

Love Triangles

Discovering Jesus the Jew
in
Today's Israel

Bobbie Ann Cole

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Author's Note

To avoid possible offence or embarrassment, the names of some of the persons whose stories or opinions are given in this book have been changed.

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Am Yisrael Chai



Psalm 133

A song of ascents. Of David.

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."

Praise for Love Triangles

"A compellingly-written personal story of a journey to faith in Christ and beyond."

—David Edwards - Bishop of Fredericton

"*Love Triangles* illuminates the unexpected journey of one woman's quest to come to grips with the overwhelming scope of Israel's history and legacy, contrasted by today's stark and sometimes harsh realities. This is all seen through the real life experiences of one person but don't be surprised if you find yourself on many of its pages. This book is an 'eyes wide open' must-read."

—George Woodward, founder Israel's Peace Ministries

"Moving and well written, Bobbie Ann Cole's story of making Aliyah to Israel with her husband, Butch, combines history, Scripture with accounts of Messianic Jews and Christians living there from around the world. With open, heartfelt honesty, Cole shares vital insights on the courage and determination that Messianic believers require to sustain their calling in Israel."

—Ben Volman, Toronto Director, Chosen People Ministries Canada and founding Messianic Rabbi of Kehillat Eytz Chaim / Tree of Life Messianic Congregation, Toronto

"Her love of the Land of Israel and the Scriptures shine out as the author narrates her Aliyah journey."

—*Judith Galblum Pex, author of Walk the Land, A People Tall and Smooth , Come, Stay, Celebrate*

"If you love Israel and Messiah Yeshua then you'll love *Love Triangles, Discovering Jesus the Jew in Today's Israel*. I recommend this great book to all!

—*Rev. Walter Slaughter, founder of Israel for Life*

"You feel as if you're walking the paths Jesus walked two millennia ago. Bobbie Ann Cole may have led a 'secret life,' but each page gives us an insider's look at some of her very personal experiences. If you've ever felt like a misfit, you'll be able to identify with Cole as a Messianic Jew in the 21st century."

—*Betsy Balega, author Being Mystic in Touch with God and Hosts and broadcaster Tuning in with Betsy*

"Bobbie writes in a very easy-to-read fashion which captures the depth of her personal experience and faith journey. Her book helps the reader to understand more about modern day Israel and the plight of the Messianic Jewish people. I would recommend this book to anyone seeking a greater understanding of our Jewish roots as they pertain to our Faith."

—*Vivian Osborne, Pastor's wife*

"A really enjoyable read that opened my eyes to the importance of Israel in God's plans, and the challenges facing Messianic Jews. In this book the author connects the life of Jesus to events and festivals in the Old

Testament. Her testimonies provide an excellent insight into the persecution experienced not only by today's Jews who believe in Jesus, but also by his early Jewish disciples".

—Trevor Fotheringham, *Treasurer, Parish of Lakewood, NB, Canada*

"*Love Triangles* has a mix of personal accounts and history to inform the reader of the modern day struggles in Israel. The Nation of Israel has had a long journey and identity crisis in the search of their Messiah. Bobbie Ann Cole has done a great job bringing this timely topic to light."

—Brad Saunders, *Sabbath Keepers Fellowship, Maine*

"*Love Triangles* is a vibrant, captivating read that effectively interweaves Israel's ancient and modern history with biblical references and the author's own personal experiences. Sparkling with intelligence and peppered with sage observations, *Love Triangles* is a spectacular labor of love born out of Cole's deep passion for both the Messiah and the country of Israel. Fearless and thought-provoking, it is a must read for anyone seeking to discover and/or better understand the impact of Jesus Christ within the context of today's rapidly evolving times."

—Sally Meadows, *two time national award nominated singer/songwriter and author of Beneath That Star*

"One of the things I love about Israel is the way ancient and modern history collide with our present-day history in a wonderful expression of God's plan for His people. Here in Bobbie's book are a number of stories woven together from the Bible, from history and from Bobbie's

own life in a perfect demonstration of how Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, reaches through history to touch both ancient and modern people, as well as Bobbie, her husband, Butch, and those they met along the way. As someone who has had the joy of visiting Israel, Bobbie's reflections took me right back to my own encounter with the Land and back to being among believers of all nations at Beit Immanuel, where I have stayed as a member of the CMJ Team. This meeting of like-minded people touched by the Spirit of God must be a foretaste of heaven."

—Steph Cottam, Youth Worker for Church's Ministry among Jewish people (CMJ), author of Ready or Not – He is Coming

"Bobbie Ann Cole is a gifted and insightful writer. *Love Triangles* showcases her ability to provide unique perspective and to present it in an engaging and compelling work."

—Karl Ingersoll, Chaplain Coordinator, RCMP, "J" Division, NB, Canada

"This book truly enlightens the heart to the understanding of the meaning of Aliyah within the Jewish soul."

—Yedidia Flaquer, the Art Garage

"Bobbie has captured what matters. This book is not about theological principals; it's about love."

—Adrian Glasspole, Secretary, British Messianic Jewish Alliance

"Bobbie Cole has opened a window onto the faith and experience of those Jewish believers who have embraced Jesus as their Messiah. With candor and an intimate knowledge of the land and its people, she weaves a

picture, together with the depth of personal experience. All believers, both Gentile and Jewish, would be well advised to read this book as its insights will add depth and understanding to Israel and to the Faith we have all inherited from the heart of Abraham. I really enjoyed reading this book, one of the best I've ever read and of great value to anyone."

—Rev. Canon Keith Osborne, Canada

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Above all, I want to acknowledge dear Butch, my husband who did not shy away from traveling to Israel with me, who fell in love with the Land and who has been more than willing to revive our experiences living there during the birthing of this book.

Preface

"In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain... He took me there, and I saw a man whose appearance was like bronze...The Man said to me, 'Son of man, look carefully and listen closely and pay attention to everything I am going to show you, for that is why you have been brought here. Tell the people of Israel everything you see'" (Ezekiel 40:2-4).

Barely a year after we married, Butch and I left Canada for Israel. No voice from heaven had thundered at us to go there. No prophetic word was spoken. We had no sense of being led to the Land.

The fact of the matter was that we had decided to move to England and the timing seemed right to leave Canada, where we had been living since our marriage. Butch's daughter and her husband were eager to take over his business looking after special care residents. However, my house in England was still rented out, until the following spring. We decided to look for a volunteer position that would bridge that six-month gap.

A guest house in Jaffa of the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People immediately came to mind. I

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knew something about the place since I had applied to volunteer there before. It hadn't been a fit then, but this time things worked out. Butch was excited to go to Israel for the first time and I was very happy to be going there with him.

We never intended to immigrate. The idea of exploring whether we could came during one of our evening wanderings along the esplanade from Jaffa to Tel Aviv. On our left, waves curled onto the sand; on our right, the city lights were going on like stars. All around us was vibrant life, strollers and joggers and rollerbladers weaving past.

"I want to live here!" Butch, the Canadian country boy, declared. Back home our friends and family were elbow-deep in snow.

And so, a little apprehensively, I checked out whether I could facilitate that. What bothered me more than the many wars and terrorism the young State of Israel had known since its founding was that for all its Western facade, this country was still profoundly Middle Eastern.

What I loved, but as someone relatively young in faith had never known before, was following Jesus all around the Land. That was a powerful incentive.

In our three months there, we had met Him in the Negev Desert, in Jerusalem's Old City, and on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. We had felt His presence at the volunteers' daily morning worship, when Polish, Russian, French, Dutch, Korean, Canadian and English volunteers sang hymns together and prayed in our own languages. We had

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discovered that even though the country was constantly on high military alert, there was what Butch referred to as “that safe, spiritual feeling,” a serenity rooted in faith, a trust that God “has it.”

Butch felt what I had felt every time I came to Israel. This little country, hardly bigger than New Jersey, the USA’s fifth smallest state, about the size of the country of Wales, is diverse and inspirational, uplifting and stunningly beautiful. All of history is here: ancient, recent, and unfolding daily. On the international stage today, Israel is the loudest little nation in the world.

The climate is as varied as the landscape. “You can be in Jerusalem and it’s snowing,” Butch would say, “and drive for forty-five minutes and be in your bathing suit.” The distance between the two is a mere forty miles, sixty-seven kilometers. During the winter, I would fill a heavy bag with coat, hat, and gloves for a day out, only to strip down to a t-shirt upon my return to the Mediterranean coast where we lived.

Israel is a nation of complex, brave, and resilient survivors. Native-born Israelis are called *sabras*. Sabra is a prickly pear, the tall cactus that lines crop fields all over Israel to keep out beasts. Like the prickly pear, Israelis are tough and thorny on the outside but soft and sweet on the inside.

To me, the three countries in my life—my native England, Butch’s homeland of Canada, and Israel—are like three daughters. England is the gentle-faced one, steady and solid. She and I have always been close. Canada is kind and gives me

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space to breathe, although she is more dramatic and extreme than her sister and can sometimes be icy, in both the literal and figurative sense. Israel is more mysterious, my dark-skinned daughter with the flashing eyes, exotic and potentially explosive. This daughter is so different from the other two that I wonder constantly whether she can really be mine.

Despite often challenging conditions in Israel today, Israelis are a hopeful people with a hopeful national anthem, anthem, "*haTikva*," which means "The Hope." The words move me deeply, particularly the part that conveys that we have still not lost our hope of 2,000 years to live in freedom in a land of our own.

When I was studying Hebrew at *Ulpan* for five hours a day, five days a week over five months, we learned the words to *haTikva*. Our teacher wondered if they were still relevant today. "Has this goal already been achieved?" she asked.

I answered that we weren't there yet with respect to attaining freedom or the immigration of many who still hoped to come to the Land and, for whatever reason, could not do so. My basic Hebrew prevented me from saying more and, in any case, I would not have opted to do so publicly. As one who usually speaks her mind, I was often uncharacteristically silent in Israel.

My *Ulpan* course began in April 2010. My level aleph written exam would be in September, after the summer break. But my oral exam was before the break, in July. I was nervous.

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Two ladies asked me questions. Then I told them my little *sipoor*, a story I had prepared. I said that I came home one day to find my apartment flooded. Panicking, I rushed upstairs to knock at the neighbors' door. I wanted to tell them there was a lot of water on the floor, *harbeh maim*. Instead, I told my neighbors there were *harbeh millim*, a lot of words. They looked blank. Very kindly, they came down to look regardless. Together we soon found and fixed the problem. I finished my story by saying I had made new friends through this crisis. It was a true story.

My examiners laughed in all the right places, which was reassuring. Then they asked me about my plans for my time in Israel. I said I wanted to write about biblical places, how they were then and how they are now.

Both women seemed pleased with my answer. One of them was Orthodox, with long sleeves, a long, dark skirt, and a headscarf covering her hair. As I shared my plans, the thought went through my mind, "If you only knew I want to write about Jesus, you wouldn't smile and nod."

Ideas like that served to set me apart from most of the population of Israel while I was living there. I never felt free to be myself and so I skulked around, careful not to connect too closely with anyone outside of my trusted circle, afraid they might find out I was one of those hated Messianic Jews. Ultimately, I would feel unable to sustain this masquerade.

Five years on, I have finally written about

biblical places, how they were then and how they are now, in this book. You will find here some of my meetings with Jesus all over His magnificent Jewish homeland. I have described moments I have relived from His life and tried to convey how it feels to walk with Jesus through biblical landscapes and ancient city streets. I have also written *harbeh millim* about the challenges other Jews and I who believe in Jesus face in Israel.

I have been amazed to discover that mainstream Jewish prejudice against Jewish believers goes all the way back to the 1st century, when early Messianics were effectively banned from synagogues by the introduction of a prayer they could not recite because it was a curse on themselves.

Judaism has not ceased to reject Jesus down through the centuries. The aspiring modern democracy of Israel rejects Him still in its policy of stripping Jewish followers of Jesus of their Judaism. That does not seem to me to be democratic. Rather, it looks more like a reversal of the Spanish Inquisition, when Jews were forced to affirm a belief in Jesus or face banishment.

Looking back, I was probably wrong in my assumptions about the Orthodox examiner. She would not have been doing the job she was if she hadn't been someone who was tolerant of people with opinions and lifestyles not her own. I suspect most Israelis were. I should not have gotten so hung up on the few still nursing archaic agendas.

But I did, right from the start.

Chapter 1 — My Secret Life

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first” (John 15:18).

Zafrir pointed to the spot where, as a boy, he and his father had been swimming when missiles began to hit the water around them. I looked at the sea below the promenade in Nahariya, a jaunty beach resort town near the Lebanese border, trying to imagine the alarming splashes landing around the swimmers.

“We jumped straight out of the water and made a run for it,” he said and grinned at my gaping mouth and my husband’s horrified expression.

Such terror was beyond our personal experience in our former lives in Canada and England. It was spring of 2010 and a peaceful time for Israel. To us, the country didn’t feel war-torn at all, which made Zafrir’s account of missiles seem all the more shocking.

We were *olim hadashim*, new immigrants, and Israeli-born Zafrir and his wife, Aviva, had

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generously opened their hearts and their home to us, inviting us to spend the day with their family. The beautiful north of Israel they had shown us had been bathed in balmy sunshine. We had found them warm people, easy to get along with. They spoke good English. Even their children did as well. The day had been a lot of fun.

As we strolled farther along the promenade, waiting for the sun to set so the trains would start up again at the end of their 24-hour halt for *shabbat*, the Sabbath, it was Aviva's turn to send tingles of fear down our spines. She told us of missiles and fighting in the north just a few years before, in 2006. She and the kids had fled farther south, to Tel Aviv to escape the danger. They had moved in with friends, stepping over one another in a matchbox apartment for what would wind up being six months, until it was safe to return home again.

Her words were rendered all the more surreal by the sun's huge ball above the Mediterranean and the sandy beach. Everything seemed so safe, but we were realizing this constant seesawing between calm and trouble had been the way of things in Israel since the beginning.

The train, when Butch and I climbed on board, was full of soldiers in camel-colored uniforms, boy and girl draftees, carrying rifles and machine guns. The line heads south, along the coast, calling at Akko, Haifa, and Tel Aviv before turning inland towards Ben Gurion Airport to terminate outside of Jerusalem. We weren't going that far today. Our

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destination was Haifa, where we had rented an apartment.

We actually got to know Aviva and her children on this same train line. We had been returning from apartment hunting in Haifa to our volunteer posts in Jaffa, by Tel Aviv. They were on their way to the airport, headed for Euro Disney in Paris. The kids were bubbling over with excitement. A conversation sprang up. Aviva loved it when we told her we were olim hadashim. We were still surprised to find ourselves Israelis, like pretty much everyone else around us on that train, with healthcare and voting rights. Making *Aliyah*, as the process of immigration is called, had taken barely two months. Compare this with gaining residency for me in Canada. That had taken around twelve months, which was considered a fast turnaround.

Aviva took my cellphone number and later called me with the invitation that had led to our visit with her and her husband.

We had started our day together with a cable car ride to the Grottoes of Rosh haNikra. The British had blasted tunnels through these caves, carved out of chalk cliffs by the Mediterranean Sea, during the British Mandate years, from 1917 until 1948. The idea had been to run trains all the way from Cairo in Egypt to Istanbul in Turkey.

Today a wall of rubble marks the end of the line. Lebanon lies on the other side of it. Trains that run only south start in nearby Nahariya. There is no access north to Lebanon. The border is closed.

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After our visit, we drove into Western Galilee's stunning mountains and gazed down at the picture perfect ruins of Montfort Fortress. An army from England was behind this, too, crusaders from 1,000 years ago fired with Christian zeal to annihilate the infidel Saracen and Jew.

The beauty of this country—now *our* country—took our breath away. But was it really ours?

We were joined for lunch at Aviva and Zafrir's by their South African neighbors. The wife asked me lots of questions. I felt uncomfortable, interrogated, and was cagey with my answers. It seemed like she was suspicious. I thought she might be onto me.

Was I paranoid? Perhaps.

My difficulty was that I had a whole secret life. If I told anyone I was a Jew who believed in Jesus, I risked being reviled, hated, or worse, sent away. This has happened to other immigrants who believe in *Yeshua*, the Hebrew name for Jesus.

Even secular Jews, like those we were sitting down to lunch with, who might not be expected to care what we believed, could look down their noses at us. There is a solidarity among Jews in Israel. It is not uncommon to find atheists who keep the festivals and keep kosher in their home. If nothing else, it makes it easier for a people with a vast array of shades of faith and practice to mingle. These same people can be a lot less eager to mix with Messianic Jews, who are seen as having defected to the other side.

Other faiths did not seem to have the power to

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antagonize Jews in this way. The Buddhist Center in Haifa was leafleting all the apartments around, offering transcendental meditation, yoga, and other Buddhist practices. No one seemed to object.

Jewish believers associated with Messianic or Christian congregations in their home countries find their applications for immigration denied. The non-Jewish spouses of Messianic Israelis face frustrating delays and setbacks in their immigration processes.

By contrast, my Gentile husband was immediately welcomed with me and received equal immigrant benefits. Our good fortune lay in the authorities' inability to connect me with my faith. Naturally, I didn't want them to discover it and so I was careful and crept around in Israel. Meanwhile, Butch had the freedom to openly be his Christian self.

Clearly Jesus was not wanted in His homeland, except as a lure to Christian tourists. If He were a native-born citizen today, the powers that be would, no doubt, be making life as difficult for Him as they used to, like the time His own neighbors tried to throw Him off a cliff.

It happened on a Sabbath in Nazareth, which is in the Galilee region. Looking across the valleys and peaks from Isifiya, a village at the top of Mount Carmel, I have fancied that I could see the very cliff they sought to throw Him from.

Jesus had returned to His hometown, "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). It was early on in His ministry, as "news about Him spread through

the whole countryside" (v. 14). His home synagogue honored Him by asking Him to read and comment on the *Haftarah*, the day's portion from the prophets. He read from the book of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (vv. 18-19).

He rolled up the scroll, returned it to the steward and sat down. All eyes were on Him as He began to teach. "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21).

The neighbors and friends listening to "the gracious words that came from his lips" (v. 22) had trouble understanding how someone they had grown up with could really be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Jesus reminded them that "no prophet is accepted in his hometown" (v. 24). He said that Elijah, one of their favorite prophets, was sent to a Gentile widow rather than to his own people when they were suffering drought and famine. He reminded them there were many lepers in Israel when God led the prophet Elisha to cure a Gentile, Naaman, of the disease.

The examples He gave were not well-received. What kind of message was this, about God choosing Gentile outsiders over His own people? The people of Nazareth could hardly believe their ears. They were enraged. They grabbed hold of

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Jesus and manhandled Him to the top of a cliff, intending to throw Him off. "But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way" (30).

The conclusion of this story is wondrous to me. I see it as a moment when Jesus' calm has a profound effect on those who wanted to do Him harm. They would have expected Him to struggle and pull back from the cliff edge but He knew it was not His time and He trusted God to save Him, no matter what. His demeanor totally deflated His aggressors. They let go and He passed through them and walked away.

I wish with all my heart that I had such trust. Some do. Objectors have hurled stones and smashed windows during worship at Jacob Damkani, an Israeli-born Jew from an Orthodox family and raised in a small town in northern Israel. He came to faith as a young man, while living in New York. Since that time, he has dedicated his life to spreading the gospel of Jesus in Israel and elsewhere. This has upset a lot of people.

It is said that native-born Israelis have an even harder time evangelizing than new immigrants since they are considered traitors by their compatriots. Jacob has seen churches burnt to ashes and hatred in the eyes of rioting aggressors. There have been defamatory posters and death threats. He has been attacked.

"Nazi! Nazi!" they have screamed in his face. "The Nazis burnt our bodies and you come here to burn our souls. Missionaries! Traitors! Converts!"

After their landlord buckled under intimidation and cancelled their lease, Jacob and his friends met in orchards, woods, and private homes, just like the early disciples in the book of Acts.

A Messianic congregation in Arad near the Dead Sea has suffered similarly. Gasoline has been poured around the congregation's meeting place and lit, with the intention of burning the worshippers inside. Videos of the protestors are on YouTube, but no one has been arrested for this crime. Many Messianic Jews in Israel feel the police will not protect them or their property.

Opinions among the local residents in Arad are mixed. Some say the Messianics do no harm and should be allowed freedom of worship. Others say they are not real Jews and should get out of Israel. One called them terrorists.

Shortly before my arrival in Israel, a parcel bomb, disguised as candy for the Jewish carnival festival of Purim, was sent to a Messianic family. It was opened by Ami, the fifteen-year-old son of David Ortiz, who is leader of the Messianic community in Ariel in the Greater Tel Aviv area.

It was a pretty package, the sort that are regularly sent by Jewish factions hopeful of bringing secular Jews back into the fold. When the boy opened it, the explosion threw him backwards. He lost four toes from his left foot, suffered burns, a collapsed lung, and other internal injuries. It was feared for a while that he had suffered brain damage. Thankfully, this was not the case.

The perpetrators justified what they had done

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by calling Messianic Jews “Murderers of souls and destroyers of Jews.”

For all these reasons, despite the kindness and friendliness of Zafir and Aviva, I felt hemmed in.

In Israel, to declare myself Jewish would be to tell only half the story. To declare myself secular would be a lie. And to declare myself a follower of Yeshua would alienate me from the very people I longed to connect with.

With a sinking heart, I realized, as we exchanged hugs and smiles and thanks at Nahariya station and promised to do it all again, that we could not be friends with Zafir and Aviva and their lovely children.

I loved Israel as they did. We had that in common. But I loved Jesus, too, and, although He also loved Israel, Israel did not love either of us.