

1. My Personal History

By John Marquez

If you're going to ponder a man's views of God and what He reveals in His written Word, it helps to know something about the man himself. Who is this man? Where did he come from? How did he get to where he is today? How did he come to know God? Can you trust his views? Does he really know what he's talking about? And does he have any hidden unhealthy, self-serving or toxic and pernicious agendas?

I've said in other portions of this website that, without exception, no fallen flesh can be trusted or relied upon to serve as a source or resource. I firmly believe that you can only trust a man to the degree that he himself relies on and trusts entirely upon the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...and the Power of His Holy Spirit and the perfect, Finished Work of His living Word.

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is Life indeed.” (1 Tim. 6:17-19 Emphasis added.)

I believe I owe it to you to tell you about myself so you'll better understand what I'm saying in my writings. It will help if you know what my 'boot camp' training consisted of. (And by the way, my boot camp training is ongoing. For disciples that are going to grow and keep maturing and developing, it never ends.) How did I learn about what disciples are and how they are to be trained? What lessons have I learned and how did I learn them and why do I see things as I do? You need to know that because when you know that, you will better understand what ingredients have gone into my understanding and what kind of life structure underlies my attempts to articulate and express what the Lord has put into my heart.

My prayer is that when you read about what happened in my past, you will have even more trust in our Master and much more personal hope for yourself. And you'll be better able to see why only one Man is to be trusted...Yeshua, the Messiah, who also happens to be the living Word of God. No other man is to be exalted or considered to be more than what all the sons of Adam really are. Apart from what we have been made and equipped to be and do by our Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer and Messiah...God's living Word, we, even on our best day, are nothing but, 'helpless dust'.

My early years...

I was born into a Mexican–American family. My four grandparents and my mother were all born in Mexico. My father was born in Texas, shortly after his parents came to America. My mother and father first met each other in Omaha and were married in 1938.

I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, U.S.A., in 1939, the first of three children. Our family background was Catholic. I was raised in that faith from birth. When I began sixth grade, I stopped attending public elementary school and transferred to a Catholic school. That is where I came to know some Catholic priests that belonged to a religious missionary order. I became good friends with several of them, and because of their influence, and my admiration of them, I decided to go to the seminary they had attended and study to become a priest just like them.

My parents gave me permission to apply for admission to the seminary. And when I was accepted, they provided the means for me to go. I left home when I was 13 years old and went to the state of Missouri, to begin six years of minor seminary training. I made many good friends and did well in my studies and eventually was appointed to various positions of student responsibility and leadership.

The entire course lasted 13 years – four years of high school, four years of college and four years of post-graduate studies. There was also one year of special religious training added that prepared us to enter the monastic life of the religious order I was joining.

[Please Note This: what I am going to say about my seminary experience, and Catholicism, and the religious order and my short time as a priest, is not meant to be a statement about the world wide Roman Catholic Church. It is merely an account of my personal experiences and how I saw and interpreted them at a time of life when I was spiritually and emotionally immature and inexperienced. This is an account of my personal relationship with God and is not meant to criticize or demean any of the dear people with whom I grew up, studied under or interacted with during my formative years. I grew to love, and was loved by many of them. They were beloved and respected friends. This is not about them or their Church per se. It is about what I saw and experienced and how I interpreted it. This is only an expression of my subjective view of the world and my life in it, during the very difficult, confusing and painful days of my youth.]

During my time in the seminary, I truly wanted to serve God as we were taught to understand it and to be a man after His own heart. I went along with everything my training required me to do, thinking that by doing that I was serving and pleasing God.

But for the first twelve years of our training in that particular system, we never seriously studied the Bible. It was given passing mention; but we never had to bring a Bible to class until the beginning of our twelfth academic year. But by the end of that year, we were already scheduled to be ordained into the priesthood. So in that system, our priesthood formation was not based on Biblical revelation. It was based on Church teachings and traditions that, instead of being Biblical and Hebraic, were utterly Greco-Roman in origin and based on Hellenistic, Aristotelian/Thomistic philosophy, theology and thought patterns, along with post-Biblical Western Church traditions that developed after the deaths of the apostles.

Because of the practice of ignoring the Scriptures, I didn't seriously begin to look into the Bible until I had to...because it was now included on our course of study. But by then, I was already a young man in my middle 20's! So throughout my formative years, I remained almost totally ignorant of the written Word of God and developed the unconscious attitude that the

Bible is not very important. The unspoken message I received was, that I could have an intimate personal knowledge of God's living Word, simply by being well versed in the organized system and the religious teachings of the men that were admired, believed and respected by the system to which I was personally connected.

The beginning of the end...

But then in my twelfth year of training when I actually began to study Scripture, something happened that I find hard to describe or explain. Two of our Scripture professors were very good at explaining the Hebrew language and the Israelite culture and their ways of seeing, thinking and expressing truth. I began to realize how important knowledge of that Hebrew world had to be, since it was the 'womb' into which God chose to place His precious living and written Word. God chose the Hebrew world as the matrix from which He revealed Himself to us. So to me, that suddenly became a major key to gaining access to an accurate, precise and authentic understanding of what God wanted us to know about Himself and His ways.

When I was finally introduced to that world, I became more excited than I had ever been in my life. I loved the Scriptures and could not get enough of them. They opened up a brand new world I never knew existed. But this only seemed to happen to me. My classmates did not seem to be affected by the Bible the way I was. It seemed to be only another class to them, but to me it was a gateway to a brand new life. I was never the same after that world opened up before me.

At that time, my primary fascination wasn't directed to the Lord Himself...to 'Jesus Christ', as I called Him in those days. I was trained to apprehend everything intellectually...to start trying to 'figure it out' to 'get my mind around it'. So at first I focused on the written Word...not The Word Himself, but the Word *about* The Word. It began as a fascination with matters that concerned Him. So my interest in the beginning was academic, intellectual, theoretical and for the most part, abstract. If I stayed on that level, I felt a sense of control and confidence and, sorry to say, arrogant 'smugness'.

That was the best I could do at that time. Nevertheless, I began to try to learn as much as I could about this new world. I quickly began to lose interest in all my other subjects. Now that I knew about the Bible, it was all I wanted to study. I discovered that our Heavenly Father named His Son, His living Word made flesh, 'Yeshua'. It is a derivative of 'Yehoshua' (Joshua). And it means, 'Salvation'. Salvation is the name God chose to give to His living Word when He finally arrived among us in the flesh! So now it's important to me to use His real name. Anyone that knows Hebrew has to think 'Salvation' when they hear His name and link that idea to the Person of our Lord.

When I first became aware of all the revelation that is packed into the Hebrew language and culture, I was shocked and amazed to find out how much I had been missing. This was a new world about which (I surmised) most people in the pews of the typical American church world, knew next to nothing! But it was so beautiful and wonderful and deep and compelling to me because I was gradually beginning to sense that God's mysteries were hidden within it. I began to feel as if I was being 'nudged' by the outer fringes of eternity and infinity! For the

first time, I began to develop a sense that God was much more than a theological doctrine or proposition or an association with a man-controlled and organized religious institution. A dim awareness began to grow within that there was something much more real and mysterious and living and incomprehensible about Him that I couldn't even begin to grasp or understand intellectually and philosophically. This was a Someone...Someone Real and Alive and chillingly Overwhelming! This dawning awareness was deliciously scary...and it filled me with a sense of awe that I had never felt before.

As Bible matters became my preoccupation, my professors, classmates and closest friends noticed great changes taking place in me. After a few months, two of the Scripture professors asked me if I would be interested in pursuing further studies in Europe so that I could be qualified to return to the seminary as a member of the Scripture teaching faculty. And of course, I said **'Yes!'**

So to speed and deepen my education and prepare me for the future studies this new direction would require, the Scripture professors began giving me extra things to read and study that the rest of my class was not receiving. I studied more and began to change more. But what began as something wonderful and exciting, suddenly started to take on the aspects of an enormous problem!

I could not understand why the seminary training had forced us to ignore the Word of God for so long. I could not understand why the teachings of men were given so much more importance, priority and exposure and why the Word of God Himself received so little by comparison. I could not reconcile what the God of Scripture required with what the God presented by organized religion required. The differences were enormous and the effect that had on me made me feel as if my mind was being torn apart in two conflicting directions.

Ten months after we started Scripture study, I and my classmates were ordained as priests. Of course our families and friends were enormously proud of us. And we went home to celebrate our 'First Mass' and receive congratulations after our long hard years of preparation. After that we returned to continue our studies, but I began to see a tremendous difference between what was in the Bible, and what was in my real life and in the daily life of the people of the church world with which I had become so comfortable and familiar.

It is historical fact that for centuries, the Church authorities had kept common uneducated people in the dark concerning the contents of the Bible. And now I began to realize that the same thing had been done to us...even though we were supposedly going to be spiritual leaders for lay people that were trained to assume we had all the answers! I became very disillusioned, confused and disturbed in my soul. For the first time in my life, I began to doubt and mistrust the faith I had in my church and what it taught and what it was really doing. I lost confidence in my professors and text books. And I lost faith in myself and in the future work into which I had invested my entire life. Now I was beginning to realize that I really didn't know what I was doing. I was no more qualified to be a spiritual leader to others than the man in the moon! And, if the religious order to which I belonged were to invest all the extra money it would take to prepare me to become a faculty member of the seminary system, it would be a waste. I knew I would not be able to teach what they would expect me to teach!

So I felt like a man that suddenly wakes up and realizes he's on the wrong train, speeding in the wrong direction and the sooner he gets off, the better it will be for everyone concerned. But I had already been ordained a priest! And I'd taken perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a member of my religious order! Nevertheless, all the doubts that were plaguing me made it impossible to function in those roles. My motivation evaporated. I was undergoing something weird...a sort of mental and emotional 'meltdown'. And finally, in the middle of a sleepless night, I suddenly admitted to myself that I no longer believed or trusted in anything I was doing. I couldn't even trust in what I thought I was seeing in the Bible! And that's when I realized that I was going to have to admit, first to myself...and then to the world...that I did not have what was required to do the job I had vowed to God to do for the rest of my life. I signed up for it; but I couldn't do it.

When I realized that we were not teaching the Word of God, but the words of men, I shut down, emotionally. And I began to believe that it would be criminal for me to allow the order to invest any more money in my education. Suddenly I was a total misfit. I no longer belonged. I began to be regarded by my friends and colleagues as a 'total stranger'. And that is also how I felt. And that intensified the pressure I was feeling...pressure to make a decision and declare my intentions as soon as possible, before I did any more damage to all concerned. I was amazed and appalled at how the Holy Spirit could have allowed the world I was in and had believed in to stray so far from God's Word. So my personal little world imploded. I lost all faith in everything, even in my understanding of God and of what I thought Reality was.

In a few months I had changed so drastically that my life as I had always known it was completely destroyed. My professors and fellow seminary students began to question my sanity. And that is when I felt compelled to leave the order, the priesthood and the church of my youth. I was afraid to do it. I had no desire and was not at all prepared, to try to be a man of the world. I knew nothing about functioning in that 'dog-eat-dog' atmosphere. The thought of doing it frightened me very much. But the thought of staying where I was and doing what I no longer believed in, frightened me even more. So I saw no other realistic alternative. I had to leave, or go mad.

I had previously told my superiors that I was undergoing major difficulties. But now I asked them to help me request permission from Rome to leave the priesthood and the religious life so that I could become a lay person once more. But they assumed it was not a matter of faith, but a matter of character and morals...that I was being assailed by demonic temptations. So they kept encouraging me to 'hang in there'. But it only got worse. And when their efforts to change my mind didn't succeed, my major superior refused to help me. In fact he ordered me to stay where I was. And when I told him I could not do that and intended to leave whether I had his permission and help, or not, he pointed his finger at me and said:

"You are a Judas! You are going to drive your parents to an early grave. And if you should ever try to get married, it won't last five years. And when you come to your senses and realize what you've done...that you walked out on Jesus Christ...you will probably commit suicide!"

Into the wilderness...

So I left without permission...in total disgrace. That of course shamed, devastated and disgraced my family in the eyes of our friends. No one could understand what had happened to me. And I could not explain it – not even to myself. I just knew I had to leave. And when I did, I was penniless and had no idea of what I was going to do next. I staggered out of that highly-sheltered world, and into the jungle of the world system, like a drunk man hoping he could manage to stay on his feet.

The shock, disillusionment, shame and pain I was feeling were so great that I decided I would never have anything more to do with God or Jesus, or Christianity and the Church. I lost all faith in those things as I understood and knew them. And because all that pain was now linked to the Bible and Israel and that awesome Hebrew world that had briefly opened up before me, I walked out on that too. I turned my back and left it behind, determined never to have anything more to do with it because now, I could see no reason to pursue it nor any realistic reason to even try. Everything linked to this experience became like a red hot griddle on which my soul had been placed. And I was determined never to come close to it again. Once was enough!

So, taking what I sensed to be the 'path of least resistance', the lesser of two evils, I went out into the dog-eat-dog world and did my best to find a job and make a new beginning. One of my professors had introduced me to Mary and her daughter Katie in the past. I had been assigned to teach Katie and help her prepare for her first communion. That is how I first got to know them. Mary's former husband (Katie's father) had been unfaithful and had deserted them several years before. So after I made my decision to leave, I called Mary and told her that I was leaving and was planning to move to California. And in the most awkward way imaginable, I asked her if she would consider going to California with me. And she said..."Yes!"

So Mary came with me. And when we saved enough money to do it, we were married in Tijuana, Mexico in 1967 by a Mexican lawyer. And Mary, Katie and I settled in Southern California.

When I asked the seminary to send the transcripts containing my grades and degrees, they ignored my request. I assumed they wanted to pressure me into a change of mind so I would return to the order and the priesthood. So because of that, I couldn't prove that I had any education. I had no proof of any history or track record to show to prospective employers. So I found it impossible to get a decent job. I had to begin 'from scratch'. I began by getting a job as a laborer in a tree nursery...and later I worked in a hospital as an orderly. Then I enrolled in a barber college because no high school diploma was required. And I studied barbering by day, and worked as a machine operator in a greeting card factory by night. I did that until I graduated from the barber school, passed my examination and received a barber license. After that I worked as a barber in Southern California for three years and also worked part time for a large moving and storage company hauling the furniture of people that were moving from one place to another.

A few months after I left the priesthood and began my life in California, I began having a recurring bad dream that in America we call a '*nightmare*'. It was always the same dream, over

and over. It would come three, four or five times a week. I was afraid to go to sleep because of it. In the dream I would be with my classmates in the middle of our ordination ceremony. And suddenly I would realize that I had left the priesthood and could no longer function in it. And I could not understand why I was back there, going surrealistically through the ordination ceremony all over again. And I would panic at the realization that somehow I was back there...being forced again to do what I did not believe in. And at that point I would stop the ceremony and walk out once more, deserting my class mates and devastating my parents and family and friends...over and over and over again. And then, as I would awaken...I'd hear that superior's voice in my head, saying, *'you are a Judas...you are a Judas...you are a Judas...'*

I'd wake up in a cold sweat. And after that, it would be impossible to go back to sleep. So I'd get up and drink whiskey to make myself sleepy enough to pass out. Sometimes during those excruciatingly dark times, I would think seriously about committing suicide. And at times, during the day, I would feel waves of agoraphobic terror...panic attacks that filled me with terror at the thought of stepping out of my door onto the sidewalk, or having to go to a grocery store in broad daylight. Thankfully that only came occasionally in waves...and then it would subside and allow me to keep functioning.

That dream made me feel what Judas must have felt, and what Peter felt as soon as he heard the cock crow on that fateful morning. And that level of desolation and despair that would fill me is impossible to describe or convey. At those times, I found that whiskey enabled me to disconnect my brain from the pain and desolation I would always feel. And, at least for a short time, I would find relief in the numb oblivion the alcohol would briefly impart. I would drink until I could pass out. And then I'd get a little sleep before I'd have to get up and get ready to face another day.

I'd wake up, go to work and try to distract myself by keeping my mind busy...I tried to outrun my life...until the next time the dream caught up with me. That wretched routine continued for 15 years. And during that time, whenever anyone tried to tell me about God or show me the Gospel, I'd feel that old burning rage and profound shame and pain I was trying to freeze, activate once more. So I'd play mind games with those people. I'd let them begin their evangelism routine and then suddenly interrupt them and begin to ask questions about the Bible that I knew they wouldn't be able to answer. And then they'd give up and leave me alone. And I would feel justified and vindicated for a while...until the next time I had that dream.

Only later did I realize what I was really doing during those years. Unconsciously, I was desperately trying to prove that Yeshua and the Bible were not real...so that I would not have to be His Judas! By trying to erase Yeshua, I felt that I could erase the Judas inside of me. The truth was that the thought of betraying the Lord and being cut off from Him was more than I could bear. So I tried to 'erase' Him with my denials, thinking that would also 'erase' the Judas curse that was murdering my soul. That incessant dream filled me with so much despair and desolation that I lost all hope. I couldn't stand it. So I developed the habits of using denial and mind games and busyness and alcohol, pornography and tobacco to try to disconnect my brain from my Judas identity and all the unspeakable feelings that always came with it.

In 1970, while all of this was going on, I saw an opportunity to start a business of my own in my home town of Omaha. So in 1971 we moved from California to Nebraska. A family friend

who was an expert in repairing musical instruments wanted to retire and leave his business to my father who was a very good musician and teacher of music. My father was like a son to that man and he wanted to leave his business to someone he knew and loved and trusted. But at that time, my father was too busy to do it. And that created an opportunity for me. I called the man and asked if he would be willing to train me and he agreed to do it. That's why we re-located to Omaha. And that family friend taught me his business and helped me to get started until I was well established in it.

Revelation and Reconnection...

In 1978 Mary and I adopted our son Frank. He was eight years old when he came to live with us. By then Katie had grown up and was married. And from 1971 to 1981 the music business grew and became solidly established. But at the end of 1981 something happened that took me completely by surprise. One day when Mary and Frank were out shopping, and I was home alone...I began to feel so much pain in my chest that I was not able to stand. I fell to my knees and doubled over until I was face down on the floor. At first I thought I was having a heart attack. But it wasn't heart trouble. It was grief...years and years of un-admitted, unresolved grief that I had swallowed and had kept stuffed inside of my heart for years and years. Suddenly it erupted; I could not hold in the pain of all those wounds and losses any longer. It suddenly exploded and spewed out of me. I began to weep and sob and vent all of the emotional energy that I had been holding inside for so long. I couldn't stop; I cried and cried until there were no more tears left.

When the weeping finally stopped, a strange peace and quiet descended on me...and suddenly I knew that Someone was in that room with me. And I knew immediately who it was. It was Yeshua...the one I had not spoken to for years...the one I had tried to deny and erase. He was there, and I knew it. And all I could think of saying to Him at that time was:

"If it's really You Lord; if You are really here with me, I want you to know that I can't stand the thought of living one more day...without You...I would rather die right now and go to hell and get it over with. But...if there is anything left of this mess I have become, Lord...would You please...would You please...take me back? If you take me back, I'll do anything You say. You can do whatever You want with me... Lord, if You'll just...please...take me back!"

And the next thing I knew, it was as if I was standing directly under Victoria Falls and it was crashing down on me with the loudest roar imaginable. Only it wasn't water flooding over me...it was the Love of God...taking me back... cleansing... forgiving... and accepting the miserable mess that I had become.

At that moment, my beloved Lord and Master took me back. And He let me know that although I had walked out on Him...He had never rejected or abandoned me. He had never regarded me as a 'Judas'. I saw Him as I had never seen Him before...He is EVERYTHING! And without Him, there is nothing. And that day, when He revealed Himself in this way, He disconnected that terrible dream and lifted the Judas curse off of me. Never again since that day has that dream ever returned. And that day, He also set me free from the habits of alcohol, pornography, tobacco and bad language that I had been using to try to numb my fear and

shame and pain. He did it to let me know that what was happening was real; it was not a hallucination or a wishful thought or a vivid imagination. He did it to let me know that He is real...and that He truly is raised from the dead...and that He is right here with each one of us...waiting for the moment when we finally cry out to Him and entrust ourselves to Him instead of to something He created. He is The Lord and He is here with us always and forever...to be whatever we will ever need Him to be!

From that day, I was like Lazarus. My Lord and Master brought me back to life and I came forth from the tomb...confused, disoriented, and still wrapped in my grave wrappings. A few months later, He showed me which congregation He wanted me to join. And I really did not want to obey. I did not want to go back to that hot griddle! I wanted none of that...but I went anyway...because that's what I sensed He was telling me to do.

As it turned out, it happened to be the congregation that the director of the Teen Challenge Ministry was part of and that is how he and I happened to meet. And a few weeks after we met, he felt led to ask me to join his staff. And I felt sure that it was the Lord, beginning to show me His purpose for coming after me and rescuing me from the human scrap heap. So I accepted the offer and effective October 1, 1984, became part of the Teen Challenge ministry staff in Omaha and worked with them for the next sixteen years.

The curses my former superior pronounced over me have not come true. I didn't drive my parents to an early grave. They both encountered the Lord as I had. My mother passed away when she was 90, my father is approaching his 95th birthday as I update this account in 2012. And Mary and I have been together since 1967... and, oh yes...I am not about to commit suicide!

Teach them My Ways...

So since the day that the Lord came looking for me and took me back, He has rigorously been disciplining and correcting and '*pruning*' me. He has worked on me and in me. And by His mercy He has also worked through me, including me in many things that He was doing in the lives of other people. As a staff member of Teen Challenge He gave me what I needed to allow Him to develop the support group ministry called *The Christ-Life Solution*. At first it was part of the Teen Challenge Ministry but then the Lord began to take it into local churches of various Bible-believing denominations. Then it became clear that Christ-Life was going to become a separate ministry in its own right. So Teen Challenge helped me and Jim and Kathie Hobson, the two Teen Challenge staff members that had been helping me, and who are my life-long beloved Covenant friends, to develop Christ-Life, to build it up until it was able to survive on its own. And so, effective October 1, 2000, with Teen Challenge's assistance and blessing, we were released to begin operating independently. You can read about the Christ-Life ministry as it has developed over the years at this website: www.christlifesolution.org.

When the Lord gave me the original Christ-Life material in the late 1980's and early 1990's, I believe He told me to model it according to the Exodus pattern as it is found in the Bible. So I did the best I could to obey, using what I understood at that time. And God blessed the ministry and enabled it to spread throughout the United States. Today it can be found in a variety of local church congregations from coast to coast (New York state to California), and from

border to border (Texas to Minnesota). Thousands of people, marriages and families and congregations have benefited from it and it continues to prosper...and to assist as the Lord teaches, liberates, heals, blesses and gives His peace and new purpose to wounded hearts and fractured marriages and families to this day.

After Christ-Life became independent, Jim, Kathie and I established its headquarters where they were going to live, in Des Moines, Iowa. I continued to live in Omaha, so I would travel every week, driving over two hours each way to continue to help Christ-Life spread and become established. But after three years of doing that, the Lord suddenly interrupted me again.

Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers...

One day, in September, 2003, a man sent a short email message to our headquarters. When our staff saw it, they decided to let me be the one to handle it. So they forwarded it to me in Omaha. The subject line read: ***“Where do we fit in?”*** And this is what the email said:

“How does a Jew, a life long Jew, fit into this organization? I do have struggles with life and the challenges it presents, however, I feel that I will always be a Jew and organizations such as this seem to be only for Christians. Please let me know your thoughts...Thank you...(Signature)”

As I read the message sent to us by this unknown, ‘lifelong Jew’, I felt as if I’d just been harpooned through the chest. Deep pain and remorse welled up inside of me. I knew the Lord was forcefully reintroducing a shameful reality that I had studiously been avoiding. I had not thought about that gateway or portal to the Biblical/Hebrew world for a long time. But suddenly there it was again, thirty eight years later — opening up once more before me...along with an ugly, blatant truth that was also suddenly in my face.

What was that truth? It was that for the last 38 years, I had been pushing away the awesome Hebrew world that had opened before me in my seminary days. And because of the pain associated with it, instead of going through that Portal, I had walked away from it. And over the years, I avoided anything connected with it...including its people. They did not fit into my life, nor were any connected to the Christ-Life ministry. I did not even personally know or interact with any Jewish people. I never thought about Israel. I only thought about myself and my world and the Jewish people had no place in it. And yet, the Lord I served was, is, and always will be, the most famous and profoundly influential Jew in all of human history...and *‘The Seed of Abraham, The Messiah of Israel and the ‘King of the Jews!’*

I had not deliberately or purposely ignored Israel or excluded Jewish people. It was more of a mindless, ignorant ‘path of least resistance’ issue caused by the way most Christians in the western, Greco-Roman, European-influenced world are conditioned and taught to be from birth. Most of us are born into a *‘Jewless Christendom’* that began to develop as early as the 2nd. century and took deep root in the 3rd and 4th centuries! So this issue did not only pertain to the Christ-Life Ministry. It pertains to almost all of Western Christendom!

That email suddenly brought this scandalous state of affairs within the whole of Christianity

to my attention! How could Jews fit into the Christ-Life Family when we never even gave them a thought? God was making me aware of a dismal state of things to which I and my colleagues had previously been insensitive. And He was letting me know that He is not at all pleased with it. He was determined to begin to do something about it—immediately!

Weighed and found wanting...

God loves His Chosen People with an endless, divine passion and He always will. He is and has always been faithful to the Eternal Blood Covenant He had made with Abraham and his family. I had been claiming for years to love God. But if I truly did love Him, then why was I not deeply concerned about His Covenant friends, His Chosen People over whom He agonizes? If I am in covenant with God, am I not also to care about His heart's most intimate concerns? Am I not to love the people He loves, even though the world continually tries to exterminate and eliminate them from the earth? Why did I not care for what My God cares for? Why were the things that are so important to Him, not important to me?

The lightning bolt of awareness that hit me...that I was still so emotionally and mentally disconnected from the Hebrew/Biblical roots of our Faith began to create deep internal changes in me that I found to be very disconcerting and scary. Questions emerged that I had to try to answer:

- Why did I not pay attention to Romans 9, 10 and 11?
- Why hadn't Ephesians 2 jumped out at me before this?
- Haven't non-Jewish believers in Christ been grafted into the Olive Tree of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?
- Do Christians not depend on that Root that God's living Word created with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to support them and give them the Eternal Life that only comes from the God of Israel?
- Has not the Holy Spirit made the two groups into one Holy Nation and Royal Priesthood that is supposed to fulfill the promises of the New Covenant that He made with Israel through Yeshua?
- Did God not make the New Covenant with the very same people that He had become one with in the Old Covenant?
- Are Christians going to be loyal, obedient subjects of "The Messiah-King of the Jews"?
- If they are, then why do so many maintain such gross alienation and disconnectedness from His Chosen People?
- How can they remain silent and look the other way, when vicious Godless people do their best to exterminate and wipe them off the face of the earth?
- If Yeshua is King of the Jews and the King of Christians too, why do the two groups of believing disciples not join their minds, hearts and lives to each other and to the Root of His beloved Israel?
- Why don't the two groups of believers not allow themselves to be grafted together...into one New Man in Messiah?

Undone – again...

In terms of theological, Biblically-based revealed truth, I found the true answer to these questions to be very disturbing. I said I was a servant of Israel's King but in terms of my real life history, habitual attitudes and actual current life style, the facts belied my claims! If I had

sent an honest answer to the sender of that email it would have looked similar to this:

“I’m sorry Mr. Lifelong Jew, right now there is no place for you in our organization, because there is no real place for your people at this time, within that fragmented, confused rabble of religious groups that we call, ‘Christendom’, even though we glibly claim to observe the Scriptures and worship and serve Israel’s Messiah!”

Since that email arrived, I noticed things in me—attitudes, conditioning, theological nuances and lifestyle—of which I was not proud. And I knew that, for the Lord’s sake, I had to repent of it. But at that point, my question was, ‘How do I do that? What does God require of me? I **think** I’m willing to repent of whatever disobedience I’m guilty of. At least, I **want** to be willing. But at that time, I did not yet know what form that repentance was going to have to take. I only knew that I would have to change course...and allow the Holy Spirit to guide me and show me the way I should go.

After the email came, I began to pray and weep and read whatever relevant information I could get my hands on. I surfed through tons of website material. Some of it was not worthwhile, but some of it was profound and penetrating and convicting.

After about five months of that, I was blessed with a totally unexpected, all expenses paid trip to Israel in late February and early March of 2004. My generous benefactor knew nothing of what had been happening to me. I hadn’t heard from him in months. But suddenly he called and asked if I had a passport. He offered to take me to Israel as his guest if I would be willing to be the 12th man in a tour group that was forming! So I knew that God was orchestrating all of this. I knew He was going to show me something that I had to know...and that my life was going to change drastically in the near future.

I went to Israel and the Lord saw to it that I did experience what I needed to see, hear and know. When I returned home, I knew I needed to speak with a Jewish person that was a believer in Yeshua. Since I didn’t know any Jewish people, I asked my precious friends Babe and Doris, if they knew anyone I could approach. And they told me about a man, Nate Seitelbach, who was the leader of a Messianic congregation in Omaha. So I called and made an appointment to see him.

Coming home...

When I met this Messianic Jew...Nate...it was my first truly deep, interactive connection I had ever had with a Jewish person. It was unlike any other meeting I can ever remember having with any other 'spiritual leader' of any persuasion. There was an instant rapport. We didn't know each other from Adam. And I had just recently learned in Israel, from a rabbi with whom I had spent an entire afternoon, that, "*Jews don't trust anybody...unless they really, really, **REALLY** get to know you.*"

But for some reason, although we were total strangers, this man trusted me. And I felt an instant rapport, a connection between us that neither of us can explain to this day. And yet, although we knew nothing about each other, we trusted each other and connected...from the first moment. Ordinarily speaking...that is supernatural! And it reminds me of something

that is expressed by Joel Chernoff in a praise song that he once wrote:

'Jew and Gentile one in Messiah...one in Yeshua...one in The Olive Tree...Jew and Gentile one in Messiah...one in Yeshua's Love...'

Within a month after that meeting, Christ-Life...the ministry I represented, began to operate within Nate's Messianic congregation, where it continues to bless people to this day. I started and conducted the first Christ-Life group in which Nate and several other Jewish and non-Jewish members of the congregation signed up to participate. It was a historic event...the first Christ-Life group in which Jewish and non-Jewish disciples of Yeshua, participated together, as one! Now I had an answer to that Jewish man that had emailed me a few months before. *'Where do we fit in?'*...Well, Mr. Lifelong Jew...we've just created a place for you in our midst! Any time you're ready, you can come and fit in with us and be completely at home! You belong with us and we belong with you...in Yeshua our Messiah.

As that first Christ-Life group was completing the three phase course, someone asked Nate what he, as a Jew, thought of my material. And he said, *"Not not bad for a Gentile. It's a little Gentile-rough around the edges, but John and I can work on that. But basically...it's a perfect fit."*

It was a perfect fit from the perspective of Jewish people because the Lord had told me in the very beginning to model and structure the material after the pattern of the Exodus, as found in the Torah of Moses. And so I realized that even from the very beginning, before I knew anything about what was going to happen, the Lord was even then, making plans to bring Jewish people into what He had given me to do...and to bring me back into His Biblical, Hebraic world. He had been planning this since even before my seminary days.

When He came after me and apprehended me after I had spent fifteen years trying to run away from Him, He brought me back to...that Gateway...that leads into that awesome Biblical/Hebraic world. And now I knew that the time had come for me to allow Him to lead me in it, through it and far beyond it on the other side. I had turned my back on it, and also on Him; but He had never turned His back on me. He came after me...just like He came for Adam and Eve when they were hiding from Him in the Garden of Eden. He came to restore whatever had been lost by our fall into Sin. He was, and is, and always will be, the promised Messiah, The Salvation of God. And He is here...to impart Salvation to me, and to Nate...and to all of the other non-Jewish and Jewish people on Earth that we represent.

Christ-Life has since been renamed *'The Ultimate Journey'* (for the Exodus). And, the Lord has also brought Jim and Kathie and the rest of the Christ-Life leadership back to the Biblical roots of the Faith. And when the Lord told me to resign my position at Christ-Life and come away with Him so that He could show me what we were going to do next, I discussed it with Nate. And he took the initiative of volunteering to lend his vast experience and skills to assist me in bringing the new Follow Me Ministry into existence. He brought it under the legal corporate entity of the congregation so that now, together, Jews and Gentiles can begin to serve as a disciple-training ministry for our congregation and for our surrounding community...and, as we are now realizing...for many people from around the world that are now part of our Follow Me Ministry Family. Now together, we will continue to explore what it means

and what it will require of us to heed our Master's call and know what to expect when He says to us:

"FOLLOW ME!"

When I wrote the original Christ-Life material in the late 1980's and early 1990's, I knew nothing about what the Lord would be doing today in the twenty first century. I simply started with what I knew. At that time, the main emphasis in my original material focused on *'Leaving Egypt'* ...making the changes that were sure to follow as we follow our Master into 'The Exodus Wilderness of Transition'.

But now, the Lord is directing our attention and focus to the other end of the Exodus Journey – *"Entering and taking full possession of The Land of Promise"*. It's not enough merely to begin to make your Exodus from the Serpent, and Sin and the world system that is spawned by rebellion against God's living and written Word. You also have to FINISH IT! You've got to go all the way...across the Jordan...into full-fledged citizenship...and mastery of our Master's Mindset and Attitudes and Lifestyle...IN THE PROMISED LAND!

If we're going to be His image and likeness, and actually operate as living members of His New Covenant Body...how could we ever think that it would be otherwise? He's not kidding or playing games. He is really serious and He means everything He has said by way of making claims and promises. What God inspired Moses and the others to put in His written Word...our Lord, the Living Word...is here to explain and fulfill and demonstrate every bit of what they wrote about Him...in and through His New Covenant Jewish and non-Jewish disciples.

So of course we need 'Boot Camp'. Of course we must be trained until we really and truly do allow ourselves to be grafted into the New Covenant Olive Tree of Israel (Rom. 11:17), so we can become 'One New Man in Messiah' with His Chosen People (John 17; Ephesians 2: 14-16). We must be trained and prepared to give the proper authentic Last Days disciple testimony our Father will expect us to render to His eternal Glory (Revelation 12:13-17). And of course we need to be trained to embody the New Covenant fulfillment that the Holy Spirit has waiting for those that will truly overcome amid the enormous troubles and changes the world will experience in the days to come (Revelation 21).

As I said...it's not enough to begin our Exodus...we must finish it...just the way God wants it to be done. We must be prepared to be a true part of God's New Jerusalem and His New Heaven and New Earth...as His perfect, totally fulfilled New Man in Messiah (Eph. 2).

So the new disciple-training material that this ministry will share, will focus on getting to know our Lord and Master who called us to follow Him, with much more personal, Biblically-based authenticity and at a much deeper level of personal interactive intimacy with our indwelling Lord. I believe He wants us to get to know Him as He really is... the Jewish Messiah... just as His Father's Holy Spirit revealed Him...starting in the Torah (Pentateuch) and throughout all the other books of the Bible. We must get to know Him as He really is...so that our testimony of Him can be authentic...and so we can be equipped and readily able to present the real Messiah, as revealed in Scripture, so that He can become unmistakably

recognizable to His own people! And knowing Him at that level of precise, personal intimacy and embodying Him as He really is...is what the 'Original Marching Orders' that are listed elsewhere in this website are all about.

Seeing the Son as revealed in Scripture...

Over the centuries, Christians have taken great liberties with what God revealed to us about His Son. We changed His name and nationality, and continue to ignore His background and Torah-fulfilling teachings and commands. We have ignored His people and forgotten the unbreakable Covenant promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We have excluded the very people through whom God gave us the Bible and our Messiah. We excluded and isolated the Messianic Jews that in the beginning, throughout the first 9 chapters of Acts, made up 100% of the Church and wrote the New Testament. And yet, they are the beautiful New Covenant Fulfillment of what God had revealed and required in what we arrogantly call, '*The Old Covenant*'.

Many of us fail to remember that for the first 10 chapters of the Book of Acts, which constituted several years after the Ascension, the Church was totally Jewish! Only after chapter 10 did God begin to allow Gentiles to be grafted into what He had been doing with His New Covenant Israelites. So now it is time for non-Jewish believers that want to be numbered among the Lord's serious Last Days disciples, to repent of all our former arrogance. It's time to learn to follow our Master in what Paul called, 'the obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5; 16:26. See also Matthew 7:13-27; Luke 4:46). And by the grace of God, and the authority of His living and written Word, and the power of His Holy Spirit, we will allow our Master to train, discipline and equip us to transform us all into His image and likeness, in spirit and in truth.

I am only a man... a weak, sinful, foolish, extremely limited man. There are many who are far better educated than I. Many know much more about the Scriptures than I do. Many have served God with much more love and devotion than I have. And many deserve much more of a Heavenly reward than I ever will. But as you can see from my story...I am not the important element in it. The only one that is important is our Lord and Master Yeshua. It is to Him that I owe everything. And He is the one to whom, by God's grace, I will continue to direct the attention and focus of all my teaching.

Focus on God and on His living Word...

I believe that Yeshua must increase in the minds and hearts of all of us and everything else that is created must decrease. I believe that Yeshua must (and will) become preeminent over all Creation just as Paul prophesies in Ephesians and Colossians. He will increase progressively, and everyone and everything that stands in the way of His Total Takeover as the Living Word of the Living God will progressively decrease. He alone is the Way and the Truth and the Life by which we can be bonded and united to our awesome God. And so He, just as His Father revealed Him, starting with Genesis, will properly interpret and fulfill every jot and tittle of what was written about Him by Moses, the prophets, the wisdom writers and the apostles.

We will see everything fulfilled by the time God's love story with the human race reaches the

Last Days conclusion as prophesied in the Book of Revelation. The awesome, overwhelming risen Lord that appeared to the apostle John in Revelation 1, is the one that the Follow Me Ministry will focus on and talk about and prepare to receive. He is the one we will prepare ourselves to obey and serve... now and forever. We must get to know Him as He really is...in all of His glorious and overwhelming Fullness!

“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last, and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.” (Rev. 1:17-18)

If what I have told you in my story about what I believe my God-given assignment is, touches your heart and prompts you to want to know more and continue your association with the Follow Me Ministry, I welcome you with all my heart and invite you to share the adventures that lie ahead as part of our ever-growing, world wide Follow Me disciple Family.

I have no authority over anyone. I have no title, I hold no official position. Nor do I desire them. We are not in this to start a business, or seek financial gain or to try to control anyone's life. We are here because we believe that only the Word and the Holy Spirit of God have all Authority over all of us. And because of that, you and I and the others in the Follow Me Family are always equal before God.

For as long as my ability, time, health and energy will allow, I will offer articles for your consideration. You are always be free to accept or reject what I say, as the Lord leads you to do it. Only the Lord Himself can and will build His Congregation of those whom He calls out to follow and serve Him. No man can replace Him and no man has the right to try to make himself out to be something special. We are all our Master's bond slaves...created, selected and purchased by His infinitely precious Life's Blood. To Him alone must all of our individual and corporate praise, glory and obedience be given... Amen.