From New York City to Rio de Janeiro

Wielding Technology to Reach Jewish People

By **RACHEL LARSEN**

Rachel Larsen works as a staff writer for Chosen People Ministries in New York City. She studies historical theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. When not studying, she enjoys reading, drinking tea, and swimming.

Meet Tal (name changed). He came from Israel to Rio de Janeiro in search of new experiences. As with many young traveling Israelis, this included partying, abundant alcohol, and mind-bending drugs. He found just what he was looking for, and for a while he felt amazing.

But as the days went by, these activities grew hollow. Tal admitted this kind of life began to feel very empty. Then, he remembered the Christian volunteers he met at the hostel where he was staying. He noticed their demeanor. They treated each guest with warmth, hospitality, and respect. "There was just something about them that drew me to them," he said.

He contacted these volunteers and willingly listened to all they had to say about the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. He even accepted a Hebrew New Testament, saying he would read it as he continued his travels in South America. Thanks to the digital age, we can easily keep the conversation going wherever Tal ends up. We can also connect Tal to a wealth of online Gospel-focused resources in both English and Hebrew.

Contextualization in a Jewish Context

In this third decade of the 21st century, the usefulness of technology in world missions is beyond doubt. We already have seen fruit from resources like online Bibles, videos, and the ability to chat with people around the globe. As with any tool, context matters. Different forms of media and kinds of content appeal to different groups.

Since 1894, Chosen People Ministries has specialized in proclaiming the Gospel among Jewish people around the world. In the past few decades, we have produced a rich treasury of evangelistic videos, websites, eBooks, and more. Our missionary staff regularly follows up with seekers who express interest in learning more. But what makes digital outreach to Jewish people different? We contextualize our content for different ages, languages, and backgrounds. Here are some ways we wield digital media to reach specific Jewish groups—from the most religious and traditional to the most secular and modern.

Wielding Technology to Reach the Ultra-Orthodox

Missiologists have long noted the great potential of digital tools to reach people for whom traditional evangelism techniques are ineffective or infeasible. The classic example is a closed country where openly proclaiming the Gospel is illegal and carries heavy penalties. Closed communities still exist in the United States and other democratic nations. Among these is the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community. These deeply religious Jewish people live primarily around New York City and in Israel. They live in tight-knit, insular neighborhoods, many of which even operate their own ambulance and security services.

Ultra-Orthodox communities are designed to be self-sufficient to avoid unwanted outside influence. Missionary presence is the most unwanted of all. Anyone setting up a book table or distributing tracts would be swiftly forced to leave. Forming friendships with ultra-Orthodox people is a key strategy, but difficult as most interactions remain within the community. Thus, creating digital content geared toward the ultra-Orthodox is one of the most important ways to make Jesus known among them.

Our Chosen People Answers website is one resource we have geared toward a more religious Jewish audience. It brings together Jewish and Christian texts and apologetics articles. Detailed and in-depth, these articles address profound, philosophical objections often unique to religious Jewish people. For instance, one article defends the incarnation and challenges the traditional Jewish view that God cannot take bodily form.

We plan to expand our witness to the ultra-Orthodox, and digital media will certainly play a significant role. In particular, increasing digital and printed content in Yiddish is a key aspect of strategic outreach, as Yiddish is the everyday heart language of these communities and a central feature of the culture.

Wielding Technology to Reach Traveling Israelis

For several years, we have had a flourishing ministry to Israelis traveling around the world after their mandatory military service. We run lodges in popular destinations like New Zealand and Brazil. Young Israelis often prove remarkably open to spiritual conversations. This season between the military and going to college or starting a career is one of physical and spiritual exploration. It is the perfect time to try new activities and consider different perspectives. Our welcoming staff is attentive to the many opportunities to tell visitors about the Gospel and offer Bibles. This ministry has proven so powerful we are now building an international network of Christian hosts to provide a similar atmosphere in their own homes.

Of course, the main focus of this outreach is the personal relationship between host and guest, but the network could not exist without digital tools. There is "Planet Zula," the app Israelis can use to find places to stay on our network. "Host Israelis"—still under construction—is our host-facing app. If guests show interest, we can have our staff in Israel follow up with them upon their return. We also are building a Hebrew-language site intended for seekers, which is another contact point with former guests and other curious Israelis.

Another advantage of having a global, digitally connected network is that an Israeli might very well stay with believers in completely different regions of the world, seeing how the same Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of all kinds of people. For instance, someone who works at Beit Samurai, our hostel in Tokyo, got to know an Israeli guest who was going on to New Zealand. This guest openly asked about Jesus and the Gospel, even asking for a Bible. Our staff gladly connected him with a Messianic congregation in New Zealand and a leader in Australia. This young traveler has kept up with the man in Australia he met through a Japanese believer. Such cooperation would not be possible without digital communication!

Conclusion

Proclaiming the Gospel among Jewish people looks a lot different from when Paul spoke in synagogues throughout the Mediterranean (Acts 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17, etc.). Strategies change, but principles do not. We must be ever ready to adjust our strategies to reach people as effectively as possible. Our message and burden, however, remain the same. Jesus is the Messiah the Hebrew Scriptures predicted (Acts 17:3). *My heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their* [the Jewish people's] *salvation* (Romans 10:1, NASB95). ᴍF