

'Good News' for modern Jews?

Story by
Terri Wilson

A caravan of persons calling themselves Jews for Jesus recently stopped in Lincoln. Coming onto campus amidst the political campaigning, they almost seemed to be part of that handing out their fliers. A Lincoln rabbi said he doubted the visitors from California had much impact here. Here's what they say.

Two weeks ago a van labeled "Jews for Jesus" traveled through Lincoln. Their singing group, called The Liberated Wailing Wall, gave a song-and-dance performance at the First Baptist Church. Perhaps you saw them. Or perhaps on your way to class you received one of the many pamphlets proclaiming that some Jewish people have accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

Their stop in Lincoln was like many the Jews for Jesus clan has made throughout America since the movement began in the hippie culture of Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco in 1966.

By about 1970 some 67,000 Jews were reported turning to Christ. Moishe (Moses in Jewish) Rosen is the national Jews for Jesus leader. He incorporated the organization in California after 17 years on the staff of the New York-based American Board of Missions to the Jews.

Jews for Jesus sounds like a paradox. The idea is to become a "completed Jew," not a "reformed" Jew, followers say. They basically have kept their Jewish tradition and culture but have embraced Christian beliefs.

In 1973, Rosen was baptized. Rosen, 44, was then trained at Northwestern Bible College in New Jersey as a Baptist minister. He and his wife are of Jewish descent.

"The term 'Christian' has come to mean non-Jewish today," Rosen said. "All the apostles were Jews but did not give up their Jewish worship" when they followed Christ.

The break in the Jewish and Christian communities came about 1030 A.D., when the messianic Jews believed in Jesus. The "medieval logic" of Aristotle divided everything into categories, he said, including Jews and Christians.

Jewish folkways kept

"The early Church was Jewish, but there was room for paradoxes," he said. "God was loving and good and he was also stern. The Bible and religion has many paradoxes."

Jews for Jesus shouldn't confuse anyone, he said.

"When I became a Christian, I didn't give up my Jewish folkways or (eating habits) I had a loyalty to my own people," Rosen said.

"I was overwhelmed when I realized how prejudiced I was against Christ (before baptism)."

"It was between God and me," he said of his final acceptance of the Bible and of Jesus of 2,000 years ago as the Savior.

Jews for Jesus has caused consternation among the "regulars" of the Jewish faith. Rabbi Robert Kaiser of the South St. Temple Congregation in Lincoln said he thought it is "a little bit silly. But the free society of America is a wonderful thing, you can leave or choose to join any religion you want."

The idea of Jews accepting Jesus Christ as their personal savior has been tried before, Kaiser said, and was not successful. About 1,000 Jews live in Lincoln, he said, and it is hard to tell if any of them were affected by the Jews for Jesus visit.

Jewish students at UNL hold a dim view of Jews for Jesus. Larry Marcus, president of the all-Jewish fraternity Sigma Alpha Mu, said, "We don't approve of them at all."

Speaking for himself and his 25 fraternity brothers, he said they thought Jews for Jesus was "asinine."

Nothing to do with them

"The Jews for Jesus—just by their name—show they are Jews that have accepted Christ as Lord. (But) the main aspect of being Jewish is not to recognize anyone over God. We believe in one God. Jesus—he is just another Jewish prophet in the Old Testament. We don't believe in the New Testament, just the Old Testament. To us their (the Jews for Jesus) attitude is absurd."

Although none of the Sammies (Sigma Alpha Mu members) did not talk to the Jews for Jesus when they were in Lincoln two weeks ago, Marcus said some of their pamphlets were passed around the fraternity house.

"Maybe we're close-minded about it... we don't have anything to do with them."

While Jews for Jesus emphasize they have kept their Jewish culture while accepting Christianity, Marcus

said, the main aspect of Judaism is the religion, not the culture."

Kaiser said The Liberated Wailing Wall singing group did not ask to perform at his synagogue during their week-long stay in Lincoln. But he said he would have let them, had they asked.

However, Wesley Hustad, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Lincoln, invited the mobile evangelistic team to give a concert at his church.

"It took 18 months to get them here," he said.

The Liberated Wailing Wall combines "Jewish Gospel" singing, with lyrics taken from scripture. They also perform Jewish folk dance and drama.

"They were fantastic," Hustad said.

"Being Jewish is mostly cultural," Rosen said. This is where the misconception comes in.

"Modern society makes Judaism and Christianity mutually exclusive. But neither Jesus nor the apostles accepted that."

Rosen said both Jews and Christians often ignore his group.

Donations support

Jews for Jesus has 59 field workers who spread the word via pamphlets and rap sessions with Americans. They have no membership program per se, Rosen said. But newsletters are sent to some 96,000 Jews for Jesus followers and sympathizers.

The operate on an annual budget of \$75,000 mostly donations received at their San Rafael, Calif. office.

Pamphlets explain their position colorfully and cleverly. There are 1,000 different titles altogether. Among them: "Jesus made me Kosher." "Christmas is a Jewish Holiday." "Happy Yom Kippur." "What's A Nice Four-letter Word You Can Say to God's Face?" "Graduate." And even "Mary Hartman Mary Hartman," a spoof on the TV show. The latter caused an alleged suit against Jews for Jesus brought by the program's producers. The pamphlet said Mary Hartman needed to repent, to repent, because she had sinned, sinned.

A pamphlet titled "Everything you always wanted to know about Jesus, but were afraid to ask your rabbi," summarizes their beliefs:

"We say that the main thing you ought to know about Jesus is that you can and should believe in him. His is the promised Jewish Messiah. His is the ultimate sacrifice by which men can be justified and through whom Jews and Gentiles can return to God. And about this we're serious."

A Jew was one who followed the covenant supposedly made by God with Abraham, Moses and David. The covenants provided for a promised land and a privileged relationship with God and gave Jews the mission to proclaim the one true God to the world.

New Covenant

A New Covenant was promised in Jeremiah 31:33, outlining how a person would become a Christian:

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Modern Jews for Jesus have been charged with disturbing the peace and littering by policemen in Chicago, Rosen said. They have been spit upon, laughed at.

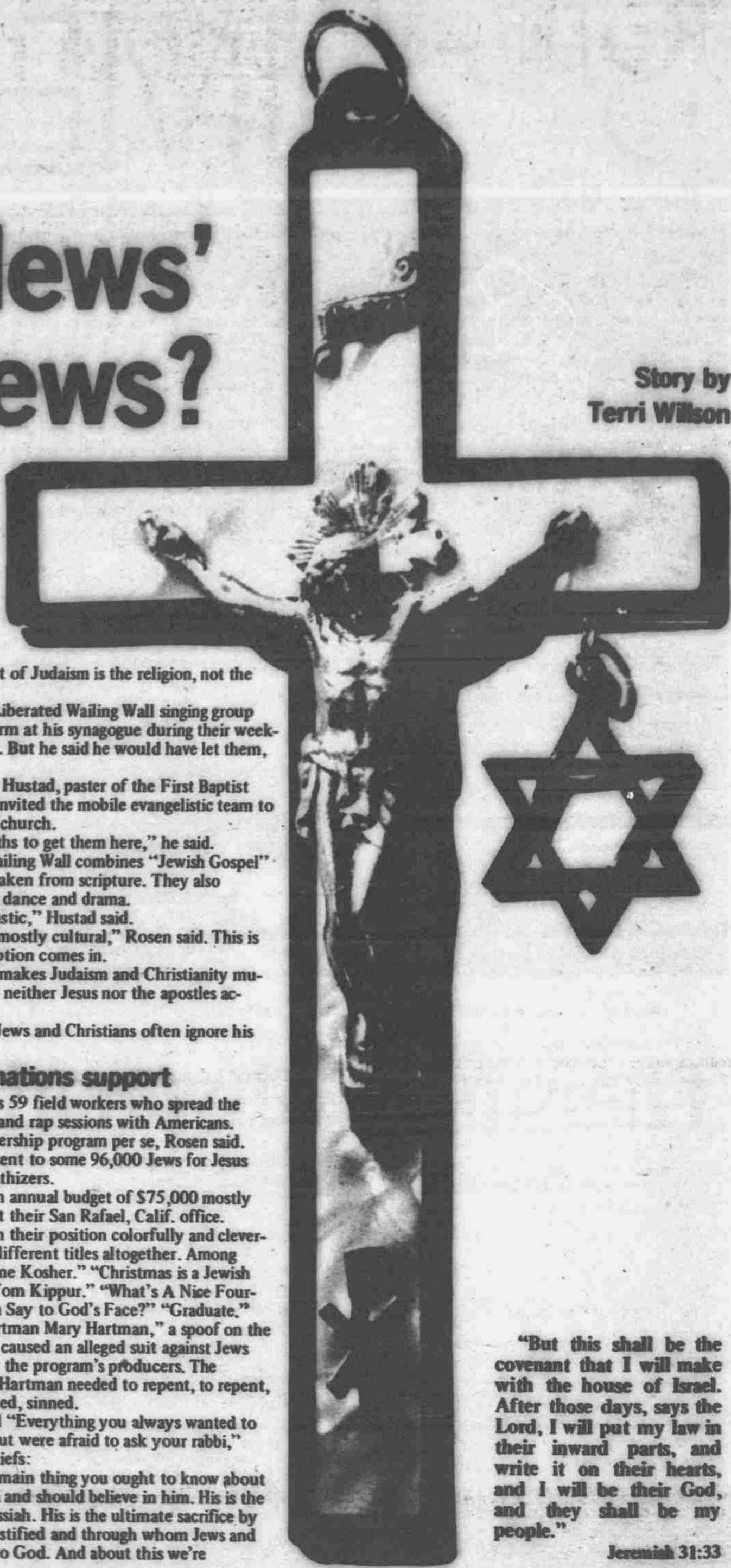
Once in Chicago, a "Gay Pride" group rallied around them. A former homosexual Jews for Jesus member reportedly silenced the mob by saying, "Gay meant anything but happy. To be gay meant to be miserable."

They go on. Traveling to Philadelphia, New York and Lincoln.

Rosen said in his recent newsletter:

"Everywhere we go, we meet Jews who are eager to talk about Jesus and Christians who are sensitive to the Jewish people... The ministry has been sowing seed. Now we hope to begin watering... and we believe we are standing on the edge of the harvest."

Moishe Rosen has written several books, among them, *Our Messianic Mission, the Saying of Chairmen Moishe*.



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Jeremiah 31:33

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The Staff

Editor _____

Nancy J. Stohs

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Mark Young

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Terri Wilson

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