

Preface

In 1996 I began to entertain a belief contrary to my Jewish friends and family: that Jesus is the promised Messiah.¹

What was I thinking? That Jesus is *not* the Messiah is a belief deeply entrenched in my family history. Was I really qualified to reevaluate this? How could I veer off the path that my forefathers had walked for thousands of years?

After struggling with these questions for several months, I realized that the generations before me probably had not approached the “Jesus question” as intentionally as I was trying to. I didn’t know any family members who read the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) in which the Messiah is foreshadowed, let alone study the New Testament to see if Jesus fit the bill. Instead, most of them—consciously or unconsciously—inherited their rejection of Jesus from their parents, grandparents and rabbis.

A little knowledge of history reinforced their view. During the Crusades, Jews were slaughtered in Jesus’ name. During the Spanish Inquisition, “Convert to Christianity or die” was the theme. During the Reformation, Martin Luther called for believers to destroy Jewish synagogues and religious books. Although I was ignorant of this history, my inherited rejection of Jesus was solidified by television evangelist scandals and seeing crosses burned at Ku Klux Klan rallies. These people appeared to be Jesus’ most visible representatives, so I wanted nothing to do with Him.

What Softened My Stance?

While recovering from a series of personal trials, I was encouraged by friends to pray for strength and wisdom. Desperate, I dabbled in prayer, and within a few days I sensed that the God of my ances-

tors was indeed still alive and well. Unable to ignore His existence, I set out to learn more about Him. But where to start?

It was Christians who seemed most interested in talking about God. These people focused on growing, changing, learning and healing—with God at the center of their lives. But the thought of becoming a “Christian” seemed strange. How could I make that leap when I knew nothing about Jesus? I realized how strongly held my disbelief was, yet how little analysis I had done. As an educated, intelligent businesswoman, I reckoned that it was time to start.

In spite of my (real or imagined) family opposition, I braved the journey with an open mind as best I could. Discovering information about Jesus that contradicted my core beliefs disturbed me, but it eventually produced fruit in every area of my life—beyond my wildest expectations. Had I not ventured outside of my preconceived theology and my ancestors’ belief system, I would have missed it.

Now, I invite you to embark on a similar journey of open-minded exploration. The implications might scare you, but consider suspending the beliefs you’ve inherited from your family, your teachers and our society. At the very least, I invite you to become aware of the lenses with which you read the Bible. What assumptions or beliefs—conscious or unconscious—influence your interpretations? Where did they come from? How do they line up with the original, historical context in which the Bible was written?

As you explore, it may feel strange to consider new perspectives on familiar Bible passages. However, if you approach this process prayerfully and thoughtfully, it may be one of the most invigorating studies you’ve ever undertaken.

Endnotes

¹ The word “messiah” comes from the Hebrew word *moshiach*, which means “anointed one.” In the Greek, *moshiach* is translated *Christos*, which is often translated into English as “Christ.” Most Jewish folks, myself included, grow up believing that “Christ” is Jesus’ last name (or a swear word) rather than an affirmation of His messiahship. As such, I like to refer to Jesus as “Messiah” rather than “Christ.”