." Immediately I had some type of emotional or spiritual experience. I felt like I was lying on top of some kind of electric wind and was rising higher and higher. (No, I was not on drugs!) Not everyone who meets Jesus has such an emotional experience the moment they meet Him. Perhaps God knew that I needed a way to know the experience was real, because I had always been taught that Jesus was a false Messiah. In fact, it is rather common that converts from other religions (especially Judaism and Islam) overcame the emotional barrier to accepting Jesus because of a dramatic spiritual encounter.

The next day I sat on the corner of my bed and considered what I had done. I did not want to repent of several things, and I did not want anyone to find out that I was a Christian. I said aloud, "Well Jesus, or spiritual teacher, or whatever you are, I'm glad that you showed me that Jesus is *a* way, but He can't be *the only* way, and He can't be the right way for *me*. I'm Jewish." What a hypocrite I was. I wanted to excuse my cowardice to face the disappointment of family and friends. I also wanted to justify my unwillingness to give up my party life. I said to myself, "I

can't follow Jesus because we are Jewish and I might hurt my parents' feelings." I had never before been so concerned about my parents! I prayed, "Jesus, I want to try some other spiritual paths. But now that I know that there is truth in You, I can always come back later." Try saying something like that to your fiancée and see if she waits for you! "Darling, when I asked if you would marry me, it was not really a proposal. I just wanted to know if you would. Now that I know you will, I can come back to you if I don't find someone cuter." That is how I treated Jesus.

I spent a year running from what I knew was true. Someone gave me a Bible. I had one dresser drawer in my room that locked. In that drawer I kept condoms, marijuana, a pipe, pornography, . . . and a Bible. When none of my roommates were around, I would lock the doors and unlock my Bible. I would read it in bed so that if one of my roommates came back, I could hide it under the covers.

During that year I had a few minor spiritual experiences while I tried to run from God. Then I met Doug. Doug was a Jewish believer in Jesus who wanted to witness to me. He was able to start building a relationship with me because he knew my girlfriend. When Doug saw me talking to her, he came over and talked to her too. After talking to us a couple of times, he would walk over to just me and talk. Sometimes we sat down and talked in the dorm lobby. He understood relationship evangelism. One day he asked if we could go to his room and have a talk. I knew what he wanted to talk about because my girlfriend had told me that Doug was a "Jesus Freak". Doug did not know that he was about to be more surprised than I was by this conversation.

Doug thought I would be shocked and perhaps angry when he told me that Jesus wanted to have a special relationship with me. Instead, he was surprised when I answered, "I know." He suggested that I try doing the things that I knew Jesus wanted for one week. At the end of a week he said we could meet "to eat and go to one of my favorite places." I thought that he meant we would meet to go to his favorite restaurant. But he meant for us to meet to eat together in the school cafeteria and then go to his favorite Christian meeting. If I had understood what Doug had meant, I probably would not have agreed to go. It seems like God had to trick me into going.

Somehow I knew that God was at work in my life that week. When we went to the Christian meeting, I saw that God was also at work in the lives of Doug's friends. A leader played guitar and we sang along. Between songs, another leader asked people to share things about what God had done in their lives that week. I was very impressed by these testimonies. I wanted more of this experience.

This is when my life began to change. As I spent time with these new friends, I learned to read my Bible every day, not to be ashamed to tell others about the exciting experience of knowing Jesus, and to turn away from sin. God Himself taught me about commitment. As I returned to my room after a class, I realized that God did not like my having Tarot cards in my drawer. When I threw these occult cards in the garbage, I felt a special closeness to Jesus and a supernatural joy. I knew that God was pleased with me. The next day, I walked into my room knowing that I had something else to throw out. God could not be pleased that I had marijuana in my drawer. Again I felt God's approval as I obeyed Him. The next day I knew that the pornography and condoms in my drawer had to be thrown out. The presence of God was so satisfying and exciting, that I was

disappointed when I did not have anything to throw out on the next day. I had learned an important lesson about commitment to Jesus Christ: A person cannot give to God more than God gives back to him.

My relationship with God had an interesting effect on my relationship with my parents. This relationship became both better and worse. On one hand, my parents liked the changes in my life. I now wanted to do what was right and good. This included building a better relationship with my parents. Before following Jesus, I felt it was my parents' responsibility to build family relationships. I just did not care. As a follower of Jesus, I now tried to be a better son. On the other hand, my parents were quite unhappy when they learned the source of these changes in my life.

A few months after becoming a committed follower of Jesus Christ, I told my father that I had met Jesus. He replied, "I'm going to tell you two things. We're not going to kick you out . . . and don't tell your mother." Three months later, my mother found my Bible. She quit talking to me for several days. That response is more common in Asian families than in Jewish families. I had never seen Mom quit talking to anyone else. It is easy to understand why she hurt so deeply.

About that time, my parents asked if I would be willing to talk to the Rabbi. I agreed. We chose an appointed time for three weeks later. The rabbi would come to my parents' house for breakfast. I would come home from college that weekend.

I spent the next three weeks frantically studying Messianic prophecy. Since it was Christmas break, I had plenty of time to study for this unusual type of "exam." I felt intimidated by the upcoming meeting with the Rabbi. One morning, about a week and a half before I was to meet with the Rabbi, I was getting ready to go jog. As I got ready, God spoke to me again. (I feel that God has only spoken clearly to me about six times, but that He is always working in my life.) I did not understand what He meant. He said, "You are going to Israel." Did that mean I was going to move there, or was I going to go on a trip? I was a college student who was supported by his parents. I had no money for taking a trip to Israel!

I went to my parents' house that weekend. It was a week before my meeting with the Rabbi. There was some interesting literature lying around the house: "Summer Programs at Jerusalem University," "Summer on a Kibbutz" (a communal farming settlement in Israel). I looked at the pamphlets and said to my mother, "Oh, you want me to go to Israel?!"

"Well, your father and I thought that, if you would be willing, it would be nice..." (Notice that Jews assume that if a Jew accepts Jesus he is also rejecting Judaism -- "if you would be willing....")

I said, "That's great! God told me I was going to Israel."

The next weekend, across the breakfast table from the Rabbi, the first question fired at me was, "Do you believe that God told you to go to Israel?"

"No," I replied. "He told me I am going." This was not the answer of a bratty and

sarcastic kid, but of an innocent one. I was not trying to give him heartburn ... it just came naturally.

I think that one of the reasons why God sent me to Israel was to help me understand and identify with my own Jewishness. Contrary to what most Jews assume, a Jew who believes that Jesus is the Messiah does not become less attracted to Jewishness. I am fascinated by Biblical Judaism and Jewish culture. However, I regard Rabbinical Judaism to be the wrong path.

Years of walking with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have continued to reveal that my initial experience with Jesus was real. Some of the things He has done since then have been quite dramatic (e.g. a Christian student telling me my wife would have a baby when we did not even know we were pregnant, and a full-time position with benefits dropping into my lap before the baby was born). Other times I do not sense His activity in my life, but that does not mean he is not there working. Have you experienced His touch? Contact me if you want to know more.