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## Father, son forge ministry of 2 faiths

They tell churches of Israel's history

*By Bob Smietana*  
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Tom Boehm believes in Jesus.

His father, Frank Boehm, does not.

For a number of years, that one difference threatened to tear the two apart. But love between a father and a son, it turns out, can conquer even theological differences that have long divided Christians and Jews.

On Sunday, the Boehms went to Woodmont Bible Church in Nashville, not to worship or pray but to talk about something they have in common — a deep concern for the nation of Israel.

Since April, the Boehm Boys, as they call themselves, have been visiting local churches to help Christians get a better understanding of Israel. They have found that, by sharing their stories, they can show how people of different faiths can learn to live together.

## Son converted after college

Getting past their theological differences wasn't easy. In fact, the Boehms sometimes still have difficulty talking about it.

Tom Boehm, 41, says he came to believe in Jesus while in his mid-20s, living in Chicago. He had just finished a master's degree in counseling at Northwestern University and was working as a therapist, when a friend started talking to him about Jesus.

"Like most people, I cringed at the name of Jesus," he said. "All I had ever heard was that I was going to hell because I didn't believe in the Christian religion. Christians looked like people who either wanted to kill me or convert me, and I wasn't interested in either."

The friend persuaded him to read the New Testament accounts of Jesus, along with the Old Testament. Eventually he became convinced that Jesus, whom he refers to as Yeshua, was the Messiah.

Breaking that news to his father didn't go well. He did it while the family was out for New Year's Eve, celebrating at a hotel in Atlanta.

"He said, 'I've become a believer,' " said Frank Boehm. "I said, 'What are you talking about?'"

The news shook the elder Boehm, who always hoped his son would become a rabbi. It didn't help that the son's zeal for his new faith made him less than sensitive to his father's feelings.

"I think I suffered what many people suffer after meeting Yeshua as Messiah — I call it new believers'

syndrome — which can tend to leave a lot of shrapnel in the wake," he said. "Thankfully, God is bigger than my ability to mess things up."

## A new mission is born

It took several years and a lot of forgiveness for the relationship between father and son to thaw. Tom Boehm said he had to mature in his new faith and learn to respect his father's feelings.

As the father and son worked through their differences, they realized they shared a common interest in Israel and its role in the world. Both feel many of their Christian neighbors have a superficial affection for Israel, but have not taken the time to find out more about that nation's history. They set about to change that.

When a friend invited the Boehms to speak at a gathering of church leaders, they jumped at the opportunity.

"There has to be a dialogue about Israel that starts with faith in God and an accurate understanding of history," Tom Boehm said. "And that history starts today and goes all the way back to Abraham."

The Boehms use a tag-team approach. Tom Boehm starts in the book of Genesis, and then recounts Jewish history up until the time of the Roman emperor Constantine. Then Frank Boehm, a physician at Vanderbilt, handles the story from Constantine on.

That in-depth approach appeals to Tod McDowell of the Nashville-based Caleb Co., which fosters relationships between Christians and Israelis. Caleb Co. hosted the first Boehm Boys presentation at Belmont Church in Nashville; people from about 20 churches were invited.

John Governor, a member of Woodmont Bible Church who invited the Boehms to speak, says some of his fellow believers mistakenly think that God cares more about Christians than about Israel, God's chosen people.

"God is not through with Israel yet," he said. "If you want to know what is going on the world, pay attention to Israel."

The Boehms, who blog at [www.boehmboys.wordpress.com](http://www.boehmboys.wordpress.com), dispel what they call myths about Israel. One of those myths, says Frank Boehm, is the idea that the conflict in the Middle East can be solved simply by Israel's returning land to Palestinians.

"There's a myth that a 'piece' of land will lead to 'peace,' " he said. "That has not been the case."

That doesn't mean the Boehms are anti-Muslim. In fact, they remind Christians that Muslims trace their heritage to the biblical character of Ishmael.

"Ishmael is Abraham's first-born son," said Tom Boehm.

Rabbi Mark Schiffan of the Temple–Congregation Ohabai Sholom says the Boehms have taken on a very difficult task. Unraveling the history of conflict in the Middle East, while also defending the right of Israel to exist, can be tricky.

On one hand, it's important to have an honest critique, he said. "On the other hand, as a friend of mine says, 'We don't ever want to wake you in a world where the nation of Israel doesn't exist.' "

## History reconnects lives

In studying Jewish history, Frank Boehm says, he made a discovery that changed his relationship with his son. He found that until the time of Constantine, around 312 A.D., Jews and Christians often still lived together and had close ties. The two groups began to diverge from that point on.

"If you think about it, back after Jesus died, you had a lot of Jews who believed in him as the Messiah," he said. "There were a lot of false messiahs, but they felt that Jesus was the real Messiah. So you had Jews who believed that and Jews who didn't, but everybody was still Jewish and living together."

Amy Jill Levine, who teaches New Testament at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, says that in some cases, Jews who believed in Jesus and those who didn't still lived together until the early Middle Ages.

"One of the reasons the connection could continue was that the Jewish people were never simply a 'religion,' and being Jewish always meant more than having particular beliefs and practices," said Levine, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt. "Being Jewish was, and is, being part of the family of Israel."

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