



Oasis

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When Everything Changed How a Young Israeli Tax collector found the Messiah

By Marty Shoub

Guy Cohen and I cross the busy intersection on Akko's main thoroughfare. We stand on the corner in front of a local restaurant, the world cup of soccer is on and a few patrons are gathered around a flat screen watching the game. Guy points down at the corner and says, "This is where everything changed." The street scene is typical of many Israeli towns – nothing in the features surrounding us bear tribute to the momentous changes that took place there some 13 years ago, but for Guy, and I dare say for the city of Akko, this non-descript street corner is a watershed of significance in the Kingdom of God. What happened on that street corner? We need to step back another 13 years or so to find out.

Guy Cohen is the congregational leader of Katzir Asher (Harvest of Asher) and a second generation resident of the city of Akko. Guy's great grandfather, a Rabbi from Casablanca immigrated to

Akko some sixty years ago. Guy's large extended family all settled in the city and growing up Guy was surrounded by aunts and uncles and cousins galore. Each successive generation was a little less religious than the preceding one but Guy was the eldest son of the eldest son and this priestly family (cohen is the Hebrew word for priest) expected him to set a tone and example for his generation. Guy was enrolled in an orthodox religious school and spent a lot of his formative years with his orthodox paternal grandparents. As his Bar Mitzvah approached Guy's heart was stirred to serve the God of his forefathers. Like many earnest young people, Guy was passionate and intense, "I was a radical, I became 'ultra-orthodox,' even more so than my grandparents. I wanted to know God strongly, to seek the Torah – to know what the Word of God says and how I can really follow..."



Guy reading from the congregation's Torah scroll

Guy's youthful enthusiasm troubled his father who wondered if his son was becoming too extreme. Guy was outspoken in his new faith and could see that his family did not meet the stringent standards of his teachers. It is one thing for a young man full of zeal to find fault with others outside his new religious stream it is quite another matter when the leaders of that same stream display the same weaknesses and failures they claim to be above. Guy's faith took a jolt when on his first Yom Kippur after being Bar Mitzva'd he witnessed the leaders of his synagogue conducting an auction before chanting the holiest of prayers. Guy explained, "My heart was broken, were they saying only people with money were welcome? What about the poor?"

Like many young, sincere believers who run up against the inconsistencies of their elders, Guy began to ask questions. He was

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particularly puzzled by Zechariah's description of the Messiah's entrance into Jerusalem, "**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.**" (Zechariah 9:9) Guy wondered why the Great King would come back to His people and city riding on a donkey. Surely, He would have a motorcade befitting His stature or maybe a red carpet laid out on the tarmac below His private jet. Guy asked his Rabbi how this could be so. A clever man, adept at nuanced rabbinical hermeneutics he solved the conundrum for his young talmid. The Hebrew word for donkey is kha-moor (המור), by switching around two letters (the mem, מ and the vav, ו) the word changes from khamoor to kho-mer (חומר), which is the Hebrew word for material; a broad generic sort of word that could stand for anything, yacht, limousine, jet, helicopter. Guy need not worry about the apparent oddity of the text's description because the Messiah can return riding on or in any material He so chooses. Guy was not satisfied with his Rabbi' interpretive gymnastics. His doubt began to grow.



Guy pointing to "the spot"

One evening Guy sat down along the old Akko harbor and called out to God. He could not make sense of the state of affairs in Israel. We had returned from our two millennia of exile just as the prophets had promised but where was the promised Messiah? Guy tried to live a pure life and be true to the traditions of his fathers but everywhere he looked he saw inconsistency and a righteousness that fell well short of what

he read in the Torah. Guy was 18 years old and he made a startling decision: "That evening I took the Kippah off my head and told myself, 'enough, no more orthodoxy.'" Gut was not abandoning his desire to serve the God of Israel but he would not do so according to the ways of the Rabbis. Guy earnestly longed for the Messiah. He pledged to seek him anywhere He may be found – with one exception: Like many sincere young Jews seeking truth beyond their own traditions it was anything but Christianity, anyone but Jesus.

Guy settled in to a more traditional Judaism, much like the way his father before him had chosen. Military service was followed by a job with the Israeli tax authority. It was lunch hour and he had stepped out of his office onto Akko's main thoroughfare. As is customary in Israel, a man approached Guy and offered him some religious material. Guy accepted the little book, expecting it to be a tract espousing rabbinic spirituality; As his eyes glanced at the title, he knew it was something different, something forbidden. He quickly turned around to give the book back but in the second or two between accepting the book and turning to hand it back the man had disappeared! Guy turned all around but the man was nowhere to be seen. Perplexed, Guy frantically ran down all the side streets to check if perhaps he had somehow magically slipped around the corner – he was not there either. In an instant the "man" had vanished.

Guy was alone, holding a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in his hand. Curiosity got the better of him and he opened it at random to read Matthew 5:29 "**If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.**" These were strong words that appealed to Guy's zeal for righteousness. He was intrigued. He thought to himself, Well, he was a Rabbi and he was Jewish after all... Perhaps it



This is where I ran after the man

would be OK to read, just for educational purposes." The clincher came when Guy read chapter 21:

"Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me... All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'" (Matthew 21:2-5)

Instantly, Guy understood the Zechariah passage that had so perplexed him as a young teenager; there was no need to explain away the text. The Messiah had indeed come to Jerusalem, riding on "**a colt, the foal of a donkey.**" As this revelation dawned on Guy he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and he had faith to believe what he had been seeking for since his Bar Mitzvah. What the prophets predicted was not an empty promise. The Messiah had come and now had come to this young man who longed for truth – Everything changed when Guy Cohen met Yeshua of Nazareth, the King of Israel. ✡

Guy Cohen is now the congregational leader of Katzir Asher. For more information please check out their website: www.harvestofasher.org

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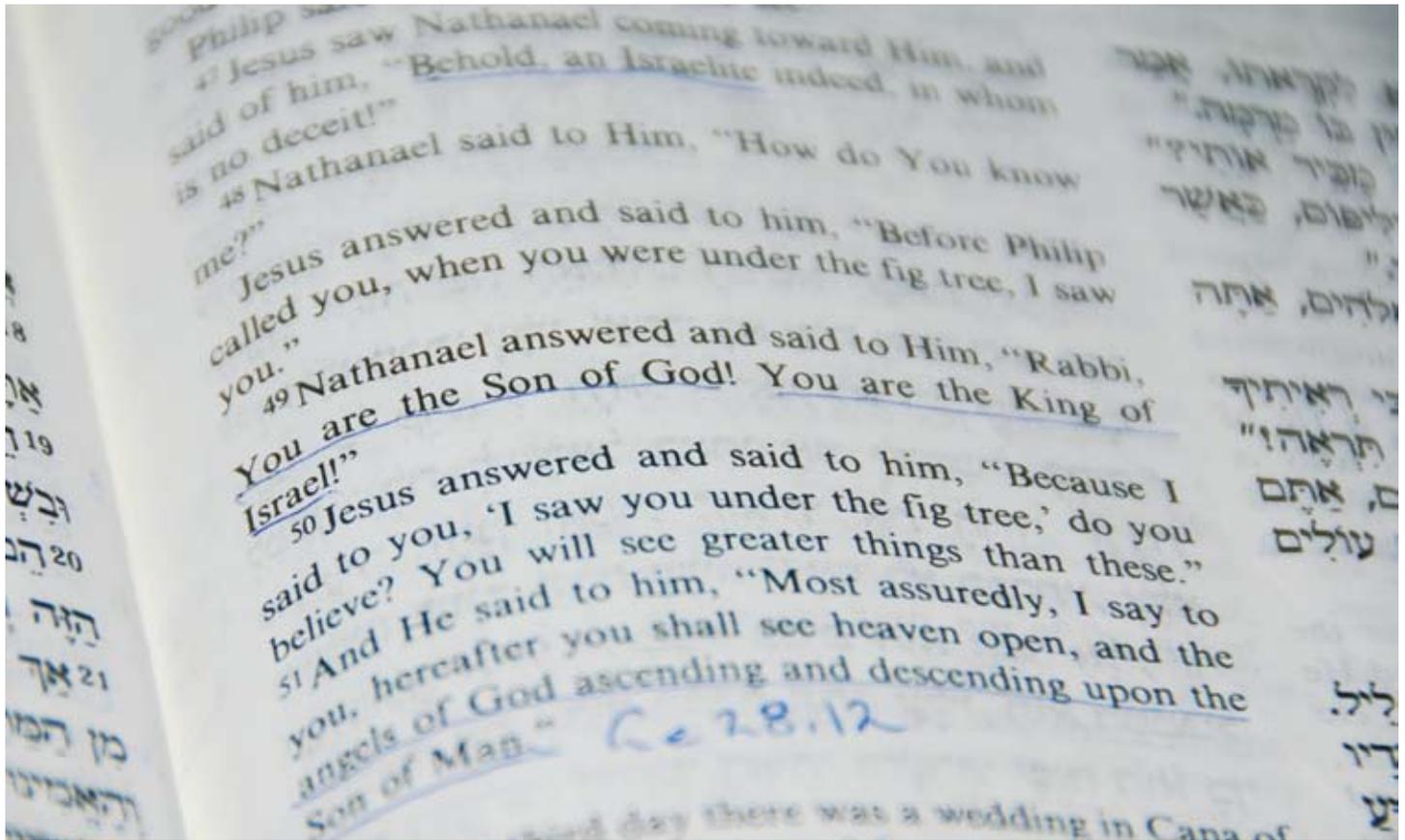
Tents of Mercy - to participate in today's historic exodus by assisting Israel's returning exiles.

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Jews Do Not Believe

By Moshe Morrison



Realize that is somewhat of a shocking statement to be found in a Messianic newsletter. Especially since it's true. What?! True?! Well, partially true. How can it be partially true? Because for some Jews, not believing in Yeshua is the fundamental basis of being a Jew. It is a chasm that cannot be bridged. You then might ask, what about those Jews that do believe? In that case, the very act of believing in Him immediately removes them from being Jewish in the perspective of those who do not believe. Therefore, the truthfulness of this statement, that Jews do not believe in Yeshua is safeguarded.

The basis of this is the development of Judaism and Christianity as competing religious systems. The two have been established in opposition to each other. In other words, if the followers of Yeshua claimed that evidence could be found in the Bible and in the history and traditions of our people that he was the Messiah, the Pharisaic/rabbinical Jewish response to that was minimizing, obscuring and outright expunging anything that would fall into the category. Conversely true was the attitude of the emerging (Gentile) church world, which sought to purge any Jewishness from the beliefs and practices of its followers, thus securely separating Yeshua from His Hebrew context. At the Council of Nicea in 325 CE, Constantine was injecting a poison in the bloodstream of believing communities for centuries to come when he said, "Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews."

The Pharisaic party is the Jewish group that emerged religiously victorious after the Jewish revolt in 70 CE. Therefore they were in a position to lay the foundations that would forever keep them

separate from any influence coming out of the Messianic community. Even things that might have at one time been part of their theology and doctrine were eliminated in order to preserve Israel's existence without Yeshua. However this process did not happen overnight. It took years. But today, the Jewish communities that are most strident in their beliefs do not accept this historical evolution. Instead they believe that their faith is one unbroken line from Mount Sinai to today, based primarily on what is known as the "oral Torah," that which is written in the Talmud and the commentaries of the rabbis.

Of course not everyone embraces this concept. There are many scholars who will honestly deal with our Jewish history. Jacob Neusner, author and editor of hundreds of scholarly Jewish books, writes in the introduction of E.R. Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (abridged edition): "At the period between the first and sixth centuries, the manifestations of the Jewish religion were varied and complex, far more varied, indeed, than the extant Talmudic literature would have led us to believe. Besides, the groups known from this literature, we have evidence that 'there were widespread groups of loyal Jews, who built synagogues and buried their dead in a manner strikingly different from that which the men represented by extant literature would have probably approved, and in a manner motivated by myths older than those held by these men.'" Messianic Jews would be included in those groups, loyal Jews following Yeshua. Neusner indicates that even a cautious examination of Goodenough's research clearly demonstrates that the Pharisaic party did not have total hegemony for at least several hundred years after the destruction of the

In Jesus!



Temple. Pharisaic/rabbinical Judaism today claims to be and to have, all that has been promised to Israel, to the exclusion of everyone else.

Gabriele Boccaccini (professor of 2nd Temple Judaism at the University of Michigan), in his book *Middle Judaism*, points out that there were many competing Judaisms in the first century, and it is incorrect to speak of Messianic Judaism (what is often called early Christianity) as anything other than a Judaism.

The forces of Pharisaic/rabbinical Judaism still seek to maintain a fence around Judaism by its foundation of an oral Torah and a falsified history. Anachronisms abound. I saw an illustrated Hasidic calendar, where one month's illustration featured Lot, and his two daughters fleeing from Sodom. The artist portrayed Lot dressed in a black caftan, a shtreimel on his head, and with a long beard and side locks. His daughters were also dressed in the plain, very modest garb of modern Orthodox women. Though just a picture, it reveals much about the underlying mentality.

This premeditated separation theology is supposed to keep Judaism pure and unadulterated by Gentile influences. Therefore, much is made of the need to hold strongly to what is perceived as being Jewish and in repudiating anything that would be seen as being different. I know a worship leader in a Messianic congregation, who was approached after the service by a young man who told him that the music "wasn't Jewish enough," whatever that was supposed to mean. Even though most of the songs were in Hebrew, taken from the Psalms, and sung and played by Jewish musicians, probably because the style was similar to a modern charismatic congregation, the young man said it was not Jewish. Yet in

his book, *The Jewish Mind*, Rafael Patai, this brilliant Jewish historian and sociologist tells us, "There can be little doubt that (the Baal Shem Tov – founder of Hasidic Judaism in the 18th century) was attracted to the ways of the peasants, their songs, their dances, their folk beliefs... Many Hasidic rabbis, following the example of the Baal Shem Tov, would later adopt the songs of Gentile folk and impute a sacred and secret meaning to their simple lyrics. With dancing the situation was much the same. We have seen the dancing was an essential expression of Gentile sectarian religious devotion... the idea that dancing was a sacred, God-pleasing act was virtually a new notion which was adopted by the Hasidim from their Gentile sectarian neighbors."

We see the same type of obscuring in relation to Isaac as a type of Yeshua. Shalom Spiegel, professor of medieval Hebrew literature at the Jewish theological seminary in New York, in his book, *The Last Trial*, explains that the concept of the atoning death and third Day resurrection of the Messiah was not an idea that was foreign to Jewish thought. He claims its ultimate origins came forth from paganism, but nevertheless admits that it was part of Jewish thought that the rabbis and sages felt they needed to minimize or eradicate altogether in the face of the challenge presented to them by the followers of Yeshua.

He writes, "The story of the akeda (binding of Isaac) and the vision of the servant of the Lord, smitten of God and afflicted, crushed by sins, not his own and by whose stripes others are healed. From these two channels the Christian idea of atonement drew its nourishment. Its founders and teachers drew quite consciously on the reservoir of Jewish thought and expression... it is certain that the very notion (the theme of third day resurrection) goes back essentially to times long before Christianity and before Judaism no less... and when Christianity placed at the center of its religion belief in the atoning power of the blood of its Messiah in Israel, a need was increasingly felt to blur more and more the remnants of similar ancient beliefs from pagan times, leaving behind therefore only faint traces in our sources."

Many Jewish writers point to common pagan concepts as being the source of many Messianic beliefs, seeking to delegitimize them. However, the presence of similar views in multiple societies only serves to reinforce their truthfulness. The biblical account of the flood is not watered down (pun intended) but affirmed by many ancient flood stories all around the world. Regardless of how distorted their details have become over the centuries and across the miles, the underlying truth is still true.

One last example is the plurality of the nature of God. While modern day Judaism stridently proclaims an absolute singular monotheism and repudiates the Messianic plurality as a recycle of pagan trinities, it was not always so. In his book, *Border Lines*, Daniel Boyarin, professor of Talmudic culture at the near eastern studies department of the University of California writes these amazing words, "Thus, one of the most characteristic differences between Judaism and Christianity as we know them is the belief in or denial of complexity within the Godhead, but in these early centuries there were non-Christian Jews who believed in God's Word (Logos), Wisdom, or even Son as a 'second God,' while there were believers in Jesus who insisted that the three persons of the Trinity were only names for different manifestations of one person. As I shall read the texts, Logos theology (and thence trinitarianism) emerges as a difference between Judaism and Christianity only through the activities of heresiologists on both sides of the divide."

So in conclusion, Jews can and do believe in Yeshua without becoming something else and without embracing ideas that are un-Jewish. An honest appraisal of our history allows for a much broader understanding of what it means to be a loyal son or daughter of Israel. The Pharisaic/rabbinical establishment will not determine that for us. Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah. ✧