



A

Jew



And His

God



Me at 9-years-old reading the Viahava at my older brother's Bar Mitzvah.

Even as a small child I knew Hitler wanted to kill every Jew. I also knew that as a Jew, my duty was to always remain a Jew. I was also taught about Gentiles. Actually, they were called *Goyim*, and it was quite understood that I was not one of them.

A Privilege

You see, I am a Jew, and being Jewish has always been a privilege and a joy for me. When I started Hebrew School at age 6, I loved memorizing the Hebrew prayers and reciting them to my parents. They often told me that I filled them with so much *nachas*.



I had a Bar Mitzvah. I prayed. I went to *Shul*. But G-d was very distant from me, quite far away. I dared not even write his name without substituting the 'o' with a hyphen.

"I don't know" characterized my life. Is there a G-d? I don't know. Does G-d care about me? Maybe, but I don't know. I just did not know.

I did know a lot about memorizing prayers in Hebrew and about going to *Shul*. I knew about Rosh Hashanah and the Day of Atonement. I certainly knew about the Holocaust. I knew a lot about rituals I did for this unknown G-d of mine, but I didn't know anything about who this G-d was. I certainly didn't know what G-d wanted from me, if anything.

A Relationship?

After thinking it over, I discovered that, though I was very "religious," I had no relationship with G-d. The *Tanach* (Jewish Bible) says "this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). I realized that though I was outwardly "religious," my heart was far from G-d.

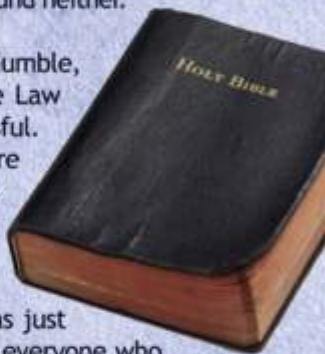
Like most people, I spent more time and energy planning my weekend than I did thinking about the creator of the universe! Sure, I went to the Synagogue on the High Holidays, and I believed in some sort of G-d, but in practice, G-d didn't have much of an influence on my day-to-day activities. Like the Scriptures said, my heart was far from G-d.

NOT for Jews!

A friend of mine asked me one day if I had ever read any part of the New Testament. My answer: "That's NOT for Jews to read!"

But I decided I wanted to read it to expose how false it must be. I expected to find anti-Semitism. I expected the stuff that inspired Hitler! I found neither.

Instead, I found Jesus: humble, meek, desiring to fulfill the Law of Moses and being successful. He quoted Hebrew Scripture and said "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).



I had thought that Jesus was just for Gentiles! But just about everyone who followed him at first were Jews. I found that Jesus was Jewish, that he was interested in Torah, and that he is our Messiah.

"I don't know" will never again be a part of my relationship with G-d. You see, "G-d" became "God!" God became Father. God became personal. The Prince of Peace came into my life, and now I know God.

The Wisest Man...

Solomon, King David's son, was said to be the wisest man who ever lived, and he said, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). The Hebrew Bible is clear: all of us have hearts that are far from God. The Jewish prophet Isaiah tells us, "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 59:2).

The bedrock of Judaism is found in the 20th chapter of Exodus. There Moses records the Ten Commandments. "You shall have no other gods before me." Had I always put God first in my life? Of course not.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." Had I ever used God's name casually, or worse, as a swear-word? I had.



"You shall not steal." Had I ever taken anything that didn't belong to me? A pen? A paperclip? *Creative* tax preparation? The value of the object didn't matter. Who of us can honestly say we've followed this command always?

"You shall not murder." Another place in the Bible says that if you think evil thoughts towards someone without cause, you are guilty of murder in your heart. God sees our hearts!

"You shall not commit adultery." The Bible says that if you think lustful thoughts then you are guilty of adultery. Who of us can say we have never had lustful thoughts?

And there were others: "Do not covet," "Honor your mother and father," "Do not lie."

I learned that while man judges the outside actions, God judges the heart. Isaiah the prophet was right: our hearts are very far from God. We are not as good as we think we are.

The Ten Commandments are summed up in the *Sh'ma* and *Viahavta*, two of the holiest of all Hebrew prayers: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). I realized that since I am guilty of breaking God's laws, I have not loved God with all my heart, soul, and might.

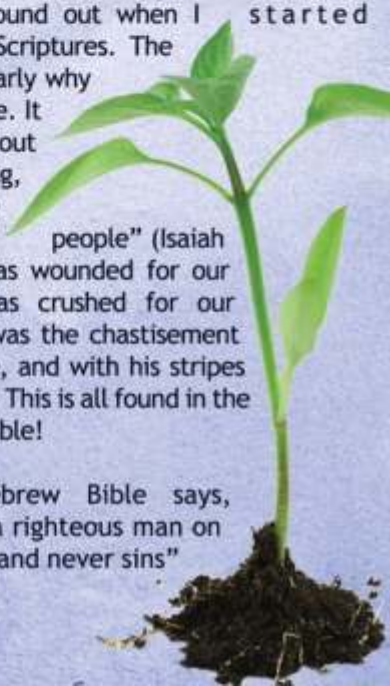
In the Hebrew Bible I learned that we are accountable to God just like a criminal is accountable to the criminal justice system. We have broken God's law, the Ten Commandments, and there is coming a day when God will judge us all, and we stand guilty before the judge with no defense. There will be no appeals, no technicalities, and no evidence thrown out. We are all guilty; none of us even comes close to the standard that God demands. If we defend ourselves based on our own actions and intentions, we will be condemned to Hell forever.

There is HOPE!

But our loving God is about hope, so just as he provided a sacrifice for Abraham in Isaac's place, so he provided a sacrifice for us in our place. Atonement means that God will pass over our sins and punish someone else instead of us. That someone else is our Messiah. More amazing is that this sacrifice would be God himself in human form! In case that sounds non-Jewish, 800 years *before* Jesus was born, the Hebrew Bible teaches that the Messiah would be "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). To prove this, Jesus did what no one has ever done... after three days in the grave, he raised himself from the dead!

Growing up in *Shul*, I never understood the purpose of the Messiah, but I found out when I started reading the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrew Bible says clearly why the Messiah must come. It says "he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people" (Isaiah 53:8). It says, "he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (vs. 5). This is all found in the *Tanach*, the Hebrew Bible!

Remember, the Hebrew Bible says, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).



We owe a sin debt to God. Jesus paid the debt in full! Make no mistake: God will judge us. If we are judged on our own deeds, we will all be damned.

Our only hope is to ask God to apply the blood of Messiah to the doorposts of our heart, so that we will be judged based on Jesus, who never sinned once. God says in the *Haftarah*, "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:7). We can return to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel by repenting of our sin and putting our faith 100% in the Messiah to forgive us.

Still a Jew!



Since I received Jesus as Messiah, I have never believed that I have become 'un-Jewish.' I have never believed that somehow I have become a Gentile. What could be more Jewish than believing in the Jewish Messiah?

The truth is that many Jews and many Gentiles have received Jesus as Messiah. Jesus offers us atonement so that we can return to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. When we do, he will give us a new heart. God has provided a sacrifice for our sins, and it is up to us as Jews to thank him for that, repent of our sins, believe on the name of his Son, and follow him as Lord. That is Jewish!

It is only when we realize that we have violated the laws of the Holy God that we can appreciate what atonement means. The Temple sacrifices of the Hebrew Bible find fulfillment in the sacrifice of the Messiah.

If you're Jewish, then know that God provided Messiah Jesus as an offering for you. If you're a Gentile, then you're invited too because God promised Abraham that through his seed he'd bless "all the nations of the earth" (Genesis 22:18).

The Old and New Testaments agree that both Jews and Gentiles need Jesus. We have all broken the Ten Commandments. We all need atonement.

Simple. Jewish.

It's actually very simple. It's actually very Jewish. God calls us to return to him. Though every one of us has a heart that is far from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, through our Messiah Jesus, we can return to God.

The way we return to God is to repent of our sins and put our faith in the risen Messiah.

The tough thing about this is that as Jews we can think that believing in Jesus makes us somehow 'un-Jewish.' Isn't it a strange contradiction that no one questions a fellow Jew who claims to be an atheist or an agnostic or a Buddhist? But say that you believe in the Messiah of the Hebrew Bible and no one knows what to do!

The message is this: God sent Messiah to atone for our sins, and that's great news for us because we never could have atoned for ourselves. Jesus took the wrath of God on the cross for those who repent and believe, as taught in the Hebrew Scriptures, and three days later he rose from the dead, as taught in the Hebrew Scriptures! Repent and believe, and all of God's wrath for you will be placed on Jesus, and you will be forgiven. You won't become a Gentile. You will become a Jew who believes in the Jewish Messiah!

Please find out more about Jesus' claims and what our Hebrew Bible says about him. It may surprise you as much as it surprised me. Read Isaiah chapter 53 as a good start. Then read the book of John in the New Testament (written by a Jew). I have written an essay called *Are Christian Beliefs Anti-Jewish?* which you can download for free from my website. And please feel free to contact me anytime.

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By the way, the reason the photo on the front of this booklet is of me as a child is because it reminds me that our Messiah has said, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Luke 18:17). Please receive the kingdom of God as a child, with joy in your heart, and hope for your future. Shalom.



Mark Sohmer was brought up in a liberal Jewish home and learned to despise the name of Jesus. When he went to college, he was very hard on Christianity, often berating the Bible, faith, and Christians personally in his classes.

He began to read the New Testament in an effort to disprove it, but instead was convinced that Jesus must be the Messiah. This happened on Yom Kippur (The Jewish Day of Atonement), 1993. Right away God gave him a burden and concern for those who have not had their sins forgiven!

Mark is currently a Missionary/Evangelist with *Open Air Campaigners*, a non-profit organization that has been "sharing Christ by all means everywhere" since 1892.

You can download a copy of this booklet, as well as watch Mark deliver this on video, or audio, on his website at: www.Luke-15.org.

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