

# K-524 Tv Show Part 8 Letters

by Art Katz

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*Art Katz discusses Jewish identity, the nature of faith, and the importance of seeking God sincerely in response to critical letters received.*

**Duration:** 26:57

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 18:37, Psalm 51:13, Isaiah 1:2, Isaiah 1:27, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Interview"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his own journey of faith and addresses the skepticism and doubts of others. He emphasizes that his belief in God is not a passing phase or a novelty, but a deepening reality that he will not give up on. The speaker also acknowledges that he has gone through various ideologies and philosophies in his search for truth, but ultimately found God waiting for him. He challenges those who are still waiting for the Messiah to consider how sincerely they are waiting and encourages them to open their hearts to God's message of peace, reconciliation, and brotherhood.

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## Transcript

Ben Israel with Art Katz and Paul Gordon. Shalom, welcome to Ben Israel. My name is Art Katz.

And I'm Paul Gordon, and we do welcome you again to our weekly telecast. You know, Art, we've been flooded this week with a number of letters, and I think it's interesting that we can read these letters on the air, answer some of the questions that are posed. We've also had a number of requests for the book, Ben Israel, that my friend and brother Art Katz wrote concerning his journey looking for reality.

So if you would like a copy of the book, Ben Israel, send a request to P.O. Box 1107, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. And we also, Art and I were talking about the possibility, or we would enjoy very much, invitation from any group within the Jewish community that we might sit and dialogue one to another. We would like to have the ability to sit down and talk rationally, discussing, not in a contentious manner, but presenting our position, listening to the position of the Jewish community, synagogues, or Jewish social group at a Jewish center, whatever.

And so if this would be appealing to anyone in the listening audience, let us know, and we'd be very happy to contact you. So Art, maybe we ought to start again by reading one of the letters that was sent into us by one of our, maybe this time we could say critics, and answer some of the questions. I'm especially touched and in sympathy with this letter, Paul, although it's a very sharp and critical letter.

It's just the kind of letter that I myself might have written only a few years ago, from the outside looking in. So I want to read this, and I ask also the sympathetic understanding of those people who are of one mind with us and have come to a place of belief to understand the kind of turmoil of soul and, oh, I don't know, the difficulty of understanding that must be part of the problem of many Jewish people as they consider what we have been presenting in the past weeks. And this dear lady writes, Dear Mr. Katz, the scriptures tell us to beware the mischief of a foolish man.

As an ex-radical, ex-atheist, ex-Jew, how would you define yourself now, an apostate? And what tenet would you embrace tomorrow? We are all seekers along the path, but that is a private search. If you prefer to be neither fish nor fowl, that is entirely your privilege. But airing your vacillations and current beliefs is an effrontery to thinking people and a psychological hazard to the undecided.

For obviously you yourself are turning with the wind and know not in which direction you'll be facing tomorrow. Obviously you have endorsed the proselytizing theme of T73, but to do so under the banner of Judaism is the height ofchutzpah. Chutzpah is brass and arrogance.

Yet you seek adherence to your cause of confusion, and that is a public disservice. If it is truly your desire to help mankind, then confine your airings to private bull sessions and do not abuse the public airways. Very truly yours.

Strong letter. Well, let's take this letter and attempt to answer some of the questions that are posed here. This letter calls you an ex-radical, ex-atheist, ex-Jew.

Well, I'll take the first two Xs, but I will strongly contend for the third. It's true I'm an ex-atheist, I'm an ex-radical, but I don't think there's any sense in which a Jew can be an ex-Jew. We're Jews, and the only question is whether we are Jews who believe and have come to hold commitments in God, or whether we're nominal or some other description of Jew.

And I hope that we've made it very clear through these weeks upon this program and in my book that we've never even so much as contemplated disavowing our being Jewish, quite the contrary, we publicly and proudly affirm our Jewishness. And as is the experience of every Jewish person who's come to the knowledge of the Messiah and the Lord, our Jewishness has not suffered, but quite the contrary, has been enhanced. So we may be an ex-Jew from the point of view that we don't share certain traditional notions or patterns of life, but we're deeply and essentially Jewish, biblically Jewish, and we believe that the beginning of real Jewishness is the knowledge of the God of Israel, which knowledge, by his grace, we have obtained.

So let's go on from there. OK. Also, he asks, how would you define yourself now, an apostate? And an apostate, of course, would be one who would go against an established belief or set of beliefs.

You know that I can sense in that question so much compacted frustration and bitterness, resentment, and I hope that our audience understands that conversion throughout the modern times in recent centuries has been, for the most part, either something forced upon an unwilling and hapless people, or something undertaken for convenience. Men like Karl Marx and others have, their families have converted, they've joined, quote-unquote, the majority faith, because Jews were cut off from certain avenues of social and cultural and business life, because they could not enter into the Christian community in contract. It was done as an expediency, and with real justification, I believe that it's right to look with a certain amount of disdain and contempt at such conversions then.

That's apostate, that's really foregoing the faith for a matter of convenience. But I just pray that the lady who wrote this letter, and others of you who are watching this now, are not so persuaded that this is what has happened to us. I think you can understand, quite on the contrary, in receiving letters like this, we've not embraced something that's brought us to convenience, but brought us instead to oftentimes painful criticism and separation from our own Jewish community and family.

It's not that we've undertaken something that would help us to advance our fortunes, we've done something because our integrity has required it, because the God of Israel has clearly shown us, Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, and we had no alternative but to receive him, and we do so joyously. You know, it brings up another question, though, which I think is very profound and extremely important, the word apostate itself. You know, one can consider what they're being accused of being an apostate to.

In other words, the scriptural position, or maybe the Talmudic position of the rabbis. Now, looking at the word apostate, one who is completely going against established principles and beliefs, I wonder now, is she considering that you are an apostate scripturally or Talmudically? Well, I would suspect it's Talmudic rather than scriptural. In fact, I'd like to put you on the other foot and ask who indeed are the true apostates.

Who are the ones who have really chosen to turn from the God of Israel and his way and embrace the wisdom of men? I recall that not too long ago in the Emanuel Temple in New York, there was a conference on problems of modern Judaism, and they had invited all of the representatives of the spectrum of Jewish belief to speak there. And the man who had come to the Lord through my ministry, a Jewish brother, had said, Art, I feel that you ought to be represented at that conference representing Messianic Judaism. I said, I quite agree.

So I wrote a letter to the rabbi asking for participation, and I got back a rather nasty reply. He said, since when are the problems of Judaism apostasy? When we need an expert on that field, we'll call for you, was the substance of his letter. I wrote back a five-page reply quoting from the prophets and suggesting that the problem of apostasy is not only the problem of modern Judaism, but it's been our chronic and ages-long problem, a problem of separation from the way and from the truth of God, having embraced the things that are vain and the imaginings of men, putting tradition before the clear Word of God.

And I think that the whole tenor of the prophets assert this, and I just want to read from the very opening chapter of the book of Isaiah, which expresses the great grief and lament, the cry of God, through that prophet. In the second verse, we read, Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O ear! For the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

And if you'll just hear the plaintive cry of a God who has to appeal to the dumb elements, Hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth! Why must He make such an appeal as that? Because men who have ears of flesh have not and will not hear. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib. But Israel doth not know.

My people do not consider. O sinful nation of people laden with iniquity! A seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters, that have forsaken the Lord! They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger. They are gone away backward.

You say, Are you being anti-Semitic? No. I'm merely quoting from the greatest of God's prophets. And I want to ask this question.

And I asked it to the rabbi. I said, Rabbi, when has this condition ever been healed? Hasn't this been the cry of all of the prophets? Indeed, it's the substance of all of the prophets. And the resolution and the reconciliation has not yet been effected.

And it's interesting that if you would read on into this first powerful chapter of the book of Isaiah, God speaks about this people continuing in the practice of their Judaism. He says, To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? I am full of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. Why do you come to appear before me? Who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations, incenses and abomination unto me.

The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with it. It is iniquity, even the solemn meetings. He was substantive and traditional biblical Judaism given of God, and yet he says that it's an offense to him.

It's a stench in his nostrils. Why is that? Because although people are continuing in the mechanics of their religion, yet have their hearts departed from the living God. And I have a kind of an intuition, a sense, a hunch, a grief that what has been part of the history of Israel is in large part true today of those who profess the name of the Lord.

They continue in all the outward aspects of their religion, but their hearts are far from him. And Jesus said the same thing to me. When Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, he told them that by their traditions, they're making the word of God of none effect.

That's right. So this is a condition which is a grief to the heart of God, and really has never been healed. Okay.

Now, he mentions in the second paragraph that we are all seekers along the path, but that is a private search. You know, and I thought as I read this, are we really all truly seeking, or are we content with our traditions and our Yiddish kind of making that? You know, I think of the Scripture that talks about men who are always seeking the truth, but never coming to the knowledge of it. I think that it delights the heart of God to be an honest seeker.

And I've oftentimes said that that atheist who may actually be in defiance against a concept of a God which he has rejected, but whose heart hungers for truth, and had set his heart to receive it and walk in it once it should be made known, is much closer to a God of whom he little suspects lives than that person who is nominal, and employs even the vocabulary of God, and may even go to a synagogue or church on a regular basis, but who in effect is Lord of his own life. God, I think his heart goes out to a very honest seeker, but there are seekers and seekers, but those, it says in Jeremiah, if we shall seek for him with all our heart and all our soul, we shall be found of him. And I just hope that the lady who wrote this letter is watching, and I want to ask you, if you equate yourself with us as a seeker, have you been seeking for him with all your heart and soul for his promises that you shall be found of him? And listen to the implication of the statement in Jeremiah.

It suggests that the knowledge of God is not an automatic thing. No one knows him by virtue of Jewish birth, circumcision, bar mitzvah, confirmation, baptism, or any other ceremonial thing in and of itself. He is found in those who will seek for him with all their heart and soul, and there are precious few who do so.

What does the scripture say about the eye of God roving the earth? Well, in Chronicles, it says that the eye of God roves the face of the earth seeking that one whose heart is perfect toward him, that he might show himself strong in that life. Yes, I confess I've been a seeker, and I've confessed, and I confess that my seeking has taken me in the course of the years from the age of 16 through my 35th year through causes and ideologies and philosophies, but praise God, there was a God who was waiting for me to have gone through these necessary, I think, processes of search, that I might in the end hear his still small voice and return to him. That brings up, I think that's a good lead-in for the very next question.

She mentions that airing your vacillations and current beliefs is an effrontery to thinking people and a psychological hazard to the undecided, for obviously you yourself are turning with the wind, and know not in which direction you'll be facing tomorrow. I was wondering, you know, you have gone through a number of different searches, like many of us have, and different avenues, and finding no reality there, and then coming to the God of Israel in the Messiah Jesus, and wouldn't you say that you've been a believer now nine years, don't you? I'd say that that's pretty well withstanding the test of time. Well, my mother and my friends, when I came back nine years ago from Jerusalem and expressed my new conviction, reality in God, had a kind of a joint response, this too shall pass.

Art's been a Marxist, he's been an existentialist, he's been a pragmatist, this too shall pass. But I want to say to this lady and to those who are watching, it's nine years, and far from passing, the reality of God becomes deeper day by day. I shall not give him up.

And so I just ask you to weigh the things that we're speaking, and see if this suggests to you any kind of vacillation or novelty. Well, it's the same thing with me. I've been a believer now five years, going on six, and my family, members of my family and friends have said the same thing about me.

This is just another thing that Paul's entered into, and sooner or later it will pass. You know, Paul, this puts me in mind a bit. People always have the opportunity, and I think God has so arranged this, to perceive things in two different ways.

You can either receive the straightforward things which we have presented, that we are two men who have been found of the living God in Christ Jesus, and that we're not vacillators who have seized upon a novelty and various other things in which we're accused, or you can choose to see it another way. My friends who hope that this too shall pass, accused me of having gone off the deep end, and the many other such accusations that they make, that I had really psychologically flipped out. Well, they're free to say that.

They're free to call us fanatics, but so much they have called in times past such men as the Isaiah whom we've spoken today, Jeremiah, and others who have known God, walked with God, and served Him, and have therefore appeared foolish in the eyes of those who know Him not. Well, look at Ezekiel. Ezekiel came to give the word of God to the people, and God told Ezekiel that the people were talking against him by the wall, and he was nothing but an entertainer, like one who would play an instrument or sing a sweet song.

You know, in a very true sense, the kind of response that people will bring to us is very much an expression of actually their response to God, not that we are God, but he said, going into all the world, those that receive you receive me, and them that receive me receive him who sends me. Right. To the degree that you receive our testimony, you receive his.

Yeah. To the degree that you'll find defect with us, you will also find it with him, as in fact his contemporaries did. They said that he was a winebibber and a glutton.

They said that he got his power from the devil. Right. They taunted him at the cross and said, you've saved others, come down and save yourself and we'll believe.

Some men saw him without even having heard a single word, never heard him preach, never saw him perform a miracle, but sensed, this is he of whom Moses and the prophet spoke. Come, we have found him of whom the prophet spoke. That's beautiful.

Men always will have an opportunity to choose their responses, and I want to say with great solemnity, you're responsible for the reaction that you choose to accept. And you're responsible for the revelation of a light that God gives you. You know, Simeon in the temple, when Mary brought the baby into the temple, immediately knew that this was the light unto the Gentiles and the blessing to the nation of Israel.

It may be that some of our viewers, Paul, will not be familiar with who Simeon is, but in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we read in the 25th verse that, Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost, the Spirit, was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ, the Messiah, the Mashiah. And he came by the Spirit unto the temple, and when the parents brought in a child Jesus to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now let thou thy servant be part in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel.

I want to draw your attention to the description that the word of God gives this unusual Jewish man. To whom is it that the revelation of God shall come? He was an ordinary babe that could not in any physical way have revealed the enormous portent that God had already invested in this life. And yet this man, in immediately seeing this child, said, Now, Lord, let me be part, for my eyes have seen the salvation of Israel.

What kind of man is it whose eyes are spiritually opened by God? He's described as a just and devout man waiting for the consolation of Israel. You know, people, we speak to a great number of our kinsmen and other people who say, Well, I don't believe that the Messiah has yet come. If the Messiah has come, where's the peace? Where's the reconciliation? Where's the brotherhood? Where's the lying down with the lamb? We don't believe the Messiah has come.

We're yet waiting for him to come. But I want to ask you if that's your point of view. Just how sincerely are you waiting? How devout are you? Are you waiting for the consolation of Israel? Are you daily crying unto God for the coming of his Messiah, who shall bring peace and reconcile the world? Or is it really just a kind of religious rigmarole, a kind of double-facedness, a religious platitude, in which you really are not anxiously anticipating his coming or the establishing of his kingdom, because you quite enjoy the kingdom of this present world? Thank you.

God is looking for Simeons who are awaiting the consolation of Israel, the reconciliation of the people who have been separated from their God, the taking away of their sin, the knowing God again by his Spirit, just and devout men, and to such as these will God's Christ be revealed. Amen. Okay, I think we have time to cover this last point, which I think is a very important one.

Obviously, you have endorsed the proselytizing theme of P73. But to do so under the banner of Judaism is the height of chutzpah. Now, it obviously, when one is proselytized, it connotes the conversion of a person from one thing to another.

And I know the normal thoughts concerning conversion are that we are attempting to talk people into converting from Judaism to something alien. But how about if we just discuss the scriptural meaning of the word conversion, and see if it has any relevance not only in New Testament talk, but in the Old Testament taboo? Well, I believe that the Hebrew rendering of the word to convert means to be turned. From one position onto another.

Right. From being God's unto ourselves, from living in complete indifference to God and to his way and to his Spirit, and turning again to him, that he might be our God in spirit and in truth. And you know, in the very same chapter of Isaiah from which we've been speaking, God speaks of the time that he will restore us as at the first.

And in the 27th verse we read, Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. Be ye converted. Thanks.

Is it on me now? It's on your glasses. We have a visitor, people, that is very much attracted to the gospel. More so, perhaps, than more people who have need.

Where else, Paul, do we find the word conversion alluded to in the scriptures? Well, we find it in 1 Kings, in, where, 18? 1 Kings, 1837. 1837. Before you read that, though, let me just mention one thing.

As I see it, conversion, scripturally, means when a person of the world, when a natural person, cleaves unto the Lord, to Jesus the Messiah, he is made then a person of the Spirit, or he's born into the family of God. That's the type of conversion that God's calling us to. And the scriptures speak that God would have all men to be converted.

Key 73 is not some kind of diabolical scheme to enjoin Jewish people to forsake their Judaism. And by the way, we have no official connection with it, but I believe that it is something of an expression of God's cry in this last hour, to bring men to the knowledge of the living God, away from nominal forms of religion and other persuasions, to a radical knowledge of himself. And of course, that is just as valid for nominal Gentiles as it is for those that are nominally Jewish.

Again, in the, I almost said the Gospel of Isaiah, but we might well say that, in the sixth chapter, the tenth verse, God tells the prophet to speak to this people, and make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. So the word to convert is a solid, often spoken, biblical, Old Testament reference. And you know, in 1 Kings, the Lord is saying, Hear me, O Lord, hear me, this is Elijah speaking, that this people may know that thou art the Lord, and that thou hast turned their hearts back again.

Conversion. Well, there's that meaning of the word conversion, or convert, to be turned. You know, also in Psalm 51 and 13, this is where David is saying, and I think these are such tremendous scriptures, because I think this is right after he entered into that great sin with Bathsheba, and he was in the disfavor of the eye of the Lord, and he said to the Lord, Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out mine iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Praise God, yes. And this cry of God to the psalmist is yet the cry of God today.

And we might just ask the lady who has written this letter, and those of you who might have written such a letter, who would find fault with us in a simple presentation of our own convictions and knowledge of God, have you ever been truly converted? There's a God who would have all men to be converted, away from their sins, from their transgressions, their offenses against him, and back again to the living God, and to his way, to create in you a clean heart, and a new spirit, that you might say with David, Take not thy presence from me, take not thy Holy Spirit from me. This is the conversion of God which has never changed, and to which God is still drawing all men. Let's pray about that.

Let's pray. Father, we ask you now, Lord, that you would not withdraw your Holy Spirit from us, that you would create in us a clean heart, O Lord, that we might be truly converted from the ways of the world, from the ways of sin, and unto thee, O Lord. And we ask you that you would reveal to us the Messiah Jesus, that through his atoning blood we might be reconciled unto God the Father.

And Jesus died.

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