



THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

SPECIAL EDITION



MESSIAH

ONE OF US!

Can I Be Jewish and Believe in Jesus?

why is it difficult and, at times, even volatile to invite a Jewish person to consider whether Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel? After all, those extending the invitation usually mean well! But oftentimes, our kindest and best efforts to share the good news with a Jewish friend or loved one seems to upset the person we love and care about. I know this from personal experience as I am a Jewish believer in Jesus (*Yeshua* in Hebrew) and love my family and friends. Yet, many of my family members are unwilling to hear about the one who dramatically changed my life, and a few have even become antagonistic. Again, the question is why.

Maybe you are Jewish and do not believe that Yeshua is the promised Messiah of Israel. I hope you will continue reading and maybe have the opportunity to explain to your Christian friends why the Jewish people they speak with might not respond well to conversations about Jesus.

A Quick Personal Answer



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Many Jewish people, including members of my own family, think that if they acknowledge the possibility that Jesus is the Messiah, they will no longer be Jewish. I fully understand this objection as it is exactly the way I felt years ago before I came to believe the Jewish Messiah had already come. I grew up in a traditional Jewish home in New York City and was taught—more by osmosis than in a classroom—that Jewish people simply are not supposed to believe in Jesus and that being Jewish and belief in Jesus are two irreconcilable truths.

Indeed, I remember the day I accepted that Yeshua was the Messiah. I went to bed that night thinking I may wake up the next morning as a non-

Jew! I realize this does not seem rational, but this is how I and many Jewish people are raised. We are



taught that there is a massive, invisible chasm separating Jesus and his fellow Jews today, especially after two thousand years of negative history between Jews and Christians. That was why, in my mind, accepting Jesus as my Messiah was tantamount to identity suicide. Yet, I was willing to sacrifice my community, heritage, and all to follow him because I was so convinced he was our promised Messiah!

Now, for any Jewish readers, before your blood pressure rises to new levels, please do not think that being Jewish was meaningless to me. My Jewish identity has always been precious to me. Most of my relatives from Europe died in the *Shoah*! Yet, I was ready to be viewed as a non-Jew for the sake of following Jesus whom I believed was the Messiah. I believed it would be a sacrifice well worth the price! I was willing to accept the Jewish community's rejection for his sake.

To my relief, I woke up the next morning after making the decision that Jesus was the Messiah and felt as Jewish as ever! The good news is that I came to realize that I not only did not have to cease being Jewish but, in many ways, I felt more Jewish than ever before. I know a host of other Messianic Jews who feel the same way. When we first came to believe, many of us thought we were the only Jewish people in the world who believed in Jesus, and then we discovered one another. Believe me, there is a growing community of Jews who think Yeshua is the Messiah—in the United States, in Israel, and around the globe. The apostle Paul (also known as Saul) even wrote about this in his letter to the Roman believers in the New Testament (Romans 11:5).

Not that truth is measured by a majority vote, but it does not hurt to recognize that you are not alone as a believer in Yeshua and that you are loyal to the Jewish people. There are tens of thousands of Jewish people, like me, who believe Jesus is the Messiah and strongly identify as Jewish.

Jewish Identity Strengthened

The Hebrew Scriptures began to mean more to me after I became a follower of Jesus. I also recognized that the New Testament is a Jewish book as almost all of the authors are Jewish. The idea of a personal Messiah is very Jewish and an ideal I was raised with but never took seriously until the day I met Yeshua! I felt very much at home believing that the



Messiah had come. I was raised to expect he would! Most of all, I renewed my faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I believed in the God of Israel through the Messiah of Israel because I knew, in the depths of my heart, it was true.

My newfound relationship with God through the Messiah gave me a new sense of spiritual, emotional, and internal intimacy with God. If you follow him, then you know what I mean. If you do not and are seeking a closer relationship with God, then I hope you will take the chance to explore the Messiah and discover what I and so many others are saying is true. Allow me to quote a famous verse from the New Testament penned by John (Yochanan in Hebrew) the apostle: *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Yeshua was speaking with one of Israel’s first-century spiritual leaders when he said this. I finally understood that being Jewish was not an accident of birth and that God’s goal in creating and calling the Jewish people into miraculous existence was to be known by His chosen people in the deepest way possible. I recognized that my being Jewish is important to God and therefore should be important to me. God made me Jewish, and He miraculously created the Jewish people from two elderly Semites (Abraham and Sarah) who could no longer bear children. And God gave the Jewish people—the chosen people—a divine purpose: to be a light to the nations and the vehicle of His eternal truth, both through the Scriptures and ultimately

through the Jewish Messiah, whom to know is life everlasting.

I do not feel less Jewish; in fact, I feel more Jewish than ever before. It makes the suffering and the difficulties that Jewish people have faced through the centuries worthwhile. We belong to God, and we have been created for a holy purpose. I am a part of His grand design for all humanity as He created and chose the Jewish people to bless the nations of the world. As God said to our father Abram, *“And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed”* (Genesis 12:3). I share in that Jewish calling now more than ever through Jesus the Messiah and will continue to live my life for a greater purpose: **to share His love and light through the Messiah with a dark and broken world.**

As Jews, we have a concept called *Tikkun Olam*, literally “the repairing of the world.” The Jewish people are called to be His servants and a bridge of messianic redemption to the world. But this is only possible through the Messiah. We cannot bring true *shalom* to the world without the Messiah, as he is called “the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Believing in and proclaiming the good news that the Messiah has come is everything God created us to do. I can barely articulate the joy I have in knowing the Messiah and in fulfilling his purposes for my life. I do hope and pray this will be true for you as well!

Now, let me give you a few other reasons why you should believe this too! So, please keep reading, and may God bless you on your journey.



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Not Just One of Us— *He Is the Best of Us*

BY SCOTT BROWN

in the 1986 film *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Mickey Sachs, played by Woody Allen, is seeking meaning in life through religion. Apparently, Judaism is not working for him, so he decides to try his hand at being a Catholic. To seal the deal, he makes the essential purchases: a jar of mayo, a loaf of Wonder Bread, and a crucifix. There are so many reasons why I love this scene, one being that I get such pleasure out of having to explain to my non-Jewish friends why this is so funny. But even when I explain it, some do not laugh because it takes a lot of familiarity with Jewish culture to understand the humor!

Jewishness is important to Jewish people, despite the fact that Jewishness is hard to define. According to the most recent Pew Research Center report, “U.S. Jews do not have a single, uniform answer to what being Jewish means.”¹ The report goes on to say that some of us link Jewishness to religion, some to tradition, some to food, locale, or even humor. But one thing is certain: For the vast majority of American Jews, being Jewish matters. If you are Jewish, you are one of the enigmatic, inexplicable us.

“Jesus is not one of us.”

At least, that is what I was taught growing up. We do not talk about him, we do not believe in him, and we certainly do not identify with him. His followers are mayo on white; we are mustard on rye.

I vividly remember the first time I received a piece of literature suggesting that Jewish people could believe in Jesus. I could not wait to show it to my friends so we could laugh together over the absurdity of such a ridiculous notion! The earth is not flat, the pope is not Muslim, and Jesus is most definitely *not* one of us. Who would believe such a message?

You can imagine my surprise when I discovered the very same question being asked by someone who was most definitely one of us—the Jewish prophet Isaiah:

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? . . . He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. (Isaiah 53:1, 3–6)

Throughout this publication, you will read rock-solid evidence of the Jewishness of Jesus straight from the Jewish Bible; evidence that I initially found detestable and terrifying. After all, if Jesus is



¹ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Identity and Belief,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project*, last modified May 11, 2021, accessed August 16, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-identity-and-belief/>.

one of us, what does that mean to me? I wrestled with the question for seven years, but it was not his identity as Messiah that concerned me since the sheer volume of scriptural testimony of Jesus' messiahship is overwhelming for any reasonable, objective observer. Additionally, modern scholarship, even within Jewish circles, affirms that Jesus was Jewish. But, I was simply not there yet!

To be perfectly honest, I was less concerned with Jesus' Jewish identity than with my own. Jewishness is important to me! If faith in Jesus were to compromise *my* Jewish identity for any reason, I was reluctant to embrace it.

Forty-one years have passed since I made the decision to believe Isaiah's "message" about the Jewish Redeemer whose sacrificial death atoned for my sin. My subsequent experience is not unlike that of tens of thousands of Jewish people who have made the same choice: We have not relinquished our precious Jewish identity; on the contrary, Jesus has given us greater faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and has deepened our Jewish roots to far greater depths. Having acknowledged and received God's revelation of Israel's Messiah in the Tanakh, Jewish believers like myself fulfill a special calling reserved for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: to, in a sense, "choose to be chosen." Twice chosen? Yes, something along that line of thinking!

Mustard on rye is one thing, but as a modern rabbi aptly wrote, "The Jewish soul needs to know God." You sense that longing, don't you? The good news is that God has given us a way to know Him intimately and meaningfully, through faith in the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua. He not just one of us . . . He is the best of us!✧

The Hebrew Scriptures usually portray the prophets as the most "edgy" of God's servants. Remember, Moses told these Jewish heroes that if their prophecies did not come to pass, they would face capital punishment for their failure (Deuteronomy 18:20–22).

The Bible's Hebrew prophets spoke God's word, which the children of Israel often misunderstood and misconstrued. In fact, the kinship of suffering and even martyrdom connect the great Jewish prophets, from Jeremiah and Isaiah to Jesus himself. Why would we expect Jesus to be more acceptable than Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, or any of the other great prophets of God? We have no reason to believe or expect that this great prophet (Deuteronomy 18:18 ff.) would be treated differently than other prophets by the very people he loved and on whose behalf he died to atone for their sins.

Yeshua the Prophet, *a Threat to the Establishment*²

BY MICHAEL L. BROWN

The Bible's Hebrew prophets, and those to whom they spoke, i.e., the Israelites, often perceived God differently. In his classic book *The Prophets*, Abraham Joshua Heschel penned these penetrating words about those discrepancies:

To a person endowed with prophetic sight, everyone else appears blind; to a person whose ear perceives God's voice, everyone else appears deaf. . . . The prophet hates the approximate, he shuns the middle of the road. Man must live on the summit to avoid the abyss. . . . The prophet's word is a scream in the night. While the world is at ease and asleep, the prophet feels the blast from heaven.³

This gap in perception is the reason why the prophets were often rejected before they were accepted and murdered before they were memorialized. *Jesus (Yeshua) suffered that very same fate because of his words of truth to the people.*

Yes, it was Jesus who was that bold prophet who stood in the temple courts in Jerusalem, just as Jeremiah did six centuries earlier, calling for repentance and warning of imminent judgment. As it happened with his predecessor Jeremiah, Yeshua's message was also rejected. But while Jeremiah the prophet escaped with his life, Yeshua the prophet did not. Yet, Yeshua's words came to pass with striking accuracy, and barely forty years after his death, Jerusalem again was in ruins, the temple again destroyed, and thousands of our people were again killed or exiled—except this time the death toll was massively higher and the devastation massively greater.

Now, here is a fundamental truth that is often overlooked: *It is only when we see Jesus as a prophet that we can rightly understand the conflict and controversy that surrounded him.* Indeed, if the New Testament had painted a picture of him being in an easy-going, cozy relationship with his fellow Jewish leaders, embraced by the religious hierarchy and praised by the religious priestly aristocracy, then we would have known that something was wrong with the picture. That is not how the Hebrew prophets were treated by the establishment they confronted.

"But," you say, "it is one thing to say that Jesus was in conflict with some of the religious leadership. It is another thing to say that any of them would want him killed."

To the contrary, the Talmud and other rabbinic writings claim that the Jewish people—our own people—have often been guilty of killing the prophets, going all the way back to Mount Sinai itself. (Surely no one can accuse Jewish texts of being antisemitic!).

- The Talmud and Midrash teach that the Israelites killed the prophet Hur shortly after receiving the Ten Commandments, with some of the texts claiming that the children of Israel killed all the elders as well.⁴

² Adapted from Michael L. Brown, *The Real Kosher Jesus: Revealing the Mysteries of the Hidden Messiah* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2012), 46–49.

³ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 1st Perennial Classics edition. (New York: Perennial, 2001), 19.

⁴ See Exodus Rabbah 41:7; Leviticus Rabbah 10:3; Numbers Rabbah 15:21; b. Sanhedrin 7a.

(Continued on page 6)

Jesus' Perception of the Torah & the Prophets

BY DARELL BOCK

in the New Testament, Jesus engages in numerous discussions about the Torah. Like the Bible's Hebrew prophets, he always emphasizes the importance that observance begins in the heart. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stresses that murder stems from anger in the heart or that lust is adultery's starting point (Matthew 5). He also says that being truthful is better than making an oath and that being gracious is more important than taking revenge (an eye for an eye). Finally, Yeshua (Jesus) says to love not only your neighbor but also your enemy. Love for one's enemy mirrors the love of God, reveals His character, and makes us distinct from the world. The Torah is not merely a set of rules to follow but a gateway to a healthy heart.

Yeshua's teaching mirrors the Hebrew prophets' critique of a shallow faith that does not reflect God's heart and character. Whether one thinks of Isaiah 58 or Micah 6:1–8 and what the Lord requires of us, these texts show that when people care about things like justice, they reflect the heart of God. Indeed, these texts teach that if the people of Israel do not first pursue the virtues of mercy and justice, then God cannot accept their sacrifices and offerings for sin.

Perhaps the prime example of this kind of concern for Jesus is found in Mark 7. This chapter describes Jesus speaking with some of the leaders in Israel whom he condemns for overemphasizing laws like ritual handwashing instead of more important laws like honoring parents. Yeshua tells the leaders that it is not what goes into a person that defiles them but what comes out of the person. He then issues a list of things that can defile a person: evil ideas, immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness (Mark 7:21–22). In a separate conversation with Israel's leaders, Jesus urges them to continue their tradition of giving a tithe of mint, dill, and cumin, but also to pursue *"the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness"* (Matthew 23:23). Again and again, Jesus contends that God intended the law to transform people's hearts and reflect God's values and character. This emphasis places him in line with what the Hebrew prophets taught.

Following the ways of God without the heart of God is not following His ways. To miss this point is to open ourselves up to not seeing our sin for what it is—a failure of the heart to honor God, and the failure to reflect on what it means to be made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). God created us to reflect Him in the way we live and to watch the intent of our heart, which is why Jesus was so concerned about sin and the need for God's Spirit to mend our damaged hearts. He was serious enough to die for the world's transgressions that cause people's hearts to be corrupt. He died so all people could receive forgiveness and God's Spirit, empowering us to live in alignment with God's law and ways.✳

(Yeshua the Prophet continued from page 5)

- The Talmud records that Manasseh, king of Judah, killed Isaiah, one of the greatest prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁵
- In 1 Kings 18:4, Jezebel, the queen of Israel, was killing off the Lord's prophets to the point that a righteous man trying to save their lives hid one hundred of them in two caves. Things got so bad that Elijah the prophet said to the Lord, *"The sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword."* (1 Kings 19:14).

There was certainly no hyperbole in Yeshua's words when he addressed Jerusalem, the seat of Jewish leadership and the national capital, as the city *"who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her"* (Matthew 23:37). When he uttered these words of rebuke (and lament) to some of the religious leaders of his day, he was standing right in the middle of the Bible's prophetic tradition:

For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, "If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. (Matthew 23:29-31)

Almost any great prophet in Israel's history could have stood in the city of Jerusalem and spoken these very same words to many of the leaders of his generation. This is prophetic truth, completely faithful to the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition. As expressed by Reform rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok,

*Like the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Jesus can be seen as the conscience of Israel. . . . In his confrontation with the leaders of the nation, Jesus echoed the words of the prophets by denouncing hypocrisy and injustice. . . . As a prophetic figure, this image of Jesus should be recognizable to all Jews.*⁶

In the words of Jewish Bible scholar Claude G. Montefiore, "Jesus does not preface his speeches with 'Thus saith the Lord,' but in the conviction of inspiration, in the assurance that he too was called and chosen by God to do a certain work, he entirely resembles Amos, Isaiah, and Ezekiel."⁷

Yeshua spoke to his own people as a prophet sent by God, and that is a major reason why Yeshua was rejected, particularly by most of the Jewish leadership of his day.

Yeshua was the culmination of the prophetic line that began with Moses (see Deuteronomy 18:9–22)—indeed, a prophet like Moses and even greater than Moses. Like Moses and all the prophets of Israel, we do well to heed Yeshua's words, even to this day.✳

⁵ See b. Sanhedrin 103b; b. Yebamot 49b.

⁶ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "Closing Reflection," in *Jesus Beyond Christianity: The Classic Texts*, ed. Gregory A. Barker and Stephen E. Gregg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 72.

⁷ Claude Montefiore, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *Jesus Beyond Christianity: The Classic Texts*, ed. Gregory A. Barker and Stephen E. Gregg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 51.



A Jewish Thing to Do

Mottel's Testimony

“Here is what you need to do: You must first shave your head. You dress all in black. You need to wear a white robe. Eat only kosher foods. You have to become a vegetarian. You face Jerusalem. You must face India when you pray. You pray only in Hebrew, and you grow a nice big beard. If you do all those outward cultural things, you will discover the God of the universe.” I thought, *This is crazy that someone thinks that they can force their culture on God and that God is going to be impressed by what you wear, what direction you face when you pray, what you eat, and all these sorts of things.* If there was a God out there who could be known, He should be able to be recognized no matter where I faced, no matter how I dressed, because He is God.

Growing up, we always understood that we had our Bible, and the Gentiles had their Bible in the New Testament, and that they were two completely separate books. I imagined that Jesus was Italian because the only people I knew who were believers in Jesus were Italian Catholics in our public school. So, the understanding that he was Jewish was a shock. Then, to hear that the New Testament was written by Jews, I could not believe it. My expectation was that the New Testament was like my grandparents had told me—it was a book on how to persecute the Jews, and it was something you should stay away from. Of course, when you are told you should stay away from something, curiosity gets the better of you and you have to see it.

When I opened the New Testament, I was expecting to find a handbook on how to persecute the Jews. My grandparents had warned me that it was written by people who killed the Jews. That is what I was expecting to see, and yet when I opened it, I read a story written by Jews about Jewish people. The New Testament was a fascinating book. So, in the library, I looked around, made sure that none of my friends had seen me take a Christian Bible off the shelf, and I opened it. Here is the first sentence. It says, “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” So, three

people are mentioned, and they are all Jewish. I was very shocked. As I continued to read, I read the story of a Jewish man who was born in a Jewish village, in a Jewish country, and who one day walked into a synagogue and announced that he was the Messiah.

The more I read the words of Jesus, the more I became attracted to him. It was as beautiful as anything I had ever read in any other part of the Bible. As I came to believe that Yeshua, Jesus, was the Messiah, it was clear to me that it was the most Jewish thing I could do. This is the one who was promised in our Bible. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is astonishing. If you would just read that chapter without the Bible being around it, you would say, “Oh, this is some Christian Bible. This is Jesus.” Then you realize that it is in the middle of our Bible, our Jewish Bible.

When I first came to faith, I dared not tell my father. It was the 1970s, and he was very concerned about me getting involved in some crazy sect. So, I waited for months. When I finally told him, he was very skeptical. On his own then, he started to read about Jesus as well. About a year and a half later, I told him that the fellow who wrote one of the books that he had read was giving a lecture in New York. He agreed to come out to hear that person. One of the most amazing moments of my life was when the speaker said, “Would everyone here who is a Jewish believer in Jesus, would you raise your hand?” I raised my hand. My father also raised his hand. I looked over and said, “Pop, he did not say, ‘Would all the Jews raise their hand?’ He said, ‘Would all the Jewish believers in Jesus raise their hand?’” My father looked over and said, “Yes, I heard what he said.”

The decision to come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah was not something that was a momentary lark, it was not something that was a passing fad. I could see changes in myself that I knew were not from within myself. I had tapped into a truth for our Jewish people. That was very powerful.



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What If Jesus Is the Jewish Messiah?

You might be ready for the next step—to acknowledge Yeshua (Jesus) as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. Here are some simple steps to take as you continue your journey.

Repent

God is holy and we are not! We frequently behave in ways that separate us from Him, and we need His forgiveness. The Hebrew Scriptures say, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:1–2). Recognizing our sin is the first major step toward an intimate and personal relationship with the Lord.

Believe

We cannot earn God’s forgiveness through good works or keeping the *mitzvot*. The Torah says about Abraham, “Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). The New Covenant Scriptures* say, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23). Personal salvation is a gift from God that we accept by faith.

Accept Yeshua

The great Rabbi Saul, writing in the New Covenant Scriptures,* tells us what we should believe to receive the gift of personal salvation: “That Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). If Yeshua is both divine and the rightful king of Israel, then He deserves our full allegiance.

Pray

Prayer is a personal conversation with God—heart to heart. You can pray in this way: “God, you are righteous and I am not. I have disobeyed your commandments. I believe Yeshua is my Messiah. His death and resurrection are my only hope. Please forgive me and give me a new life with you.” And God will answer, as we read in the New Covenant Scriptures,* “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

*New Testament

We would love to help you discover how Yeshua can transform your life—so please do not hesitate to contact us! Email ask@chosenpeople.com or call 212-223-2252.



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