

Examples of Cruciformity

8. Yousef Dakwar

What follows is the story of how this man has overcome hardship, prejudice, persecution and hatred to become an Arab Christian pastor with a heart not only for his own Arab/Palestinian people, but also for Israel and the Jewish people. However, it is a credit to Yousef and others like him that more and more Arab Christians (some former Muslims) are learning to love the Jews and believe that God's eventual plan for Israel, which, when viewed through secular eyes appears unlikely, will happen, to the surprise of the whole world.¹

The following is a shortened revision of Yousef's story as found in Julia Fisher's book, *A Future for Israel? Christian Arabs share their Stories*, pages 67 to 80.

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Yousef's father came from a nominally Christian Arab village near the Lebanese border. In 1948, the State of Israel was founded and in November of that year, the people of the village were ordered by Israeli soldiers to evacuate the village and walk towards Lebanon. The people started to move away, but some were suspicious of this order and were reluctant to go too far. They did not trust the soldiers because they had heard that Arabs from other villages had been asked to evacuate, only to find that later their villages had been destroyed. Thus, the villagers hid in nearby woods and caves of the surrounding valleys from where they could watch their village. They had no food or clean water and after a few days seven children died from hunger and thirst.

After two weeks, an Israeli government minister came to the village along with the village priest, and they called the people together. The minister asked them again to leave, this time for two weeks, and not to take any belongings with them. They took their animals to another nearby village but were never allowed to return. Instead, their village was razed by Israeli planes. They lost thousands of acres of land and their houses, and thus they had to start all over again. Consequently, their hearts became full

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Fisher, *A Future for Israel? Christian Arabs Share Their Stories*, 67.

of hatred towards the Jewish nation and Jewish people. Further, Yousef's hatred was deepened because his mother taught him that the Jews killed Jesus.

Yousef's family settled later in Haifa. When he was a teenager, he went to a youth conference, where the Lord touched his heart and started weeping and asking the Lord for forgiveness. For three days he wept, pleading with the Lord to forgive him. He returned a changed man and immediately started searching for true believers.

As time went on, the Lord showed Yousef there was something in his heart that he needed to deal with—a deep hatred towards Israel, and the Jewish nation. Gradually, he started to understand a verse from Ephesians chapter 2 where the phrases, 'He put to death their hostility' and 'one new man' spoke to my heart. The Lord said 'Enmity and hostility are living and growing inside you and you need to do something about it.' He came to understand that Jesus put enmity to death on the Cross. He then started to pray for the salvation of the Jewish people, forgive them for everything they had done, and became eventually part of a Messianic Jewish congregation. In all this, we see Yousef embracing cruciformity in his forgiveness and his love for Jewish people.

When his old friends eventually met him and heard how he had changed, they started rebuking him and cursing him. For the first time in his life he did not fight back, but later had a chance to tell them how the Lord saved him and baptised him in the Holy Spirit. They were convicted and asked what they should do. That night in the main street in Haifa, five people knelt down and started to pray for salvation and forgiveness.

However, his father was not pleased with him and often threw Yousef out of the house for his new faith. His father offered to pay for his university courses only if Yousef would leave his faith. He expressed gratitude for his father's looking after him for nineteen years but explained that he could not leave Jesus. Yousef quit his university studies and found a job. Yousef demonstrated cruciformity in his love to his father and in his commitment to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.

In 1991 the issue of reconciliation really became a central part of Yousef's life when he heard that there were Jewish believers who felt the same way and wanted to be reconciled to Arab Christians. Our faith tells us that we are brothers, all sons of Abraham.

He believes in the salvation of the Jewish nation, that the promises of God do not change and we need to believe them, but he does not agree with what the Israeli

politicians are doing to his people. But that does not mean that he should be their enemy. Further, he does not agree with what the Palestinian leaders are doing towards the Jewish people.

As pastor of a church, he teaches his congregation to have cruciform love to all, even to those that hated them. "I want to see Arabs and Jews and Christians here in Israel meeting in one place worshipping the same God . . ."2