

The Gospel for the Jewish People

A Personal & Scriptural Appeal — The Atonement, the Messiah the Prophets Promised, and the New Covenant

To My Jewish Friend

This tract is written to you with genuine respect and love. If you are Jewish, you belong to the people to whom God first gave His Word. “Unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2). Through your people came the law and the prophets, the psalms of David, the covenants and the promises. The writer of this tract owes his Bible, and his hope, to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to the Scriptures your fathers preserved.

Whether you are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or simply Jewish by heritage, the question this tract puts to you is the most important question in the Hebrew Scriptures: how can a sinful man be right with a holy God? And has the Messiah whom the prophets promised already come? We ask only that you open the Tanakh, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, and weigh what they say. Moses himself pointed to One who was to come: “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deuteronomy 18:15).

The Problem the Day of Atonement Cannot Solve

Every Jewish person knows the solemnity of Yom Kippur. For a day the synagogue confesses its sins, fasts, and prays to be inscribed for a good year. The liturgy declares that “repentance, prayer, and charity” avert the severe decree. Yet the law of Moses gave a very different answer to the problem of sin:

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” — Leviticus 17:11

On the Day of Atonement the high priest entered the most holy place, “not without blood” (Hebrews 9:7), and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:14–15). But the temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, and for more than nineteen hundred years there has been no altar, no priesthood, and no sacrifice. After its fall the rabbis taught that prayer, repentance, and deeds of lovingkindness would now take the place of the offerings. But where did God ever say so? The law He gave required blood, and the prophets confess that our best works cannot cleanse us: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

Consider this carefully. If God required blood for atonement, and if no blood has been offered in the temple for nineteen centuries, then either God has left His people without any atonement at all, or He has provided a sacrifice that made the temple offerings no longer necessary. The prophets tell us which.

The Messiah Was to Come Before the Temple Fell

The Hebrew Scriptures do not leave the time of the Messiah’s coming open-ended. Daniel was told that the Messiah would be “cut off” and that afterward the city and the sanctuary would be destroyed:

“And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.” — Daniel 9:26

Jacob prophesied that the sceptre would not depart from Judah “until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Genesis 49:10). Micah named the town of His birth: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). Haggai and Malachi said the Lord would come to the second temple (Haggai 2:7–9; Malachi 3:1).

All of these point to a Messiah who would come while Judah still had its rulers, while the second temple still stood, and before the city and sanctuary were destroyed. That temple fell in AD 70. If the Messiah was to come before then, He has already come. Only one person fits every one of these prophecies: Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, who taught in the second temple and was cut off, not for Himself, about forty years before it was destroyed.

The Servant Who Suffered for His People

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah describes a righteous Servant of the LORD who is despised and rejected, and who suffers and dies for the sins of others:

*“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” —
Isaiah 53:5–6*

Many rabbis since the Middle Ages have taught that the Servant is the nation of Israel. But read the chapter for yourself. The Servant suffers “for the transgression of my people” (Isaiah 53:8). The people are Israel, so the Servant who suffers for them cannot be Israel. The Servant is innocent: “he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (53:9). No nation can say that of itself. He makes “his soul an offering for sin” (53:10), and after His death He lives again, prolongs His days, and “shall justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (53:10–11). Ancient Jewish writers themselves applied this passage to the Messiah. It is worth asking why this chapter, so plain and so precious, is not among the prophetic readings of the synagogue year.

King David wrote of the same sufferer: “they pierced my hands and my feet” (Psalm 22:16). And Zechariah foretold a day when Israel would mourn: “they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son” (Zechariah 12:10). Notice: *me* whom they have pierced. The LORD Himself is the One who is pierced.

The Messiah Is the Son of God

Rabbinic Judaism teaches that the Messiah, when he comes, will be a man only, a great king and teacher, and that God has no Son. But the Hebrew Scriptures speak otherwise. Isaiah says of the Child who would sit on David's throne: "his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). In the second psalm God says to His anointed King, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee," and commands the nations, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry" (Psalm 2:7, 12). Agur asks, "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? ... what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" (Proverbs 30:4).

This does not deny the Shema. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4) is true, and Christians confess it with all their hearts. The Hebrew word for "one," *echad*, is the same word used when a man and his wife become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24): a true unity, not a bare numeral. The same God who says "I am the LORD, and there is none else" also said at creation, "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26). There is one God, and the Messiah is God come in the flesh.

What the Bible Says: A Comparison

The Question	Rabbinic Judaism Teaches	The Scriptures Say
How is sin atoned for?	Repentance, prayer, charity, and good deeds, since the temple fell	“It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11); fulfilled in the Messiah’s death (Isaiah 53:10)
Has the Messiah come?	No; he is still awaited	He was to be cut off before the second temple was destroyed (Daniel 9:26; Genesis 49:10; Malachi 3:1)
Who is the Servant of Isaiah 53?	The nation of Israel	An innocent Person stricken “for the transgression of my people” (Isaiah 53:8–9)
Is the Messiah divine?	No; a human king only	“The mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6); “Thou art my Son” (Psalm 2:7); from everlasting (Micah 5:2)
What is the final authority?	The written Torah as interpreted by the Oral Law and the Talmud	The written Word alone: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2)
How is a man made righteous?	By keeping the commandments, with God weighing his deeds	By faith: Abraham “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6)

The Fence Around the Law

Modern Judaism is not simply the religion of Moses. It is the religion of the rabbis, built on the Oral Law, written down in the Mishnah around AD 200 and the Talmud some centuries later. Its traditions were meant to be a “fence around the Torah,” but in practice they have often stood in the place of the Torah itself. The prophets warned against this very thing: “their fear toward me is

taught by the precept of men” (Isaiah 29:13). And Moses commanded: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

The written Law was never given as a ladder by which men might climb up to God. It was given to show us our sin and our need of a Saviour. “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them” (Deuteronomy 27:26). No one has kept them all. That is why the Law itself was full of sacrifices, and why the prophets looked forward to something better.

The New Covenant Promised to Israel

Jeremiah foretold that God would make a new covenant with His people, not like the covenant made at Sinai, which Israel broke:

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” — Jeremiah 31:31–34

This is not a covenant of works, but of grace. God promises to do it all: to write His law on the heart, to forgive, and to forget. Ezekiel describes the same work: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you” (Ezekiel 36:26). On the night before He died, the Lord Jesus took the cup and said, “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20). The new covenant Jeremiah promised was sealed in the blood of the Messiah.

And this is the way Abraham himself was made right with God, long before Sinai: “he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). “The just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). The righteousness God accepts is not one we build up by our deeds, but one He gives freely to those who believe.

A Personal Word

Dear friend, the first followers of Jesus were all Jews. The apostles were Jews, the writers of the New Testament were Jews (with perhaps one exception), and thousands in Jerusalem believed in the days after His resurrection. To believe in the Messiah is not to stop being Jewish or to forsake the God of your fathers. It is to receive the One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote. “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me” (John 5:46).

The Apostle Paul, a Pharisee of the tribe of Benjamin, wrote of his own people with tears: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Romans 10:1). He saw that many were “going about to establish their own righteousness,” not knowing that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:3–4). Salvation is not earned by deeds weighed in the balance on the Day of Atonement. It is the gift of God’s grace, received by faith in the Messiah who bore our sins.

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” — Acts 4:12

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” — Romans 1:16

Read Isaiah 53 slowly. Then read the Gospel of Matthew, written for Jewish readers. Ask the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to show you who the pierced One is, and look upon Him and live.

This tract is offered freely for personal use, printing, and distribution. We have no unkind feelings toward the Jewish people — only love, gratitude for the Scriptures God gave through them, and a sincere desire that they should know their Messiah and the forgiveness He gives. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

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