

The Chosen People



Volume XII, Issue 9 SPECIAL EDITION

“I believe
with perfect faith in
the coming of the
Messiah.”

- Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith

... BUT RECOGNIZING HIM
MAY NOT BE SO EASY!

Some Reflections about the Jewish People and Jesus

Dear friend,

This newsletter tackles a controversial topic: if and how the claim that Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the Hebrew Scriptures has any bearing on Jewish people today. However this material may have come into your possession, I would like to take the liberty of encouraging you to read through it with an open mind.

I have to admit that, as a Jewish man myself, I remember my thoughts and feelings when I first heard about people who talked about being Jewish and believing in Jesus. I thought such people were out of their minds. I was shocked by them, embarrassed for them and angry at them.

But as I listened, read, and reflected, I became first cautiously open and finally truly convinced that these wild claims were true. It was the last place I ever thought I would go, and over the past three decades, I have never regretted that decision.

The Hardest Hurdle

If you are Jewish, you know that there are many different ways to relate to your Jewish identity. You can ignore it, which some try to do, or it can be your single, defining fact of life. Most of us, however, live between these two poles. We are grateful for our rich heritage and are conscious of its claims to one degree or another. We also recognize that we share a world with others and, being naturally inquisitive, we are intellectual and spiritual explorers there. But somehow, we remain tethered to the Jewish world and are deeply suspicious of anything that threatens to sever that tie.

The articles inside this publication deal with various aspects of Jewish religious thought and history. They are, I think, thought-provoking pieces that I hope you will find engaging. But I know as well as you do that until the knot in your stomach unclenches about the relationship of Jesus to the Jewish people, intellectual discussion will probably not persuade you to change your thinking.

It is a complicated knot—a knot that consists of pain, and an intuitive distrust of Christians and many of their ways. And at the center of it all is the belief that it is impossible to accept the claim that Jesus is the Messiah and remain Jewish. More than anything, let's admit, this is the single greatest hurdle even for Jewish people who never go to synagogue and for all intents and purposes have left Judaism behind.

But what if this isn't true? What if a Jewish person who accepts the message of the Messiah remains Jewish—and even discovers new and meaningful dimensions to that identity? This is our claim, as Jewish believers in Jesus—Yeshua—the Messiah. He is Jewish. His message was rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. His first followers were Jewish and never thought of themselves as other than that. And we today, if we are Jewish, may embrace this message and continue to express our Jewish lives as we serve the Lord of Creation.

So I invite you to peruse the following articles. And I also invite you to contact us at 888-2-YESHUA for more discussion.

Your brother,



Mitch Glaser

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Jesus and the Jewish People

A LOOK AT HISTORY

Why don't Jewish people believe in Jesus?

From the earliest days of what was known as the Nazarene sect of Jewish believers through the later centuries of Christianity, the majority of Jewish people have denied the claims of the New Testament. While theological and cultural differences have contributed to a hardening of positions on both sides, it may also be said that the forces of history have helped to drive a wedge between mainstream Judaism and Christianity that has made the distance even harder to bridge. One of the saddest things is that it happened so quickly. But how did it come about?

History and a Parting of the Ways

The apparent distance between Judaism and the message of Jesus the Messiah was not always so great. It can be argued that at first there was no distance at all, since the early believers were all Jewish. How did this Grand Canyon-sized abyss develop?



Several events in the first and second centuries were largely responsible. The first is the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE by the Romans. This calamity not only resulted in the wholesale slaughter of Jewish people in Jerusalem, but also reconfigured Judaism as a religious faith. Without the Temple, the offering of sacrifices would no longer play a meaningful role so the Great Sanhedrin gathered in the town of Yavneh to mourn, regroup and redefine Jewish life.

Another factor contributed to the distancing of the followers of Yeshua from Judaism. The original Jewish believers in Jerusalem who provided leadership to the earliest form of the church were also swept away in the ensuing Jewish wars that culminated in 135 CE with the disastrous failure of the Bar Kokhba rebellion. Without the guiding hand of this early Jewish leadership, the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles led to the conscious decision to distance the emerging Christian faith from its Jewish roots. It also led to the rise of anti-Semitism and a deeply-seated contempt for Judaism among so-called Christians that raises its ugly head even to this day.

First Failed Expectations

There is another reason for the Jewish rejection of the message of the Nazarenes. The Messianic message of the New Testament is composed, in part, of the Jewish expectation that the end of world was just around the corner. Ironically, although this has not yet occurred, this component of the Messiah's teaching is one of the

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most persuasive pieces of evidence that His message is historically authentic.

The world in which Jesus moved was charged with apocalyptic hope. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has shed enormous light on the intense interplay of history and faith in the world at this time. The fervent few waited in devout hope that they would be vindicated by a mighty warrior who would cast out the wicked oppressor. But that hope did not materialize, and from that time forward, one of the most frequent reasons set forth by Jewish people to reject the claims of Jesus has been His “failure” to deliver the longed-for Kingdom and accompanying peace.

Now there are two possibilities here. The first is that many Jewish people are right to reject Jesus on this basis. The second is that they are wrong, and there are more pieces on the board that need to be considered. Perhaps the timing of this expectation was off.

An Alternative Interpretation

Saul of Tarsus, writing to a fellowship of Jewish and other believers in Rome, tackled this very question. He wrote to them, *“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob’”* (Romans 11:25-26).

In other words, even the widespread Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah, because of the delay of the Kingdom’s fullness, was a part of God’s plan. For the Hebrew Scriptures speak plainly of the inclusion of the nations in the blessing of Israel. If this alternative interpretation proves to be the case, then the historical

objection that the delay of the Kingdom has disqualified Jesus just won’t hold water.

If this is so, then perhaps it might be worthwhile to take a fresh look at other traditional objections to Jesus. You might find that there is more to Him than you originally thought.

Bridging the Distance

The relationship between the Jewish people and Christianity has not been an easy one. Although Christianity is often depicted as the “child” of Judaism, it might be more accurate to say that Judaism and Christianity are siblings. As they exist today, both of them owe their existence to the earlier Israelite faith that birthed and nourished them. And for better or worse, as many sibling rivals realize, they cannot live without each other.

The principles of the Israelite faith that undergird both Judaism and Christianity speak to the essential condition of humanity. We are all wounded creatures in a broken creation. The prophet Isaiah laments that *“all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”* (Isaiah 64:6). We are unable to mend ourselves. Israelite faith, embodied in the Hebrew Bible, teaches us to look beyond ourselves with hopeful expectation for a promised deliverance — by a promised Messiah.

What would such a Messiah look like? He would be holy, just and mighty enough to be able to overcome evil. But He would also first be the embodiment of compassion, forgiveness, servanthood and love. The New Testament portrays Yeshua of Nazareth as both of these things. It asserts that He first came among us to provide the willing sacrifice through which we can be reconciled to the Lord of Creation. And secondly, He will return so that all of humankind will finally be made whole.

Finally, it should be clear that Jesus never called upon Jewish people to become Gentiles, but rather to follow Him as the Jewish Messiah. And quite frankly, the most important gap we have to close is not between Judaism and

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Christianity—but between ourselves and God. It is our sin, our failure to keep the Torah—our failure to oftentimes even live up to our own standards of morality and goodness, that causes this gap. How then do we approach God and draw close to our Creator?

The answer is found by bridging the gap between the Older and Newer Testaments. When we put these two together we discover that God bridged the gap by sending His Son, the fulfillment of prophecy, to be the promised Messiah and to bear our sins. Through accepting

Yeshua we are forgiven and cleansed—brought nearer to God than we ever thought possible. Yeshua closes that gap between man and God—whether you are Jewish or Gentile. Why not take time to read the Scriptures and see if Yeshua really is who He claimed to be—the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world? ☆

Rabbinic

O B J E C T I O N S

by Dr. Michael L. Brown

Whether you are a religious Jewish person or not, it is clear that all modern forms of Judaism, from Orthodox to Reform, are based upon the idea that two Torahs were given on Mount Sinai — one written and the other oral. Eventually, the oral Torah was written down, codified, commented upon and passed along to future generations of Jewish people and became known as the Talmud — the judgments and interpretations of our Sages.

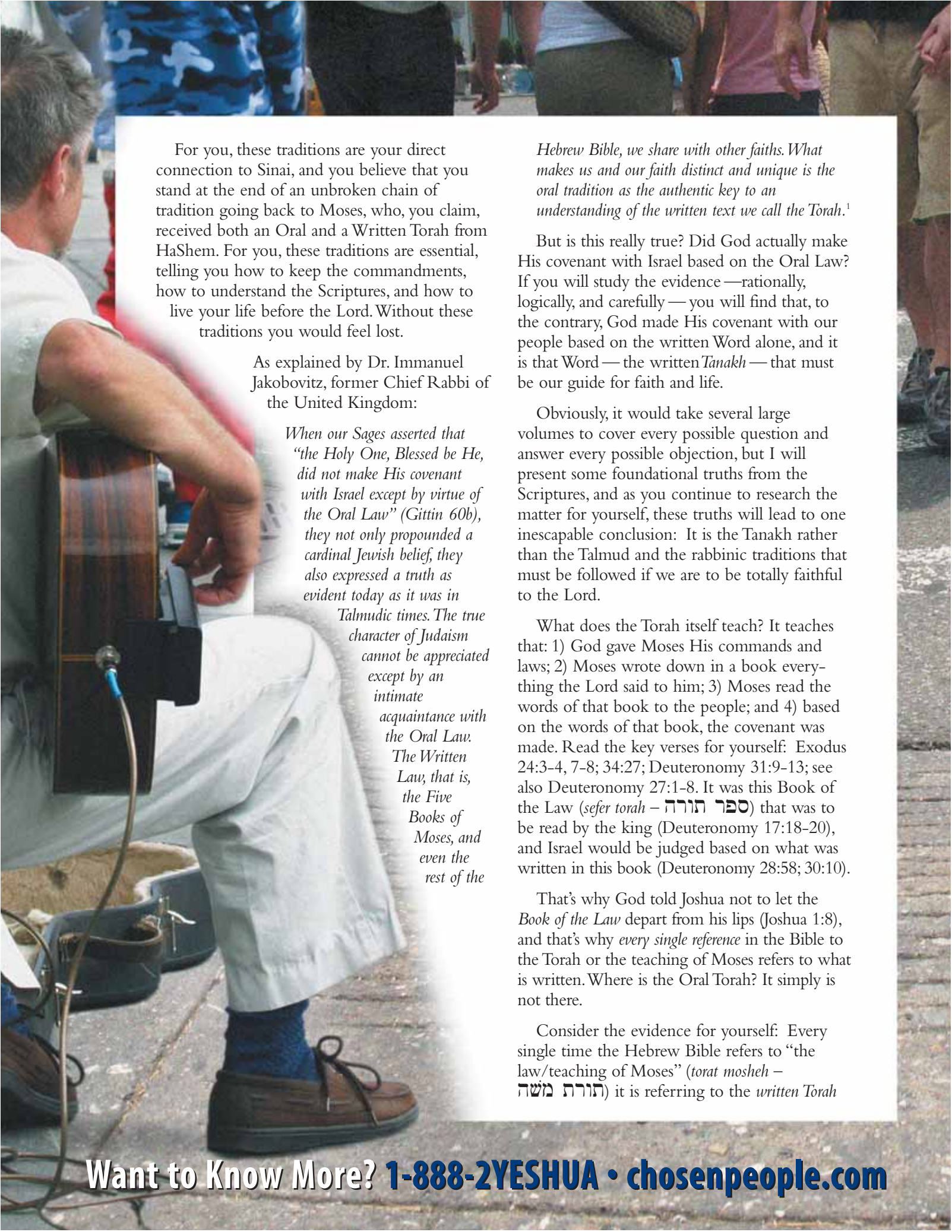
All Jewish people today — whether religious or not—generally participate in Jewish religious life by engaging both biblical truth and the traditions passed along by our rabbis. It is impossible to practice normative Judaism without relating to Jewish tradition. But we should ask the question, “Does Jewish tradition carry the same weight and religious authority as the Bible?”

This might be something that many of our Jewish people take for granted, but have you ever considered the implications of this way of thinking about God and our relationship to Him as Jews? What do you think about Jewish tradition and Scripture?

This is the significant subject addressed by Dr. Michael Brown in the following article.

If you are an observant Jew, then the rabbinic traditions are very important to you. After all, without the traditions, there would be no such thing as traditional Judaism!

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For you, these traditions are your direct connection to Sinai, and you believe that you stand at the end of an unbroken chain of tradition going back to Moses, who, you claim, received both an Oral and a Written Torah from HaShem. For you, these traditions are essential, telling you how to keep the commandments, how to understand the Scriptures, and how to live your life before the Lord. Without these traditions you would feel lost.

As explained by Dr. Immanuel Jakobovitz, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom:

When our Sages asserted that “the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not make His covenant with Israel except by virtue of the Oral Law” (Gittin 60b), they not only propounded a cardinal Jewish belief, they also expressed a truth as evident today as it was in Talmudic times. The true character of Judaism cannot be appreciated except by an intimate acquaintance with the Oral Law. The Written Law, that is, the Five Books of Moses, and even the rest of the

Hebrew Bible, we share with other faiths. What makes us and our faith distinct and unique is the oral tradition as the authentic key to an understanding of the written text we call the Torah.¹

But is this really true? Did God actually make His covenant with Israel based on the Oral Law? If you will study the evidence—rationally, logically, and carefully—you will find that, to the contrary, God made His covenant with our people based on the written Word alone, and it is that Word—the written *Tanakh*—that must be our guide for faith and life.

Obviously, it would take several large volumes to cover every possible question and answer every possible objection, but I will present some foundational truths from the Scriptures, and as you continue to research the matter for yourself, these truths will lead to one inescapable conclusion: It is the *Tanakh* rather than the Talmud and the rabbinic traditions that must be followed if we are to be totally faithful to the Lord.

What does the Torah itself teach? It teaches that: 1) God gave Moses His commands and laws; 2) Moses wrote down in a book everything the Lord said to him; 3) Moses read the words of that book to the people; and 4) based on the words of that book, the covenant was made. Read the key verses for yourself: Exodus 24:3-4, 7-8; 34:27; Deuteronomy 31:9-13; see also Deuteronomy 27:1-8. It was this Book of the Law (*sefer torah* – ספר תורה) that was to be read by the king (Deuteronomy 17:18-20), and Israel would be judged based on what was written in this book (Deuteronomy 28:58; 30:10).

That’s why God told Joshua not to let the *Book of the Law* depart from his lips (Joshua 1:8), and that’s why *every single reference* in the Bible to the Torah or the teaching of Moses refers to what is written. Where is the Oral Torah? It simply is not there.

Consider the evidence for yourself: Every single time the Hebrew Bible refers to “the law/teaching of Moses” (*torat mosheh* – תורת משה) it is referring to the *written Torah*

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(see Joshua 8:31-32; 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 23:25; Malachi 3:22; Daniel 9:11, 13; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Nehemiah 8:1; 2 Chronicles 23:18; 30:16; 34:14)—every single time! Conversely, there is not one time in the entire Hebrew Bible where someone is rebuked or punished for breaking “the law of Moses” when it does not refer to the written Torah. Not a single time! If someone was indicted for breaking “the Torah of Moses,” or if reference was made to “the Torah of Moses,” it meant one thing and one thing only: the written Torah. And it was that written Torah that our forefathers were called to keep. Why then do some put such an emphasis on the Oral Torah, claiming that without it, one cannot understand what is written?

The phrase *sefer torah* (ספר תורה, “Book of the Law,” occurs twenty times in the Tanakh, while there are no references whatsoever to an Oral Torah (*torah she-be'al peh* – תורה שבעל פה) in the entire Tanakh. As for the supposed hints to the Oral Torah within the Scriptures, all of them can be easily explained. What then will you follow: the sure and certain testimony of the written Word, or the traditions of men, no matter how beautiful those traditions might be?

In many cases, the Talmudic interpretation of the Scriptures contradicts the plain sense of the Torah. For a famous example, see B. Bava Metzia 59b, which changes the meaning of the end of Exodus 23:2. If you are a student of the Talmud, you know that this is common, even in legal interpretations; see, e.g., B. Berachot 2 a-b, where the word *vetaher* (וטהר) in Leviticus 22:7 is misinterpreted. In other cases, the Talmud makes the Torah laws void, as seen in the well-known rabbinic interpretation of Deuteronomy 21:18-21 in B. Sanhedrin 71a, where it is taught that the Torah commandment was never observed and, in fact, never meant to be observed. On what basis, then, will you follow human traditions when those traditions overrule the Word of God?

The Rambam, Moses Maimonides, taught in his introduction to the Mishnah that the

rabbinic traditions were to be followed even if they contradicted the plain, grammatical sense of the Torah and even if a prophet of God confirmed that the plain, grammatical sense of the Torah was correct (using Deuteronomy 25:11-12 as his example). So, the written Word, confirmed by a prophet, has less authority than the rabbinic traditions! Add to this the Talmudic teaching in B. Bava Metzia 59b (cited above, and based on a wrong interpretation of Exodus 23:2) that states that even divine miracles and a voice from heaven cannot overrule the majority opinion of the rabbis, and you realize just how extreme this position really is.

Which, then, will you follow? The written Word or the traditions of men? When you stand before God, what will you say? A word to the wise is sufficient (*vehamaskil yavin* – והמשיכיל יבין). ☆

1. Foreword to H. Chaim Schimmel, *The Oral Law: A Study of the Rabbinic Contribution to Torah She-be-al-Peh* (2nd, rev. ed.; Jerusalem/New York: Feldheim, 1996), n.p.

Messianic Jews—Jewish people who believe that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel—believe in the priority and greater authority of the Tanakh (the entire Hebrew Bible) and affirm that the case for Yeshua being the Jewish Messiah is well documented by Moses, the Prophets and the Writers of the Bible. If you follow the Bible, it will lead you to believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, but if you remain under the authority of Jewish tradition then you probably will not. So, what will become the basis for your decision to accept or reject Yeshua? Will you make your most significant life choices based upon Jewish tradition or Scripture? The Psalmist writes,

Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God (Psalm 146:3-5).



Isaiah 53

¹Who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

²For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.

He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

³He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

⁴Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;

Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.

⁶All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

⁸He was taken from prison and from judgment,
And who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living;
For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

⁹And they made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

¹⁰Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put Him to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

¹¹He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,
Because He poured out His soul unto death,
And He was numbered with the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.

The Challenge to Believe (Isaiah 53:1)

Isaiah challenges the people to believe God's message and to respond in faith to the Suffering Servant whom He has sent to deliver them. The authors of the New Testament assert that Yeshua is the Suffering Servant of whom Isaiah spoke and challenge us to recognize that Yeshua is indeed the One sent by God to rescue us from our sins (John 12:38; Romans 10:16).

The Mission of Messiah (Isaiah 53:4)

Isaiah clearly spells out the mission of the messianic Servant to take up our infirmities and to carry away our sorrows. The Book of Matthew confirms that Yeshua healed the sick in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "*He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses*" (Matthew 8:17).

The Suffering of Messiah (Isaiah 53:5)

The healing and forgiveness of sin that Messiah brings does not come without a price. The Messianic Servant would die in the place of His people and suffer an excruciating death. The biblical accounts of Yeshua's execution fulfill Isaiah's prediction (Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 24; John 19; Acts 2:23).

The Purpose of the Sufferings of the Messiah (Isaiah 53:6)

Although we all have gone astray, it is the Messiah who bears the brunt of God's judgment and wrath. Yeshua told His disciples, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). The Messiah died so that we might experience God's forgiveness.

The Personal Invitation of the Messiah (Isaiah 53:11)

All people—Jewish or Gentile—who place their faith in God's righteous Servant will be justified because Yeshua the Messiah has paid the price for their sin. Alluding to this passage, Peter wrote, "*Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls*" (1 Peter 2:24-25).



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