

YOU TURN!



**The Jewish Response to
a Christian Challenge**

Rabbi Michael Skobac



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PREFACE

If you are Jewish, you're a target. Millions of evangelical Christians in North America are passionately committed to converting us to their faith. They fund over 1,000 different missionary organizations to spearhead this effort. These include groups like Jews for Jesus and Chosen People Ministries, as well as hundreds of Messianic congregations reaching out to Jews of all stripes. Many of these organizations encourage and train ordinary Christians to share their faith with Jewish friends, neighbours, and business associates.

When they want to begin a discussion with us, what will they speak about? They realize, of course, that it will have to be something that is relevant to us and that we are concerned about.

While many Jewish people don't spend much time thinking about Biblical issues like the Messiah, we are all sensitive to our failures and shortcomings in life. There just may be something to all those jokes about Jewish guilt. We let others down, disappoint them, and sometimes hurt them. Often, this is most true for those closest to us. And we certainly don't always live up to God's expectations. We may not usually speak using terms like sinning, but all this word really means is falling short of how we should be living. We know what we need to do for our friends to forgive us, but what about our relationship with the Almighty?

THE CHALLENGE

One of the cornerstones of Christian theology is that the only way to atone for our sins is through the offering of a sacrifice whose blood is shed in our place.¹ The New Testament states this directly in Hebrews 9:22, "... without the shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness)."

Is this idea consistent with the teachings of the Tanach (Hebrew scriptures), or do the Jewish and Christian bibles diverge on this issue?²

Christians generally insist that the absolute need for a vicarious blood sacrifice is rooted in the Torah, citing as proof Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”

It is safe to say that when missionaries seek to convert Jewish people, one of their most common approaches is to speak about moral and spiritual failure and insist that in the absence of the Temple sacrifices in Jerusalem, we have no means of achieving forgiveness for our mistakes and transgressions.

The following is a typical missionary presentation using this appeal:

Since you no longer observe the sacrificial system commanded by God and declared to you by Moses, where, in the scripture, do you find justification for so doing? If it was necessary for Israel to make a blood atonement for sin in the Mosaic dispensation, and even up to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, why have you ceased to bring your offerings on God’s altar? Is it because you no longer believe you need a sin offering?

You have no blood atonement at all, and “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” for “it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11). Therefore, your sins are unatoned for and your soul stands condemned before a Holy God.

From the tract *Israel, Think!* by B. Johnson

How does Judaism respond to these claims? If we no longer have Temple sacrifices, how can we be forgiven for our sins? These are actually very legitimate questions, and this booklet was written to bring some clarity to this vital topic.

A CLOSER LOOK AT LEVITICUS 17:11

You might remember that in junior high school, we were sometimes assigned to read a passage and identify its central theme. Let's look at Leviticus 17:11 in context and think about what its theme is:

And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you, who consumes any blood, I will set My face against that person who consumes blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. Therefore, I say to the children of Israel, "No one among you shall consume blood, nor shall any stranger who sojourns among you consume blood." Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For the life of every creature — its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel, "You shall not consume the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever consumes it will be cut off." (Leviticus 17:10–14)

What should immediately be obvious is that the topic of this passage is *not* how to atone for our sins; rather it discusses the prohibition against consuming blood! This prohibition is directly stated in verse 10 and the next verse goes on to explain the reason for the prohibition. Blood contains the vital life force of the animal — "the life of the flesh is in the blood."³ Consequently, when we bring an animal sacrifice, its blood serves as the atoning agent and not some other part of its body — "it's the blood that makes atonement for the soul."

Because blood was designated only for the holy purpose of being this atoning agent when applied to the altar, it could not be used in any other way. It could never be consumed and we had to cover it with earth (Leviticus 17:13 and Deuteronomy 12:16, 23-24). Since Leviticus 17 isn't coming to inform us about the principles of atonement, we will have to look elsewhere for the Bible's essential teaching on how to repair our relationship with God if we transgress His laws.

Before proceeding, let's consider another point about what is, and what is not being said in Leviticus 17:11. The verse does say that since blood symbolizes life and contains the life force of the animal, God has given it to us as a means of atoning for our sins. But does the verse clearly teach that it is the *only* means God has provided to make atonement? As with any other Biblical study, we will have to examine this question in light of the Bible as a whole. But for now, we should note that our verse merely says that blood can serve as a way to atone; by no means are we told it is the only method of obtaining atonement.⁴

In the Torah, there are multiple paths to atonement. For example, incense served to atone for the people in Numbers 17:12–13 (16:46–47 in a Christian version), and giving money is described in Exodus 30:15–16 and Numbers 31:50 as “making atonement for your souls” — the same expression found in Leviticus 17:11. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezar was told that he could atone for his sins by showing mercy to the poor in Daniel 4:24 (4:27 in a Christian Bible), and we see similar ideas in Proverbs 10:2 and 21:3.

We should also point out that many Christians erroneously assume that the entire sacrificial system of the Torah was ordained as a vehicle to atone for sin. In point of fact, there were many different kinds of sacrifices and not all were for atonement. For example, the Peace offering found in Leviticus, chapter 3 was a voluntary sacrifice brought to express one's love and closeness

to the Almighty. The Thanksgiving offering was a special kind of Peace offering brought to express gratitude to God (Leviticus 7:11–15). In addition, there were numerous sacrifices for special occasions, such as giving birth, purification from ritual impurity, and national holidays.

DOES THE BLOOD IMPERATIVE MAKE SENSE?

The Christian insistence that atonement is only possible through blood sacrifice runs into trouble when the Torah discusses the question of those who can't afford to purchase an animal. In certain situations, the Torah allowed a poor person to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons if he couldn't afford a lamb (Leviticus 5:7). However, what if he was so destitute, he couldn't afford even these small birds?

But if his means are insufficient for two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then for his offering for that which he has sinned, he shall bring **the tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering**; he shall not put oil on it or place incense on it, for it is a sin offering. (Leviticus 5:11)

Since flour could be used for a sin offering, it is clear that blood was not absolutely necessary for atonement (see Appendix 1).

Another example will drive home the point. The proposition that only blood sacrifices could expiate sin creates a dilemma. Could it be that God would set up a system of atonement that wouldn't be available to all people at all times? While the Temple stood, sacrifices did, under certain circumstances, serve as part of the atonement process. But what would be the fate of Jewish people who don't have access to the Temple?⁵ What were the Jewish people supposed to do after 423 BCE when the first Temple was destroyed⁶ and we were exiled to Babylon? Or, how did we

atone for our sins after the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70 CE?

Christians erroneously claim that after the destruction of the second Temple, Rabbinic Judaism came up with novel, non-Biblical measures to deal with the atonement issue since sacrifices could no longer be brought. They assert that Jesus's crucifixion in the year 30 CE served as a special sacrifice replacing the entire sacrificial system of the Temple.⁷ Therefore, they explain, after the destruction of the second Temple, we can be forgiven for our sins through faith in Jesus's sacrificial death. However, those making this claim fail to explain how Jews living in Babylon and Persia after the destruction of the first Temple hundreds of years earlier could be forgiven for their sins. What did they do without the ability to sacrifice in the Temple?

It wasn't Talmudic innovation at all that provided a path for those seeking atonement after the second Temple was destroyed. The Bible itself had already anticipated the possibility of the cessation of sacrifices.⁸ When King Solomon finally laid the finishing touches on the first Holy Temple in Jerusalem, he inaugurated it with a moving dedication speech (I Kings 8; II Chronicles 6). In this lengthy speech of almost fifty verses, you will notice that Solomon doesn't speak about sacrifices at all! This omission would be strange if the most crucial part of the Temple were the sacrifices. Actually, the central focus of the Temple was the Holy Ark containing the Torah. The Temple was first and foremost symbolic of God's presence and revelation to the Jewish people (Exodus 25:8, I Kings 8:13).⁹

Toward the end of his speech, Solomon deals with the possibility of the Jewish people being without access to the Temple in the eventuality that they are exiled from the land of Israel.

When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy,

far or near; and they take to heart in the land where they were taken captive and **repent, and pray to You** in the land of those who took them captive, saying, “We have sinned and done wrong and have been wicked.” **If they return to You** with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and **pray to You** toward their land, which You have given to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your Name; then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Your dwelling place, and maintain their cause, **and forgive Your people who have sinned against You and all their transgressions that they have transgressed against You.**

(I Kings 8:46–50)

This seminal passage puts the spotlight on the Christian distortion of Leviticus 17:11. The Bible is clearly teaching that sacrifices weren’t absolutely necessary in order to atone for sins. Prayer and repentance are cited here as effective means for securing forgiveness. Certainly, when the Temple stood, a sacrifice was brought as part of the atonement process for unintentional sins.¹⁰ Leviticus 17:11 teaches that when we offer such an animal on the altar, its blood that contains the life force of the animal is the critical part of the sacrificial ritual. This is the only permissible use of blood and it may never be consumed.

To summarize, Leviticus 17:11 does not say that only blood sacrifices can atone for sin, and I Kings 8 informs us that there are other means of atonement.

Before moving on, we should point out that the Christian Bible went to great lengths to demonstrate that the atoning death of Jesus was predicated upon the Tanach.¹¹ In the New Testament book of Hebrews, a verse from the Psalms is cited as evidence that the sacrifice of Jesus was part of God’s original plan for the world:

Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, **but a body You have prepared for me.** (Hebrews 10:5, referencing Psalm 40:7)

Verse ten of this chapter in Hebrews informs us that the body spoken of is the body of Jesus. However, the Christian Bible took great liberties, distorting the verse quoted from the book of Psalms, which never mentions a body being prepared. What follows is the actual verse from Psalm 40:

Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired, **but my ears You have opened;** burnt offerings and sin offerings You have not required.

The Christian claim of fidelity to the Biblical text is exposed here as a very hollow one.

WHY JESUS COULD NOT HAVE BEEN A SACRIFICE

Christian dogma asserts that the crucifixion of Jesus at Calvary served as the final atoning sacrifice for sin. Missionaries insist that this is not a Christian innovation but reflects the requirement of the Jewish Bible. They point to Leviticus 17:11 as the anchor in the Torah for the alleged necessity for blood sacrifices to atone for sin. However, if this text is examined carefully, it will be obvious that Jesus's death could never serve as an atoning sacrifice. This passage delineates how sacrifices are to be brought:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you **upon the altar** to make atonement for your soul, for it is the blood that atones for the soul. (Leviticus 17:11)

Surely, the Torah doesn't accept any shed blood as a sacrifice. Jesus's crucifixion may qualify as a sacrifice according to the

New Testament, but since his blood was not offered on the Temple altar, it is not in line with what the Torah mandates.

One of the most serious contraventions of the Torah that we find with the proposition that Jesus was a sacrifice is scripture's strident opposition to human sacrifice. Before entering the land of Israel, Moses warned the people against following the repulsive spiritual practices of the nations they would encounter there. "You shall not do so to the Lord your God, for everything that is an abomination of the Lord, that He hates, they have done to their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire for their gods." (Deuteronomy 12:31)¹²

There are actually several other factors that would render the crucifixion of Jesus an unacceptable sacrifice. According to the Biblical guidelines in Leviticus, all sacrifices had to be offered by a Priest who descends from Aaron. This was most certainly not the case with the death of Jesus, who was crucified by Roman soldiers. As well, sacrifices brought to atone for sin had to be burned on the Temple altar (Leviticus chapter 4).

Furthermore, Biblical law prohibited any sacrifice that was blemished or maimed (Leviticus 22:17–21, Deuteronomy 17:1). However, prior to his crucifixion, Jesus was beaten and scourged (Matthew 27:26, Mark 15:15–19), which would render him unfit to be a sacrifice. Additionally, Jesus was circumcised in the flesh (Luke 2:21), which according to Philippians 3:2 is considered a form of mutilation.

YOU CAN'T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS

Christians usually react to this line of reasoning by protesting that it's absurd to be so literal, and that Jesus's death was more of a symbolic or spiritual sacrifice. This would be fine if the Bible provided for such ethereal offerings,

but such is not the case. The New Testament, though, insists that Jesus was a real sacrifice, literally fulfilling the Biblical requirements.

An example is the Gospel of John's account of Jesus's crucifixion. In his narrative (19:33–36), the author of John relates that there was a request to break the legs of Jesus and two others who had been crucified on a Friday in order to hasten their deaths so they could be buried before the Sabbath.

But coming to Jesus, when they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs... For these things were done in order that the Scripture should be fulfilled: not a bone of it shall be broken.

The Gospel of John (1:29) likens Jesus to the Passover lamb. According to Torah law, this sacrifice was not supposed to have any of its bones broken (Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12). Since the author of John insists that Jesus was a literal sacrifice to the extent that the Biblical rules of the Passover had to be fulfilled by him, we can't dismiss the problems cited above as legalistic nitpicking.

One wonders why the New Testament chose to type Jesus as a Paschal lamb. We know from Exodus 12 that the annual Passover sacrifice did not serve to atone for sin; it commemorated the exodus from Egypt.

When the lamb was slaughtered in Egypt and its blood smeared on the doorposts, it did not serve to atone for the sins of anyone. It was a sign for the angel of death to pass over Jewish homes during the plague of the first-born. The only people in danger were first-born males. The blood wasn't relevant to other people in the family and didn't serve to atone for the first-born.

Another problem with using the Passover lamb as an archetype for Jesus's sacrifice is that the Torah barred uncircumcised males from participating in the Passover ritual (Exodus 12:48).

However, historical Christianity, based upon the teachings of the Apostle Paul, did not advocate circumcision and actually derided the practice (Galatians 5:1–12).

A more fitting prototype for Jesus would have been the Yom Kippur sacrifice, which atoned for the sins of all the people. It is noteworthy that according to Leviticus 16:10 and 21–22, the animal that effectuated the atonement for the sins of the nation was not killed - but sent live out into the desert. Again, according to the Biblical text, the shedding of blood is not a sine qua non for atonement.¹³

VICARIOUS ATONEMENT: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Is the idea that an innocent person can be killed instead of those who are guilty consistent with what the Bible teaches? We had a potential occurrence of this in the book of Exodus. After the sin of the Golden Calf, God expressed His intention to destroy the Jewish people. Moses interceded and offered to die in their place. In response, God says, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book!” (Exodus 32:32–33) Throughout the Bible, God says that one person cannot die for the sins of another:

Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin. (Deuteronomy 24:16, II Kings 14:6)¹⁴

But everyone will die for his own sin; each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. (Jeremiah 31:30)

The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the

righteous will be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon him. (Ezekiel 18:20)

No man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him. (Psalms 49:8)

So you shall not pollute the land in which you are, for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who has shed it! (Numbers 35:33)

The Torah repeatedly insists that each person is responsible for his or her own sins.¹⁵ Although the New Testament book of Romans says that Jesus came to justify the ungodly (4:5), the Jewish bible teaches that “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them are an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 17:15).

THE FUTURE THIRD TEMPLE

If Jesus came as the final sacrifice¹⁶ to atone for the sins of the world (Hebrews 10:10, 18), why do the Hebrew Scriptures predict that the Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the sacrificial services resumed? This restoration is one of the key developments that will take place with the coming of the Messiah:

My servant David will be king over them and there will be one shepherd for all of them; they will follow My ordinances and keep My decrees and fulfill them. They will dwell on the land that I gave My servant Jacob, where your fathers dwelled, they and their children and their children’s children will dwell on it forever; and My servant David will be a leader for them forever. I will seal a covenant of peace with them; it will be an eternal covenant with them; and I will emplace them and increase them, **and I will set My sanctuary among them forever.**

My dwelling place will be among them; I will be their God and they will be My people. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary will be among them forever. (Ezekiel 37:24–28)¹⁷

Lest someone suggest that the Temple will be rebuilt in the Messianic age but sacrifices will not be resumed, the Bible unambiguously dispels this numerous times:

Even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar, for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. (Isaiah 56:7)

All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth will minister to you; they will go up with acceptance on My altar, and I shall glorify My glorious house. (Isaiah 60:7)

And it shall be the prince's responsibility to provide the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the libations... he shall prepare the sin offering, the meal offering, the burnt offering and the peace offering to make atonement for the house of Israel. (Ezekiel 45:17)¹⁸

From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones will bring My offerings. (Zephaniah 3:10)

And every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. (Zechariah 14:21)

And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years. (Malachi 3:3–4)¹⁹

GOD'S ABILITIES

The Christian claim that God can only forgive us if blood is shed on our behalf seriously undercuts His absolute omnipotence. It is problematic to say that God's ability to forgive us is dependent on anything. One of the most basic teachings in the Bible is that since God is merciful and loving, He sometimes forgives us simply because of His infinite mercy.

We see an example of this in Micah 7:18–19: “Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and overlooks transgression for the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever because He desires kindness. He will again have compassion upon us; He will suppress our iniquities. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” There are many other sources supporting this idea:

For You, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon You. (Psalm 86:5)

...I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and ready to relent from punishing. (Jonah 4:2)²⁰

In Psalm 103:6–17 we see that God's relating to us with generous mercy and kindness is tied to His recognition of our frail spiritual natures. This is related, as well, in Psalm 78:37–39:

Their heart was not steadfast toward Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; often He restrained His anger and did not stir up all of His wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a fleeting breath not returning.

Even when we don't seek God appropriately, He has the ability to reach out to us with love and forgive us for His own sake and agenda.²¹

You have not brought Me the sheep of your burnt offerings... or the fat of your sacrifices, but you have burdened Me with your sins. ...Nevertheless, I, I am He who will wipe out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:23–25)

But they and our ancestors acted presumptuously and stiffened their necks and did not obey Your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders You performed among them, but they stiffened their necks and determined to return their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and You did not forsake them. (Nehemiah 9:16–17)

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF ATONEMENT

One of the most telling indications that Christianity is off base in its insistence on the absolute centrality of blood sacrifice is that none of the Biblical prophets speaks about it. There isn't one instance in the prophetic books where the Jewish people are told that in order to get right with God they need to make sure to bring sacrifices.²² If that's the case, what is the fundamental teaching of the Tanach on the issue of atonement? What theme is reiterated time and again by the holy prophets in the Jewish Bible?

There is actually a passage in the Bible where the question of how to atone is directly raised. We saw that the foundational Christian source for the need to have blood (Leviticus 17:11) is from a passage that contextually isn't dealing with the issue of atonement. However, in the Hebrew Bible, the pressing question of what we need to do in order to relieve ourselves of the burden of our sins is squarely and poignantly raised:

Now you, Son of Man, say to the House of Israel, “Thus you have spoken, saying, ‘Since our sins and our iniquities are upon us and we are wasting away because of them, how can we live?’” (Ezekiel 33:10)

This is the critical question before us — what is the essential response to sin? God could have given the Christian answer and stress the need to have our sins covered by sacrificial blood. But this is not the response God gives here:

Say to them, “As I live — the word of the Lord God — I do not desire the death of the wicked one, but rather that the wicked one returns from his way that he may live. Repent; repent from your evil ways! Why should you die, O House of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11)

There is no ambiguity about the context here. Ezekiel has zeroed in on the issue of how to atone for our sins, and God tells us that the way we do this is through repentance, turning away from our sins and returning to Him. (In the Bible, this is called *teshuvah*, meaning turning or returning.) This is the essential response and antidote to sin that our Bible repeatedly stresses.²³

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:7)

Perhaps the House of Judah will hear of all the evil that I intend to do to them, so that they will repent, each man from his evil way, and then I can forgive their sin and transgression. (Jeremiah 36:3)

And if My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (II Chronicles 7:14)

But if the wicked man turns from all his sins, which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practises justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions, which he has committed, will not be remembered against him; because of the righteousness that he has practised he shall live... When a wicked man turns away from his wickedness, which he has committed, and practises justice and righteousness, he will save his life... Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. (Ezekiel 18:21–22, 27, 30)

If the wicked person restores the pledge, gives back what they have taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity — they shall surely live, they shall not die. None of the sins that they have committed will be remembered against them; they have done what is lawful and right and they shall surely live. (Ezekiel 33:15–16)

If you return to God you will be restored, if you remove unrighteousness far from your tent. (Job 22:23)

Turn from evil and do good so you will abide forever.
(Psalm 37:27)²⁴

Since repentance and not blood is the essential Biblical path to atonement, we now understand how in I Kings 8, Solomon explained that even if the Jewish people won't have access to the Temple, they will still have access to God (Ezekiel 11:16). They can turn directly to Him in prayer and repentance.

This foundational teaching about the primacy of repentance is the focus of the book of Jonah. God sends Jonah to warn the evil city of Nineveh of His coming judgement. Jonah doesn't come into the city and tell the people that unless they begin offering sacrifices they are doomed; he says only that the city will be overturned.²⁵ Their response to his warnings is to repent. They fast, pray, and turn from their evil. What is God's response?

When God saw their deeds that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity that He had declared He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.
(Jonah 3:10)

The most potent way of expressing regret for past actions and a desire to turn back to God is through confession and prayer. God is able to penetrate the heart of the penitent to know if he or she is sincere. We are always able to approach God directly in prayer (Psalm 145:18), and God assures us that sincere prayer as an expression of repentance can achieve forgiveness for our sins.

Hosea was a prophet to the ten northern tribes of the kingdom of Israel during the civil war between them and the two tribes of the southern kingdom of Judah. Because of the strife, the tribes up north couldn't get to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. Did this leave them with no way of atoning for their sins? Hosea taught them that prayer can take the place of Temple sacrifices and he urged them to:

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, and let our lips substitute for bulls." (Hosea 14:2-3)

King David had already expressed this concept when he sang, "Let my prayer be counted as incense offering before You, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice." (Psalm 141:2)

This is why Solomon, in his dedication of the first Temple, directed future generations who may be in exile and without access to the Temple to pray for God's forgiveness and restoration. (I Kings 8:46-52 and II Chronicles 6:36-40)

The scriptures continuously emphasize the vital importance of contrite prayer in the repentance process:

Deliver me from blood-guilt, O Lord, the God of my salvation.
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord,

open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise.
For You do not delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of
God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. These,
O God, You will not despise. (Psalms 51:16-19; verses 14-17 in
a Christian bible)

I will praise the name of God with a song and will magnify Him
with thanksgiving. This shall please the Lord better than an ox
or bullock that has horns and hoofs. (Psalm 69:31-32)

For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in
loving kindness to all who call upon You. Give ear, O Lord, to
my prayer, and give heed to the voice of my supplications. In
the day of my trouble I call upon You, for You will answer me.
(Psalm 86:5-7)

Are Christian missionaries consistent with the Jewish Bible when
they claim that atonement is only possible with a blood sacrifice?
Did the rabbis just make up the idea that we can restore our
relationship with God through prayer and repentance? The
Biblical record here speaks plainly and clearly for all to see.

THE PROPHETIC PROTEST

The tethering of atonement primarily to blood sacrifice
is a serious error that had already been repudiated by
the prophets of Israel centuries prior to the canonization
of the Christian scriptures. Unfortunately, Christianity fully
embraced this guiding principle and enshrined it at the centre of
its theology.

Sacrifices served as an important catalyst to spur people
toward full contrition and repentance. The sacrifices were also a
powerful external symbol and expression of the internal changes
that had taken place within the penitent.²⁶ But the Bible openly
teaches that sacrifices, in and of themselves, were not a vehicle

that automatically secured forgiveness. This could only be achieved by breaking with past errors, charting a new course for the future and sincerely turning back to God in repentance.

It is important to understand that it wasn't only that sacrifices were not sufficient and effective by themselves to atone for sin; God considered it an affront when people related to Him in this way. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." (Proverbs 15:8 and 21:27)²⁷

The Biblical prophets were relentless in their denunciation of those who made the disastrous assumption that God's primary interest was in sacrifices as the way to deal with their sinful behaviour:

"Why do I need your numerous sacrifices?" says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats... Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil; learn to do good, seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you are willing and obey, you will eat the goodness of the land." (Isaiah 1:11–19)

Has the Lord as great a delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken more than the fat of rams. (I Samuel 15:22)

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. (Proverbs 21:3)

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6)

Even though you offer Me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:22–24)

With what shall I come to the Lord and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my first-born for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:6–8)

This passage from the prophet Micah summarizes the theme of our discussion. How are we to approach God? What exactly is needed to atone for the sins of our soul? It is important to pay attention to what Micah didn't say. Christian theology would have liked him to say: What does the Lord require of you but to offer blood sacrifices and believe in the Messiah who will come to die for your sins. Micah doesn't say this. Rather, he teaches us that ultimately, all God requires is that we practise justice and kindness and live humbly with Him. This is the bottom line.²⁸

AFTERWORD: NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

It is worth pondering what led Christianity into the Biblical quagmire of insisting that Jesus died for our sins and that without the shedding of innocent blood atonement isn't possible.

Jesus did come to see himself as the Messiah in the first century and attracted a small group of followers. Their understanding

of what the Messiah was supposed to be was radically different from the way Christianity later redefined the concept.

The Messiah portrayed by the Jewish Bible will be a wise and righteous descendant of King David who will rule as the King of Israel when the world has reached a utopian zenith. We're told that during his reign the Jewish people will undergo a spiritual revival and be reunited and gathered to the land of Israel, our Temple will be rebuilt, and we will live in peace and serve as a spiritual beacon to the world. This will lead to a universal embrace of God and His ways, and world peace will prevail.²⁹

Jesus's main message was that "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17, 10:7; Luke 10:9, 11). The ultimate reign of God over the entire world is one of the central features of the Jewish Messianic vision.³⁰ It is clear that Jesus's followers expected him to redeem the Jewish nation from the Roman occupation and bring about the Kingdom of God.³¹ They were most certainly not expecting him to be killed without accomplishing these things.³²

The gruesome crucifixion of Jesus came as a huge shock and crushing disappointment to his followers. Rumours began to circulate that he had risen from the dead and had ascended to heaven, but none of the positive utopian developments they were expecting seemed to be moving forward. The pagan and brutally barbaric Roman Empire was still flourishing and the Kingdom of Heaven seemed like a remote dream. Cognitive dissonance pressed them to believe that Jesus would soon return to complete his mission.

The original "Second Coming" idea didn't envision a lapse of centuries. Jesus's followers anxiously expected him to return within that generation. When this failed to materialize, cognitive dissonance set in again but in a more pronounced way. In order to maintain their belief that Jesus was the promised Messiah, some of his followers felt compelled to construct a new

Messianic profile that could explain away his death. This crisis is what led to the novel rationalization that the purpose of the Messiah's coming was to die as a sacrifice that would atone for the sins of those putting their faith in him.

The champion of this new construct was the Apostle Paul.³³ Not surprisingly, he tried to link this innovative concept of the Messiah to the Jewish Bible by appealing to a verse from the prophet Isaiah. We find this in Paul's book of Romans:

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion **and remove ungodliness from Jacob.**" (Romans 11:26, apparently citing Isaiah 59:20)

However, checking the original passage in Isaiah reveals the flawed foundation of the claim made in the book of Romans:

A redeemer will come to Zion, **to those of Jacob who repent from willful sin**, the word of the Lord. (Isaiah 59:20)

Isaiah didn't teach that the Messiah's purpose is to remove sin; rather, he will come to the Jewish people when they show themselves worthy by turning away from sin.³⁴ While attempting to pass his Messianic concept off as thoroughly Biblical, Paul ends up impaling himself on the very verse he attempts to co-opt once the careful reader spots his corruption of the text.

This passage from Isaiah actually caused Paul tremendous difficulty, which is probably why he felt the need to edit it. The problem Paul faced was a simple one. If it were possible for people to repent of their sins and return to God, then what need would there be for Jesus to die for them?

As we have seen in this booklet, the program for atonement that God established in the Bible is through repentance. God assures us that if we turn from our sins and to Him, we will be forgiven. This system had been in place for thousands of years, so why

would there be a need to replace it with faith in the atoning death of Jesus? Paul was very cognizant of this problem and spelled it out himself:

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could come through following the Torah, then Christ died in vain. (Galatians 2:21)

It is easy to see how redefining the concept of Messiah pulls a theological thread that leads to the unraveling of the entire garment of Biblical teaching. In order to support its unbiblical notion of the role of the Messiah, Christianity was forced to distort numerous other Biblical concepts. The first casualty³⁵ was the assertion that it is impossible for us to really keep the Torah, and consequently, that we cannot be righteous in the eyes of God.³⁶ As Paul admits, if we could keep the Torah, Jesus died in vain.

God Himself thunderously refutes the assertion that it is too difficult for us to keep the Torah:

For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not up in heaven for you to say, Who can ascend to the heavens for us to take it for us, so that we can listen to it and do it? Nor is it beyond the sea for you to say, Who can cross the sea for us to take it for us, so that we can listen to it and do it? Rather, it is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it! (Deuteronomy 30:11–14)³⁷

Of course, it would be impossible to imagine that God would give the Jewish people a Torah at Mount Sinai 3,300 years ago, knowing full well that we were not capable of observing it and yet threatening us with dire consequences if we didn't properly keep it.

The claim that we are not capable of observing the Torah hinges on the Christian idea that after Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, human beings became irreparably corrupt.

The Torah, however, never teaches this and actually reveals that humans have free will and are capable of overcoming temptations to sin. Right after the Garden of Eden episode, God says to Cain:

Surely, if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin will crouch at your door. Its desire will be toward you to tempt you, but you can conquer (rule over) it! (Genesis 4:7)

Because we are imperfect physical beings living in a material world, we sometimes make mistakes and even succumb to temptation. That is our nature as human beings.³⁸ Even righteous people will sometimes sin:

For there is no man wholly righteous on earth that [always] does good and never sins. (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

People who do wrong can still be considered righteous if they try to correct their ways. This is the distinction between righteous and wicked people. The wicked keep on sinning and don't seek to improve. The righteous recognize when they do wrong, regret their mistake, resolve to change and pray to God for forgiveness. The Bible calls this *teshuvah*, repentance.

For though the righteous one may fall seven times, he will get up; but the wicked ones will stumble through evil. (Proverbs 24:16)

God assumes that we are able to obey His instructions, and that is why we are held responsible for the way we live our lives. We can choose to live in obedience to God and live righteous lives that are pleasing to Him. Scripture lays this out for us:

I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you: I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse; and you shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring. To love the Lord your God, to listen to His voice and to cleave to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days... (Deuteronomy 30:19–20).³⁹

APPENDIX 1: FLOUR AS SIN OFFERING

Even though Christians insist that only blood can atone for sin and that flour offerings could never serve to atone for sins, the Torah explicitly states without qualification that flour served to atone for sin.

But if his means are insufficient for two turtledoves or two young doves, then he shall bring, **as his guilt offering** for that which he sinned, a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a **sin offering**; he shall not place oil on it nor put frankincense on it, for **it is a sin offering**. He shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall scoop a handful as its memorial portion and cause it to go up in smoke on the altar, on the fires of the Lord; **it is a sin offering**. (Leviticus 5:11–12)

Some missionaries have attempted to poke a hole in this by insisting that the handful of flour must be placed atop the blood of animals that had previously been sacrificed on the altar. It is only this association with the blood of these sacrifices, they contend, that empowered the flour to atone.

This contention is based upon translating the verse to read, "... the priest shall scoop from it... and cause it to go up in smoke on the altar, **upon (al) the sacrifices made by fire (ishei) of the Lord**; it is a sin offering."

In truth, this translation is far from clear. Rashi (eleventh century, France), the foremost Jewish commentator to the Bible, rendered the phrase *ishei Hashem* simply as "fires of the Lord,"⁴⁰ and this reading is substantiated by numerous contemporary translations of the Torah.⁴¹

Even if we accept the translation of *ishei Hashem* as "offerings of fire to the Lord," insisting that *al* has to mean "upon" is

questionable. The word *al* can also mean “beside,” “with,” or “near.”⁴² Therefore, there is no proof here that the flour must be placed on top of other sacrifices that had previously been sacrificed on the altar. This is an assumption that missionaries try to pass off as a certainty.

Furthermore, even if *al ishei Hashem* means “upon the offerings of fire to the Lord,” this could be referring to other flour offerings! In Leviticus 2:2–3 and 6:10–11, *minchah* (flour) offerings are referred to as *ishei Hashem*, offerings of fire to the Lord. Therefore, when Leviticus 5:12 says that the poor person’s sin offering of flour was placed *al ishei Hashem*, it could very well have been placed on other *menachot* (flour offerings) where blood would not be present.

Finally, even if we accept the contention that *al ishei Hashem* in Leviticus 5:12 is a directive to place the flour offering for the poor person on top of animals sacrificed on the Temple altar, this would still not prove that the flour was only empowered by its contact with blood. This is because the blood of the sacrificed animal was drained before their remains were placed on the fire atop the altar. The collected blood from the various offerings was sprinkled toward the curtain in the Temple, dabbed on the protruding corners of the altar, applied to the altar’s walls, or poured out at the base of the altar. However, the blood of the various types of sacrifices was never placed on top of the altar. We see, therefore, that it was the flour itself that served as a sin offering for the poor person, just as the Bible states repeatedly in Leviticus 5:11–12.

APPENDIX 2: THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF ISAIAH 53

One of the major problems facing the Christian enterprise has been its inability to produce even one passage from the Jewish Scriptures that clearly articulates their theology. The centrepiece of Christian doctrine is the claim that Jesus came to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world and that unless one believes in him one is doomed to eternal damnation in hell. There is no place in the Tanach that teaches this, and all attempts by missionaries to shoehorn this belief back into the text are as futile as trying to force a square peg into a round hole.

When pressed to offer a definitive source for their foundational doctrine, missionaries will confidently point to the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah.⁴³ A full treatment and explication of this important and complex passage is beyond the scope of this publication, but we will discuss a few salient points.

In order for this passage to serve as a proof for Christian doctrine, it would have to be clear and unambiguous that the suffering servant of the Lord is understood to be the Messiah. What is immediately self-evident is that this assumption is far from clear. Let's note the following:

- Many Christian commentaries to Isaiah concede that this chapter is not about the Messiah or about Jesus. They understand that the Servant here is the nation of Israel (see The New Interpreter's Study Bible; The HarperCollins Study Bible; The New English Bible (Oxford Study Edition); and Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: An Historical and Critical Study*, London, Oxford University Press, 1956). Why would they take such a view if the chapter were clearly portraying Jesus as the Messiah?

- The early followers of Jesus did not understand this chapter to be about the suffering of the Messiah (Matthew 16:21–22; Mark 9:30–32; Luke 9:43–45).
- The book of Isaiah doesn't begin in the fifty-third chapter. In the preceding chapters, Isaiah identifies God's servant as the nation of Israel: 41:8–9, 43:10, 44:1–2 and 21, 45:4, 48:20, and 49:3. Isaiah describes Israel as God's servants in subsequent chapters as well: 54:17, 65:8–9, 13–15, and 66:14.⁴⁴
- Significantly, the surrounding chapters 52 and 54 movingly describe the historical suffering and ultimate redemption of Israel. It would be reasonable to assume that Chapter 53 follows this theme as well.

The vast majority of Jewish Biblical commentaries⁴⁵ and numerous Christian scholars understand God's suffering servant to be the people of Israel or a righteous remnant of Israel. Some Rabbinic sources view the servant as the Messiah. However, it is crucial to understand that their view of Messiah is vastly different from the Christian concept. The normative Jewish understanding is that the Messiah is the leader of the nation. As such, his fate is intertwined with that of the people. When Isaiah speaks of the exaltation of the servant (52:13), he is speaking of the nation at the time when the Messiah will be at their helm. However, in the Christian perspective, the Messiah is seen as a divine being totally disconnected from the nation of Israel. His fate has nothing to do with the fate of the people.

Of course, even if we were to assume that the subject of Isaiah's prophecy is the Messiah, there is no proof it is speaking about Jesus. This is simply an assumption that Christianity makes, lacking any compelling evidence.⁴⁶ In fact, upon close examination, it becomes clear that Jesus could not have been the subject of this chapter. Let's look at a few examples:

- All agree that the fourth of Isaiah's poems about the servant of the Lord really begins at verse 13 in chapter 52. God here says

that His servant will one day be exalted, lifted up, and raised very high. God then predicts that when this happens, it will come as a complete surprise and shock to the nations and kings of the world because it is something they had never expected. Of course, if Isaiah were forecasting about Jesus, his exaltation would not surprise the world at all, as most of the planet believes in him and expects him to return one day in exaltation.

If Isaiah was referring to Jesus, he should have said that the Jewish people would be totally surprised by the exaltation of the servant. But Isaiah didn't say this. What will utterly shock the nations and kings of the world will be when the true Messiah appears (and they see it is not Jesus) and that the nation of Israel will be glorified and exalted. This will be something they were not expecting.

- Isaiah says the servant will be despised and rejected. This has certainly been true regarding the people of Israel. However, Jesus has become the most beloved person in history and the Gospels portray him as extremely popular while he was alive (Matthew 4:24–25; Mark 3:7–9; Luke 2:52, 4:14–15).
- The kings and nations of the world are the speakers in chapter 53, and they confess, “Due to the transgression of my people, they were afflicted” (verse 8). Isaiah here clarifies that the servant is a people and not a person. The following verse speaks of many people dying different kinds of deaths (b'motav).⁴⁷
- God's servant will live a long life and be blessed with children (verse 10). The word used here is zera (seed), which is used in scripture for actual physical progeny (Genesis 17:7–12). Had Isaiah wanted to speak of figurative descendants, the word ben (son) would have been used (Deuteronomy 14:1). Jesus died at a relatively early age without having fathered any children. It is clear that he was not the servant portrayed by Isaiah.

Evangelical Christians insist that salvation is only available to those who believe that Jesus died for their sins and put their faith in him (John 3:16–18, 36; Mark 16:16; Acts 16:30–31; Romans 10:9). However, nowhere does Isaiah 53 demand belief in the servant. As a matter of fact, Isaiah actually describes the servant suffering on behalf of those who have rejected him:

He was despised and rejected of men... as one from whom we would hide our faces; he was despised and we had no regard for him. But in truth, it was our ills that he bore and our pains that he carried, but we regarded him as diseased, stricken by God, and afflicted. He was pained because of our sins and oppressed through our iniquities; the chastisement upon him was for our benefit, and through his wounds, we were healed. (Isaiah 53:3–5)

As we've pointed out, Isaiah here is describing the shock the world will experience when Israel is redeemed by God (see 52:9–10) and finally vindicated under the reign of the Messiah. After a long history of persecution and rejection, Israel will be recognized by the world as the people of God:

Arise! Shine! For your light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord shines upon you. For darkness may cover the earth and a thick cloud may cover the kingdoms, but the Lord will shine upon you and His glory will be seen upon you. Nations will walk by your light and kings by the brilliance of your illumination. (Isaiah 60:1–3)

And the sons of those who afflicted you will bow to you, and all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; they will call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting pride, a joy from generation to generation. (Isaiah 60:14–15)

But you will be called the priests of the Lord; you will be spoken of as ministers of our God... Instead of shame, you will have a double portion, and instead of humiliation, they will shout for joy over their portion... Then their offspring will be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them because they are the offspring whom the Lord has blessed. (Isaiah 61:6-7, 9)

And the nations will see your righteousness and all the kings your glory, and you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will designate. You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. (Isaiah 62:2-3)⁴⁸

Chapter 53 of Isaiah describes the confession of the nations that will take place at that time. They will reflect back on their historical relationship with Israel and admit that all along, they assumed that the Jewish people suffered because God had rejected them.⁴⁹ However, they will now realize that the suffering of Israel was mainly the result of their wickedness and obsession with making the Jewish people the scapegoat for their own national shortcomings.⁵⁰

Footnotes

- 1 With thousands of Christian denominations, there is no totally monolithic theology. This booklet will focus on the doctrines and claims of most Protestant Evangelicals. These are the denominations active today in targeting the Jewish community for conversion.
- 2 Missionaries are heavily invested in trying to demonstrate how all their beliefs derive from the Jewish Bible. Historically, Jews were urged to convert *from* Judaism *to* Christianity. Contemporary missionaries, however, insist that a Jew who embraces Jesus becomes a completed Jew rather than someone abandoning his or her faith since, in their view, the theology of the New Testament was anticipated in the Jewish Scriptures. The thrust of this booklet will be to demonstrate that this claim is patently false.
- 3 See Genesis 9:4 and Deuteronomy 12:23.
- 4 Missionaries checkmated by the Biblical text sometimes resort to cherry-picking passages from Rabbinic literature in order to buttress their claims. Here, missionaries appeal to Babylonian Talmud Tractate Yoma 5a, which cites Leviticus 17:11 and teaches, *Ein kappara ela b'dam* — “There is only atonement through the blood.”

Superficially, this seems to support the Christian contention. Actually, a close reading of this Talmudic passage reveals that the rabbis were only discussing the limited question of what part of the sacrificed animal was critical to effecting atonement. They were not commenting on the broader question of whether atonement was possible through means other than animal sacrifices.

The rabbis certainly did not believe that blood is the only means for atonement, as this would contradict the clear teaching of the Bible. The rabbis themselves discuss numerous other means of atonement that missionaries conveniently ignore in their misappropriation of this passage from Yoma. For example, Chagiga 27a teaches that the table where we have our meals serves to atone for sins (through the virtuous deeds done on it, like feeding the hungry). Arachin 16b, reflecting Psalm 25:18, teaches that physical afflictions can atone for our sins. Of course the rabbis place tremendous emphasis on the centrality and efficacy of repentance. This is so potent, we are taught, that if one repents out of love of God (rather than from a fear of punishment), our sins can be transformed into merits (Yoma 86b).

- 5 Sacrifices could be offered only in the Temple and the Bible prohibited bringing them elsewhere. See Leviticus 17:1–9 and Deuteronomy 12:5–14.

- 6 This is the date according to traditional Jewish chronology. Other sources date the destruction of the first Temple to 586 BCE.
- 7 The New Testament claims that Jesus's mission was to die as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of those who would believe in him: Matthew 1:21; John 1:29, 3:16-18, 36; Acts 5:31; Romans 5:8-9, 11:26-27; I Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:4; Hebrews chapters 9-10; I Peter 1:19, 2:24; I John 1:7, 2:2; Revelation 1:5.
- 8 See Hosea 3:4-5.
- 9 See the commentary of Nachmanides to Exodus 28:1. The Holy Ark was the first part of the Tabernacle that God commanded us to construct (Exodus 25:10-22).
- 10 The *Korban Chatat* (sin offering) is discussed in Leviticus, chapter 4, and was only offered for sins committed unintentionally. (For example, someone didn't know it was forbidden to cook food on the Sabbath. Or, they knew that it was forbidden, but were unaware it was the Sabbath when they were cooking). See also Numbers 15:27-31 which states that sacrifices were available for the person who sinned unintentionally but not for the one who sinned with intent.

In his *Akedat Yitzchak*, R' Isaac Arama explained that both body and soul are involved in intentional sin, while only the body is implicated in unintentional sin because there was no mental intent. Therefore, a physical sacrifice could atone for an unintentional sin since only the body was involved in transgressing. A physical sacrifice could not atone for a deliberate sin because it can't correct an evil intent rooted in the soul.

- 11 See Appendix 2 for a discussion of Isaiah 53, the most critical source cited by missionaries.
- 12 See also Leviticus 18:21, 20:2; Deuteronomy 18:10; II Kings 3:26-27, 16:3, 17:17; Jeremiah 7:31, 19:4-6, 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20-21, 23:37-39; Psalm 106:37-38. Some have suggested that Abraham ultimately being instructed not to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:12) clarified that this kind of practice is not pleasing to God.
- 13 According to the Oral Torah, the Yom Kippur scapegoat was pushed over a cliff and died (Yoma 39a). However, Christianity rejects the legitimacy and authority of the Oral Torah and they have recourse only to the Biblical text where there is no mention of the death of the scapegoat.
- 14 Exodus 34:7 seems to present a problem by teaching that God will recall the sins of parents upon children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation. The Talmud (Brachos 7a) explains that this is speaking only of a situation where the descendants follow in their parents' path. Some have suggested that since the context of this passage in Exodus is God's great mercy and kindness in dealing with us, we need to see

the recalling of parental sins in a positive light. Along these lines, what might be implied is that when God judges someone, He takes into consideration the sins of their parents and grandparents. Less might be expected of someone who grew up in a home where all they were exposed to were negative examples going all the way back to their great-grandparents. This recalling of ancestral sins as a mitigating factor in how God judges people is an expression of His mercy and beneficence.

- 15 Some missionaries attempt to prop up and legitimize their belief in Jesus's vicarious sacrifice by appealing to rabbinic sources. When we examine these teachings, it becomes clear that the missionaries either misunderstand or intentionally distort them. Here, they cite several passages from the Talmud and Midrash that the death of the righteous can atone for the sins of the nation. There are numerous distinctions between these rabbinic teachings and Christian doctrine. (a) This Jewish concept is not about the death of only one particular person — it refers to numerous righteous individuals throughout history. Christians may insist that only Jesus was totally sinless, but the Bible plainly teaches that this could not have been the case. See Ecclesiastes 7:20; Job 15:14 and 25:4. (b) The rabbinic concept doesn't require that we believe in the righteous individual or even be aware of their death for it to effect atonement. In Christianity, those who don't believe in Jesus's atoning death are doomed to eternal damnation. See Mark 16:16, John 3:16. This is a critical distinction. The Jewish concept is an observation about the benevolent economy of God's providence, and was never meant as a directive about how we are to live our lives. Christianity turned this on its head and made the need for each person to embrace the death of Jesus as the most pressing responsibility in life. (c) The atonement available through the death of a righteous person is similar to the atoning power of a sacrifice. It doesn't work magically independent of our actions. Rather, the grief and mourning for the righteous person can be a catalyst toward repentance that can bring reconciliation with God. In Christianity, it is faith in Jesus alone, independent of anything the believer does that brings atonement. See Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16. (d) Some of these rabbinic teachings are referring not to the atonement of an individual's sins, but to the fate of the community as a whole. In the Bible God relates to us both as individuals and as a nation. The sense of the word "atonement" in these passages is referring to the alleviation of national punishment and suffering rather than full exoneration and expiation of sin. The important point here is that rabbinic teachings where God's calculus of justice takes into account the death of the righteous do not contravene the scriptures cited here maintaining that individuals are each responsible for their own sins.
- 16 It is interesting to note that despite this teaching from the book of Hebrews, which became normative church doctrine, the disciples of Jesus continued going to the Temple in Jerusalem after his death (Luke

- 24:53 and Acts 2:46). In fact, it seems clear that they continued to bring sacrifices, including sin offerings. We see this when they demanded that Paul prove his fidelity to the Torah by having him pay for the sacrifices of four men (Acts 21:21–26) who had recently completed their Nazirite vows, which included a sin sacrifice (Numbers 6:13–14).
- 17 See also Isaiah 2:2, 33:20, 60:13; Joel 4:18; Micah 4:1–2.
 - 18 Chapters 40–47 in the book of Ezekiel are about the third Temple that will be built in the future Messianic age and the sacrifices that will be offered at that time, including sin offerings. According to many commentaries, the prince spoken of in these chapters refers to the Messiah, who will be responsible for offering some of these sacrifices on the altar.
 - 19 See also Jeremiah 33:11,18 that speak about sacrifices being offered in the future Messianic age.
 - 20 See also Exodus 34:5–7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 4:31; Joel 2:13, Psalms 51:3, 86:15, 130:7–8, 145:8–9.
 - 21 God exercises this kindness at His discretion and we cannot rely on this mercy to avoid our responsibility to turn from our sins and toward Him.
 - 22 This is not to say that sacrifices are not important or necessary when required and when possible. Rather, it illuminates the fact that sacrifices are not the core and essence of how our sins can be forgiven and how we are to approach the issue of atonement.
 - 23 How many references do missionaries marshal for their assertion that atonement can only come via blood? Their only attempt is Leviticus 17:11. However, we saw that the context of that solitary reference is not about atonement, and it doesn't even say that blood is the only means to atonement. However, the references to the actual Biblical idea of repentance as the way sin must be addressed are taught throughout the Tanach clearly and consistently.
 - 24 There are numerous other references to the efficacy of repentance to atone for sin, including: Deuteronomy 4:29–31, 30:1–3; Isaiah 1:16–19; Jeremiah 7:3–7, 18:8, 26:13; Joel 2:12–14; Amos 5:4; Micah 6:6–8; Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 3:7; Psalm 32:1–5; Proverbs 16:6, 28:13; II Chronicles 30:18–20.
 - 25 See Jonah 3:4. This expression contains two possibilities. Either the people will turn themselves over and repent within 40 days or they won't and the city will be overturned and destroyed.
 - 26 See rabbisacks.org - Vayikra (5769) – “The Sin Offering”; Vayikra (5775) – “Why Do We Sacrifice?; Vayikra (5771) – “The Dimensions of Sin”; Tzav (5768) – “On Sacrifice”. Also Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation – Leviticus: The Book of Holiness* (Maggid Books & The Orthodox Union, 2015) pp. 61–69.
 - 27 See also Isaiah 66:2–4 and Ecclesiastes 4:17 (5:1 in a Christian version).

- 28 Micah does not ignore the sacrifices, and they certainly have their place in certain circumstances and when possible. But even when brought, they were not sufficient to atone for our sins. The point here is that they are not the essence - the core of what God is seeking from us. The clear and consistent message of the Hebrew Scriptures is that God wants our repentance — for us to change by turning from our wrong behaviour and to begin living Godly lives.
- 29 Isaiah 2:1–4, 11:1–12; Jeremiah 23:5–6, 30:1–11, 33:14–18; Ezekiel 34:23–30, 37:24–28; Hosea 3:4–5; Zechariah 9:9–10; Micah 4:1–4, 5:1–6. Notice that these foundational passages mention nothing about the Messiah dying to redeem the world from sin, the necessity for him to come twice or the need to believe in him. (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBSRiwy4T7k>)
- 30 Isaiah 11:9 66:23, Jeremiah 31:33, Habakkuk 2:14, Zephaniah 3:9; Zechariah 8:23, 14:9, Psalm 86:9.
- 31 Luke 1:68–75, 24:21; Acts 1:6.
- 32 See Matthew 16:21–22; Mark 9:30–32; Luke 18:31–34.
- 33 We should remember that Paul never met Jesus. Two decades after the crucifixion, Paul began travelling around the Greco-Roman empire and spreading his beliefs about Jesus among non-Jews. But the small group of Jews in Jerusalem who were the actual disciples of Jesus never fully trusted Paul. They were especially bothered by his dim view of Torah observance. It is possible that they never accepted his redefinition of the Messiah. We know that they continued worshipping in the Temple and bringing sacrifices after the death of Jesus (see footnote 16). By the fourth century, these Jewish followers of Jesus disappeared and all that remained was the gentile church founded by Paul.
- 34 The redemption of Israel will take place after our national repentance; see also Deuteronomy 30:1–3.
- 35 There are several other deviations from Torah doctrine that naturally followed in the wake of redefining the Biblical concept of Messiah. We'll mention two here. One flows from the question of why Jesus's suffering and death were unique. The Romans crucified, according to some estimates, over 100,000 Jews, many of whom lingered far longer on the cross than Jesus. This was one of the factors that led Pauline Christianity to assert that Jesus was not just a normal human being but was God Himself, who took on human form and came down to our world. Judaism views this deification of a human being as idolatrous. A second problem is that the New Testament's focus on faith in Jesus rather than Torah observance quickly led to Christianity totally rejecting the eternal, binding nature of the Torah commandments (Romans 3:28; Galatians 3:24–25; Hebrews 8:13). We should point out that Jesus himself never seemed to teach either of these ideas (see Matthew 19:16–17), and they were probably innovations of Paul and those who followed him.

36 One place where Paul develops this line of reasoning is in Romans 3:9–12. Here, he quotes Psalm 14 out of context and fails to clarify that when David said, “Everyone has gone astray... there is no one who does good, not even one” (verse 4), he was not speaking about all of humanity. The beginning of the Psalm shows that he is speaking of depraved people who deny God. This is proven in verse 5, where David says that God is with the righteous generation. Of course, Paul’s contention is also soundly repudiated by the many hundreds of passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that speak of righteous people and contrast the righteous with the wicked. See Psalm 32:11, 97:10–12; Proverbs 11:3–6, 13:5–6; Ecclesiastes 9:1–2; Isaiah 57:1–2; Job 1:1; Habakkuk 1:4; II Kings 23:24–25; II Chronicles 34:1–2; Genesis 6:9, 7:1. The Christian Bible itself doesn’t deny the possibility of living a righteous life; see Luke 1:6 and Matthew 9:13.

37 Incredibly, Paul’s homily in Romans 10, based on Deuteronomy 30, turns the entire chapter on its head. Instead of the powerful chapter it is, describing the incredible importance of the commandments and our ability to observe them, Paul transforms it into a sermon on the primacy of faith over action. In part, he accomplishes this by conveniently omitting the crucial phrase “that you can do it” when he cites Deuteronomy 30:14.

38 See Job 15:14 and 25:4.

39 See also v.15 a few verses earlier and Deuteronomy 11:26–27.

40 A perpetual fire was supposed to burn on top of the altar used for sacrifices, Leviticus 7:1–6. According to the standard Jewish translation, the flour was placed on the altar’s fire. The Christian rendering of this verse assumes that the flour had to be placed on top of left over animal sacrifices that had been burning on the fires of the altar.

41 The popular Artscroll and Stone editions of the Bible, the Koren Tanach, the Feldheim Linear Version by Rabbi Pesach Goldberg, the Metsudah translation by Rabbi Avraham Davis, the Agam Torah by Gefen Publishers, the Margolin Edition Torah by Rabbi Benjamin S. Moore, the Chok L’Yisrael Chumash by Rabbi Yoseph Milstein, the Gutnick Chumash and The Five Books of Moses Torah by Rabbi Chaim Miller.

42 See, for example, Genesis 30:40: “Jacob segregated the lambs and he made the flocks face the ringed ones and all the brownish ones among Laban’s flocks. He formed separate droves of his own and did not mingle them with (*al*) Laban’s flocks.” No one would suggest that *al* here means “on top of Laban’s flocks.”

Milgrom, in the Anchor Bible, takes *al* in Leviticus 5:12 to mean “in addition to” and not “on top of.”

43 The fact that Christians are only able to produce one dubious source in the Jewish Scriptures for their central doctrine is itself a significant problem. The Jewish concept of the Messiah is based upon a solid

- foundation of numerous indisputable passages throughout the Bible. See footnote #29. As well, the contention that it is only the death of the Messiah that can alleviate the burden of our sins would negate the mountain of Biblical teaching concerning the effectiveness of repentance.
- 44 Throughout the Tanach, Israel is repeatedly identified as God's servant: Leviticus 25:42, 55; Deuteronomy 32:36, 43; Jeremiah 30:10, 46:27–28; Ezekiel 28:25; Psalms 79:10, 135:1, 136:22; Nehemiah 1:6, 10–11; I Chronicles 16:13. Interestingly, even the New Testament, in Luke 1:54, identifies Israel as God's servant.
 - 45 Missionaries erroneously insist that this is a late view that was first advanced by Rashi in the eleventh century. This is simply not the case. There are numerous references in Rabbinic literature, going back long before Rashi, identifying God's servant with Israel. The second century church father Origen, in his *Contra Celsum*, writes that identifying God's servant with the nation was the way Jewish sages understood this chapter in his time.
 - 46 There is no way of empirically verifying that Jesus's death served to atone for anyone's sins. This is merely an assertion Christians make that remains in the realm of faith. The passage could just as easily be speaking of any other person or people who underwent suffering such as Rabbi Akiva, who was sadistically tortured to death by the Romans, or victims of the Nazi Holocaust.
 - 47 Some Christians argue that this chapter cannot be speaking of a nation because the pronouns are singular. This is a weak objection because throughout the Bible, the Jewish people are spoken of as a corporate singular: Exodus 1:10-12, 4:22, 19:2; Numbers 22:5, 23:21; Deuteronomy 32:8-13; Isaiah 43:10; Jeremiah 48:27, 50:19; Hosea 8:3, 11:1, 14:5-7; Psalm 130:8, etc. (In the Hebrew, the pronouns in these passages are in the singular, but many English translations "adjust" them to the plural for smoother reading).
 - 48 See also Jeremiah 3:17; Ezekiel 37:28; Zephaniah 3:19–20; Zechariah 8:23.
 - 49 Christian peoples had all along assumed that God rejected Israel because she did not come to faith in Jesus. Of course, Isaiah is describing a time when these people will recognize that Israel was correct in not believing that Jesus was God who had come to the world in human form as the Messiah. Muslims will at that time acknowledge that Israel was correct in not embracing Mohammed as a true prophet of God.
 - 50 See Isaiah 41:11, 45:14–17, 24–25, 49:23; Jeremiah 3:17,16:19–20; Micah 7:15–17; Genesis 12:1-3. In the future, the nations of the world will not only acknowledge that their historical persecution of Israel was a result of their own moral corruption. They will also come to realize how they benefited from Israel's torment in ways they hadn't previously understood. See <https://yourphariseefriend.wordpress.com/2014/08/12/isaiah-53-a-verse-by-verse-exposition/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rabbi Michael Skobac has been involved with JEWS FOR JUDAISM (Canada) since 1989 and currently serves as its Director of Education and Counselling. He is a leading authority on missionaries, cults and issues relating to Jewish continuity and Jewish spirituality.

Educated at Northwestern and Yeshiva Universities, he has been passionately involved in Jewish education and outreach since 1975. Previously a campus professional with Hillel groups in Philadelphia, New York and Toronto, he was founding director of Kiruv, the campus outreach arm of the Rabbinical Council of America.

Rabbi Skobac established the New York branch of JEWS FOR JUDAISM and served as a consultant to the New York Jewish Community Relations Council Task Force on Missionaries and Cults. He has developed and taught many courses on Jewish-Christian polemics that are now replicated around the globe.

Rabbi Skobac has advised Jewish communities worldwide in developing responses to the many threats and issues challenging Jewish survival, and has developed innovative responses to missionaries and cults that target Jews.

Rabbi Skobac's publications include *Missionary Impossible: Counter-Missionary Survival Guide*; *The DaVinci Code: A Jewish Perspective*; *Stolen Minds: Understanding Cults*; and *Intermarriage: Is There Light at the End of the Tunnel?* His popular audio recordings include *How to Answer a Christian Missionary*; *Scripture Twisting: How Missionaries Distort the Jewish Bible*; *The Jews for Judaism Counter-Missionary Survival Seminar*; and *The Forest Beyond the Trees: What is Judaism's Bottom Line?*

Rabbi Skobac is a popular, sought-after speaker who has addressed wide-ranging audiences throughout North America, Israel, South Africa, England, India, Australia and the Former Soviet Union.

A regular contributor to Jewish and secular media, his columns appear internationally. For over 10 years, he has been a featured guest on two Toronto radio shows, and makes frequent appearances on a wide range of radio and television programs to share his vast expertise.

In recent years, through his presence on the Internet, Rabbi Skobac has made an enormous impact in reaching Jews worldwide. Every day on YouTube and KosherTube, thousands of people view his videos and hear the audio recordings of his many lectures. As well, he personally interacts with and counsels countless others on Facebook and Twitter.

Through his counselling of Jewish families and individuals involved in intermarriage, cults, Christianity or other religions, Rabbi Skobac has personally rescued countless Jews and reunited them with their families, friends and community, thereby fulfilling JEWS FOR JUDAISM's goal of "Keeping Jews Jewish."

ABOUT JEWS FOR JUDAISM

JEWES FOR JUDAISM is the only international organization exclusively dedicated to countering the multi-million dollar efforts of Christian missionary groups that target Jews, the impact of cults and eastern religions, and the growing rate of assimilation that is devastating the Jewish community.

Our two primary goals are to keep Jews Jewish by strengthening Jewish pride and identity through preventive education, and to save Jewish lives by winning back vulnerable Jews who have been influenced by missionaries, cults, eastern religions and assimilation.

JEWS FOR JUDAISM achieves its vital goals and promotes Jewish continuity through the following free educational programs, materials and counselling services that connect Jews to the spiritual depth, beauty and wisdom of Judaism.

- 24-Hour Hotline
- Activism & Volunteers
- Advertising Campaigns
- Audio & Video Materials
- Books & Literature
- Campus Programs
- Conferences & Rallies
- Counter-Leafletting
- Crisis & Exit Counselling
- Facebook & Twitter
- Internet Websites
- Lectures & Classes
- Library & Archives
- Monitoring Missionary & Cult Activity
- Outreach to Hebrew-Christians
- Referrals & Information
- Russian Outreach
- Shabbat Hospitality
- Speakers' Bureau
- TV & Radio Programs
- YouTube Video Channel

To date, over 400,000 Jews worldwide have participated in JEWS FOR JUDAISM's successful educational programs and counselling services.

In an average year, JEWS FOR JUDAISM (Canada) achieves the following through the generous help of concerned individuals:

- Provides 2,200 counselling sessions on missionary, cult and Jewish issues.
- Fulfills 1,800 requests for help, information or referrals
- Presents lectures to 5,000 Jews, including youth & seniors.
- Distributes 25,000 free pamphlets, books & audio materials.
- Receives 100,000 visitors to our Internet websites including www.jewsforjudaism.ca.
- Receives 500,000 "views" of our online video programs at YouTube and KosherTube.

JEWS FOR JUDAISM unites the entire Jewish community in a common cause. Over the past 26 years, we've earned endorsements from a spectrum of Jewish agencies, rabbis and educators.

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Rabbi Michael Skobac

It can be frustrating when others challenge your Jewish faith and you are not quite sure how to respond. It might be a missionary, Christian friend, neighbour or co-worker. They may ask for your interpretation of a passage in the “Old Testament” or want to know how Judaism understands a particular issue. When they share their perspective and inundate you with Bible verses, it can be intimidating.

We don't always need to engage these people and respond to their probing, but it is important to know, at least for ourselves, the Jewish perspective.

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JEWS FOR JUDAISM is dedicated to countering efforts of Christian missionaries that target Jews, the impact of cults and eastern religions, and the growing rate of assimilation devastating the Jewish community. JEWS FOR JUDAISM achieves its goals through free educational programs and materials, as well as counselling services that connect Jews to the spiritual depth, beauty and wisdom of Judaism.

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KEEPING JEWS JEWISH

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