



A JEW AND HIS GOD

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. You see, I am a Jew, and being Jewish has always been a privilege and a joy for me. Even as a child I loved memorizing prayers in Hebrew 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.

The *Tanach* (Jewish Bible) says "this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart 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 Temple on the High Holidays, and I believed in some sort of G-d, but G-d's word didn't have much of an influence on my day-to-day activities. Like the Bible said, my heart was far from G-d.

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. I expected to find anti-Semitism. I expected the stuff that inspired Hitler! I found neither. Instead, I found Jesus not at all the way I expected him to be. He quoted Hebrew Scripture and said "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

I had thought that Jesus was just for Gentiles! But you know, just about everyone who believed in 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.

Solomon, King David's son, was said to be the wisest man who ever lived, and he said, "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). The great Jewish prophet Isaiah tells us, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

The bedrock of Judaism is found in the 20th chapter of Exodus. There Moses records the Ten Commandments. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Had I always put God first in my life? Of course not. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Had I ever used God's name casually, or worse, as a swear-word? I had. "Thou shalt 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? "Thou shalt not kill." Another place in the Bible says that if you think evil thoughts towards someone without cause, you are guilty of murder. "Thou shalt 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.

The Ten Commandments are summed up in the *Sh'ma* and *Viahavta*, two of the holiest of all Hebrew prayers: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy 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 we stand guilty before the judge with no defense. There is coming a day when God will judge us and 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.

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. 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: for the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Isaiah 53:8). It says, "he was bruised for our iniquities" (vs. 5). This is all found in the *Tanach*, the Hebrew Bible!

Remember, the Hebrew Bible says, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). We owe a sin debt to God. Jesus paid the debt in full! Make no mistake: God will judge us. And know that if we're judged based on our own deeds, we will be damned to Hell. 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. 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.

Since I received Jesus Christ 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 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. 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!

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.

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. Repent and believe, and all of God's wrath for you will be placed on the Messiah, and you will be forgiven.

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. Please read Isaiah chapter 53 as a good start. Then read the book of John in the New Testament (written by a Jew). Please ask Jesus to be your king. And please feel free to contact me anytime. Shalom and God bless.

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By the way, the reason the photo at the beginning of my story is of me as a child is because it reminds me that our Messiah has said, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein" (Luke 18:17). Please study the prophecies, pray, and then gladly receive the kingdom of God as a child with joy in your heart and hope for your future. May the Lord bless you in the name of Y'Shua (that's Jesus' Hebrew name!). Mazol Tov.