

## **Your Search**

*The following articles will give you key information to consider in your search for something more. May God give you understanding of His truth.*

## **The Bible Is True**

These Scriptures will help you to establish the truth of God's Word. All prophecies are from the Jewish Scriptures.

### **Preservation of the Jewish people**

*This is what the Lord says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord Almighty is His name: “Only if these decrees vanish from My sight” declares the Lord, “will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me” (Jeremiah 31:35-36).*

### **Dispersion of the Jewish people**

*You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the Lord your God. ...Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known (Deuteronomy 28:62,64).*

### **Survival of the Jewish people**

*Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking My covenant with them. I am the Lord their God (Leviticus 26:44).*

### **Formation of Israel and re-gathering of the Jewish people**

*In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of*

*His people...He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth (Isaiah 11:11-12).*

### **Israel rebuilt**

*...They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them... (Amos 9:14).*

### **Agricultural achievements**

*The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom... (Isaiah 35:1).*

### **Jerusalem: a burden for all people**

*I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves (Zechariah 12:2-3).*

### **All nations will turn against Israel**

*I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it... (Zechariah 14:2).*

*“In the whole land,” declares the Lord, “two-thirds will be struck down and perish...” (Zechariah 13:8).*

### ***Shalom* with God**

Do the Jewish Scriptures talk about life after death?  
Daniel says:

*Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).*

How can we awake to everlasting life? By not being separated from God. The Bible says all of us are separated from God. We read in Psalms:

*All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one (Psalm 14:3).*

And in Isaiah:

*But your iniquities have separated you from your God... (Isaiah 59:2).*

God gave us a way of “covering our sins” (atonement) through the sacrifice of an unblemished animal in the Temple:

*...It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life (Leviticus 17:11).*

Since the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, animal sacrifices for atonement are impossible. How can we have the blood of atonement today?

Jeremiah predicted a New Covenant for the house of Israel and Judah:

*“The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...and will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:31,34).*

God provided this New Covenant blood of atonement through a perfect sacrificial Lamb, one called “The Messiah.” Isaiah described how to recognize Him:

*Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ...He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in*

*His appearance that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:1-6).*

God made sure we could recognize the Messiah by giving us over 300 identifying marks as described by the prophets of Israel.

#### **He would be born in Bethlehem of Judah**

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2).*

#### **His ancestry was to be of the family of David**

*“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch.... This is the name by which He will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:5-6).*

#### **The Gentiles will follow him**

*In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious (Isaiah 11:10).*

**He was to die *before* the Second Temple was destroyed**

*After the sixty-two “sevens,” the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city [Jerusalem] and the sanctuary (Daniel 9:26). [The Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.]*

Since God has provided the blood of atonement through Messiah Yeshua (Jesus), we must repent (admit we have sinned and turn from unrighteousness) and ask for forgiveness in the name of Yeshua. Each individual’s prayer should be:

“Messiah Yeshua, I admit that I have sinned. I believe that You have provided the blood of atonement for me. I receive You now as my Messiah and Lord. Thank You for giving me *shalom* with God.”

## Dialogue

- *I was born a Jew and I will die a Jew!*

You do not give up your Jewish identity to receive Jesus. On the contrary, you gain a personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through your walk with the Jewish Messiah.

- *A person is either Jewish or Christian. I'm Jewish.*

No, you are either Jewish, Gentile, or of the Messiah. Non-Jewish (Gentile) followers of Messiah Jesus are called Christians; many Jewish believers in the Messiah prefer to be called Messianic Jews.

- *Doesn't belief in Jesus mean that you're no longer Jewish?*

This question really isn't the issue. The question "How can you be Jewish and believe in Jesus?" is better answered with another question: "Who is Jesus?"

If Jesus, as claimed, is Israel's promised Messiah, then according to the Scriptures, in order to be a truly observant Jew one must acknowledge and believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

One is either Jewish or Gentile by birth—nothing can change that. According to the Bible, a Jew is a person who is descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Jesus and His earliest followers were Jewish. They never renounced their Jewish heritage. Nor were they expected to do so. Believing in and trusting the Jewish Messiah can add to one's appreciation of Judaism.

- *If Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, why don't more Jews believe in Him?*

Judaism today is divided into various groups: Reformed, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox, and Hasidic. Each group accepts certain truths from the Talmud and certain truths from the Bible. The distinctive quality of Messianic Judaism is that it is biblically Jewish—it holds to the absolute authority of the Scriptures. This is important because to all other Jewish groups the *Bible is not the final authority*. Therefore, the Messiahship of Jesus is *not* an issue that is approached with an open mind, since the interpretations of today's rabbis depend totally on the opinions and traditions of their forefathers who rejected Jesus.

Those Jews who *have* studied the question of the Messianic claims of Jesus with a truly open mind have come to surprising conclusions, and many rabbis and Jewish leaders have indeed accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Some Jewish people have rejected Jesus because they fail to understand His dual role. They have looked for a king, a political leader who would free them from their oppressors and provide peace and prosperity. Jesus will accomplish this in the future, when He returns to re-establish the throne of David.

The Hebrew Scriptures indicate that the Jewish people would not recognize their Messiah when He first appeared to die as an atonement for sin (see Is. 53:1-3).

■ *We Jews believe in one God, not three.*

Followers of Jesus also believe in one God, not three. Most Jews recite the *Shema*, the Jewish confession of faith: "Hear O Israel, the *Lord* our God, *the Lord is one!*" However, the translation of the New Jewish Version, recognized as the most accurate English translation produced by Jewish scholars, states: "Hear O Israel, the *Lord* is our God, *the Lord alone!*" The point of the *Shema* is to demand absolute faith in the Lord alone, with no gods

before Him. The Hebrew word *echad* translated “alone” here, means “one” in the sense of “that one alone.”

In the twelfth century, Moses Maimonides, writing to counter Christian and Muslim beliefs, compiled his thirteen articles of faith, recited by observant Jews daily. One of the articles states that Jews must believe that God is *yachid*—“absolute unity.” But this is unscriptural, since the Hebrew Bible gives clear indications of God’s composite unity.

Genesis 19:24 states that “...the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens.” In other words, the Lord, *who had been on the earth talking to Abraham* (read Genesis 18:1-33 very carefully), rained down fire and brimstone from the Lord *out of the heavens*.

*The Spirit of God* came upon many people in the Scriptures. For instance, Isaiah 61:1 states, “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me....”

And, finally, who is God’s *Son* in Proverbs 30:4?

*Who has gone up to Heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of His hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in His cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and the name of His Son? Tell me if you know!*

Isaiah 42:1 speaks of God’s Servant (that is, the Messiah) upon whom God places His Spirit so that “He will bring justice to the nations.” Here in one passage is a reference to the Lord (the Father), the Messiah (the Son), and the Spirit.

*Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen One in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations* (Isaiah 42:1).

■ *Jewish people don't need a middleman.*

Judaism historically has required a priesthood, the Levites, to minister between the Israelites and their holy God. Leviticus 1:15 directed that only a priest (one of Aaron's sons) could sprinkle the blood of atonement in the Tent of Meeting for the forgiveness of sin.

Followers of Jesus now have direct access to God through the mediatorial role performed by Jesus. We now approach the Lord directly and go right into His holy presence. No Jew in Bible days, aside from the High Priest (and only once a year, even for him), could ever do this.

■ *Jewish people do not believe in human sacrifice.*

Followers of Jesus do not believe in this either. We as human beings have no right to sacrifice another human being for our sins. Only God has the absolute right to give life and take it away. Because the penalty for sin is death, God in His great mercy provided His own sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world (see Ezek. 18:4). His own Son willingly suffered the death penalty for us.

It is the absolutely clear teaching of Isaiah 53 that God would place the punishment due to His people upon an innocent and righteous sufferer who would die for Israel's sins. This prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus the Messiah.

■ *Judaism does not believe in original sin.*

Depending on one's definition of original sin, one may say that Judaism does or does not believe in this teaching. Psalm 51:5 states, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." This clearly teaches the inherent sinfulness of humanity. And, according to some Jewish traditions, all human souls were in Adam when he sinned. Thus, when Adam sinned, the entire human race fell with him.

There can be no question, however, that the Hebrew Bible teaches the *universality* of sin. Genesis 8:21 says that "...every inclination [Hebrew *yetzer*] of [humanity's] heart is evil from childhood." And Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." Proverbs 20:9 asks, "Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?'" And Isaiah 53:6 states that "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." The sinfulness of humanity is clearly taught throughout the entire Hebrew Bible.

- *Religions are all alike. They all have some good points and can help people to lead worthwhile lives.*

Faith in the Messiah is not a religion; it is God's declared way for humankind to be reconciled to Him. While there are many good points to commend in some religions, this does not mean that God is satisfied with everything in "religion."

What is important is not what people decide about God, but rather what God decides about us. We must approach God according to *His* standards. It is not up to us to devise our own way of approaching Him. Since He has given us a way to have our sins forgiven, it is our *privilege* to accept His grace.

- *Why did God allow six million Jews to die in the Holocaust?*

*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us... (Deuteronomy 29:29).*

God has chosen to keep some of the reasons for the Holocaust a mystery. But some reasons have been revealed.

God tells us that if we obeyed the law, we would be a nation of priests and blessed above all people on the face of the earth. However, if we violated the law, we would lose our homeland and be scattered to the four corners of the earth. And wherever we would go, we would be persecuted (see Deut. 28).

It was as if God's law were a picket fence of protection around us. However, once we went out of the gate of protection, we would be destroyed.

In addition to this warning in His Word, God always sent prophets calling for repentance in the hope that judgment could be averted. Sometimes we repented, as the Ninevites did when warned by Jonah, and sometimes we ignored God's message, as in Jerusalem when Jeremiah warned of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. Before the Holocaust of Hitler, God warned us through fiery Zionists like Theodor Herzl and Ze'ev Jabotinsky. In 1939, Jabotinsky said, "I see a horrible vision. Time is growing short for you to be spared."

Even with the warnings, why a God of love allowed the Holocaust is a secret we will not fully understand until we get to Heaven.

■ *What happens to Jews who do not believe in Jesus?*

The only way to be granted forgiveness of sin is belief in Jesus. Jesus said, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Mark 12:29). This is called the *Shema* and is chanted by God-fearing Jews.

Jeremiah says, "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

Some believe that many Jews, sincerely seeking God, died with the *Shema* on their lips and had revelations of Jesus in concentration camps and during other times of trial and tribulation.

Only God knows those who are seeking Him with all their heart. We cannot know what is in any heart but our own. Who do *you* say Jesus is?

■ *How can a virgin have a child?*

Is anything impossible for God? Sarah gave birth to Isaac when she was past ninety. Besides, which is more difficult: for a virgin to conceive, or for God to create a human being from dust?

Actually, Messianic prophecy indicates that while Messiah was to be a real man, He was also to be greater than any man, one of His titles even being “Mighty God” (see Is. 9:6; 9:5 in some versions). The virgin birth explains how this could be possible: Messiah would be born by human *and* divine means.

The Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 can *today* be translated “virgin” or “a young, unmarried woman.” Interestingly enough, when Jewish scholars translated Isaiah 7:14 into Greek (Septuagint) about two hundred years *before* Jesus, they translated the Hebrew word *almah* with the Greek word *parthenos* which means “virgin.” It is this Jewish translation which Matthew quoted in Matthew 1:23.

It is clear that the Messiah, who was to be a special and supernatural person, had a special and supernatural birth.

■ *Christians have always hated and persecuted the Jewish people.*

Not everyone who calls himself a Christian is a Christian. Jesus, who commanded His followers to love all people, said:

*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them...*

(Matthew 7:15-16).

If a person does not bear the Christian “fruit” of love, compassion, and mercy, then he has no right to call himself a Christian.

■ *Do Jewish people need to repent?*

The Hebrew word for “repent” is *shuv* (pronounced *shoov*), and it literally means, “turn, turn back.” Many times God spoke through His prophets to Israel saying: “Return to Me and I will return to you” (see Zech. 1:3-4; Joel 2:12-14). In other words, if Israel would *repent* then God would *relent*.

But do Jews need to “turn back” today? The answer is emphatically “Yes!” since:

- 1) All Jews are members of the human race.
- 2) All human beings sin.
- 3) Whoever sins “turns away” from God.
- 4) Whoever has “turned away” needs to “turn back.”

Have you sinned in thought, word, or deed? Have you stolen something, or committed a lustful act, or hated someone in your heart, or been ungrateful, or abused your body, or told a lie, or been filled with pride? Is there any way at all, large or small, that you have turned away from God? Then whoever you are, Jew or Gentile, you need to repent (“turn back”).

■ *Doesn't Isaiah 53 refer to the Jewish people as a whole?*

The earliest Jewish interpretations of chapter 53, which really begins with Isaiah 52:13, said that it spoke of the Messiah. It is clear for many reasons that it *cannot* refer to the Jewish people as a whole, or even to a righteous remnant within the nation. This passage also *cannot* refer to the “Messianic Age” because verse three would then have the people reject a Utopia: “He was despised and rejected

by men, a Man of sorrows...” (Is. 53:3). Furthermore, Israel has never been a silent sufferer: “...so He did not open His mouth” (Is. 53:7). And, who is “my people” if “he” refers to Israel? “...For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was stricken” (Is. 53:8).

The prophet Hosea describes Israel as a harlot; Israel, unlike the Messiah described in the passage, is *not* without sin: “...nor was any deceit in His mouth” (Is. 53:9).

Furthermore, according to the Torah, the Jewish people would only suffer if they were unrighteous. Nowhere is it ever taught that Israel would suffer for the sins of the world. Only Jesus has ever fulfilled this prophecy.

# Who Is He?

## By Dr. Michael Brown<sup>1</sup>

Jesus—Yeshua.

Rabbi? Prophet? Healer? Deliverer?

Savior?

Messiah?

Son of God?

Jesus—Yeshua.

Deceiver? Apostate? Magician?

Rebel? Traitor? Liar?

Accursed of God?

Jesus—Yeshua. Who is He?

Two thousand years have come and gone, but the question remains the same: Is Jesus of Nazareth the Jewish Messiah, the Savior of the world? If He is, then let's follow Him, for we have no other way. If He's not, let's expose Him, for only the truth will set us free.

Although the world is full of religions, the controversy surrounding the Messiahship of Jesus is unique, because both those who accept Jesus and those who reject Him base their beliefs on one and the same book. Jews who follow Jesus say: "He must be the Messiah. He fulfilled *all* the prophecies of the Bible." Jews who don't follow Jesus say: "He can't be the Messiah. He fulfilled *none* of the prophecies of the Bible."

### Who's Right?

From one book, the Hebrew Scriptures, have come two faiths. One faith says: We'd rather die than *confess* the name of Jesus. The other faith says: We'd rather die than *deny* the name of Jesus. One faith says: There are two Messiahs who will come only once.<sup>2</sup> The other faith says: There is one Messiah but He will come twice.

## **So How Can I Know the Truth?**

Simple. Only one of these two faiths has really followed the Bible. The other has gone its own way. Only one has really continued in the power of God. The other has followed the traditions of men. If we listen carefully to the voice of God, then His Word will be "a light to our path and a lamp to our feet." His Word is sure. He cannot lie.

Recently I was speaking to a well-educated ultra-orthodox rabbi about the Messiahship of Jesus. He didn't want to hear my opinions (and I can't blame him for that!). He didn't care about what anybody else had to say. He just wanted to go back to the original sources. "Let's go back to the Talmud," he said. "That's where we can find the truth."

I think my answer surprised him. "Why should I go back to the Talmud," I said, "when I can go all the way back to the New Testament?" To *my* surprise, he didn't argue.

You see, many Jewish people today are told that Judaism alone is the real religion of the Bible, and that "Christianity" is a much later, predominantly Gentile religion. And yet statements such as these, intimidating as they may sound, are simply not true.

Here are the facts: traditional Judaism as we know it today is absolutely *not* the religion of Moses and the prophets. It is the religion of the rabbis who lived and taught over 1500 years later. Instead of being the religion

of Temple and sacrifice as prescribed by the Torah, it is the religion of *no* Temple and *no* sacrifice, in spite of the Torah. It may shock you to know this, but some of Judaism's most sacred books did not even *exist* before the late Middle Ages. Christopher Columbus had already discovered America before the Code of the Jewish Law used by orthodox Jews today had ever been compiled!

As for Messianic Judaism, the Judaism that believes in Yeshua the Messiah, the facts are as follows: the sole authority for faith and practice is the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Covenants. Rather than the New Covenant being a late Gentile book, all its authors, except one, were Jews, Jews who lived in the days *before* the second Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. Many other traditions and customs added in the following centuries by the church have had nothing to do with the Bible and therefore have absolutely no connection with Messianic Judaism. Although some people may call them "biblical" or "Christian," they are totally devoid of scriptural authority.

The writers of the New Covenant were Jews who recognized that Messiah had come to atone for the sins of His people. They based their beliefs on the Hebrew Scriptures, and on the Hebrew Scriptures alone. Thus they knew that Yeshua was the Jewish Messiah because He fulfilled the Old Covenant prophecies. *If He had not fulfilled the prophecies then they would not have followed Him.* They recognized Him because He fit the description perfectly.

Then why didn't the other Jewish leaders of the day acknowledge that Yeshua was in fact the Messiah? The answer again is simple: They weren't looking for Him. They were looking for another. The Messiah of the rabbis was not the Messiah of the Bible. And yet the thing they longed for most was the very thing they missed, *for Messiah had to come to save them from their sins.*

So in 30 C.E., as Yeshua “approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. For you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.’” Forty years later Jerusalem was destroyed, and tens of thousands of her inhabitants were dead.

“But wait one second,” you say. “Weren’t these rabbis the very ones who studied the Law day and night? And weren’t these the men who were responsible for some of the most beautiful prayers and teachings that were ever written? How did it happen, then, that some of the most scrupulous and zealous Jews who ever lived missed the Messiah?” It is to this question that we now must turn.

## **Substitution**

There is no more important word in the Hebrew Bible than this if we are to understand God’s holy love for us—substitution.

It is the key that unlocks the door to our redemption. And it is the rock that makes men stumble. *It alone can fully explain why Yeshua’s own people missed Him, and it alone can open their eyes again.* Substitution. Without this word Yeshua’s death is a farce.

The rabbis of the Talmud debated about how to be made right with God. While some recognized that “there is no atonement without the blood,” they didn’t all agree on the rest. Some said, “For certain sins, the Day of Atonement alone is sufficient.” Others argued, “No! There must be repentance as well.” Some claimed that only the Day, *plus* repentance, *plus* suffering would do the trick, while there were those who said, “The only hope for forgiveness is in the Day of Atonement and death!”

And yet they missed the point of the Day, missed the point of the blood. They failed to grasp the lesson that was before their eyes.

Day after day, the Sadducees offered their sacrifices at the Temple. Thousands upon thousands of animals were slain, and gallons of blood were poured out on the altar. Lambs and goats and rams and calves were offered up to a holy God. Yet the people could not see.

The Pharisees studied the Torah day and night. They added new regulations to old laws, and they developed the most detailed system of ritual purity that the world has ever known. They taught that *study* of the Law was more loved by God than even the offerings themselves. Yet they failed to see the heart of the matter. They failed to grasp the fundamental meaning of it all.

For it was not the blood of bulls that God wanted for Himself; it was not the fat of rams that He desired. It was not a people of outward holiness that He sought; He did not require a new code that would keep men clean. No. He wanted a substitute, a righteous lamb who would bear His people's sins. He wanted a spotless sacrifice who would purify the people within.

Over and over again, a thousand times ten thousand, the offerings were brought before the altar. And over and over again, in numbers too great to count, their innocent blood was spilled. And over and over again, the message of God was crying out: "A substitute must come! A substitute must come!"

The Jewish people of Yeshua's day were all looking for a Savior. Some hoped for a mighty military leader, while others looked for a deliverer from the sky. Some looked for a holy priest, while others looked for a teacher of righteousness. Yet no one was looking for a crucified Messiah. And no one was looking for the Lamb of God.

They had forgotten that the righteous Servant of the Lord was *Himself* to be an *asham*—an offering for sin (Is. 53:10). And they had forgotten father Abraham's words that *God* would provide the lamb for the burnt offering (Gen. 22:8).

Yes, there *were* some rabbis who claimed that *every* sacrifice was accepted on the basis of Abraham's offering up of Isaac. And they claimed that in the Passover rite, when God "saw the blood" (Exod. 12), He was looking at the sacrifice of Isaac and *not* at the blood of the lamb.

Yet Isaac was *not* offered, and his blood was never shed. And it was *God Himself* who provided the sacrifice that saved the life of Abraham's son.

It was *Messiah* who suffered and died, and it is by *His* wounds that we are healed (Is. 53:5). It was He who was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and it was He who bore our sins (Is. 53:7, 12 and Lev. 16:22).

Oh yes, there were Jewish teachers who believed that the suffering of the righteous could bring atonement to the world. Yet when the truly Righteous One suffered and died, they said that it was for naught.

Our rabbis tell us that when Messiah comes, He will establish peace on earth. When the real Savior comes, He will remove us from sin. *But a savior who takes us out of sin without taking the sin out of us is really no savior at all. And a Messiah who establishes peace on earth without first establishing peace in our hearts is really no Messiah at all.*

Messiah *had to* die. Messiah *had to* take our place. *There was no other way.* No other substitute was found. No one else could pay the price. Nothing else could heal our wounds, for sin required death.

Yeshua paid the price. It was *His* death that brought us life. *He* alone was the substitute for the sinful human race, and *He* alone can offer us redemption.

The traditional Judaism of our day has its roots in the religion of the Pharisees, a small group of Jews who banded together over two thousand years ago. These were the men who would not eat with ceremonially unwashed hands, the men so famous for their attention to detail. These were the men who even tithed on insignificant crops and who studied every jot and tittle of God's Law.

Yet many of these men missed Yeshua when He came. They did not see the forest for the trees.

For it is not ritual observance that makes a man clean within, and it is not attention to an outer system of laws that brings us to God. The heart of the Torah is to "love God with all our hearts, and to love our neighbor as ourselves." Yet this is the truth that these zealous men missed, since in their passion for the letter of the law they missed the spirit of the One who gave it.

And as the Pharisees went, so have the Jewish people gone.

*Traditional Judaism as we know it today is the religion of those who rejected Yeshua.* It is a decided reaction *against* faith in Him. It is a system which has been reconstructed to negate and counteract Messiah's real claims. That's why traditional Jews throughout the ages have stumbled over the person of Yeshua. But in the beginning it was not so.

The Jewish teachers *before* Yeshua emphasized the miraculous and believed in the power of God's testimony from Heaven. But when the followers of Yeshua had all the healing cures, they said, "We don't depend on a miracle!"

Many of the Jews of Yeshua's day were looking for a deliverer who would come in the clouds of Heaven. Yet when Yeshua came and said, "I will come again in the clouds of Heaven," they said, "Not so! Our Messiah will be a teacher of the Law, a rabbi like ourselves!"

They had the prayers, they had the laws, they had the covenant tradition—how did our forefathers miss it? The answer again is simple. They truly had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2). They did not attain what they sought after, for they stumbled over the grace of God.

Messiah had come to make them well, yet they said in reply, “We’re not sick!”

But not all of our forefathers missed it. The writer of almost half of the New Covenant was himself a Pharisee, born of the tribe of Benjamin. And the Book of Acts records “how many thousands of Jews” there were who believed and were zealous for the Torah (Acts 21:20). In fact, “a large number of [Jewish] priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7), and even today in our country and throughout the world, there are *tens of thousands* of Jews who believe and confess, “Yeshua is the Messiah! Yeshua is Lord!”

This, then, is the real Judaism, the Judaism that is truly Messianic. And this is the faith that will bring the world back to God, the faith that will cause the nations to believe. And Yeshua is the One who will establish justice in the earth, “and the coastlands shall [and do!] wait for His law!” (Is. 42:4 NKJV).

The Talmud teaches that for the last forty years before the Temple was destroyed, God did not accept the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement (Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39). Year after year, for the life of one whole generation, the Lord was saying, “No.”

You see, God had provided one sacrifice for all, a final atonement for the sins of mankind. God had provided the Lamb. And it was *forty years before the Temple was destroyed* that Yeshua offered His life. From that day to this, God has been saying “no” to His people. “No more of

*your* sacrifices, no more of *your* prayers, no more of *your* works. I have provided the way.”

Yet to all who have ears to hear, God has been saying: “Yes, you may come! Yes, you can know Me! Yes, I will cleanse you from *all* your sin! Believe in the One whom *I* have sent. Messiah Yeshua has come.”

The spiritual leaders of our people who tell us that we cannot know God are wrong. They are only saying, “I don’t know Him, so how can you? I’ve studied for years and I’m still learning. How can you be so sure?”

Once again, our answer is simple and clear. Messiah Yeshua has made God known. He has revealed the Father to us. And through His blood we have been brought back to God.

Tradition will not save us.

Opinions will not set us free.

Messiah has ransomed our souls from the pit.

Let all His Jewish people come!

## **Endnotes**

1 See note, page

2 Although most traditional Jews are unaware of the teaching of the two Messiahs, one who will suffer and die in the last great war, and one who will rule and reign, this is the teaching of the Talmud and most of the early Jewish writings. For a clear statement, see the Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52a.

# Advanced Dialogue

## By Dr. Michael Brown<sup>1</sup>

### The New Covenant

- *The New Covenant is anti-Semitic. It is filled with negative references to the Jewish people, and it blames them for the death of Yeshua.*

It is not difficult to show that the New Covenant is definitely *not* anti-Semitic. First, consider these facts:

1) All of the authors of the New Covenant, save one, were Jews. Their main topic was Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, and much of their writing was addressed to a Jewish audience (e.g., the Gospel of Matthew or the Letter to the Hebrews).

2) The New Covenant has many positive things to say about the Jewish people. Yeshua himself taught that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22b), and Paul (Saul) said that the Jewish people were “loved [by God] on account of the patriarchs” (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Rom. 11:28b). In fact, Paul claimed that, from a spiritual standpoint, there was much advantage “in every way” in being born Jewish (Rom. 3:1-2), and that the Gentiles owed the Jewish people a material blessing, since they had partaken of the Jews’ spiritual blessing (Rom. 15:27).

3) The heavenly city of Jerusalem, which is *the final destiny of all believers in Yeshua*, is said to have “a great, high wall with twelve gates” and the names written on these gates are “the names of the *twelve tribes of Israel*” (Rev. 21:12). In other words, *the only way into Heaven is through Israel’s gates*. This hardly sounds anti-Semitic!

What about the claim that the New Covenant also has many *negative* things to say about the Jewish people? Again, several answers can be given. First, the Hebrew prophets called their own people rebels, stiff-necked, and sinful, and they predicted that judgment would come upon them if they did not repent. This is exactly what God told His Jewish people. Were the Hebrew prophets anti-Semitic? Or is God anti-Semitic? Of course not! But these are the very things that the Jewish writers of the New Covenant said about *their own people*—that because they rejected the Messiah they were being just like their forefathers, stiff-necked and sinful, and that for this they would be judged. Does this make the New Covenant anti-Semitic?

Also, it is important to note that the term “Jews” in the New Covenant often refers to “Judaeans,” or even “Judaeen religious leaders.” Thus, some of the negative comments spoken in the Gospel of John against “the Jews” are not meant to apply to *all* Jewish people, but rather to specific Jewish leaders in Judaea. For a clear example see John 9:22, where the *Jewish parents* of a blind man who had been miraculously healed were afraid of “*the Jews*” (i.e., some Pharisees; see 9:13-15, 40-41). Similarly, the Hebrew word *yehudi* (pronounced ye-hoo-dee) can either mean “Jew” or “Judaeen.” This explains a verse *in the Hebrew Scriptures* like Nehemiah 2:16, where Nehemiah, himself a Jew, refers to *another group* called “the Jews” (i.e., the inhabitants of Judaea), along with the priests, nobles, officials, “or any others who would be doing the work,” all of whom were Jewish as well!

Finally, while some have claimed that Paul told his Gentile readers (in this case the Thessalonians) that *the Jews* “displease God and are hostile to all men,” it is important to read the overall context carefully (1 Thess. 2:14-16). When this is done, it will be seen at once that

Paul is speaking about *those* Jews “who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets,” and now persecute us “in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.” And this, says Paul, is exactly what the Thessalonians were suffering from *their* own countrymen (i.e., not *all* Thessalonians, but rather those who opposed the faith).

When all these facts are considered with an open mind, it is quite clear that the New Covenant is *not* an anti-Semitic work. Thus many scholars today emphasize that if you want to understand the New Covenant fully, you must read it as a thoroughly Jewish Book!

- *The New Covenant is full of historical inaccuracies. It frequently misquotes and misunderstands the Hebrew Scriptures.*

As far as the historical accuracy of the New Covenant is concerned, it should be noted that of *every* book written in the ancient world, the Greek New Covenant is far and away the best preserved. There are literally *thousands* of ancient manuscripts containing copies of either part or all of the New Covenant books. And, in spite of the abundance of ancient manuscript evidence, these documents contain virtually *no disagreements* on any major doctrinal point.

As more and more research has been done into the customs and history of first-century Palestine and Asia Minor, the New Covenant has emerged as a prime historical source of great value, either confirming or supplementing what archaeology has taught us. Furthermore, studies by modern Jewish scholars have served to underscore the Jewishness of Jesus and the New Covenant authors.

The New Covenant’s use of the Old Covenant has also been found to be thoroughly Jewish. Because the New Covenant was written in Greek while the Old Covenant

was written in Hebrew, the writers often quoted from the Greek version of their day, the Septuagint. But this version was made by *Jews* some two hundred years *before* Yeshua was born. And, although on certain occasions the *wording* of an Old Covenant verse may seem to change when it is quoted in the New Covenant, this is often due to the fact that the *Jewish Septuagint* was being quoted! These “differences,” then, do *not* reflect later, “Christian” changes; and, more importantly, the *actual meaning* of the verses *never* changes.

Another major factor to be considered is that the New Covenant writers, who, with the exception of one medical doctor, Luke, were all Jews, often followed the *Jewish interpretative rules* of the day. It was as Jews that they read their Scriptures, and it was as Jews that they interpreted their Scriptures! Thus, some of their quotations of the Hebrew Scriptures are in keeping with the *common Jewish understanding* of the passage that they were citing. At other times, the main difference in interpretation was due to the fact that they understood that the Messiah had *already* come, and, rather than waiting for a future fulfillment of the Scriptures, they saw them as already being fulfilled. And there are some New Covenant quotations that reflect the interpretation found in the Aramaic paraphrases (called Targums—“translations”) which were then being read in the *synagogues*. Again, this means that the New Covenant writers were being thoroughly *Jewish* in their handling of the Hebrew text.

It is also important to remember that the Jews in the first century of this era were primarily concerned with determining what the Scriptures were saying to *them*, in *their* day and age. Their primary concern was not in rediscovering what Amos or Isaiah had said to *his* contemporaries. They wanted to know what God required of them in the present tense, and they wanted to know what

He had promised them. Thus, the Jews who authored what we now call the Dead Sea Scrolls moved into an isolated life of study and discipline *based on their interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*. The Pharisees began to develop a detailed system of laws and regulations *based on their interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*. And the writers of the New Covenant received and followed Yeshua as Messiah *based on their interpretation of the Hebrew Bible*.

Of these three different systems of Jewish interpretation, that of the New Covenant most accurately adheres to the proper understanding of the Hebrew text. In fact, in comparison to the *Jewish* interpretation of Scripture as found in the Talmud and Midrash, the New Covenant writers were amazingly careful and sober.

Any time the New Covenant interpretation does seem hard to follow, one need only remember these three facts: (1) the writers may have been quoting the Septuagint, the *Jewish* Greek version of the day (the *wording* may be slightly different, but the *meaning* is the same); (2) they may have been following an unusual *Rabbinic* method of interpretation (while our 21st-century Western minds may have a hard time following their line of reason, a first-century rabbi would have had no problem grasping their point); and (3) they were able to find hints and indicators of Messiah's life and ministry on virtually every page of the Hebrew Bible, since, along with many other first-century Jews, they rightly believed that all the Hebrew prophets and the entire history of ancient Israel pointed to the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, although they did not disregard the original contextual meaning of the passages which they quoted, their primary purpose was to show how wonderfully all Old Covenant history and revelation were brought to their fullness (i.e., were fulfilled) in Yeshua the Messiah.

Although many Jews of today claim that the New Covenant authors contradict themselves, not a single Jew in ancient times ever raised such an argument! If there were so many gross errors and mistakes, why didn't those who opposed the faith point these things out back then? The answer, of course, is that according to all standards of ancient history writing, the New Covenant documents were a first-rate piece of work. And if, as some claim, the Jews who wrote the New Covenant were cunning men who were willing to lie and deceive, then why didn't they make up a story that no one could argue with, not even their opponents? Obviously, they were just reporting the facts as they saw them, and none of their contemporaries could disagree!

One early follower of Yeshua pointed out that there is an amazing *overall harmony* that exists in the Gospel accounts of our Messiah. He stated that any *apparent* discrepancies which might be noticed could be explained only if we understood that each of the eyewitnesses was accurately reporting what he saw and heard. Thus, if we ourselves were there at the time the event occurred, we would see how perfectly all the pieces of the puzzle fit together to form one clear picture of the life and teaching of the Son of God. Therefore, rather than being evidence of poor memory and lies, the different perspectives of the various New Covenant authors help us realize just how accurate their accounts really were.

Some of the greatest minds this world has ever seen have devoted their entire lives to the careful study of the New Testament text, and some of history's greatest skeptics have attacked it. *There is nothing new that today's critics will discover.* The New Covenant has endured the test of time. It continues to be worthy of our faith.

- *Yeshua didn't fulfill any of the Messianic prophecies. We know that the New Covenant*

*writers actually reconstructed the life of Yeshua so as to harmonize it with certain predictions made by the prophets.*

These two statements are mutually contradictory. Why would the New Covenant writers intentionally rewrite the events of Yeshua's life so as to make Him fulfill predictions that were not really Messianic? If the prophecies that they quoted were really non-Messianic, then why did they "make" Yeshua's life conform to them?

We can be confident that the Gospel writers accurately depict the events of Yeshua's life, since it is recorded that even they were baffled by His suffering and death. They had different ideas of what the Messiah would do when He came, and so they could not understand much of what occurred as *the fulfillment of Old Covenant prophecy*. It was only *after* Yeshua's resurrection that these men were able to see how all the events of His life *and* death were spoken of by the prophets of old.

Now, the point of all this is simple: If the disciples were going to *rewrite* Yeshua's life story as a witness to their own people, why didn't they make it line up with some of the more "orthodox" Jewish expectations? Why did they make it run contrary to much of the popular feeling of the day? And why did they write a story that would surely go against the grain? Simple! It was just as Peter told the Jewish authorities who challenged him: "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). They were true eye-witnesses; they saw it all. They could only give it to us the way it happened to them.

As to the statement that, according to the New Covenant account of the life of Yeshua, He did not really fulfill any truly Messianic prophecies, one might well ask, "Messianic prophecies according to whom?" According to one statement in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 99a), *all* the prophets prophesied of the days of the Messiah, a statement

echoed by Peter in Acts 3:22-24. Who says that Isaiah 2:1-4, speaking of the days of universal peace, *is* Messianic, while Isaiah 53, speaking of one man dying for the sins of the nation, is *not* Messianic? Who says that Numbers 24:17, speaking of the destruction of Israel's enemies, *is* Messianic, while Daniel 9:24-27, speaking of the death of the Anointed One (Hebrew *mashiach*), is *not* Messianic?

The only reason why certain prophecies of a suffering Savior have been considered non-Messianic by certain strands of Judaism is due to the fact that, if they were acknowledged as being Messianic, then Yeshua would have to be the Messiah! Since He was, in fact, rejected by many rabbis, the next step was to reject as Messianic the prophecies that foretold His suffering and death.

- *If the death of Yeshua really inaugurated the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet, then why hasn't it been fulfilled?*

Any covenant God makes with man has *conditions* and *goals*. First, there must be people who are willing to accept the stipulations of the covenant. Exodus 24:3 records that "when Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, 'Everything the Lord has said we will do.'" If some Israelites refused to accept God's covenant, then they would be cut off, but the covenant would still be binding and valid for those who did hear and obey.

For those people who did have a heart to follow God, the goals of the covenant would then be set forth. Exodus 19:5-6 records the *ideal goals* of the Mosaic Covenant: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Yet, even though this promise has never been fulfilled in the history of our nation, no one would dare question the validity and the

authority of the Torah; it is *we* who have failed to keep our part of the bargain.

Those who have accepted the New Covenant's stipulations, ratified with Yeshua's own blood (Matt. 26:28), can bear witness that the promises and goals of the New Covenant are being fulfilled in them. God's law is now written in their minds and in their hearts, and the Lord has forgiven their iniquity, and remembers their sins no more (see Jeremiah 31:33-34, verses 32-33 in some versions). One day, when all Israel turns to Messiah Yeshua, the New Covenant will reach its fulfillment in the people as a whole. Until then, the *goals* of the New Covenant are being fulfilled in those who willingly accept its *conditions*.

## **The Messiah**

- *Judaism doesn't believe in a divine Messiah.*

Judaism does believe in an *exalted* Messiah, higher than Abraham, higher than Moses, and higher than David (see, for example, the Midrash to Is. 53:12). And, according to Psalm 110:1, the Lord would say to Messiah (David's Lord), "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Also, based on Jeremiah 23:6, some early rabbis offered the opinion that one of Messiah's names would be Yahweh. And Judaism does teach the *preexistence* of the Messiah, as one created before the worlds began.

More importantly, the Hebrew Scriptures clearly teach the divine nature of the Messiah. According to Isaiah 9:6 (9:5 in some versions), the King whose government and rule would have no end would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Although some Jewish interpreters tried to refer

this passage to Hezekiah, king of Judah from about 715-687 B.C.E., he clearly was *not* the one described by Isaiah. His kingdom most definitely did come to an end, and, as a mere man, he could hardly be called *el gibbor*, “Mighty God.” In fact, “Mighty God” is used as a title of the *Lord* Himself in Isaiah 10:21! Modern Jewish translations of Isaiah 9:6 (9:5) that seek to soften the clear statement of Messiah’s deity must ignore the most obvious meaning of the original Hebrew text.

■ *Judaism doesn’t believe in a suffering Messiah.*

Although this statement is commonly made, there is almost no truth to it. The Talmud records the teaching of more than one rabbi to the effect that Messiah son of Joseph (Hebrew—*mashiach ben Yoseph*) would suffer and die in the great war that would precede the reign of Messiah son of David (Hebrew—*mashiach ben David*). In fact, Zechariah 12:10, which says, “They will look on me, the one they have pierced,” quoted with reference to the death of Yeshua in the New Covenant, is applied to Messiah ben Joseph in the Rabbinic writings! It is also noteworthy that Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the clearest prophecy of a suffering Savior found in the Old Covenant Scriptures, is applied by the Targum to the Messiah, and Jewish exegesis up until approximately 550 C.E. interpreted this section almost exclusively with reference to the Messiah. Since then, the idea of a suffering Messiah has been present in many forms of Judaism, and descriptions of the Messiah’s sufferings are especially rich in medieval mystical Jewish literature.

■ *Judaism doesn’t believe that the Messiah will come twice.*

As noted above, the Talmud mentions *two* Messiahs, one who will suffer and die, and one who will rule and

reign. Yet the Hebrew Scriptures know only *one* Messiah, descended from David. Therefore, rather than creating a *second* Messiah descended from a *different tribe*, the New Covenant writers correctly saw that there would be only *one* Messiah who would come *twice*. His first coming would be to fulfill the prophecies of a righteous sufferer who would pay for the sins of the world. His second coming would be to establish His reign of peace on the earth.

Also, statements such as “*Judaism doesn’t believe...*” are often totally misleading, seeing that from one Jewish group to another there may be totally different beliefs on such important subjects as the Messiah, life after death, oral law, and even God Himself! Thus, one can find within Judaism the opinion that Messiah was created before the world began, and He has been waiting in every generation to be revealed; or, Messiah has *already been on earth* in every generation, waiting to be revealed; or, Messiah will come when the world is totally righteous; or, Messiah will come when the world is totally wicked; or, Messiah is more than a mere man; or, Messiah is only a mere man; or, Messiah is a concept; or, Messiah is a myth. Therefore, to say that “Judaism doesn’t believe in a suffering Messiah, or in a Messiah who comes twice,” is to give the false impression that Judaism has one set of beliefs regarding the person and work of the Messiah, and that these beliefs absolutely exclude the notion of a suffering Messiah or of a Messiah who would come twice.

- *The Messiah is David’s son. If Yeshua were really born of a virgin, then Joseph was not His father and He is really not a descendant of David. Therefore, Yeshua cannot be the Messiah.*

According to Yeshua’s own words, the Messiah was at one and the same time David’s *son* and David’s Lord (see

Matt. 22:41-46), and the New Covenant is careful to show how the natural son of David could also be the spiritual Son of God. Thus, Matthew's genealogy provides the *royal* and *legal* descent of Yeshua carried through His adoptive father Joseph, while Luke's genealogy provides His *natural* and *physical* descent through Miriam His mother. In this way, the virgin-born Son of God, greater than David, has become the royal Messiah, descended from David. Therefore, rather than the virgin birth presenting a problem for the Messiahship of Yeshua, it actually provides a proof.

- *Yeshua cannot be the Messiah, because He is a descendant of King Jehoiachin. God cursed both this king and his offspring, saying that none of his descendants would ever sit on the throne of David.*

This argument can be answered in two very simple ways. First, it must be noted that Yeshua is *not* a natural, physical descendant of Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah or Coniah), but only a legal descendant. Thus, only Matthew traces Yeshua's lineage through this king, while Luke's genealogy follows a different line. (Note carefully: the Shealtiel and Zerubbabel of Matthew 1:12 are probably *not* the same as the Shealtiel and Zerubbabel of Luke 3:27. This can be seen by noting that the name of Shealtiel's father in Matthew 1:12 is none other than Jeconiah, while in Luke 3:27, Shealtiel's father is Neri. Thus, Luke's genealogy of Yeshua does *not* include Jeconiah.) Therefore, even if all of Jehoiachin's physical descendants *were* cursed, Yeshua would not have actually been under that curse.

More important, however, is that the Hebrew Scriptures plainly show that God did *not* curse all of Jehoiachin's descendants, but only his immediate offspring. In other words, God was not declaring that, for all time, none of Jehoiachin's descendants would ever sit on David's throne,

but rather that his sons *who were then alive* would not rule. According to Jeremiah 22:24, God said: “Even if you, Jehoiachin...were a signet ring on my right hand, I would pull you off.” And then in verse 30 He commanded: “Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.”

Apparently, there were Jews living in Babylonian exile who hoped that their people would soon break the yoke of the Babylonians, allowing either Coniah (i.e., Jehoiachin) or one of his sons to reassume the rule in Jerusalem. Jeremiah categorically stated that this could not be, for seventy years of captivity were determined for the Jewish nation, and neither Jehoiachin nor his sons would rule again. But, two generations later, Zerubbabel, *Jehoiachin's grandson*, became governor of Judah, *and the Messianic promises were renewed through him*. Thus, the prophecy that God would shake Heaven and earth and overthrow the Gentile kingdoms was spoken to Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:21-22), and in the very next verse the *Lord* declared: “‘I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel, and I will make you like my signet ring [that’s right, a signet ring! Coniah, even if he were a signet ring on God’s hand, was rejected. Zerubbabel would actually *be* a signet ring to the Lord], for I have chosen you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.” In addition to all this, Zerubbabel became so famous in later Jewish literature that he is even mentioned in a Hanukkah prayer (“Well nigh had I perished, when Babylon’s end drew near; through Zerubbabel I was saved after seventy years”)!

It is impossible that Zerubbabel, Coniah’s grandson, was under the curse, since he did in fact prosper (the curse said, “*none* of his [i.e., Coniah’s] offspring will prosper”); and, as a son of David, he did govern the Jewish people. It

is altogether fitting, then, that Matthew traces the royal line of Yeshua through Jeconiah (i.e., Jehoiachin), since the promises to David were renewed and confirmed in Zerubbabel, his grandson.

## **The Atonement**

- *The notion that we Jews need a blood atonement is completely wrong. First, even the book of Leviticus indicates that at certain times flour was accepted for an atonement, while Exodus 30 refers to “atonement money” and Numbers 31 mentions jewelry being offered for atonement. The prophets indicated clearly that God did not want blood sacrifices, and the rabbis have taught that God is satisfied today with prayer, repentance, and good deeds.*

Until the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., Jewish teaching emphasized the necessity of blood atonement. According to the Talmud, “There is not atonement (*kapparah*) without the blood” (Yoma 5a; Zebahim 6a; Menahot 93b). It is recognized by Jewish and Christian scholars alike that the New Covenant emphasis on blood atonement is based on *Jewish* beliefs of the day. And, although many Jews today think that it is the New Covenant writers who cited Leviticus 17:11 to prove that God required blood atonement, it is actually the *rabbis* of the Talmud who quoted this verse in this way! They recognized that, because “the life of a creature is in the blood,” God gave it upon the altar to make atonement for His people. “It is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” (Lev. 17:11).

Blood sacrifices formed the main part of the ancient Israelite Temple service, and according to Leviticus 16, on

the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) *the Holy Place itself*, as well as the High Priest and all the people of Israel, were to be cleansed by the *blood* of a sacrificial goat. On the eve of Israel's exodus from Egypt, it was the *blood* of the Passover (*pesach*) lamb, put upon the two doorposts and lintel of the house, that would be a sign to the destroying angel, and the *Lord* said, "And when I see the *blood*, I will pass over you" (Ex. 12:13). Even the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was ratified with the shedding of *blood* ("This is *the blood of the covenant* that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words"—Ex. 24:8, and the Aramaic Targum to this verse reads: "And Moses took the blood and poured it on the altar *as atonement for the people...*").

It is with good reason that the Letter to the Hebrews says that "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, *and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (Heb. 9:22), since the central importance of the blood, and, in particular, the blood of atonement, is clearly seen in the Tanakh. Any other system of atonement that does not include the blood is not biblical, and any other system of atonement that fails to offer *substitutionary* atonement, i.e., an innocent sacrificial victim dying on behalf of a guilty sinner, is not able to provide real forgiveness of sins.

How then do we account for references to flour offerings and "atonement money" in the Torah? The answers again are simple. According to Leviticus 5:11-13, a poor Israelite who was unable to bring the required trespass offering of a lamb, goat, turtledoves or pigeons could bring instead an offering of fine flour. According to verse 12, the priest will "take a handful of it [i.e., the flour] as a memorial portion, *and burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the Lord by fire*" Then (verse 13) "the priest will make atonement for him." In other words, the

priest, in his capacity as mediator for the people, *and having mingled the flour with the blood that was already upon the altar*, would make atonement for his fellow Israelite. Nowhere is it written that “the flour will make atonement,” or that “the life of a creature is in the flour.” Rather, the whole basis for atonement remained in the sacrificial blood that was upon the altar.

The references to “atonement money” actually have nothing to do with atonement for sins. One example is found in Exodus 30:11-16, where every male Israelite who was to be counted in the census was to pay a *kopher* (“a ransom”; see Ex. 21:30—the owner of a goring ox that killed a man would have to pay a *kopher*, i.e., a fixed amount of ransom money). Since the taking of a census was considered to be a dangerous enterprise (according to 2 Sam. 24, when David numbered Israel, a plague broke out among the people), God told the Israelites to contribute an offering to the Tabernacle, *so that no plague would break out among them*.

Thus, the *kopher* here had to do with *protection from a plague*, and not forgiveness of sins or personal atonement. In fact, the expression in verse 15, “to atone for your lives,” should really be translated as “to pay a *kopher* (ransom) for your souls.” This is also the best way to translate Numbers 31:50, since the reference to the children of Israel offering gold jewelry to the Lord again has nothing to do with atonement. Having just counted the soldiers who had gone into battle with Midian (again, they had taken a *census*), the officers decided to offer some of the spoil to God and thus, to pay a *kopher* for their souls. What connection is there between any of these narratives and the concept of personal atonement or forgiveness of sins?

As to the belief that “the prophets indicate clearly that God doesn’t want blood sacrifices,” it is clear from reading the prophets’ own words that what they really opposed

were *empty* sacrifices and *vain* offerings. If one wishes to say that the prophets wanted to *abolish* the sacrificial system, then one would also have to say that the prophets wanted to abolish the Sabbath! (See Is. 1:13: “Stop bringing *meaningless offerings*, New Moons, Sabbaths, and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies.”)

The prophets taught that sacrifices without mercy and justice were vain, and that bringing an offering without a repentant and contrite heart was unacceptable. Both of these themes are constantly reiterated in the New Covenant, and one of Yeshua’s favorite texts was Hosea 6:6: “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings” (see, e.g., Matt. 12:7). In fact, when Yeshua gave the Great Commission, He said that “*repentance and forgiveness of sins* will be preached in his name to all nations...” (Luke 24:47). Without repentance, the sacrifice of Yeshua will do the sinner no good.

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., the rabbis instituted what they thought were other forms of atonement, such as prayer, good deeds and charity. They found support for this in verses such as Hosea 14:2 (verse 3 in some versions) which states poetically, “That we may offer the fruit of our lips.” Yet, while the Bible sometimes describes prayer, repentance and worship with “sacrifice imagery,” it never implies that these things were to take the place of the sacrifices themselves.

Thus, in Psalm 51, after stating that “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” (v. 17), David says: “Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar” (v. 19). Another good example is Psalm 141 where David asks that his *prayer* be set before God as *incense*, and that the *lifting up of his hands* be as the *evening sacrifice*. Yet no one would suggest that King David, who brought the ark of God to Jerusalem, and who desired to build a permanent

“house” for the Lord, wanted to abolish incense or the evening sacrifice!

The rabbis have taught us much that is beautiful regarding prayer, repentance and good deeds. Yet, as beautiful as this teaching is, it provides us with no suitable replacement for the blood of atonement. To this very day, there are still orthodox Jews who, recognizing their need for an atonement sacrifice, kill a chicken on Yom Kippur, wave it around their heads and say: “This is my substitute! This is my atonement!” What a sad testimony to our people’s lack of true forgiveness outside of God’s way through Messiah! And what clear evidence of the fact that, with the Temple destroyed, traditional Judaism offers no *new covenant, ratified with blood*, and acceptable in the sight of God.

- *What did the Jews living in Babylonian exile, before Yeshua died and with no sacrifices to offer, do for atonement?*

It is significant that the Jews who were in exile in Babylon longed for the days when the Temple would be rebuilt, and they fully recognized that it was *because of their sin* that the Temple had been destroyed (see Dan. 9:1-19). Interestingly enough, scholars believe that it was during this very time of exile that the teaching of Isaiah’s *Suffering Servant* came to prominence. The hope of the Messiah was coming alive, and the Jewish people were being directed to the One who would bring to fulfillment the system of Old Covenant blood sacrifices by offering up Himself. By the time the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., He had already come and done His work.

The Jews in Babylonian captivity could look forward to the coming of the Deliverer who would be cut “off, but not for himself” (Dan. 9:26, text note). Today, our Jewish people can look back to the One who paid the ransom for our souls.

- *Even if we admit that we need the blood, we still can't believe in Yeshua. God wanted the blood of a goat or a lamb, not a person.*

The writer to the Hebrews stated that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). Obviously a just God could not accept the death of an innocent and ignorant animal for the payment of human sins. Rather, as Rashi stated in his commentary on Leviticus 17:11, there was a principle involved: “Because the life of the flesh of every creature is dependent on the blood, I have therefore given it [upon the altar] to make atonement for the life of man. Let life come and atone for life!”

God was teaching His people that sin deserved death (see Deut. 24:16, 30:15, and Ezek. 18:4). Yet, because He was merciful and compassionate, He provided a way of escape—the life of an innocent victim would take the place of the sinner. Passages such as Isaiah 53 make it clear, however, that these sacrifices were only a great object lesson pointing forward to the coming of the One who would “do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26). His blood alone would provide an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the world.

On the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, the High Priest would perform a very significant ritual. He would take two goats and present them before the Lord (Lev. 16:7). One goat was to be killed, and its blood offered to “make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been” (verse 16). Then he would take the second goat, which was still alive, and, laying both his hands on its head, he would “confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head” (verse 21). He would then send it away

into the wilderness, where the goat would “carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place” (verse 22).

God had devised a plan whereby sin would not only be *atoned for*, but it would actually be *removed*. Justice would then be satisfied, for sin would be punished. And yet mercy would be fulfilled, for the sinner would be forgiven. Thus, in physically graphic and literal terms, the Lord was pointing forward to the death of Messiah, who, in one act, would provide the blood of atonement and remove our sins far from us.

And it is this very concept, viz., *that the suffering of the righteous could provide atonement for the sins of the world*, which is so well known in Judaism. Thus, the Zohar states so clearly that, because

*the children of the world are members of one another, when the Holy One desires to give healing to the world, He smites one just man amongst them, and for his sake heals all the rest. Whence do we learn this? From the saying, “He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities,” i.e., by the letting of His blood—as when a man bleeds his arm—there was healing for us—for all the members of the body. In general a just person is only smitten in order to procure healing and atonement for a whole generation.*

Could one ask for a clearer statement of the substitutionary death of Yeshua, by whose wounds we are healed?

## **The Law (Torah)**

- *The Torah is forever, every jot and tittle, and only traditional Jews keep it. In fact, even the*

*so-called New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 says that God will put the Torah in our hearts. Therefore, since Yeshua abolished the Torah, He cannot be the Messiah.*

Yeshua came to *fulfill* the Torah, not to abolish it, and in Him alone can it truly be said that “the Torah is forever.” The clearest example of this truth is found with regard to the rituals of the Tabernacle and the Levitical priesthood, which formed such a large part of the Mosaic legislation. Over and over it was stated that these institutions and their governing laws were “eternal” (see, e.g., Ex. 27:21; 28:43; 29:9,28; 40:15). But with the Temple destroyed, how could the Jewish people observe these commandments? Without a sanctuary, how could there be legitimate sacrifices, acceptable to God?

The New Covenant provides the answer, for not only did Yeshua foretell the destruction of the Temple forty years in advance (see, e.g., Luke 19:42-44), but, by His substitutionary death on the cross, He fulfilled the demands of the Law’s sacrificial system. When the Temple did in fact fall, the followers of Yeshua had no problem, *since they did not have to invent alternative means of atonement*. Their sacrifice for sins had already been made.

As far as traditional Judaism is concerned, it has had no sacrifices since A.D. 70; but those who recognize Yeshua as Messiah have enjoyed His once-for-all sacrifice for every generation. Thus, rather than Yeshua *abolishing* the sacrificial system, He has brought it to fulfillment. In the same way, His identification as the Lamb of God has effectively deepened and underscored the Passover message of liberation from bondage, and Messianic Jews can celebrate this holiday with greater fervor and conviction than ever before. Through Moses they have been delivered from the hand of Pharaoh, and through Yeshua they have been redeemed from the power of sin!

Another example is seen in the fact that the *priesthood of all Israel* was established as a goal of the Torah (Ex. 19:6). The Pharisees sought to realize this goal by developing a system that required every Jew to live with the same ritual cleanliness as a consecrated priest. Unfortunately, this only resulted in new regulations and laws, without bringing the people into a truly priestly ministry. Yet now, through Yeshua the Messiah, all New Covenant believers are “being built into a spiritual house to be *a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God!*” (1 Pet. 2:5). The New Covenant community has become the very Temple of God (see Eph. 2:19-22), and *every believing member* has direct access into the holy presence of the King!

As far as the *ethical* commandments of the Law are concerned, Yeshua always brought out the *deepest* meanings of God’s righteous requirements, and He refused to allow following the Lord to degenerate into a mere outward formality. One key feature of the New Covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah was that the Torah would be written in our *hearts*. Thus, rather than destroying and nullifying the Law, Yeshua planted it in our hearts and gave us the ability through the Spirit not only to hear, but also to obey.

As for the argument that while Yeshua did not actually abolish the Law, He did *change* it, the question may be asked, “Doesn’t Jewish tradition teach that when Messiah comes, He will give new commandments or a new Torah?” In other words, while the righteous principles of the Law will never change, won’t some of the earthbound regulations be affected? And if this is possible, could not Yeshua *as Messiah* institute certain “New Commandments,” since He had brought about the fulfillment of Torah’s demands in His perfect life and

sacrificial death? This being the case, is it even accurate to speak of Yeshua's *changing* the Law?

Paul, James and the other early followers of Yeshua were known as observant Jews who were zealous for the Law (Acts 21:20-25). What better proof could there be that Yeshua *in no way* sought to contradict, nullify, or abrogate the commandments of God? It is ironic that today, when Messianic Jews want to worship on Saturday, celebrate the feasts and circumcise their sons as children of Abraham, they are called deceptive and hypocritical!

While there are some who argue that in order for Jeremiah's New Covenant prophecy to be truly fulfilled, God would have to place the *whole Torah* in our hearts, this argument is based on a misconception of the biblical meaning of Torah. Actually, although the Hebrew word *torah* is generally taken as referring to the first Five Books of the Bible (the Pentateuch), and while many Jews understand every reference to *torah* in the Scriptures as meaning *God's entire revelation to His Jewish people*, the fact is that *torah* has a variety of meanings in the Tanakh.

In the sense of "*the Torah*," it can be a synonym for the first Five Books. Yet, more often than not, it simply means "teaching," "instruction," "law," or "regulation." Therefore, when Jeremiah prophesied that under the New Covenant, God would put the *Torah* in the hearts of Israel and Judah, he was saying that God's teaching would be planted within the believer, and that the revelation of the Lord would, by the Spirit (see Ezek. 36:25-27), be internalized. He was not saying that *the traditional Jewish Torah*, consisting of Mishnah and Talmud, would automatically be placed in the hearts of the partakers of this covenant!

Such a concept would not only have been strange to Jeremiah's ears, it would have been totally alien, since the concept of "traditional interpretation of the Law" had not even come into existence! And, although traditional Jews

claim that the “oral law” was revealed to Moses, almost all modern Jewish scholars will admit that the vast part of the oral law did not even exist before the days of Yeshua. It is therefore with every right that Messianic Jews claim to be the true heirs of Moses and the Prophets, children of the New Covenant. We do not lean on later Jewish tradition. We place our feet firmly on the written revelation of God.

- *According to the Law, Yeshua was a false prophet, and those who follow Him are guilty of the worst kind of idolatry: making God into a man!*

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 says:

*If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, “Let us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) “and let us worship them,” you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

According to these criteria, Yeshua can only be classified as a true and faithful prophet, since the entire object of His earthly ministry was to bring glory and honor to His Father, the God of Israel. When asked which was the first and greatest commandment, Jesus answered: “The most important one...is this: ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’” (Mark 12:29-30). Matthew records that when the crowds saw the great miracles that He did, “they praised the God of Israel” (Matt. 15:31). Over and over again, Yeshua pointed the people to God.

How then could it be said that Yeshua Himself was God? And doesn't this in fact make God into man?

First, it should be emphasized that both traditional Jews as well as Messianic Jews would agree that "God is not a man" (Num. 23:19), and that for God in His totality to become man would mean that God would cease to be God. And yet Judaism has often asked the question of how God, who is an infinite spiritual Being, can come into fellowship with man, who is a finite physical (and spiritual) being. In answer to this question, various streams of Jewish teaching have offered some different solutions, and yet all of them have this one thought in common—one way or another, God condescended to the level of man.

Some rabbis taught that God, the perfect Spirit, reached down to man, the imperfect earthling, by means of successive emanations (Hebrew, *sephirot*) of His being. In other words, He revealed Himself in successive stages or spheres, until, at the lowest sphere, He was able to be perceived by man. Others believed that He revealed Himself to man through His Divine Word (Aramaic, *memra*).

Each of these concepts gives us insights into the New Covenant portrayal of Yeshua as Son of Man and Son of God. First, the idea that there are different spheres or emanations in God is *similar to* the idea of the Trinity: God, who is One, exists in the Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is in this way alone that He reveals Himself to man. Thus, Yeshua (the Son) came down to earth to reveal the Father to the world. This is what He meant when He said, "I came from the Father and entered the world: now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father" (John 16:28); and, "No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).

There is also much Jewish teaching that speaks of the Shekinah, *the Divine Presence itself*, going into exile with the Jewish people. According to this concept, God cannot be “whole” again until His people return from their physical and spiritual exile, since the rabbis saw in the Shekinah the “motherly” aspect of God, suffering with her children in foreign lands. Similarly, the New Covenant teaches us that God, in the Person of the Son, has joined Himself with man—Yeshua is thus wholly God and wholly man. As the Son, the One who proceeded forth from the Father, He was the “image of the invisible God” to us. As Man, He lived a perfectly righteous life and died for our sins, thereby becoming the “new” or “second” Adam.

As for the revelation of God by means of His *memra* (Word), Jewish teaching understands that, because God is infinite and totally above man, He can only interact with us by His Word. Thus, rather than God Himself “touching” this earth, He does it by means of His *memra*. Of course, readers of the New Covenant will immediately think of John’s description of Yeshua as “the Word” (Greek, *logos*) Who was *with* God in the beginning, and yet at the same time *was* God. And, although “no one has ever seen God,...God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side,” has declared God to us (John 1:18). We learn about the Father by means of His Word! And, just as the Hebrew Scriptures declare that God created all things *by His Word* (see Gen. 1 and Ps. 33:6-9), so also the New Covenant teaches us that it is through Yeshua that all things were created, and it is by Him that all things consist (Col. 1:16, 17).

From all this we can learn two important facts. First, while Judaism has consistently taught that God alone is the Savior, it has also taught that, in a sense, “man must save himself.” Both of these concepts, rooted as they are in the Scriptures, are fulfilled in Yeshua: as man, He broke the

power of sin over man and paid the penalty for our disobedience; as God, He alone is the means by which we can be saved, since man without God will always turn away.

Second, although the New Covenant concept of the Trinity does *not* allow for different *levels* of deity (although the Jewish mystical concept of the *sephirot* seems to view the divine “emanations” in this way), the consistent emphasis in the Scriptures is that the *Father* is God and *Yeshua* is the Messiah. Thus, Paul could write that when all things are made subject to Yeshua the Son, “then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

It is clear, then, that, rather than having a coarse and idolatrous view of God, the New Covenant has explained to us the real way by which God could remain the high and lofty Holy One, sitting on His heavenly throne, while at the same time, as the Savior of the world, He was reaching down to the lowliest sinner. And it is through the earthly ministry of Yeshua that countless millions of people around the world have “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). He alone is the Savior, and He alone will bring the nations to God.

# **Keys to Understanding Messianic Prophecy**

**By Dr. Michael Brown<sup>1</sup>**

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“You’re completely misinterpreting Isaiah!”

“This verse has absolutely *nothing* to do with your Jesus! The fact is, it’s not even a Messianic prophecy!”

“As for the *real* Messianic prophecies, Jesus fulfilled none of them.”

These are some common arguments used by those who do not believe in Yeshua as their Messiah. Listed below are important keys and principles that will help you to see that, in fact, Yeshua fulfilled the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures.

## **1) Messianic prophecies are not clearly identified as such.**

There is not a single verse in the entire Hebrew Bible that is specifically identified as a Messianic prophecy. Nowhere do the Scriptures say, “The next paragraph contains a prediction of the Messiah!” Thus, whether or not one accepts a certain passage as Messianic depends largely on how one understands the person and work of the Messiah.

For example, if someone believes that the Messiah will be a king who will bring peace to the earth, he will probably interpret Isaiah 11 as a Messianic prophecy. But he will not interpret Isaiah 53 in a Messianic way *because it does not fit his preconceived notion of what the Messiah*

*will do*. And so, when I point to Isaiah 53, he will confidently say to me, “But that is not a Messianic prophecy!” How can I answer this argument? Just by asking two simple questions: “Who says Isaiah 53 is *not* Messianic while Isaiah 11 *is* Messianic? Who says your interpretation is right?” In other words, I want to help him see that his understanding of Messianic prophecy is based on *traditional bias* as opposed to *objective scriptural truth*. Maybe it is *he* who has brought preconceived notions to the text. If he is open to dialogue, I can take things a step further and ask, “Are you sure your picture of the Messiah is correct? Maybe you are missing some of the pieces to the puzzle! How do you know that Messiah hasn’t already come?” And from there I can show him the way!

## **2) The Messianic hope in Israel developed gradually.**

Messianic prophecies were not clearly identified as such because they were not initially understood as referring to *the Messiah*. Also, the Hebrew word *mashiach* (Messiah), which literally means “anointed one,” almost never refers to *the Messiah* in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, it refers to the anointed king (like Saul or David), the anointed high priest (like Aaron), or even an “anointed” (chosen) foreign ruler (like Cyrus).

Let’s apply this to the Messianic hope in Israel. David was a great king, a *mashiach* of the Lord; so was his son Solomon, who had a wonderful reign of peace. Many of the Psalms were written for them or about them: Psalm 72, which is a prayer for Solomon; Psalm 2, which celebrates the coronation of the king; or Psalm 45, which commemorates the royal wedding ceremony. And when all was well, God’s people recognized no need for *the Messiah*.

But when Israel’s kings began to fail, when there were no more Davids or Solomons, and when the Jewish people

were exiled from their Land, they began to realize their need for a special *mashiach*, supernaturally anointed by God. And what do you think happened when they went back and reread the Psalms? They began to see the Messianic significance of the verses! They recognized, for example, that Psalm 2, which prophesied *the worldwide dominion* of the Lord's anointed, was *not* fulfilled by David, Solomon, or any other king. It could only be fulfilled by *the Messiah*. And so, little by little, they began to understand the Messianic hope.

### **3) Many biblical prophecies are fulfilled gradually.**

This key principle applies to *all types* of prophecy, whether Messianic or not. This is also implied by the word "fulfill": the prophet's words had to be "filled up to the full" to be "fulfilled."

Ezekiel, *living in the Babylonian exile*, prophesied that his people should return from their captivity. The fulfillment *began* in 538 B.C.E., when the first group of exiles returned to Judah; it has *continued* in the last century with the return of the Jewish people to the Land; and it *will reach fulfillment* when Jesus comes back and gathers His scattered people from every corner of the globe. Over 2500 years and still being fulfilled!

Now let's look at a Messianic prophecy. Zechariah prophesies that when Israel's King comes, He will be "righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey...His rule will extend from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (9:9-10). If you show this to a rabbi, he will probably say, "It's clear that Jesus hasn't fulfilled it!"

How would I respond? Simply by explaining to him that the prophecy *is presently being fulfilled* (i.e., it is in the ongoing process of fully coming to pass): Jesus *came* as the

prophet foretold, “righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey”; *every day* the number of individuals over whom He reigns as King continues to increase (countless millions from every country!) and *in the future*, when He returns, He will completely establish His rule.

#### **4) The prophets saw the Messiah coming on the immediate horizon of history.**

Have you ever stood on top of a mountain and looked across to another mountain peak? The mountains appear to be next to each other, even though there is a huge valley in between. It is the same with biblical prophecy. *The prophets saw the future through a telescope.* Things far away in time appeared close. They did not realize that centuries would come and go between their initial prediction and its actual fulfillment. In fact, to the prophets, the expression “at the end of days” could have meant “right around the corner”!

Why is this principle important to understand with regard to Messianic prophecy? Because believers in Yeshua are often accused of taking a verse “out of context.” We are told, “That prophecy applied to Isaiah’s day 2700 years ago. It certainly does not refer to Jesus!” But did it *really* apply to Isaiah’s day, or was it an example of prophecy being telescopic? Did Isaiah see the coming of the Messiah (i.e., a great deliverer) *in the context of his very own day*?

Let’s look at Isaiah 9:1-7 (8:23-9:6 in some Bibles) where it is predicted that the yoke of the enemy (i.e., Assyria) would be broken by the son of David *who was already born*. And this son of David would have an everlasting kingdom of peace. When was Assyria crushed? 2600 years ago. Who was born shortly before that time? Hezekiah. Did *he* fulfill the prophecy? Obviously not! But

the prophet saw the coming of the future Davidic ruler as if it were about to happen in his very own day.

Watch carefully for prophecies like this, since they are extremely common. In fact, this key to prophetic interpretation is really a summary of the first three principles just given. If you go back and read them again, things will begin to fall into place for you.

**5) It is important to read every prophecy in its overall context in Scripture.**

Do the New Covenant writers take Old Covenant verses out of context, or are they faithful to the meaning of the text? In Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14 is applied to the birth of Jesus (the virgin [or, maiden] will bear a son and call his name Immanuel). But is this quotation faithful to Isaiah? How can Matthew apply *a sign given to King Ahaz about 734 B.C.E.* to the birth of Yeshua over 700 years later? How could this be a relevant sign?

Consider the context of Isaiah chapters 7-11. Judah was being attacked by Israel and Aram. These nations wanted to replace Ahaz, who represented the house of David (see Is. 7:2, 13), with their own man named Ben Tabeel. *This would mean the end of David's rule in Judah.* Yet when Ahaz would not ask God for a sign, God gave him His own: a child named Immanuel (meaning "God is with us") would be born and within a few years, before the child was very old, Judah's enemies would be destroyed.

Who was this Immanuel? Obviously a child to be born to the house of David in place of faithless Ahaz, a son who would be a token of the fact that God was with His people (in other words, good news for the nation and bad news for Ahaz!). But is his birth ever mentioned in the book of Isaiah? No! In fact, the birth of Isaiah's son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz in Isaiah 8:1-4 *seems to take its place as a time-setter* (read Is. 7:14-16 and 8:3-4; before Maher-Shalal-

Hash-Baz would be very old, Judah's enemies would be destroyed—just what was said about Immanuel!).

What happened to Immanuel? Nothing is clearly said. But what is clearly said in Isaiah 9:6-7 (9:5-6 in some Bibles) and 11:1-16 is that there will come forth a rod from Jesse (David's father) who will rule the nations in righteousness.

And this was Matthew's context! He was reading Isaiah 7-11 in full! Thus he quotes Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 9:1-2 (8:23-9:1 in some Bibles) in Matthew 4:15-16; and he alludes to Isaiah 11:1 in Matthew 2:23 (the Hebrew word for "Nazarene" resembles the Hebrew word for "branch").

Was anyone born in Isaiah's day that began to fulfill the Immanuel prophecy? We simply do not know. But of this we can be sure: Jesus, the ideal King from the house of David, and clearly the subject of the Messianic prophecies in chapters 9 and 11, is Immanuel—God with us—in the fullest sense of the word!

#### **6) The Messiah was to be both a Priest and King.**

Everyone who believes in the Messiah accepts the *royal* prophecies of the Scriptures as referring to Messiah the King. But what about the predictions of *suffering*. What do *these* verses have to do with the Messiah?

Here is an important answer! *The prophecies of suffering and death point to the priestly ministry of the Messiah, since it was the duty of the High Priest to intercede for his people and make atonement for their sins.*

Did you know that in the first century of this era there was widespread belief in the coming of a *priestly* Messianic figure as well as a *royal* Messianic figure? This belief was almost correct. There *was* to be a priest and there *was* to be a king, only these two figures were one! According to

Psalm 110, the Davidic ruler was to be both priest and king. In Zechariah 6, *the crown* is placed on the head of *the High Priest* named Joshua (he is also called *Yeshua* in Ezra and Nehemiah!), who is then referred to as “the Branch,” a Messianic title!

Thus, it is clear that the Messiah would have a dual role: as High Priest He would take His people’s sins on Himself and intercede for them; as King He would rule and reign. Because traditional Judaism has largely forgotten the Messiah’s priestly work, it has not always recognized key passages in Isaiah as referring to Him.

### **7) The Messiah is the ideal representative of his people.**

In ancient Israel, the king and his people were one. As the kings of Israel went, so went the nation. They saw themselves represented in their head.

How does this apply to the Messiah? First, the history of Israel paralleled the life of Jesus. For example, when Moses was born, Pharaoh was trying to kill Israelite baby boys, and when Jesus was born, Herod began killing Jewish baby boys. Also, both the nation of Israel as well as Jesus spent their early years in Egypt. (*That* is why Matthew quotes Hos. 11:1 in Matt. 2:15! Compare also Matt. 2:20 with Ex. 4:19.)

\*\*\*

And because the Messiah was the ideal representative of his people, *He fulfills the words of their psalms*. Thus Psalm 22, the psalm of the righteous sufferer whom God wonderfully delivers, is not identified at all as a Messianic prophecy. Yet, to any impartial reader, it is clear that both the depth of suffering described as well as the universal effects of the deliverance can refer only to Jesus, the ideal righteous Sufferer, the representative King, the greater David. Therefore, the New Covenant writers often see the

Psalms as containing Messianic prophecies, since the Messiah is seen as their ultimate, representative subject.

*How can you put all these principles together?* Every time you see a Messianic prophecy quoted in the New Covenant, look it up in the Old Covenant and read the whole section from which it is taken (this could be a paragraph, a chapter, or even more). Then, try and see which of the interpretive keys explains the quote. Remember: many times several principles are at work together!

Not only will you enrich your understanding of the Word, but you will learn to appreciate how wonderfully God has woven together the prophecies of the Messiah's coming.

## **Are the Rabbis Right?** **By Dr. Michael Brown<sup>1</sup>**

*The following passages are excerpted from a special cassette entitled, "Are the Rabbis Right?" offered by It's Supernatural! and Messianic Vision.*

It's often said by the rabbinic community to Christians that you cannot have a Christianity without a Christ. And it's said in somewhat of a negative way. In other words, you can have a Judaism without a Messiah, but you cannot have a Christianity without a Christ.

I don't take that as an insult. I thank God for sending us the Messiah. But I want to give you a parallel statement—you cannot have rabbinic Judaism without a rabbi. You cannot have traditional Judaism without a tradition.

According to the rabbinic teaching, quoting from an introduction to the Talmud by a famous Jewish scholar named Zevi Hirsch Chajes, "The Torah, divine instruction, is divided into two parts: the written and the unwritten law. The former, the written law, consists of the Pentateuch, which was divinely revealed to Moses at Sinai."

Everyone accepts the Pentateuch (five books of Moses) as authoritative, the written law that God gave and that formed the basis for all later Jewish thought, all later Jewish law, all later Jewish teaching. This is the foundation and I agree with this. But now Chajes goes on to say "the latter, the unwritten law, comprises expositions and interpretations which were communicated to Moses orally as a supplement to the former."

The traditional Jewish view is that God gave Moses the written law, which is often obscure and doesn't tell you everything you need to know. That was put down in writing. And then God told Moses all the other things, really hundreds and thousands of laws and interpretations and insights into the written Scriptures. He told Moses to pass them on to Joshua and then Joshua to the elders that lived in his day and then the elders to the prophets, and so on right up to Jesus' day and then after that right up to the rabbinic community to this day.

Some of those traditions got written down. That's called the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the later Jewish law codes. Other traditions were just passed on orally. But according to Chajes, "Allegiance to the authority of the said rabbinic tradition is binding upon all sons of Israel since these explanations and interpretations have come down to us by word of mouth, from generation to generation right from the time of Moses."

Those sentences that I just quoted to you are the traditional, standard view. The oral law was handed down to Moses and he handed it down, directly transmitted it, and it's been transmitted verbatim throughout all the ages.

And it says here, "They have been transmitted to us, precise, correct, unadulterated. And he who does not give his adherence to the unwritten law and the rabbinic tradition has no right to share the heritage of Israel."

Chaim Schimmel, a Jewish lawyer who wrote a book called *The Oral Law*, speaking of our Jewish people, says this, and this is very surprising: "They do not follow the literal word of the Bible, nor have they ever done so. They have been fashioned and ruled by the verbal interpretation of the written word, more particularly by the Torah, which embraces both the written and the oral law."

Now here's the problem I have with all of this. I can show you by the five books of Moses and throughout the rest of the Scripture that *there was no such thing as an authoritative oral tradition*. God made a covenant with Israel for all time based on a written word and a written word alone. Every single reference in the entire Hebrew Bible to violating the Torah of Moses is only a reference to violating the written Torah. There is never any reference to violating any oral law, oral tradition or anything. Why? Because it didn't exist. It was developed much later and then in the memory of the people was attributed to an earlier time in history.

Yet despite the lack of evidence, the rabbinic community has placed great importance on the oral law. Tractate Gittin, 60b of the Babylonian Talmud says: "The Holy One, blessed be He, did not make His covenant with Israel except by virtue of the oral law." And then in the Jerusalem Talmud, in Tractate Pe'ah, Section three, Halakhah three, a rabbi was trying to figure out which was more important, the oral law or the written law. He says: "Words were given orally and words were given in writing and I didn't know which of the two sets was the more valuable. However, from the verse, Exodus 34:27, 'According to these words have I made a covenant with you...', we learn that those that were transmitted orally are the more valuable."

What does Exodus 34:27 have to do with the oral law? Let me read this verse to you from the New Jewish Version (all Scriptures below are from this version): "And the Lord said to Moses: Write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and with Israel." Look at that. "Write down these commandments." How do they get the interpretation based on this verse that the oral law is more valuable than the written law because it explains and interprets the written

law? Very simply—by a total misinterpretation of the Hebrew words translated “in accordance.” The Hebrew words by themselves would mean “on the mouth.” But every Hebrew scholar would agree that here the words mean “in accordance.”

So God didn’t say I’m making a covenant with you based on the oral law. He said I’m making a covenant with you based on what you’re going to *write down*. Many times the rabbinic community accuses Messianic Jews of taking Scripture out of context and of twisting the meaning of Scripture. And I’d say with all respect to the great learning that many rabbis do have, that the foundations of rabbinic Judaism are based on misinterpretation and twisting of Scripture.

What I want to challenge you with is this: by giving oral law a higher place than God’s written Word, *rabbinic tradition has usurped divine authority. Rabbinic tradition has replaced the prophetic voice. Rabbinic tradition has taken the place of a face-to-face encounter with God.*

Let me explain to you what I mean by a face-to-face encounter with God. In Deuteronomy 5:2-4, Moses is speaking to the children of Israel as they are about to enter the promised land after almost forty years of wandering in the wilderness, He says: “The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb [Sinai]. It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, the living, every one of us who is here today. Face to face the Lord spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire....”

You say, “Well, what does that mean?” Didn’t God make a covenant with our forefathers and here Moses is saying he didn’t make it with our fathers, but only with us?

Here’s what it means. Moses said that God made the covenant with *us* the living. Yes, he did make a covenant with your fathers, but they’re dead now. They died in the

wilderness. You who heard God speak from the mountain face to face and are still alive, you are the ones He made the covenant with.

Why? Because God doesn't make covenants with dead people, but only with living people. I can't say, "Well, God made a covenant with my forefathers, therefore I am in it." No. I have to myself enter into it. I myself have to have that living experience, that living entering into the relationship of the covenant with God.

But didn't God also make a covenant with our children? Yes, but they themselves must enter into it in a living way.

When I asked an ultra-orthodox man why he lives the way he lives, the basic gist of his answer was, "Well, it's pretty good. My father did it, I learned it from him, now I'm going to teach my children and they're going to learn it from me and they're going to grow up and do the same things I do."

Have you entered into that relationship with God that Moses and the first generation of Israelites had, or have you simply mimicked what you learned and your fathers mimicked what they learned? I don't mean mimicked in a negative way, I mean following traditions that have been learned by rote. Is that what you're doing as a traditional Jew?

One of the foundations of rabbinic Judaism is that the majority rules. The only text in the Bible that is used to prove that is Exodus 23:2: "You shall neither side with the mighty to do wrong—you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute so as to pervert it in favor of the mighty—nor shall you show deference to a poor man in his dispute." In other words, *don't follow the majority* (mighty). What the rabbis did is knock out the word "don't" and just said, "Follow the majority."

If you'll read rabbinic scholars talking about it, this verse is admittedly taken out of context and changed in meaning. Nowhere does the Bible hint at such a thing, that the majority of the leaders in the community have the right view. In fact, basically every time that you read the history of our Jewish people in the Bible, you'll see very plainly that the majority, even the majority of leaders, was almost always wrong.

“How do you know who was right or wrong?” you ask. The first thing is that we have the written word. Whoever violated or changed the meaning of the written word could not be following God. They could not be right. Not only that, God would confirm His Word with miracles, signs, and wonders. And finally, God spoke to His people through the prophets.

One of the greatest rabbis who ever lived was Moses Mamonides (1135-1204). In his introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, he says some very startling things. He says that if someone who is a proven prophet tells you to follow the literal word of the Torah and the literal word runs contrary to the rabbinic interpretation, he's a false prophet. *That is saying that human rabbinic authority is more weighty, more powerful, more decisive than the testimony of a proven prophet following the literal word of the Scripture. If you accept this, then the plain sense of the Bible is no longer binding. You can make anything mean anything.*

The rabbi's view is that somehow or another rabbinic interpretation is the true interpretation of the written law, even when it seems to contradict what is written down. What I say is this: according to Exodus 24, verses 3-4, it says that Moses read aloud all the words that were written down in the book and that that was the covenant that the Lord made with the children of Israel. (See also Exodus 34:27.)

Joshua 1:8 says “Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful.” Did you get that? “Let not this *Book of the Teaching* cease from your lips....” That’s what God gave to the people of Israel. It’s the written Torah. The oral Torah, the oral tradition was something that came in much later and violates prophetic authority.

I remember when I first believed that Jesus was the Messiah, that he had come to fulfill the promises in the Torah that God would raise up a prophet and that he was the last great prophet that God raised up to speak to Israel. I understood that he came as the fulfillment of the image of the high priest in the Torah who would stand and make sacrifice and make atonement for the sins of the people.

It says in Isaiah 53, that the righteous servant of the Lord,

*makes the many righteous, it is their punishment that he bears; assuredly I will give him the many as his portion, he shall receive the multitude as his spoil. For he exposed himself to death and was numbered among the sinners, whereas he bore the guilt of the many and made intercession for sinners (vs. 11b-12).*

When I understood that Jesus made atonement for me, my life was radically changed. I want you to understand this great mystery, that Jesus who was exalted and recognized as the Messiah and loved and worshiped by men and women, millions and millions of them all over the world, to this day, was a Jewish carpenter who was nailed to a tree and despised by our own people. And to this day is despised by many of our own people. But He is the key. That’s the mystery. He was the exalted One, He was the despised One. He is One and the same.

Are the rabbis right about Talmud? Are the rabbis right about Jesus?

## **Endnote**

1 “Dialogue,” “Who Is He?,” “Advanced Dialogue,” “Keys to Understanding Messianic Prophecy,” and “Are the Rabbis Right?” by Dr. Michael Brown previously published in Sid Roth, *There Must Be Something More!* (Brunswick, GA: Messianic Vision Press, 1994).