

Is the New Testament antisemitic?

**Yeshua -
אני לא יודע**

**Is Jesus
the Messiah?**

**THE
CHOSEN
PEOPLE**



Volume XXIV, Issue 8
Special Edition



Shalom



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The topic of this month's newsletter, antisemitism, is the fault line that separates Judaism and Christianity and creates a Grand Canyon-sized chasm between Jewish people and Jesus. Must this be? The highly sensitive and difficult question we will address is whether or not the message of Jesus that is conveyed through the Gospels is intrinsically antisemitic. This is a question that most Christians would never even think to ask. But every Jewish person knows that this assumption is one of the primary underlying reasons for the rejection of Christianity by Jewish people. Allow me to explain further.

Jewish historian Solomon Grayzel wrote, "The history of Judaism and Christianity is written in blood and punctuated in violence." It is understandable why Jewish believers are reluctant to become involved with the church. From childhood, we are taught that Christians (the people in churches!) are the enemies of the Jewish people. The church was supposedly the institution responsible for persecuting our ancestors. Many of us find it painful to step inside a local church, whatever the denomination. How can we enjoy the company of those who inspired the murder and destruction of our people? Am I exaggerating? Perhaps, but if you were brought up in a Jewish home like mine, my words should at least ring with familiarity, if not authenticity.

Is there any truth to the accusation that Christians persecuted Jews? Of course there is! And I will not qualify that statement by placing quotation marks around the word Christian. If I say that all those who mistreated Jews were Christians in name only, I am arrogantly dismissing early church leaders such as Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine, not to mention Reformers such as John Wycliffe and Martin Luther. Painful as I find it, I do not have the authority to write these individuals out of history, much as I might like to.

To deny the past would be foolish. To forgive these men posthumously would be presumptuous because they never asked for forgiveness. Yet, to think that they characterize what God intended the church to be would be foolish *and* useless.¹

I still remember when I was first considering the message of Jesus. I was only 19 years old, living far away from home, where I had been raised in what I call a non-practicing Orthodox Jewish home. This might sound a bit odd, but many Jewish people are raised in one of the various denominations of Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative or Reform—and are not especially religious. But, for what it's worth, when I practiced Judaism I did



SPECIAL EDITION
Volume XXIV, Issue 8

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ANTISEMITISM

740 BCE

475 BCE

IN HISTORY*

Thousands resettled as captives by Assyria

Haman attempts genocide against the Jews (Purim)

* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_antisemitism

so as a modern Orthodox Jew. Truthfully, at this time in my life, it was more a case of Orthodox Judaism being the Judaism I preferred not to practice. I was far from God, although I was open to all sorts of religious and spiritual ideas, all except Christianity!

Because I knew virtually nothing about the tenets of Christian faith, my major objections to the message of Jesus were not theological or biblical. They stemmed from the deeply ingrained cultural and historical memory I referred to earlier. I was raised in New York City and lived in a very Jewish community. I knew some Christians at school, mostly ethnic Catholics who didn't seem to like Jewish people! At least that was my impression. In fact, everything I knew about Christianity was negative towards the Jews. I also believed that those who perpetrated the Holocaust were Christians and knew that my grandparents had moved to the United States to get away from the Christians that were persecuting them in Russia.

So, you might ask, what was it that brought me over the line to faith in Jesus? How did I reconcile who I was as a Jew with belief that He was the Messiah?

Briefly, there were three reasons why I ultimately became a follower of Jesus. First of all, I met Gentile Christians who loved the Jewish people. They might not have known much about Judaism, but they showed God's love to all. They especially enjoyed meeting Jewish people, as they were avid Bible students and understood the importance of the Jewish people and Israel in the plan of God.

Also, I began reading the story and words of Jesus in the Gospels because of my encounters with these Gentile Christians, who eventually helped two of my best friends come to faith in Yeshua. In what seemed like a miracle to me, I found a New Testament in a phone booth in the middle of a campground in the Redwood Forest...a long story! As I began reading the New Testament, I immediately felt a deeply emotional conflict. On one hand, I felt so guilty reading this book which I thought was the inspiration for millennia of antisemitism. Yet, on the other hand, I was unmistakably drawn to the compelling words of Jesus. On top of that, my close reading led me to the surprising conclusion that the gospels were not antisemitic as I had thought. In fact, they seemed so Jewish!

However, what really put me over the line was the person of Jesus Himself. I just fell in love with Him. He was strong, bold, courageous, truthful, and so deeply spiritual. His words grabbed hold of my heart in ways that I cannot even explain. It became obvious to me that He was the Messiah and the fulfillment of all

that my Jewish people hoped for through the centuries. I found myself asking how Jesus could possibly have inspired hatred of the Jewish people when He was so clearly Jewish, with a great love for His people. And I confess, this is a dark mystery I do not fully understand to this day. As He said at a moment of intense rejection by the Jewish leaders of His day, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling"* (Matthew 23:37).

And so I was left staring at the chasm between myself as a Jewish person, feeling the burden of thousands of years of intransigence towards Jesus, while at the same time wanting to embrace Jesus as my Messiah. Without, I hope, sounding trite—for me, the bridge was actually Jesus Himself. He reflected the depths of spirituality I was longing for, but could not quite find within the Judaism in which I was raised. I did not want to reject

Judaism or who I was as a Jew, but I desperately wanted to know God intimately and personally. Jesus became my Messiah, Redeemer, and my Bridge to my heavenly Father. I finally understood what He meant when He said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me"* (John 14:6).

Coming to faith in Jesus as my Messiah was the most difficult and most profoundly wonderful decision I ever made in my life. I now follow Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah and join arms with any others who do the same, although I try to be clear-sighted about the failings of people and institutions. There remains much to lament on that score.

I hope that you enjoy the rest of this newsletter as we look at some difficult

New Testament passages that have been interpreted in an antisemitic way throughout the years. We are going to try and help you know to how to handle these texts and understand them within a first-century Jewish context—which is the key to unlocking their meaning. I also asked my friend Dennis to share his story, and I hope you enjoy it. It is my prayer that you will reflect upon what you read and ask God to show you if Jesus is indeed the Jewish Messiah for all.

Mitch
Mitch



1. Direct quote from the following article written by Dr. Mitch Glaser, <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/havurah/havurah-mm88-02/the-egg-and-miriam-or-a-post-easter-assessment/>

63 BCE

12,000 Jews die / many sent into the diaspora—Pompey's conquest

38 BCE

Anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria / Jews confined to one quarter of the city

70 CE

1,000,000+ Jews perish / 97,000 enslaved following the destruction of the Second Temple

132–135

580,000 Jews are killed/Hadrian orders the expulsion of Jews from Judea (renamed Syria Palaestina)



IS THE GOSPEL OF JOHN ANTISEMITIC?

Charges of the New Testament and, particularly, the Gospel of John being antisemitic are nothing new. Many Jewish people grow up in neighborhoods suffering antisemitic attitudes from Gentile neighbors. It is assumed that they were Christian simply because they were not Jewish and went to church. We might reason that since the New Testament is their holy book, surely it teaches them to hate Jewish people. Some of the statements in the Gospel of John have been used to support that assumption, and those statements have even been misused by some Gentiles to support antisemitic views.

The charge of antisemitism in the Gospel of John usually involves negative statements about “the Jews.” The assumption is that those statements are intended by the author to induce dislike and hatred of “the Jews,” both as a people and as individuals. In John 5:16, 18 and 7:1, it says that “the Jews” sought to kill Jesus. There are also other examples of “the Jews” showing opposition and even hostility toward Jesus. But is that what John meant when he used the term “the Jews?” John, being Jewish himself, was not talking about all Jewish people at all times. He was referring to a specific subgroup of Jewish people in a specific time that were in opposition to Jesus.

The term *Jews* (Ἰουδαῖοι, *Ioudaioi*, in Greek) is used about seventy times in the Gospel of John and not all references have a negative connotation. In John 2:6, the word is used to explain a Jewish custom. In John 4:22, John reports that “salvation is from the Jews.” In John 4:9, Jesus is identified as a Jew. In John 11:45 and 12:11, John reports that many Jewish people believed in Jesus. In John 7:1, the term is used for the Jewish leadership in Judea. The most common use of the term *Ioudaioi* refers to the Jewish leadership, especially for those in Judea and Jerusalem (e.g., John 1:19). In many of those instances, Jesus is in opposition to that leadership. This opposition was a “within the family” dispute because those on both sides of the issues were Jewish, including Jesus and His disciples.

Not all Jewish leaders are presented negatively. For example, Nicodemus (John 3:1-21; 7:50) and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38-42) are presented in a positive way. The diversity of the use of the language as well as the context in which the term *Ioudaioi* was used in John’s Gospel demonstrate that Jesus was referring to the Judean leadership of His day who, for the most part, missed the mark and stood in opposition to the Jewish Messiah and those Jewish people who put their faith and trust in Jesus.

One could argue that any criticism of Jewish leadership or even of Jewish people is antisemitic. If one makes that argument then

HOW CAN WE EXPLAIN NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO THE JEWS AND THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

167

Earliest known accusation of Jewish deicide made in the tract “Peri Pascha”

325

The Council of Nicaea calls Jews “our adversaries”

386

John Chrysostom preaches against the Jewish people

624

Mohammed watches as 600 Jews are decapitated

943–944

Byzantine Jews from all over the Empire flee from persecution

COMING TO FAITH IN JESUS

AS MY MESSIAH WAS THE MOST DIFFICULT AND MOST PROFOUNDLY WONDERFUL DECISION OF MY LIFE

they are not only calling John, who was a Jew, antisemitic, but they are also calling much of the Torah and the rest of the Tanakh (Old Testament) antisemitic. In Exodus 33:5 and Deuteronomy 9:6; 31:27-29, Moses called the Jewish people of his day — not just the leadership — a stubborn and obstinate people and even defiant toward the Lord. In Isaiah 30:9, the prophet describes the Jewish people this way: “*For this is a rebellious people, false sons, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of the Lord.*” The prophet Ezekiel (2:3-4, 6; 3:4-7) also harshly criticized the Jewish people of his day. None of these Hebrew prophets were antisemitic and neither is the author of the Gospel of John.¹

It is unfortunate that antisemitic people twist the words of the prophets as well as John to fit their purposes. An accurate reading of the texts in context will show that there is no antisemitism involved and no attribution to all Jewish people at all times. When John wrote about the Jews seeking to kill Jesus (John 5:16), it was part of a larger series of disputes that Jesus had with the leadership about proper Sabbath observance.² The penalty in Torah for violating the Sabbath is death. In John 5:18 and 7:1, “the Jews” sought to kill Jesus, but “the Jews” didn’t refer to all Jewish people. It was the leadership in Judea that sought Jesus’ life because they perceived His claim of equality with God as blasphemy, and the Torah’s penalty for blasphemy is death. Placed in context, the passages in question refer to the leadership in a given time and in a given place. The leadership did not recognize Jesus as Messiah and Lord and they were also trying to adhere to their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. While this may not be obvious to the reader in the twenty-first century, it would have been obvious to John’s intended audience in the first century.

One of the many great things about the Bible (from Genesis to Revelation) is that, since it is true and the Word of God, it can be brutally honest. It shows both the good and the bad sides of the people and the leadership. Evidence that there is no antisemitism in the Gospel of John or the rest of the New Testament can be found in a careful and contextual study of the text. It can also be found among evangelicals who love Israel and the Jewish people and whose love is based on the Word of God. ✨

1. Michael L. Brown. *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: General and Historical Objections. Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 146-148.
2. D.A. Carson. *The Gospel According to John. The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 246-247.

UNDERSTANDING ACTS 2:36 & 3:15

Jewish people have often been called “Christ-killers.” Some of our own Jewish staff members have been verbally attacked with this label. Unfortunately, many people think that the New Testament supports the idea that all Jews murdered Jesus, often citing the words of Peter in Acts 2-3. In Acts 3:15, Jesus’ disciple, Peter, speaks to a crowd of Jewish onlookers in Jerusalem, saying that they “*put to death the Prince of life the one whom God raised from the dead.*” But are all Jewish people morally responsible for the death of Jesus?

In order to use Peter’s words as an indictment against all Jewish people, one must ignore Peter’s context and even what he says later in his speech. Peter is speaking specifically to Jews in Jerusalem who had been present in the city for Jesus’ trial and had supported His execution. Thus, Peter’s direct audience was the Jerusalemites who were supportive of Jesus’ death. The text says nothing about other Jewish people.

There is also a difference between criminal intent and negligence, with the latter being a less guilty crime. Peter says, “*And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also*” (Acts 3:17). Does Peter charge those directly responsible with criminal intent in murdering Jesus? No! Not even Jesus assigned criminal intent to His opponents. Jesus prayed from the cross, “*Father, forgive them,*” — “them” being the religious leaders who supported His death — “*for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). The consistent teaching of the New Testament is that the Jewish religious leadership and the others who supported Jesus’ execution did so *without* full knowledge.

The New Testament limits its rhetoric to the Jewish leadership physically present at Jesus’ execution and even releases them from criminal intent! Therefore, the “Christ-killer” label needs to be removed and buried in a tomb, never to be raised again. ✨

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|---|--|--|--|--|
| 1011 | 1096 | 1275 | 1328 | 1348-1351 |
| Pogrom against Sephardic Jews in Córdoba by Muslims | The First Crusade, Count Emicho attacks Jewish communities in Europe | Edward I of England forces Jews to wear a yellow patch | 5,000 Jews are massacred after anti-Jewish preaching by a Franciscan friar | Jewish people blamed for the Black Death |

THE JEWISH ELDERS IN **MATTHEW'S GOSPEL**

Matthew did not write in a vacuum. He communicated to and about Israel in a way that is consistent with what is found throughout the entire Bible. As with the prophets of old, Yeshua's rebukes were either directed at individuals, at groups or at the nation as a whole. And like the prophets of old, some of His harshest statements were only relevant to His generation.

In Matthew 23, Jesus criticizes a group of scribes and Pharisees with a string of rebukes, addressing their heartless worship and the impact it has on others. We actually have no reason to believe that Jesus felt this way about all scribes and Pharisees, which is sometimes assumed by historical Christian commentators. The last of these rebukes or "Woe!" statements finds Jesus pointing out the hypocrisy of venerating the prophets while behaving like the generation that rejected them. Jesus strongly asserts, "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?" (Matthew 23:31-33). In the strongest way possible, Jesus reveals their sin, warns what will happen as a result, and specifies that the consequences will apply to His generation (23:36). Again, this passage is not about all Jewish people—it's about certain scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' generation who didn't recognize the time of God's visitation.

In Matthew 27, Pilate offered to set Jesus free if the crowd desired. The people, led by the chief priests and elders (27:12, 20), refused and instead called for his crucifixion, uttering the words, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" (27:25). Indeed, the chief priests and elders—those who had political and religious power—suffered this very consequence when the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, with the eventual exile of the Jewish people from the land of Israel. However, this passage is not about all Jewish people as the ensuing judgment fell upon the Jewish leaders of Jesus' generation. And unfortunately, as is found true throughout the Bible, the judgments fell upon the entire nation as the innocent suffered with the ungodly. ✨

THE FUTURE HOPE OF **1 THESSALONIANS**

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

Antisemites have used the verses in the above passage throughout the centuries as a basis for persecuting the Jewish people. These verses have been interpreted to undergird the belief that the entire Jewish people are guilty of killing the Messiah and are eternally cursed for rejecting Him. Yet, this could not be further from the truth, as a deeper reading of the text will reveal.

The Apostle Paul is Jewish himself, so certainly he understood that the text does not refer to all Jews at all times or to them allegedly being under a curse for committing decide—the crime of killing God. Actually, the Thessalonians were also suffering at the hands of their hostile, non-believing Gentile fellow citizens just as the Jewish believers in Judea were suffering at the hands of those Jewish people who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

In verse 15, Paul is referring to this group in Judea when he writes that they "killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out" and who "are not pleasing to God but hostile to all men." Paul is describing those specific individuals who were persecuting the Jewish believers at the time the letter was being written and not every Jewish man, woman, and child at any time or place in history.

Understanding the above as a general statement about all Jewish people would conflict with Romans 9-11, where the Apostle Paul's tender heart toward his own Jewish people and future hope for them is poignantly expressed. Also, and, perhaps, most important to remember is that the Jewish people did not kill the Messiah! In John 10:18, Yeshua tells His disciples, "No one has taken [my life] away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative." It was predicted that the Messiah would die for the sins of the world and that His own people would reject Him. This is true. But, clearly there were also many Jewish people who embraced Him as Messiah. While He was actually slain by Romans, in the end no human could put Him to death unless He wanted to die.

Keeping these truths in mind will help us to clearly see that 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 was never meant to be applied to all Jewish people. ✨

1481

The Spanish
Inquisition is instituted

1543

Martin Luther writes a
tract against the Jews

1835

Oppressive constitution for the Jews
issued by Czar Nicholas I of Russia

1844

Karl Marx's writings infuse
communism with antisemitism

1915

World War I prompts expulsion of
250,000 Jews from Western Russia

I FOUND SHALOM

DENNIS KARP'S STORY

I was born in the Washington, D.C., area into a middle-class Jewish family. We were not Orthodox, but we did follow the rhythms of Jewish life. On Friday nights, we went to synagogue for the Shabbat evening service and on Saturdays, we attended Shabbat morning services. We attended all of the holy days, and in our home, we maintained kosher laws by not eating pork or shellfish. Our county had a large Jewish population, so we were not seen as out of the ordinary, and I had virtually no contact with “Christians” or “Christianity” except for some friends in school. We were just friends, without any religious dimension.

College was much the same except that I had walked away from Jewish practice. I had found it hollow and lacking. My hippie lifestyle took over and I had no time for much else. Again, there was no real contact with anything that could be called religious.

It wasn't until after I was married and had two children that a believer I knew through my work invited me to visit his church to hear a Jewish man speak about Jesus and the Passover. To this day I don't know why I said yes, but off I went with my wife and two kids to his church. To say that my Jewish jaw hit the floor is an understatement! I did not want to believe what I heard.

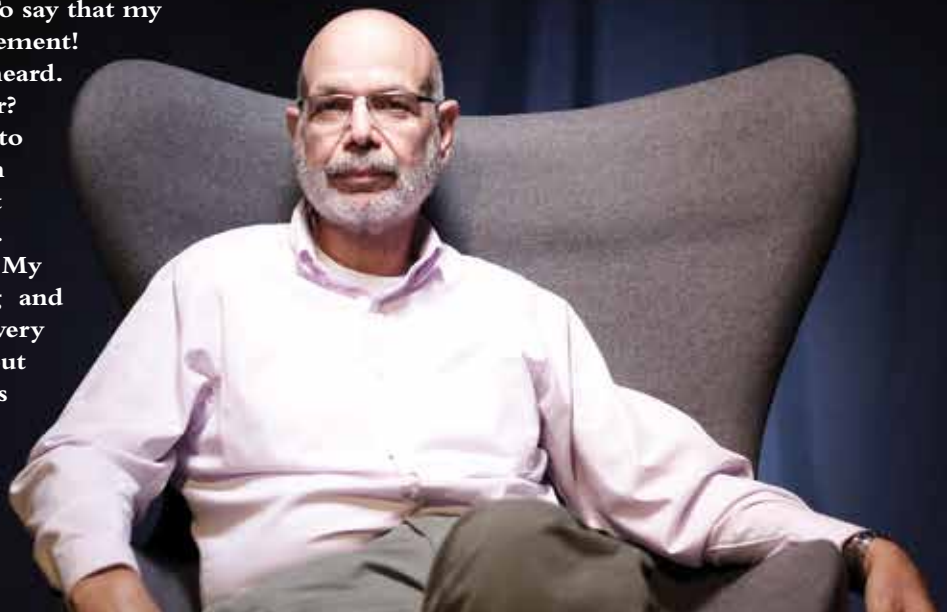
Jesus...Jewish...Passover...Last Supper? Are you kidding me? Yet, I went up to the man who gave the presentation and said that I would like to meet with him to ask him some questions.

Let me be perfectly clear: My intention was to prove him wrong and defend my so-called Jewishness. Yet every question that I asked him throughout the following eight weeks was answered from the Old Testament. As I think back, if he had quoted the New Testament, the

questioning and the meetings would have stopped right there. You see, to me, the New Testament was a book for the Gentiles, not for the Jews. It was an antisemitic book, according to all that I knew. And I wanted nothing to do with it.

But I became curious. If the Old Testament spoke of the necessary death of a Messiah, and a virgin birth, and of sin that required sacrifice, then maybe the New Testament had something to say. And so, one night I just picked up the Bible and started reading from the book of Matthew. I read Matthew, then Mark, then Luke, and then John. I remember my wife asking me this question when I was about halfway through John: “Well? What do you think?” I answered, “It's very interesting, but he is just saying what the first three guys said.” My understanding was that of a child, but this much I began to realize—this New Testament is a Jewish book. It constantly refers back to the Old Testament and it is definitely not antisemitic.

I have now come to see the Scriptures as one book, from Genesis to Revelation. I don't see New or Old, just God's word and truth. And for this I am eternally grateful. ✨



1938

Kristallnacht

1939–1945

The Holocaust

2006

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights: antisemitism a “serious problem” on U.S. college campuses

WORLD WAR II TO PRESENT DAY

Increasing antisemitism across the globe

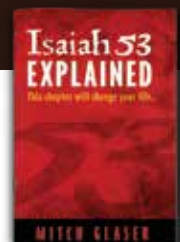


WHAT IF JESUS IS THE JEWISH MESSIAH?

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, “Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2). Recognizing our sin is the first major step towards 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, “Abraham believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). The New Covenant Scriptures say, “For the wages of sin is death, but the 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).

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.



For more information and to request a free copy of the book, *Isaiah 53 Explained*, please visit Isaiah53.com.

To view video testimonies of Jewish people who believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, visit ifoundshalom.com.