

Jewish Spiritual Life

PEACE THROUGH THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

GodandJews.org

Who is a Jew?

By George Gruen

The question "Who is a Jew?" has been discussed often through the years because of many changes that have engulfed our Jewish people as a nation and as individuals. Judaism, as a religion, is practiced in many different forms in Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist circles. With various degrees of "faith" among our Hebrew people, one wonders "Who is a Jew?"

In the light of today's changing viewpoints, one asks what place the Jewish Holy Scriptures have and will have in modern Judaism. May we consider this extremely important matter in the writings of the only One who is able to make clear, authoritative pronouncements on this subject - Almighty GOD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The world today, and through the ages past, has recognized the descendants of Abraham as a different people. Our Jewish people are unique, for no people have been so persecuted, so dispersed, so plundered and murdered, and yet for over 4,000 years the children of Israel have lived, and exist today, not only as a people throughout the world, but as a free independent nation - Israel. How is this possible in the light of human history? The answer is found in Israel's origin, for in her origin we will find the key to answer the question, "Who is a Jew?"

Hebrews are a special people because God is their Father. In Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1-3, we find their Divine origin: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram [later called Abraham], Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The God of eternity and creation, in order to reveal Himself to mankind, called out Abraham to father a special people who would be God's messengers to the world. Some of the descendants of Abraham (Jewish prophets, judges, kings, etc.) would be chosen by God for the purpose of recording in a Book His will for men and women upon earth. This Book when completed was called the Holy Scriptures, or the Bible. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures will give us God's definition of a Jew and will reveal to us the only true Judaism given by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Bible is God's Word to us with clear directions for the Hebrew people as His Chosen People!

It is possible for men and women to deny God's authority and develop their own philosophy on the basis of some tradition and call it Judaism. But such a religious belief will not produce in the lives of its adherents the true purpose and results of following God's will. Within the development of tradition and philosophy, there are many different views of what a Jew should believe, for when people stray from the pure unadulterated Holy Scriptures of God, they promote a man-made religion. In matters pertaining to the things of God, we cannot accept the philosophies of people. God is the author of Judaism, and His definition is given in the Holy Scriptures. Let us give careful consideration to God's answer to the question, "Who is a Jew?"

The God of Israel created mankind. Genesis, chapter 1, verses 26 and 27 and chapter 2, verse 7 state: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them...And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Men and women are God's creation. God created men and women to have fellowship with him, but this relationship with God was broken by disobedience and sin. The result is made clear in many scripture verses, but two will suffice. "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Ecclesiastes, chapter 7, verse 20) Though we have many good people in the eyes of mankind, yet God says that all people have sinned.

Then we read in the writings of the Jewish prophet Isaiah, chapter 59, verses 1 and 2: "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that He will not hear." Sin separates men and women from the blessings of God. Sin severs the lifeline to God, thereby loosing people to drift aimlessly on the sea of life without an anchor or foundation. The Eternal One has said that there is no peace for the sinner. Because of the need of sinners to have a clear revelation of God and His plan of forgiveness of sin, the God of Israel brought into existence the Judaism that is based entirely on the Bible.

God's provision for the restoration of people to Himself would come through a Special People (the children of Israel), by a Special Law (God's Commands given in the Holy Scriptures), and in a New Way (Atonement). God gave the Law and the Atonement for the forgiveness of sin so believing men and women could live in His peace. We need not dwell on the origin of our Hebrew people except to state that Hebrew people are the direct physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not necessary to elaborate the Laws of God through Moses. A reading of the books of Moses, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, will refresh one's memory or give new knowledge of God's requirements for His people. It is not possible for men and women to keep even the first of the Ten Commandments, let alone all of them! Disobedience to God's law, the failure to obey, or the willful violation of it, is called sin in the Scriptures. "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them...." (Deuteronomy, chapter 27, verse 26)

The great King David of Israel said in Psalms, chapter 51, verse 3 concerning sin: "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." The knowledge that we have sinned against God is ever with us if our heart is honest before the Almighty. The atonement given through Moses may be simply stated as follows. The atonement was the sacrificing of God's specified animal with the shedding of the animal's blood and this blood placed upon the Jewish altar. God saw this sacrifice, and when it was offered by a Hebrew who was truly sorry for his sin and desired God's forgiveness, then atonement was made and the person's sin was covered and forgiven. Cleansing from sin followed obedience to God's requirements as recorded for us in His Holy Scriptures.

A clear picture of this is given in the fifth chapter of the book of Leviticus where we read beginning with verse five: "And it shall be when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing: And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering, and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin...And he shall sprinkle of the blood of the sin offering upon the side of the altar, and the rest of the blood shall be wrung out at the bottom of the altar: it is a sin offering...and the priest shall make an atonement for

him for his sin which he hath sinned, and it shall be forgiven him." Notice that the person's sin was forgiven!

The instructions of God to Moses concerning the great Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, are given in Leviticus, chapter 16. It would be well for you to read this entire chapter, for the atonement was the only way the people were to be forgiven of their sins and have peace with Almighty God. You will notice in the chapter that it is the blood of the slain animal that was offered to God for the atonement. The principle is given in Leviticus, chapter 17, verse 11: "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." God has never revoked this law of the blood of atonement for the cleansing of sin. It is true that in two or three places in the Holy Scriptures God said that He did not want their sacrifices. When the verses are taken in their context, such as in Isaiah chapter one, it is seen that God refused to accept their sacrifices at the time because the people were coming to Him with insincere hearts. God hates hypocrisy!

True Judaism is a living faith in God and His Word, the Holy Scriptures, and a life lived in obedience to the will of God. Anything short of this cannot be defined as Judaism as God ordained it. The word "Jew" comes from the Hebrew word, "Judah," which means "praise." It therefore follows that a Jew is one who brings praise to God. It is possible for one to be a Hebrew because of his being a physical descendant of Abraham. It is not possible for one to claim to be a Jew and then to deny the very existence of the Eternal God of Israel, or question God's authority. Regardless of his claims, such a one is not a true Jew according to God's Holy Scripture.

A Jew is one who brings praise to God by his faith in, and obedience to, the Word of God. A true Jew in God's sight would be one who is faithful to the founder of Judaism, God, and to the high and holy calling of this special people. The fruitlessness of mere forms of worship in place of true faith in the Scriptures, and the plan of God revealed therein, is evident.

However, another question enters the picture in the day in which we live. The Holy Scriptures required the blood of atonement to be offered to God in the Tabernacle and then in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem on Yom Kippur, as well as the daily sacrifices. In 70 A.D. the Jewish Temple was destroyed by Titus and the Roman army. To this day it has not been rebuilt. Because there is no Temple, has Judaism then been permitted to change God's law? Today we are instructed on Yom Kippur to pray, fast, give to charity, and ask God's forgiveness for the sins of the past year. But, are we forgiven? Is this what God expects? No, not according to the Scriptures, and the Bible is the only God-given authoritative source of Judaism. God has never revoked the principle of the blood of atonement for the cleansing of sin. Is God unjust to demand something of us which we cannot offer? The answer is found in the Scriptures, where indeed it must be found! Jewish people, under God, are not free to develop their own philosophy or religion, or some form of Judaism to conform to the trends of society. People are not at liberty to change God's law. To believe a teaching that cannot be found in the Holy Scripture is to become an idolater, for to follow a faith or religion which is not of God is idolatry.

Let us turn again to the Bible, our foundation for faith. First, the God of Israel is Supreme, and His Word is our answer. Man's philosophy cannot be trusted, for it can be subject to change according to the needs of individuals in society at a particular time. Man might feel he is right, but the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 14, verse 12: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,

but the end thereof are the ways of death." It is possible to be sincere and be sincerely wrong. It is not enough to be sincere. We must be sincere in believing the truth that comes from God alone.

God's law and the requirement for a right relationship to Him cannot be changed by any man or woman, but it certainly can be enlarged upon or modified by God Himself. This is evident from the teaching of the Jewish prophets. For example, we read in the Scriptures that God would, at a future time, write His law upon the hearts of men and women, not just in their minds. God said Jews would then be circumcised in their hearts and not just as a physical rite. He also spoke through the Jewish prophets of an eternal atonement which He would provide for all people before the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem (70 A.D.).

Let us consider these prophecies with an open mind and heart, and pray that God will make clear to us His will, that we might indeed be true Jews in His sight.

From the early record of the Holy Scriptures, God revealed through the Jewish prophets that He would provide an eternal plan of forgiveness of sin. We find in the Word of God that He would send One to earth to die for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles. This Divine person would be born as a son into the world, live a perfect life, and then die as the perfect sacrifice for sin. This One would be raised from the dead and bodily ascend into Heaven to the right hand of God. Any person who would believe in this Divine One and accept Him as his sin-bearer would be cleansed from all sin and have assurance of eternity with God in Heaven after physical death. This Divine person is called the Anointed One or Messiah, in Daniel, chapter 9, verse 26: "And after threescore and two sevens shall Messiah be cut off..." He is also known as the Servant of God, the Branch, and Shiloh. These names were recognized by rabbis of old as referring to the Messiah.

The truth that the Messiah is a Divine member of the Eternal Godhead is clearly set forth in the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 48, verse 16: "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me." A Divine person who was with God "in the beginning" is sent to earth by God and the Spirit of God. In Genesis chapter 1, verse 26: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." The "us" indicates the plurality of Divine Persons. The Messiah was there! Another verse in Isaiah that reveals the Messiah's Divine nature is verse six of chapter nine: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." While in the form of a man, the Messiah would be called by terms which can only be used when referring to God.

The place in which the Messiah would be born into the world is given in the book of Micah, the Jewish prophet, in chapter 5 verse 2 (verse 1 in some Bibles): "But thou, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, 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." The birth would be in the little town of Bethlehem, located in the area of Ephrathah in the land of Judah. This is a very precise location, such as giving the city, state and country in an address. Notice also, that the One born would come forth for God's purpose. In addition, the One would be Divine for His eternal being is mentioned again: "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." The word for everlasting is that used to denote eternity.

The Messiah's life, death and resurrection for the sins of mankind are proclaimed in Isaiah, chapter 53, verses 1-12, which was written by this Jewish man of God about 700 B.C. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 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. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief, 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. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; 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."

In these verses we read that this person grows up; He is rejected by men, yet He bears the griefs and sorrows of mankind; He is wounded for the sins of people; men and women can find peace because of His suffering in their place; all people have sinned and the LORD laid on this One all of their sins; He suffered willingly for sinners; He was in prison and was brought to trial; He was then slain and buried in a rich man's tomb; people who would believe in His sacrifice for their sins would be forgiven for "he shall bear their iniquities;" He would live again after His death and would pray for sinners. According to the Scriptures quoted, God would be satisfied with the sin-offering of the Messiah, and so when a person believes in the Messiah and accepts Him as his sacrifice for sin, God forgives the sinner.

The prophecy of Daniel, chapter 9, verses 24-26, fixes for us time of the death of the Messiah for the sins of the world. A careful study of these verses reveals that His death would be about 32 - 33 A.D. (Contact us for a copy of this detailed study.) Messiah would die before the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

The prophecy of the resurrection of the Messiah and His ascension to the right hand of God in Heaven is given in Psalms, chapter 110, verse 1: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Psalms, chapter 16, verses 9-11 also speak of the resurrection of the Messiah.

After ascending to God, He would later return to the earth to bring peace to Israel and the world: Jeremiah, chapter 23, verses 5 and 6: "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is

his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." The Jewish prophet Zechariah, in chapter 14, foretells the second coming of Messiah to earth to defeat the enemies of Israel and establish world peace. The first coming of the Messiah would provide the sacrifice for sin whereby those who accept it would find forgiveness of sin and peace with God - individual peace. At His second coming, the Messiah will bring peace to the world - universal peace.

To whom does this description apply? Who is the Messiah? Has He come the first time and died as the offering for our sin? Let us not permit the atheistic comments of some people, the prejudiced statements of others, nor the teaching of any religion hinder us from an open-minded examination of the facts which are vital to our relationship to God. Upon studying the prophecies with the New Testament record of the life of Jesus, we have found that He is the promised Messiah. We would urge you to read the first four books of the New Testament which begins with the book of Matthew. These Scriptures give conclusive proof that Jesus was sent to earth by God, born of a Jewess, lived a perfect life, performed miracles, claimed to be the Messiah, died for the sins of people, was buried in a rich man's tomb, was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God! The first four books of the New Testament are biographies of the life of Messiah Jesus. Read these biographies and make a judgment for yourself whether or not Jesus is our Jewish Messiah on the basis of recorded history.

Acceptance of Jesus as my Messiah and sin-bearer has brought forgiveness of sin to me and assurance of Heaven. Yes, I know I will spend eternity with the God of Israel in the place He has prepared for those who believe His Word. Peace comes through faith in the promises of God. In Second Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 21 we read: "For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us...that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 24: "Who his own self [Jesus] bare our sins in his own body on the tree...." Romans chapter 5, verses 8 and 11 say: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us. Messiah Jesus by whom we have now received the atonement." 1 John chapter 5, verses 10-13 state: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself..." "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son has life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Finally, in John, chapter 3, verses 14-16: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

We praise God for the peace that He has given through Messiah Jesus to those who trust Him. Pray and ask the God of Israel to reveal to you the truth of Scriptural Judaism and the answer to the question, "Who is a Jew?" As you believe and become a Jewish Bible believer, you too will find peace with the God of Israel and will experience Jewish identity in His sight. There will be no fear of death and the unknown future for your life will be in God's hands. As the believer trusts God for daily strength and provision for every area of living, the Eternal One will fill the trusting heart with peace and joy. A wonderful new life awaits the person who seeks God, repents of his sin, and accepts Jesus as Messiah and Redeemer. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is yet near."