

Apples of Gold

Zvi Kalisher's life-changing spiritual conversations

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UNHOLY FIRE

When I returned home from one of my frequent army tours of duty, I took my family for a walk through the district of Mea Shearim, inhabited by the most Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem.

Several children were dancing around a bonfire, singing, "We shall rebuild the Holy Temple." When I came close, I noticed New Testaments burning in the bonfire.

I asked the children, "Why do you burn these books?" Then I pulled out from the fire one New Testament.

I said, "Everything in this book is about the living God and the Messiah. It is a sin to burn His Word."

They all shouted, "This is an Avodah Zarah [which means 'an alien religion']. We must destroy it. Burning these books is a mitzvah [which means 'a good deed']."

Suddenly a bearded man came up and said, "Throw that book back into the fire."

I replied, "I will not throw this holy book into the fire. I will show it to your rabbi and ask him if he permitted you to do this."

As soon as I said this, the rabbi came. I opened the New Testament and

started reading from it at random. The page to which I opened was Hebrews 11. I read it aloud and all listened.

When I finished, the rabbi asked, “Did you study in the yeshiva?”

“No,” I said. “This book was my yeshiva.”

Then I opened to Matthew 5:43–44: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

The rabbi looked at the New Testament and shouted, “He is a goy!” (Goy means “gentile.”)

I said, “I only tried to show you what this book is all about. Here, you may have it if you still want to burn it.”

He reached out to take the book, but suddenly his hand started shaking. I asked, “Why are you shaking? Perhaps the Spirit of God is speaking to you. Perhaps He wants to punish you for trying to burn His Word. If you burn this book, millions of other New Testaments will be printed by those who love God and His Word. However, one day you will stand before the throne of God for judgment.

“Suppose you saw the Tenach profaned and burned. You would fast and wear sackcloth. This New Testament is the same Holy Scripture. Of whom did Isaiah speak when he wrote, ‘Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel’ (Isa. 7:14)? Or this: ‘For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’ (9:6)? You are burning the very faith you profess to

believe.”

When the rabbi heard me speak to him in Yiddish, he and his little lambs were no longer afraid. The rabbi looked wistfully at the bonfire. I felt sorry for him because he looked so bad.

“I am also a Jew,” I said, “but I believe with all my heart in the Messiah, Yeshua Hamashiach. Through Him I receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.”

His poor lambs started yelling, “Meshumed!” Meshumed means “apostate.”

This time the rabbi silenced them and asked me, “Are you still angry at me?”

“No, I am not angry at you or at your foolish sheep. I just feel sorry.”

I gave him the New Testament and asked him to read it. This time he did not cast it into the fire, but put it into his pocket. A good sign—the Lord can do the rest.