

The Chosen People: Chosen for What?

by Art Katz

The Jewish people need to seek a renewed relationship with God in order to understand their distresses and find hope and redemption in a hostile world.

Scripture: Exodus 19:3-6, Deuteronomy 30:1-3, Psalm 9:10, Isaiah 53:5, Isaiah 55:8-9, Matthew 5:17, John 5:39, John 14:9, Romans 1:16, Romans 10:11-12

Topics: "Covenant Relationship", "Chosen People"

Description

Art Katz addresses the Jewish predicament in a hostile world, questioning the meaning of being 'chosen' and the historical troubles that accompany this identity. He explores the disconnect between the Jewish people and God, suggesting that their suffering may stem from a failure to acknowledge their covenant with Him. Katz emphasizes the need for a return to God and the importance of understanding the prophetic significance of Jesus as the Messiah, urging the Jewish community to confront their beliefs and consider the implications of their rejection of Him. He calls for introspection and repentance, highlighting that true safety and peace can only be found in a restored relationship with God.

Transcript

Examining the Jewish Predicament in an Increasingly Hostile World As Jews, one thing that makes us recoil is being called "chosen." It is something like the involuntary shudder that comes with the screech of chalk on a blackboard. After all, what has being chosen ever meant to us but trouble? Better that the term had never been coined for all the good it has done us! Where does it come from anyway? Can't we be left alone to live like other people without the ominous overtones that have always dogged us?

Chosen for what? Why give to those who instinctively don't like us yet further provocation and pretext for bitterness? Perhaps you yourself, dear reader, are so reflecting even now. The litany of daily disasters with reports of suicide bombings and the increase of anti-Semitic episodes virtually everywhere in the world give us a heightened sense of dread. What will the end of all this be? Is this what it means to be a Jew? How long before we will be fearing for our children, or ourselves, that we will be singled out as Jews in the streets of America's cities and suburbs?

Already, Jewish leaders in England, France and Germany are exhorting their communities to learn another language, pack their bags and prepare to move again! Is the answer to be more assertive, more insistent on our rights as citizens, demanding that public officials guarantee our safety? Or is it to be found in supporting Jewish organizations monitoring the activity of hate groups, who have access to policy

makers in government and influence in the media? In former times of distress, our more religious kinsmen would sigh, "When Messiah comes..."

How plaintive, if not pathetic, to make that an appeal now! That frail expectation saved no one in the Holocaust? how much less now? Can even the Chasidim, who daily gather up into plastic bags the body parts and grisly, severed members of nail-torn bomb victims, sustain such a hope? What real defense do we have when America's proudest commercial towers and, indeed, the very Pentagon itself are not exempt from attack? This vitriolic hatred, infecting even children, at first against "Zionists," and now Jews in every place, threatens us all.

Chosen indeed! If there is a God, where is He now? From the vantage point of our historic and present Jewish life, the evidence of a living God does seem painfully sparse. If there is such a God, how are we to interpret or understand His apparent, palpable absence? Perhaps from a biblical perspective, one might even suggest that He has a controversy with us, or has withdrawn His Presence, in proportion to our own indifference and alienation from Him. This is a supposition which the Scriptures, of which we have characteristically little knowledge or interest, seem to suggest.

The very first chapter of the Book of Proverbs sends the chilling message that "because we refused the call of wisdom, she will even laugh at our calamity and mock when dread comes upon us like a storm;" and it will be too late because: "they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord...But he who listens to me [wisdom] shall live securely, and shall be at ease from the dread of evil" (v.20-33). By and large, are we not Torah indifferent, preferring to bury ourselves in literature of entirely other kinds, as in the copious folds of a Sunday Times and the like--all of which uniformly espouse views antagonistic to faith?

The very idea of divine authorship, that is, Scripture actually inspired by God, is contrary and offensive to our incredulous, secular minds. We instantly, matter-of-factly and self-evidently dismiss it out of hand--no discussion necessary. Though the Hebrew prophets proclaimed "Thus saith the Lord," and Isaiah announced, in commencing his book, "The vision which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem," we are persuaded, together with our more liberal rabbis, that such are altogether stylistic devices and quaint rhetoric peculiar to the Bible as literature.

A remarkably candid statement about this unbelief to which we have come is found in a recent article by conservative rabbi and scholar, Alan J. Yuter, *Etz Hayim?--Torah For Our Times: Conservative Judaism's Spiritual Response to Judaism's Canon* (Midstream, May/June 2002). *Etz Hayim* is the recently published Torah commentary by a panel of the best scholars and rabbis of Conservative Judaism. Yuter describes *Etz Hayim* as: The most ambitious non-Orthodox Jewish Bible Commentary ever written for synagogue use in the history of Jewry, but framed in a modern world view that appropriates ancient ideas that are comfortably usable in modernity (p.21).

In commending this new work, Yuter informs us, As modernists who reject pre-modern dogma, Conservative Judaism assumes that the Torah's human language can, by definition, be no more than the work of human beings...creating stories that make religious statements. For *Etz Hayim*, the Torah is not history but pious, inspirational fiction...God as the hero of Scripture and as a mental and literary construct...God is no more than the power within us that makes for good, salvation, and redemption.

There is thus a theological disconnect between the God of Hebrew Scripture, who "appears" as a real being in the Scriptural text, and the God idea of *Etz Hayim's* elite community (p.19 *Emphasis and italics*)

ours, here and throughout). He goes on to say, For...Conservative Judaism, holiness and sanctification are a mental mood and not the consequence of obeying the Divine command...Etz Hayim exhibits intellectual integrity, but without the religious faith that the classical tradition mandates...The Torah informs but does not command the autonomous moral conscience of the modern liberal Jew...Its religion is not the religion of the Talmud or Bible, but a modern world view that appropriates ancient ideas that are comfortably usable in modernity (p.20, 21).

Evidently, autonomous man, in his mood and disposition, considers himself to be the measure of all things. This asserts the God of Israel to be a figment of Man's imagination! It portrays the giants of our heritage as mere victims of delusion. What is staggering here is the "up-front" boldness, nay even a boasting, of these views. This is a proud, even arrogant, assertion of the primacy of man over God; of the superiority of an elite council of scholars whose intuited inspiration determines for us what is "comfortably usable" in modernity!

As any even superficial assessment of Scripture will indicate--from the call of Abraham, the epochal suffering of Moses, to the Prophets and the Psalmists--not comfort, but obedience, if not sacrifice, has been the enduring motif of Biblical faith! By making Man supreme, have we not laid ourselves open to assault on every side for the forfeiture of just that faith, inviting the very penalties of covenantal disobedience for which we were forewarned through Moses and the Prophets?

How can we demand the protection of society from the anti-Semitic attacks that our own unbelief may have occasioned? Are we so thoroughly secularized as to be unable to see in our increasing calamities a divine cause? Can we not consider the fact that anti-Semitism pre-dates Christianity, and has haunted us in every place and time and nation as being perhaps the consequence of covenantal defection? Is it, in fact, the very evidence of that defection? As Jews, the Chosen of God, the recipients of the tablets of the Law on Mt.

Sinai, the descendants of the Patriarchs and heirs of the Prophets, should we not reasonably look first for an explanation for our distresses in a failed relationship with the God of our Fathers, before considering secular, social or political causes? Are we aware of Moses' warnings in the book of Deuteronomy (31:29; 32:18 and following) in regard to covenantal failure? If we will not heed God's Word, must we not learn and be instructed, if it be true, through our bitter experience?

As abiding as our distresses are, so evidently are the reality of God and the application of His word! What is this "modernity" to which all things must be submitted but the very golden calf of idolatry that has been our undoing from the very inception of our history as a people? Not only do we bow to it, but more so, are its creators and promulgators, corrupting others even as we ourselves are corrupted. Is this not perversely contradicting our call to be a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6) and a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6)?

Every analysis and critique of "the Jewish predicament" will fall short if it does not factor in this inescapable call to the nations. Our purpose from the beginning was to be a witness of the One, True, Living God and Creator King to all the nations, and in all the nations. Ought we not to suffer proportionate retribution from that God for our willful failure? If the biblical principle, "As the priests, so also the people" is valid, can't we then say, as Israel goes, so go the nations?

Is it for our failure as a priestly nation that some measure of resentment, even unconsciously, is kindled against us among the nations? Only a biblically-formed mind could conceivably think this way! Contrary and offensive though it might be to our norms of thought, could such a view be closer to God's? Could we

be held liable for our failure to align our thoughts with His? As we read in Isaiah 55, For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord (v.8).

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts (v.9). Our unbelief reiterates to the world the mocking taunt of Satan in the Garden of Eden: "Hath God really said?" If denying His truth distorts reality, perverts life and damages all the processes of living, what judgment could issue from a God, so misrepresented, upon that nation privileged to make Him known? Certainly, God's continuing controversy with us, the Jewish people, is an index and a piece of His larger contention with all mankind; but the wider conflict likely awaits resolution first between God and "Israel, His son, His firstborn" (Exodus 4:22).

Can it be that our 'effectual atheism,' reflected in a liberally-oriented Judaism, springs from the absence of an actual experience of God by the Spirit? Or that our inability to experience God is, in itself, a judgment of God? A condition held for so long that it is now considered normative? Those who reduce God to a "concept," have no God personally whom they can seek. One experience of God, as God, dissolves all our doubts! How shall we ever be able to understand, as did the Patriarchs and Prophets of our own faith, that which alone has rightly driven our entire Hebrew past: the actual, experiential knowledge of God as God?

What alternative, then, in its absence, but to reduce the God, who is Israel's glory, to no more than primitive anthropomorphisms, syncretism, and the influence of "other Near Eastern mythologies!" The passage of a people in flight from pursuing Egyptians, through a Red Sea opened by God, becomes the mere confluence of a movement of tides! Miracles are "explained," and predictive prophecy, robbed of its revelatory power, is dismissed through ingenious alterations in time-line dating!

If we are offended by the super-natural, how then can God be God? Hadn't we better confront these issues on this side of eternity rather than on the other? Will we learn too late our God-rejecting error, when it will be unalterably fixed--eternally and without remedy? How shall we not be unspeakably ashamed for the triviality of a lifestyle that pores over stocks and bonds, or their equivalent, but omits the question of God Himself? For, as the Scriptures say, The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

His ways are always grievous... (Psalm 10:4-5a).¹ Such a disposition renders God a negligible object, making the knowledge of Him irrelevant. The problem is pride, the unduly exalted opinion of one's self! A scholar of an earlier generation superbly comments on the above verses, ...[pride] is therefore impatient of a rival, hates a superior, and cannot endure a master. In proportion as it prevails in the heart, it makes us wish to see nothing above us, to acknowledge no law but our own wills, to follow no rule but our own inclinations.

Thus it led Satan to rebel against his Creator, and our first parents to desire to be as gods. Since such are the effects of pride, such a Being as God, One who is infinitely powerful, just and holy, who can neither be resisted, deceived or deluded, who disposes according to his own sovereign pleasure, of all creatures and events, and who, in an especial manner, hates pride, and is determined to abase and punish it. [Toward] such a Being, pride can contemplate only with a feeling of dread, aversion and abhorrence.

It must look upon Him as its natural enemy...These truths torture the proud, unhumiliated hearts of the wicked, and hence they hate that knowledge of God which teaches these truths, and will not seek it. On the contrary, they wish to remain ignorant of such a Being, and to banish all thoughts of Him from their minds. With this view they neglect, pervert, or explain away those passages of revelation which describes

God's true character, and endeavor to believe that He is altogether such a one as themselves.² This commentator continues, He [the unhumiliated] never takes God or His will into consideration or consultation, to square and frame all accordingly, but proceeds and goes on in all as if there were no God to be consulted...no more than if He were no God; the thought of Him and His will sway him not.

Such a God is not of their counsel, is not in the plot; nor is God in their purposes or advising; they do all without Him...all their thought is, that there is no God...[and] seeing there is no God or power above them to take notice of it, to regard or requite them, therefore they may be bold to go on.³ Hence, what issues from such an individual--and he is legion--is the inevitable contagion affecting all his conduct and life as the Scripture says, "His ways are always grievous."

We have taken the liberty of inserting these lengthy quotes because they are so rare. Our own age is steeped in unbelief, so normative and unquestioned, as to taint the very air we breathe. To "seek after God" has rarely been commended to us. Indeed, who could do so? It would imply that there is a God who could be found, and who, being a Person, desires to be sought! Such a conviction would be enough to dismiss such an individual from polite society as clearly out of touch with "reality."

Yet, is this not the very neglect of God that Israel's own prophets have always protested to an unwilling nation? The covenant given at Mount Sinai, from which we have shrunk, is no icy piece of contractual formalism, but a covenant framed in love by the God who brought us out of Egypt, desiring to have us for His own: Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'" (Exodus 19:3-6 NIV 4). Pause for a moment and ponder this promise. By its very nature, it requires a vital knowledge and love of God to keep it, which is why He needs to be continually sought! Psalms 25:14 makes it clear that the fear of the Lord is the condition for having the covenant revealed to us.

How great our need for the "new" or everlasting covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:26--a covenant promising "a new heart" and "a new spirit;" a covenant under which God declares that He will write His law on our hearts! As our distresses mount, how much more should we seriously ponder the word of God in the Psalms, where we are told that: The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you (Psalm 9:9-10 NIV).

At the time that this is written, Israelis are building a wall of separation between themselves and the Palestinian population, penalizing entire families of suicide bombers, re-establishing tight Israeli Defense Force governance over the territories in a powerful and dangerous military build-up. May we suggest that perhaps we, as a nation, ought instead to consider GOD? To "know His name" is not a technical formula. It is to experience God in His essential attributes, an intimacy only available to those who seek Him!

Can it be that the frustrating helplessness of a besieged Israel is the urgent wake-up call of God to an essentially God-rejecting nation?--who, according to His promise, will not forsake those who put their trust in Him. However horrific the means, can our increasing predicament be understood as a mercy to save us from yet worse catastrophe? As the Scripture has already informed us, the same writer tells us that when every other appeal fails, God's severity is yet His love!

If we read this verse [Psalm 9:10] literally, there is, no doubt, a glorious fullness of assurance in the names of God...The Lord may hide His face for a season from His people, but He never has utterly, finally, really, or angrily, forsaken them that seek him.⁵ Lest we assume that personal, ethical morality can substitute for a relationship with God, this writer terrifyingly makes clear: The moral who are not devout, the honest who are not prayerful, the benevolent who are not believing, the amiable who are not converted, these must all have their portion with the openly wicked in the hell which is prepared for the devil and his angels...The forgetters of God are far more numerous than the profane or profligate, and according to the very forceful expression in the Hebrew, the nethermost hell will be the place into which all of them shall be hurled headlong.⁶ "The wicked will return to Sheol [hell], even all the nations who forget God," declares Psalm 9:17.

As our writer concludes, Forgetfulness seems a small sin, but it brings eternal wrath upon the man who lives and dies in it.⁷ Such a willful forgetfulness is, as the Psalm says, wicked, ...for where the God of heaven is not, the lord of hell is reigning and raging; and if God not be in our thoughts, our thoughts will bring us to perdition.⁸ The same "wicked," according to verse 3 of Psalm 10, bless "the covetous, whom the Lord abhors." And covetousness, this root of idolatry, which the tenth commandment condemns, serves to dull the conscience against God.

At its heart lies the desire for riches and material acquisition, the desire to unduly possess and to obtain. Every reasonable observer of contemporary Jewish life will acknowledge that this is more descriptive of us than the desire for God--and has even become our distinctive. Indeed, truth to tell, it is likely its substitute or alternative! Our Rejection of God If Scripture authenticates itself in the heart of every reader who loves and respects truth, must not our history as Jews reveal the tragic story of so cataclysmic a forfeiture as the rejection of God?

How far will this yet continuing rejection pursue us as misfortune, as the baleful reports of grisly tragedies in Israel, and rising anti-Semitism among the nations, now suggest? Losing our covenant consciousness as a people has not relieved us of its responsibilities, or its stated penalties. Moses included us, as with all previous generations of Jews, at Mt. Sinai: Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath [i.e., its blessings in obedience and its curses in failure], but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God and with those who are not here with us today... (Deuteronomy 29:14-15).

According to Scripture, God yet waits for a future recognition from us that will come in the Last Days when we will rightly view our calamities in this covenantal context: So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion upon you, and...will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, in order that you may live (Deuteronomy 30:1-3a, 6).

God's rejection of us can be remedied only by our return to Him. It is apparent, considering our present condition, that this "circumcision" of our hearts is yet future. What is not apparent to us, and far removed from our secular consciousness, is the recognition of this word as actually being God's word. It shows that our disasters issue from a rejection of God, remedied only by our return to Him in genuine repentance! To this, virtually all the prophets testify: For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house

of Judah.

I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver. I will go and return to My place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me (Hosea 5:14-15). In the light of our predicament, are we now willing to look at that single most riveting Messianic prophecy, which gives every appearance of being rabbinically excluded, for obvious reasons, from all synagogue Haftarah readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:1-12?

Should we not read it as if our life depended upon it? Here are the words of the Prophet Isaiah: Behold, My servant will prosper, he will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, so his appearance was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. Thus he will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; he has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to him. 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. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away, and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet he was with a rich man in his death, because he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief; if he would render himself as a guilt offering, he will see his offspring, he will prolong his days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

As a result of the anguish of his soul, he will see it and be satisfied; by his knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as he will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot him a portion with the great, and he will divide the booty with the strong; because he poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors (Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12). Of whom does this speak?

Jewish authorities have insisted that it describes the redemptive suffering of the Jewish nation itself. Certainly it is suggestive of much of our historical experience, and perhaps more ominously, that which is yet to come. But who is the "he" who is despised and forsaken of men, and the "we" who have hid our faces from him? Who is the "he" who bore "our" griefs, who was pierced through for "our" transgressions, crushed for "our" iniquities? Are we not the sheep who have gone astray, turning every one to our own way?

Has not the Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him? Do consider that this prophecy was written seven centuries before the advent of the Galilean, Jesus of Nazareth, and even before the formation of the Roman Empire, whose distinctive execution through crucifixion this sufferer is evidently bearing (a look at Psalm 22 confirms this⁹). Surely, in Isaiah 53, it could not be said of us Jews that we "...had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his [our] mouth," since it was because of "the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due" (v.8).

Note the genius of the inspired Scriptures in that both the Prophets and the Psalms so plainly declare this event centuries before its time. ...when Thou shalt 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. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall My Righteous Servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities...because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53.10b-12).¹⁰ He "shall be satisfied" evidently signals this servant's life-after-death continuation!

Indeed, everything hinges upon the resurrection of this Suffering Servant. However unfamiliar this is to us, it is nevertheless, not "Christian," or gentile per se, but indisputably and Hebraically Biblical! The logic of what we have been saying so far brings us now to a place considered 'out of bounds' for us as Jews. Could our difficulty be, not the consideration of what we think to be an alien, novel and "goyish" New Testament, but our failure to perceive what had preceded it, what had actually been foretold in our own Hebrew Scriptures?

Having failed in the first, a failure that yet prevails, must we not necessarily fail in the other? The unbroken continuum of the two Testaments is lost to us because we have not adequately embraced the first! Are we not still refusing, now as then, even to consider the exhortation of the despised Galilean to his rejecting contemporaries to search the Jewish Scriptures, of which he himself said, "it is these that bear witness of me" (John 5:39)? He declared that if we had believed Moses, we would believe him, for Moses wrote of him (John 5:46).

Could it be that our mounting tzuris (trouble) is again a consequence of that very same stubborn inconsideration? How may we now be better able to consider the unfamiliar opening statement of the Gospel of John: For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus [the] Messiah (Christ in Greek, Y'Shua Ha Mashiach in Hebrew) (chap. 1:17). Could it be that the Law's demands, requiring our complete observance, and by that very process, is intended to bring us before God in an acknowledged, broken dependency?

This recognition would necessarily then precede the enablement given by the same God as a "gift" (grace) to those few who seriously seek righteousness with God through the Law, but necessarily fail to obtain it. Therefore the New Testament says, He came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right [authority] to become children [sons] of God, even to those who believe in his name (John 1:11-12). Paul, the Jewish apostle, brilliantly explicates the connection between the Law given through Moses and the grace that came through Jesus, in his Letter to the Romans, ...in order that the requirement of the Law [Torah] might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh [a rules-guided, human determination to fulfill divine commandments], but according to the Spirit...and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:4,8).

For Paul, as for Jesus, the Law is holy and is not to be abrogated or annulled. Rather, Jesus says, Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill (Matthew. 5:17). Unhappily, much of historic Christianity has lost, rejected, or never understood, its continuity with its Hebrew roots. This, tragically, has served to discourage us as Jews from even considering the place of Jesus in our Jewish heritage. What we would suggest now, though it flies in the face of our deepest Jewish prejudices, is that though the Church that historically bears his name has shamefully misrepresented him, the issue of this "messianic pretender" is, more than we are presently able to realize, the very issue of God.

Life and death decided by one's own disposition toward him! Never has so much hung, then, on the recognition of a single person! The recognition of these truths, as well as their fulfillment to us, waits upon a bestowal of God's Spirit, Ruach, promised to us by the Prophets--the very medium of Divine revelation and empowerment for which our scholarly and rabbinical elites are an inadequate substitute! Therefore, Jesus mystified a sincerely inquiring Nicodemus, "a ruler of the Jews," when he said, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water [the Word of God] and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit... You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?" (John 3:5-6,10). Likewise, Jesus astonished the congregation at his own synagogue in Nazareth by reading the appointed text for that Shabbat from Isaiah 61:1, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel [good news] to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

And he, astonishingly concluded by saying, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v.21). With this, he proclaimed the very inauguration and authorization of his messianic call! Consider, if you will, that if it is true, as he himself consistently affirmed, that he was "sent of the Father," what must the consequence of his rejection be to a people who persist in rejecting him, as those to whom he was especially sent? What a slight to the Father whose voice, according to the record, came from heaven over the transfigured Messiah, "This is My beloved Son...hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5b).

For what reason do we disclaim this account? Can this be a fulfillment of the inspired warning foretold us by Moses: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him...and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And it shall come about that whosoever shall not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him (Deuteronomy 18:15,18b-19)?

What blessed provision have we also spurned in persisting in that same refusal to consider him who said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b) What true Pesach (Passover) can we have if he is, as John the Baptist proclaimed by the banks of the Jordan River, "Behold the [Paschal] Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29b). Could John have been considering that: ...the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement (Leviticus 17:11).

If there is no blood shed to atone for our sins, what valid Yom Kippur, required by the Law, remains to us after the destruction of the Temple, Priesthood, and Sacrifices? This being so, can rabbinically determined "mitzvot," fasting, and a day's Yom Kippur synagogue attendance, be an acceptable substitute in the sight

of God? Or are these merely expediencies, conceived by well-meaning men, upon the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, which seemed to offer coherence and continuation for a now dispersed nation?

In this, they also avoided the only other option, already chosen by tens of thousands of Jews, who understood the sacrificial death of Yeshua Ha Mashiach (Jesus the Christ) as God's once-and-for-all Yom Kippur. These same alternatives confront us today! Jesus grieved, both as Messiah and Prophet, foreseeing the consequences that would befall us in our rejection of him. He foresaw prophetically not only the destruction of the Temple and the dispersal of the nation, but also the tragic events that would pursue us into the Diaspora.

And when he [Jesus] approached, he saw the city [Jerusalem] and wept over it, saying, If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes...and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation (Luke 19: 41-42,44b).

This was the historical and critical point of disjuncture and departure from Biblical, Messianic Judaism. Either the crucified Messiah was the once-and-for-all Atonement to which the Biblical sacrifices had pointed, and for which purpose he said he had come, or the Jewish nation is left with the cruel dilemma of the Mosaic requirement rendered inoperable by the destruction of the Temple and the dispersal of the priesthood. This continues as an unresolved issue to this day. Surely, then, the Jesus who warned of our being liable for every idle word we speak would not lightly exclaim, ...for unless you believe that I AM He, you shall die in your sins [i.e., without necessary atonement] (John 8:24b).

Foreseeing the unspeakable anguish of such loss, as well as the prospect of terror of an endless torment, the divinely instructed apostle Paul proclaims, The wages of sin is death [eternal and irremediable separation from God], but the free gift of God is eternal life in Yeshua Ha Mashiach Adonoi [Jesus the Christ, our Lord] (Romans 6:23). Why, dear reader, if you have patiently borne with us thus far, should you not consider these things? What perceivable error do you find to justify rejecting them?

However relativistic one's mindset, can God in His divine prerogative not insist upon a scandal of particularity centering in this One? What if that same One specifically fulfills the over 300 prophecies that speak of His birth, its time and location (Micah 5:2), and His suffering, rejection, death and resurrection (Isaiah 53), and His yet future and imminent return when, "...they will look upon me whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10b)? And learn that "the wounds between Your hands" were "those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends" (Zechariah 13:6b)?¹¹ The New Testament confirms these prophetic themes when it declares, ...these [things] have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name (John: 20:31).

Yes, we know that "Judaism does not believe" that God has a Son.¹² But with all due respect, may we ask, what is this Judaism? Is it some sacrosanct entity greater than God, or rather, a compendium of rabbinical opinion framed for two thousand years in conscious opposition to, and repudiation of, the messianic claims of Jesus?¹³ Let us be sure we do not invoke "Judaism" to sidestep our obligation as *menschen* (responsible individuals) to consider issues of truth for which we are eternally liable.

Are we so persuaded that our traditions' concept of God apprehends the full richness of biblical monotheism? What of a possible composite tri-unity, whose definition by men, must always be less than its ineffable glory? Might God not be One [Echad], even as we are, made in His image--body, soul and spirit--and yet be One? Many of us who are formed in the Jewish tradition will have to consider the words

of Him who was also the author of the renowned Sermon on the Mount: "Don't you know me...even after I have been among you such a long time?"

Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father...and I and the Father are One" (John 14:9). He spoke repeatedly of having come from the Father, and that "He should depart out of this world to the Father...that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God" (John 13:1b, 3f). Ought this not to give one, as it has us, sufficient reason to re-examine one's conception of God? Without question, if these things are true, it will turn one's world upside down. All our trusted categories, will necessarily be challenged.

Except we be willing to bear that consequence, how shall our allegiance be ultimately tested in the foremost commandment to "love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength"? Will you yourself not ask the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about the crucial claims Jesus made for himself? Will you not choose to rise above that instinctive, historically-conditioned enmity to His name should they prove true? Scripture soberly informs us, "There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12b).

Will you not trust and test the Word of God by acting upon it? For as the Scripture says, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek [Gentile]: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him (Romans 10:11-12 AV). Even the famous "doubting" Thomas, who said, "Unless I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of His nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25b), upon seeing the resurrected Christ, let out the astonished gasp, "My Lord and my God!" (v.28b)!

Jesus, forsaking a once-and-for-all opportunity to squelch a preposterous and blasphemous exaggeration, acknowledged it as being perfectly appropriate to Himself, adding, "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29b). Someone wrote, "The climax of sin is that it crucified Jesus." Think on it. We, a people, who have but a scant consciousness of sin (what need for atonement then?) ought to ponder that God, knowing how sin disguises itself, became Himself our victim, in order to reveal, as nothing else could, the inexorable truth of our condition!

Is it not significant and revealing that the best of Roman Law, coupled with the best of Jewish piety, put to a cruel death the long-awaited object of our faith? Tragically, not only were we too blind to recognize Him, but as a nation were sufficiently offended and threatened by Him, making His removal by death a necessity! As the Scripture says, "Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Isaiah 53:3). What person or nation can be absolved from such sin as this?

If this be so, what passage of time can in any way mitigate our personal and corporate guilt? Our defiant declaration, "His [Jesus'] blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25), has haunted us throughout our history more than we can know. If He be the Son of God, "very God and very Man," as ancient creeds declare, we have committed an appalling sin. Not the sin of a failed moment's error, mind you, but rather the summation of all sin, chronic and ages old, and repeated again in a Judaism that, to this day, prefers the rulings of a rabbinical "elite," and of "ideas comfortably usable in modernity."

Against this, ironically, stands the timeless Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-6 that either defrocks Jesus as ultimate blasphemer, or shows Him to be the very One for whom, in the wisdom of God, the ancient creed was given! As our painful history testifies only too well, "Be assured your sins will find you out." (Numbers 32:23). Have we been the "Cain" to this "Abel"--moved to murderous envy of a "Son" of the Father more virtuous than we, whose greater, altogether righteous sacrifice, accepted by the Father, leaves our own

sacrifice unaccepted and unacceptable? (Genesis 4).

Ours, the inept product of our own sweat and industry; His, the ultimate, acceptable blood-sacrifice, satisfying the Holiness of God, which cannot be placated for the terror of sin by anything mankind can humanly or religiously provide! Have we, like Cain, become fugitives and vagabonds in the earth, hidden from the face of God, marked, but all too often not spared? The comparison is altogether too close to be comfortable! Ought we not be stricken with sorrow, seeing our likeness to that first murderer?

May we not bear, ever so remotely, any resemblance to Cain's penalty! Better yet, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered [saved]" (Joel 2:32a). But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved (Romans 10:8-10). Thus, the Apostle Paul, Hebrew of the Hebrews, did not forsake his Jewishness.

Nor do we, in proclaiming the good news of our Messiah, For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16b AV). A Prayer: Lord, grant mercy to me, the reader in this once-and-for-all moment. You know well how every power in the world, the flesh and the devil have conspired against You. Grant me, in this moment, a respite from all that has barred us, as Jews, from calling upon Your Name. Give me some measure of the same humility that You Yourself bore nakedly in that public shame on the Cross.

Thank You for making this crisis of decision possible for me. In Yeshua's holy, and till now, untried name, I ask it. Save me. Amen. A Final Prophetic Consideration Some may ask, why must there be a soon-coming "time of Jacob's trouble," as prophesied by Jeremiah (chapter 30:7)--a global anti-Semitism threatening to exceed even that of the Holocaust? Because, truth to tell, are we not still Jacob ("schemer"), and not yet Israel ("prince with God" Genesis 32)? Is there not a Man waiting with whom we must ourselves wrestle till daybreak--in a night that must come, and hastens even now?

Are we not barred from full possession again of the Land of our fathers by the inveterate "Esau," who would again have our life? Is there not a final drama of reconciliation with a vengeful brother, which we must play out first by confronting God in a Man? But, like our father Jacob, whose heel-grasping nature we yet painfully retain, for all our success in the Diaspora, our "pillowed head" is once again upon a stone! And yet, God is in that place, however "dreadful" it be, and though we know it not, it is the gate to heaven!

Pour oil upon that stone though you will, and promise the Jacob's tenth though you will, it is but a token of the total consecration that alone makes of a Jacob an Israel. Is it not for this that God waits? He waits at that threshold of blessedness as the Man we have too long avoided. But there is no entry into that blessedness till we shall say like Jacob, "I will not let You go unless You bless me" (Genesis 32:26). It is this stubborn specificity of God, coming in the form of His own choosing, with which we must grapple!

Only recognizing the face of God in that scandalous Man breaks, and is calculated to break, our inveterate, self-determining, self-affirming Jacob-pride. Yeshua alone, face to face, turns us into the Israel of God! So "send over all" that we have, divide our substance into two bands, devise every Jacob scheme that we will; it will not save us from the outraged brother who brings his "four hundred with him"! That Man, whom we have struggled so long to avoid--only His touch at the hip socket of our Jacob self-sufficiency, power and confidence can "cripple" us and make us, for the first time, a worshipping, lame supplicant at his Altar--the altar of El-Elohe-Israel!

Out of "a broken and contrite heart," which He will not despise, issues the authentic, self-surrendering worship that transfigures Jacob the usurper into a servant-son--now rightly named Israel! (Psalm 51:17). Reconciled to God, as a son to his father, we will, with Him, overcome every enmity, however ancient and bitter. All the object of our Jacob-striving propensity to obtain by our wit and cunning is, ironically, what God all along intended as our inheritance--had we but known Him as we ought, and received it in all humility at His hand!

Break, break, O sons of Jacob. The Father of our fathers, the Ancient of Days, the Lord of Glory, the Savior of Israel awaits our worship. And till it come, what possession of our inheritance, what priestly service to "bless all the families of the earth," (especially of the kin of Esau and Ishmael), can there be? (Genesis 12:3). Our neighbor, with whom we have striven, needs now to be blessed by an Israel that indeed is Israel, and who has at last admitted, and is blessed in the admittance, that, Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord (Psalm 118:26a).

That blessedness is worth our every present travail. Do you recognize the press of God in the anti-Semitism raised once again to haunt us? Our false, secular and non-biblical hopes have not, and cannot, save us. The sins of our fathers, being also our own, pursue us in every generation, awaiting their acknowledgment and repentant forsaking (Leviticus 26:39-42). Our sins have required Him to turn His face from us for the "moment" but with abundant mercy will He receive and restore us and make us His own--to the everlasting praise of His glory.

Endnotes 1 Authorized Version of the Bible (The King James Version). All other Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. 2 From Chas. H. Spurgeon's The Treasury of David, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass., Vol.1, pp 117-118, A Commentary on the Psalms. 3 Ibid, p118. 4 "NIV" means The New International Version of the Bible 5 From Chas. H. Spurgeon's The Treasury of David, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass., Vol.1, pp. 98-99 6 Ibid., pp.100-101 7 Ibid., p.101 8 Ibid., p.112 9 Consider the graphic details of death by crucifixion, astonishingly recorded a thousand years before the event, and described in Psalm 22. 10 Authorized Version of the Bible 11 (According to a literal rendering of the Masoretic text.) 12 This, in spite of the testimony of Psalm 2:7, "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee;" Psalm 2:12, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.

Blessed are all they that put their trust in him;" and Proverbs 30:4, "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" 13 We are aware of, and deplore, the painful and forced confrontations to which our people have been subjected under "Christendom." We appreciate the rabbinical defense of Judaism against the encroachment of what was rightly understood then as an apparent pagan idolatry.

God forbid that this booklet be thus misconstrued as being in keeping with that ungodly coercion. Nevertheless, "God would have all men to be converted," that is, to voluntarily and totally turn to Himself in spirit and in truth. Our effort here is to challenge and stir the reader to that consideration.

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