

Yeshua (Jesus) portrayed in "The Chosen" TV series as a rabbi (teacher) reading the Jewish scriptures in a synagogue on the Sabbath

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CHRISTIANITY IS A JEWISH COVENANT

By **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

If you've ever read our background story, you know that the *Maoz Israel Report* has been documenting the story of Israel and the Body of believers in Israel as it has developed for almost 50 years.

Many of you, our readers, have been with us for decades following closely the ups and downs of our nation's struggles and growth. When we have been under attack, you have held our hands, prayed for our families and supported our people's causes. And while this is a time of war in Israel, we are looking out at you around the world and seeing that you are under attack as well, simply for standing for the ancient truths written in the Word of God.

These are times of significant shaking in the world. You may have experienced in your own life that when things shake, underlying issues surface that need to be addressed.

In light of this, I want to cover a difficult subject that is often full of misconceptions and misunderstandings. So, I ask for your patience as you read this article. You may well know some of these issues, or you may not have ever experienced someone who held some of the troubling ideologies I will address. However, rest assured, these issues are very real and have resulted in both the tarnishing of the name of Yeshua (Jesus) around the world—and the death of millions of

Jews. My uncle once told me, the easiest way for an enemy to take down a strong tower—is to attack the foundation. And the easiest way to weaken Christianity is to delegalize its roots and its God. That is why this issue is so important.

Fear Not! You're In!

Because some of the topics I discuss in this article may be initially hard to swallow, please ponder them for a bit and you may actually find them clarifying and ultimately liberating! I'd like to first establish that I believe **every person on earth, Jew or Gentile, has been invited to have direct access to the Creator of the Universe through His son Yeshua (Jesus). Forgiveness of sins, eternal life and a relationship with God are all gifts we now have the ability to enjoy when we embrace the New Covenant.**

Having said that, there are areas of mainstream Christian beliefs that have developed over extended seasons without consistent access to the Bible. Note that I am using the term Christianity broadly to include all people who claim the religion including Catholic, Protestant, Coptic, Greek, Russian, Oriental Orthodox and so on. As various streams of the church branched out from the original message

carried by Yeshua's Jewish followers, many Christians never learned how the New Covenant came to be accessible to them and have sadly veered into areas that attack the very Jewish tree that nourished them, so to speak.

Love the King, Hate His People

There are eras in history most of us would rather not think of. The depravity of the days of Noah. The sacrificing of children alive on the altar of Molech. The torture methods of Christian warriors in the Dark Ages. When we do study them, it is primarily so we can be warned not to repeat the same mistakes.

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In this historical depiction of the First Christian Crusades, Jews were forced to renounce their faith and kill each other.

There are, however, incredible times in history where knowledge and even entire languages have been lost because of circumstances like war, mass exiles and natural disasters. These treasured pieces of history sometimes hold secrets we spend years researching—hoping to rediscover the wisdom of that time. Like the secrets of the mummification process in ancient Egypt for instance—as well as how massive structures were built without using modern machinery.

What did they use that lasted thousands of years, while we have to build and rebuild buildings every few decades? What are mandrakes? Or the soothing balm of Gilead? And what were the musical

arrangements and melodies to which the Psalms were written? Just as this beautiful knowledge has been lost to time, one of the most significant aspects of modern Christian teaching has lost its story of origin.

The Gospel story did not begin in a manger. The Gospel began at creation when the Lamb of God was slain from the foundations of the earth (Rev 13:8). Perhaps, conceptually, the Bible could be divided into a trilogy. Let's say the first book would include creation until Joseph's family moves to Egypt. The second would begin with the Exodus until the last of the prophets and the third would be the New Testament (promised in the Old Testament).

If you are an avid reader of book series, you can imagine how many misconceptions you might have about characters and story plots if you began reading the storyline from book three! And yet, that may happen if Christians begin their theology with the New Testament. Perhaps this is the very reason why the Gospel of Matthew begins his record with the genealogy—so the reader will understand they are in the middle of an ancient story!

The first century Jewish believers knew the background story and that is why they had no problem explaining the New Covenant using the Old Testament scriptures alone. The rediscovering of this wisdom and knowledge that was prominent in the first century and before is what is being addressed in this article.

Bible Tells Me So

One of the more interesting things to watch on the news and social media these days are Christians posting scriptures to justify their opposition to Israel. It's not unusual to see Christians post out of context verses like Revelation's "the Synagogue of Satan," the Gospel of John's "You are of your father the devil," to describe Jews today. Ironically some Christians simultaneously recognize the "forever" status of blessings promised to Israel and simply identify themselves as the new and true "Israel."



Sentiments rejecting Jews and depicting Christians as superior are not just hateful, they are ignorant of what being Christian means.

It's fascinating, not because it's something new, but rather because it's the same approach early Christianity produced after a few centuries—later when Christians no longer had the ability to read the ancient languages of the Bible for themselves. Christian theology continued to deteriorate in the Middle Ages taught by a Christian clergy that was at best ignorant and at worst greedy, power-hungry and corrupt.

It also behooves us to acknowledge that no matter how many modern translations we have of the Bible today—and no matter how easy it is to access all those translations (or original texts) many people still prefer to get their doctrines solely from church hierarchy via sermons and catchy phrases.

Still, it is hard to ignore the deep and pervasive irony of having hundreds of millions of people claim the Bible as the light of their life while having such a deep disgust towards the people who wrote it and are recorded in it.

Three Misunderstood Points

It's a strange phenomenon that even today, nominal Christians can spend half a lifetime (if not all of it) before they ever stumble across the 'side note' that Jesus was a Jew. Jesus' given name by His mother Miriam was Yeshua. They lived in a region called Judea and only ever practiced a Jewish lifestyle. His followers were Jewish with Hebrew names. Only later as the Bible was translated to various languages, were their names adjusted losing their Jewish identity.

1

**WHO JEWS
ARE AND
WHAT THEY
REPRESENT
IN THE BIBLE**

2

**THE
CRUCIFIXION
AND
REJECTION
OF JESUS BY
JEWS**

3

**WHAT A NEW
COVENANT IS**

In Romans 15, Apostle Paul described the overwhelming gratitude Gentiles (who abandoned their pagan lifestyle and became known as Christians) had towards Jews who brought them the message of everlasting life.

Paul recognized the future potential of animosity by Christians and warned them not to become arrogant against Jews (Romans 11:18). It would take a few generations, but sadly the anti-Semitic ideology, prominent in the Roman Empire, would creep into Christianity. This disconnect from Christianity's Jewish roots would come from church leaders who did not understand they were always by grace grafted into a Jewish Covenant. There was never a separate New Covenant made with the Gentiles. Without Jews and their Covenant with God there is no Christianity.

Anti-Semitism was never supposed to be part of Christianity, and the years when it festered would become synonymous with the

darkest era of Christianity. During the time when the name of Jesus was used to control the weak, steal from the poor and destroy the very freedom He offered.

Thankfully, in recent decades many Christians delved into their Bibles and stood firmly alongside God's plan and His people Israel. That is why I believe when it comes to true Christians today, if there is any animosity against Jews, it comes from a misunderstanding of several core issues.

1

Who Are the Jews? And What Do They Represent in the Bible?

The short answer is, the Jewish people are a people group chosen to demonstrate God's intentions for mankind. How He speaks about them, treats them, punishes them, restores them and commits to them tells us everything we need to know about who God is and what He plans for all of us.

Here are a few questions raised when the topic of Jews arise.

Namely, what is a Jew? Are Jews a lineage or a religion?

It's a good question and the confusion comes from two primary and unique factors of the Jewish people —also historically called the Children of Israel, Hebrews or Israelites.

First, Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob ultimately became known as the nation of Israel. They have always been a small people group in comparison to the world's population. Though, the reality is that their continued existence is entirely dependent on the God of Israel rescuing them again and again. This is one reason people associate the existence of the Jewish people with religious belief. Without God, you don't have an Israel.

Second, on occasion there are times in the Bible when non-Jews would join the Jewish people—like Ruth and Rahab—and their descendants would be enfolded into the lineage of the people of Israel. Today, the more easily accessible practice of religious conversion to some form of Judaism through a rabbi has made it look from the outside like the identity of the people of Israel can be anyone who goes through a religious conversion process. However, these remain a minority and still don't nullify the reality of those born as natural descendants of the Children of Israel.

Having considered that, why do Jews matter at all in the grand scheme of things?

They matter because they are the demo. The prototype. (I Corinthians 10) The example set on display for the world to learn about the Creator of all mankind and know how to reach Him. They are the testament of God's commitment to His friend Abraham and His ability to do what He said He would do. How God keeps His promises to Israel is how He will keep them for you!

This is why in every significant turning point in God's story towards reuniting with mankind—He begins with Israel. It's Israel first, but not Israel only. From worship to the Covenants, to the Savior, to the Holy Spirit and ultimately your Bible—it always originates with Israel who would then shine that light to the nations.

2

The Crucifixion and Rejection of Jesus

Some Christians maintain that sure, God wanted to work through Israel, but now they are cursed as they not only rejected Yeshua but killed Him. I have to say as a child hearing this perspective confused me, “Why are they so mad at us? Even if we were responsible, they call the day of crucifixion ‘Good Friday’ and sing, ‘Oh Happy Day’ because it led to their freedom from sin! Shouldn't they be thanking us?”

We'll set aside the technical fact that while the Jews could have stoned Him according to their interpretation of the Law, the Romans are the ones who not only killed Him but brutally shredded His body before hanging him to die a slow and painful, public death.

The fact is, the prophets said he would be rejected. It was all part of the plan of redemption. Yet for centuries Christianity of the Dark Ages maintained Jews killed God and must therefore pay. After all, it was Jews who cried for His crucifixion saying, “His blood be on our heads and the heads of our children!” But Yeshua clearly said to His Father,

“Forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” Unless you'd like to maintain the Father rejected Yeshua's request, we must conclude that Yeshua and the Father issued forgiveness. As such, who are these humans claiming to represent God by murdering Jews?

Secondly, what other people group has ever been blamed down through centuries for what their forefathers did? And since when has an entire people group been blamed for the sins of their leaders?

Beyond that point, the Gospels repeatedly say the Jewish religious leaders who were jealous of Yeshua's success were “afraid of the people” *because the masses revered Yeshua*. Meaning that the little rioting crowd screaming “Crucify Him!” that day (and asking for the release of a known criminal instead) **was all a set up and did not represent the majority of Jewish people of the time**. It was precisely because Yeshua was so accepted by the Jewish people that the Jewish leaders wanted Him dead. **And it would be precisely because Jews accepted Him after the resurrection that the message of the Gospel would make it to the nations of the world!**

3

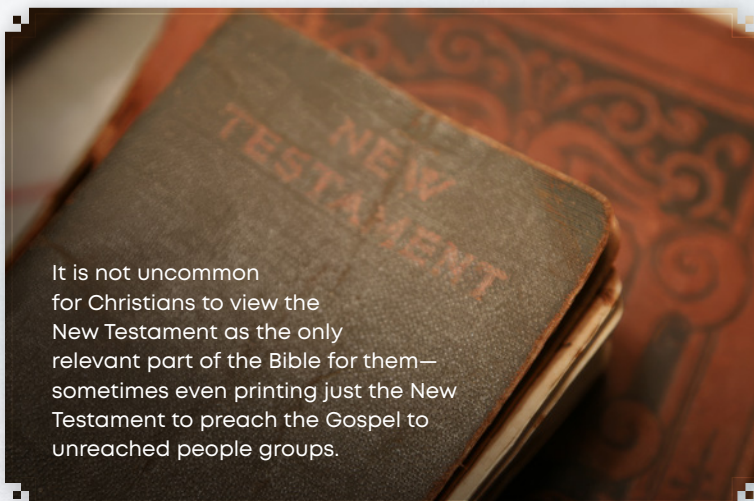
What the New Covenant Actually Is

I once heard a Bible school teacher begin his semester class by telling the students to turn to that page right before the Gospel of Matthew—the one that separates the Old Testament from the New.

“Tear it out,” he said. “The Bible is one continual story handed to mankind by God. If we think of the Old and New separately, we won't understand either.” His was a small step to combat the years of nuanced indoctrination against the Jewishness of the New Testament. As if the Old Testament written by Jews was full of death, destruction and the burden of the Law, while the New Testament was written by Gentiles who knew how to bring the best out of God's character. While in fact, all but one or two (Luke and possibly Job) of the 66 books of the Bible were written by Jews.

Among other things, the New Covenant was promised to Israel hundreds of years before Yeshua was born. It was

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It is not uncommon for Christians to view the New Testament as the only relevant part of the Bible for them—sometimes even printing just the New Testament to preach the Gospel to unreached people groups.

called the New Covenant because Israel already had the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. Even the title “New Covenant” only makes sense in context of previously established Covenants. Jews who believed in the New covenant never converted from being Jewish—just as believing in the Mosaic covenant had nothing to do with

abandoning their Jewish heritage. They already believed in the One True God.

The term Christian was given to those among the nations who abandoned their pagan polytheistic ways and identified them as worshippers of this one God.

Perhaps one of the biggest (albeit well meaning) mistakes Christians make when trying to reach Israel with the Gospel is attempting to “convert” them to Christianity. This is due to fundamental misunderstanding of what Yeshua is to a Jew. The Jewish origin of the Gospel was such a core value that early teachings of salvation to Gentiles maintained that one must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law to accept the Jewish Messiah. (Acts 15)

It took a serious meet between the

Apostles and leaders that would become known as the Jerusalem Council to prayerfully consider how one could enjoy this New Covenant and not be required to become

Jewish in the process. It was testimonies like Peter’s encounter with Cornelius’ household receiving the Holy Spirit “just as they were” and the quoting of the ancient prophecy that declared there would be “Gentiles who bear My name” (Amos 9:11-12) that convinced the Jewish believing leaders that the nations could enjoy the Jewish covenant.

As a Jewish believer, this is the covenant we believe in. As a Christian, this is the covenant you believe in - this is the covenant you are grafted into. Without Israel there is no Covenant.

A New Testament

Being a born-again Christian is not just believing the right doctrine—it is a relationship. It involves your love for God, your desire to be near Him. To know His heart and do His will.

Most of our understanding of who God is, comes from texts written and collected over several thousand years into a book we know as the Bible. This book tells the story of God’s journey with mankind. Early in the story, it tells of a special friendship God had with a man named Abraham. The friendship is so special God spends the rest of the book highlighting the bumpy but passionate and devoted relationship God has with that man’s descendants.

These descendants seem to supernaturally excel in their giftings. Whether they use these giftings for good or bad is a different story. In between the dramatic stories of pain and betrayal, God reiterates over and over His devotion and commitment to bringing that relationship to a beautiful place—for Israel and for the nations. The culmination of this accomplishment will be a testimony to God’s glory and greatness.

When Christians will say, “Our faith is a Jewish Covenant made by the God of Israel. He has not changed His word to Israel, but has opened the gates wide for us to join the story of His redemption. He is an able Promise Keeper—first to the Jewish people, and then to the whole world!”

I am well aware that many of you know about what I have written. My prayer, then, is as more Christians begin to openly embrace their faith as a Jewish Covenant and not a separate religion, that Jews themselves will finally hear and understand that the New Covenant is their Covenant given to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And that ultimately it will allow Jews to also embrace what has always been rightfully theirs. ■

THE NEW COVENANT

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

JEREMIAH 31:31-34



Shalom from Jerusalem!

“Why are you guys here together and how do you all get along so well?” is the most common question we get when hotel staff see Arab and Jewish believers together in a conference.

The world-famous conflict between Jews and Arabs is **not exactly what meets the eye**. On one hand, the political and military conflict is evident to all, but underlying—and **fueling it all** is the spiritual clash between the **God of Israel and the God of Islam**.

Though it is true most Arabs are Muslims, there are Christian Arabs. **There is an even smaller group of born-again Arabs who love the God of Israel and recognize the promises of the Jewish people**. Born-again Arabs are probably the smallest religious minority in the Arabic world and are sadly shunned and **even persecuted by nominal (or traditional) Christian Arabs** who tend to side with Islamic ideology.

That makes us as Jewish believers their most natural allies. We, Jewish and Arab born-again believers are both minorities among our people, but united our testimony is substantial. **And what better time to shine this light than in the middle of this miserable war?**

That is why Maoz is so excited about this **summer’s Dor Haba (Next Generation) week-long Arab and Jewish conference**. Youth from all over the country gather to learn about worship and the various arts in Hebrew, English and Arabic, through teaching and example!

This summer **100 Jewish and 100 Arab youth** (and an additional 100 adult staff and volunteers!) will spend a week together learning media skills, musical instruments, song-writing, recording videos, times of intercession and ultimately being a shining light for Yeshua to all those around them.

The conference is heavily subsidized by partners like you so that **no family will be hindered from sending their children because of cost issues**. The cost per child is **\$400 to cover food, lodging—and security**, of course.

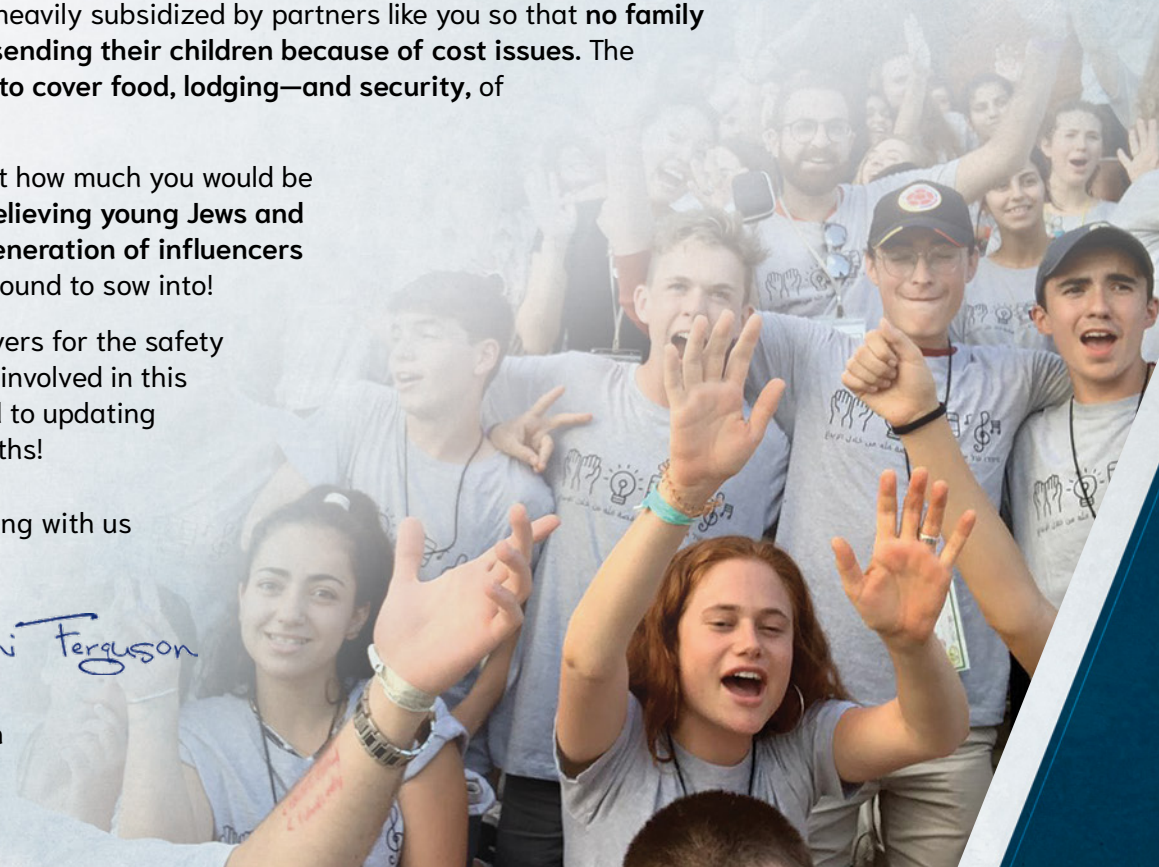
Think for a moment how much you would be willing to give to **see believing young Jews and Arabs lead the next generation of influencers in Israel?** This is the ground to sow into!

We covet your prayers for the safety and health of all youth involved in this event and look forward to updating you in the coming months!

Thank you for partnering with us and Israel,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi & Shani Ferguson



THE Land OF Israel

WITNESSES

IT FOR YOURSELF



The Bible speaks of significant times and seasons.
And that those who watch and listen would recognize them. This is one of those
chance in a lifetime moments.

Come stand with Israel. Come experience her history, her struggle—**and her hope!**

SEPTEMBER 4-10, 2024

For more information or to make a reservation,
scan the QR code,
visit our tour website or contact Rachel Melton at:
rachel@maozisrael.org



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