

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Clarifying Judaism to an Israeli “Messianic Jew”



On a hot summer day in Jerusalem, I noticed a young man wearing a t-shirt with the Hebrew words [יהודי משיחי] in bright letters. These words are pronounced “Yehudi Meshichi” and mean “Messianic Jew”; that is, a Jewish believer in Christianity.

I approached this man, and he told me his name was Avi. When I asked about the shirt, he explained that he was raised a secular Israeli and considered religious Jews to be hypocrites. While working through some life challenges, Avi encountered some evangelicals visiting Tel Aviv. They showed him biblical passages they claimed proved Jesus was the messiah, and they told him that believing in Jesus is the only way to have his sins forgiven. Avi was skeptical but intrigued, so he checked out some Israeli messianic congregations. Eventually, he accepted “Yeshua” [Jesus] as the messiah.

When Avi noticed my reaction, he asked me, “What’s wrong with believing in the Jewish messiah?” I answered, “Nothing! As long as he meets the biblical criteria, isn’t a false messiah, and you don’t believe he is God.”

At this point, Avi wanted to show me the passages he considered to be “overwhelming proof” that Yeshua is God and the messiah. I agreed and we chatted for several hours. Avi admitted that my polite approach caught him by surprise; in fact, it shattered his negative stereotype of religious Jews.

Since Avi was convinced that the messiah was both God and the Savior from sin, I showed him a passage that refutes both of these ideas. The prophet Hosea states, *“The children of Israel will live for many days without a king or leader, and without sacrifice.... Afterward, the children of Israel will return [repent] and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days”* (Hosea 3:4-5).

The words *“the Lord their God and David their king”* demonstrates that God and the messiah are two separate entities. Secondly, the passage says that although the Jews will be in exile without Temple sacrifices for a long time, they will eventually *“return [repent] and seek”* God, and as a result, the messiah will come.

Contrary to what Christians claim, this passage proves that the Jews can repent without a Temple or sacrifices. No wonder Hosea instructs Jews who could not offer sacrifices with these words, *“Return, Israel, to the Lord your God.... Take words with you and return to the Lord.... Offer your prayers in place of [sacrificial] bulls”* (Hosea 14:1-2).

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To dispel any doubts, I showed Avi that Isaiah corroborates Hosea's words when he states, "*The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those in Jacob who repent of their sins*" (Isaiah 59:20). This statement is so damaging to the Christian argument, the New Testament felt compelled to mistranslate it as, "*The deliverer will come out of Zion, and he will remove ungodliness from Jacob*" (Romans 11:26).

Avi was shocked when he saw with his own eyes that the New Testament intentionally changed the role of the messiah from a redeemer from exile to a savior from sin. The Torah confirms that only God is our Savior, as it says, "*Return to Me, and I will return to you*" (Malachi 3:7).

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I continued speaking with Avi and we discussed the criteria for the messiah. First and foremost, the Torah requires that he be from the tribe of Judah, as it says, "*The scepter [ruling authority] shall not depart from Judah*" (Genesis 49:10). Secondly, he will be a son-after-son descendant of King David, as it says, "*David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel*" (Jeremiah 33:17; I Chronicles 22:7-10).

Despite Avi's secular upbringing, he knew, as it says in this week's Torah portion, *Bamidbar* (Numbers 1:1–4:20), that membership in a specific tribe is an inheritance passed on to sons exclusively "*from their fathers*" (Numbers 1:2). Avi recognized the obvious contradiction that

Jesus could not be from the tribe of Judah or a direct male descendant of King David, as long as the New Testament claims he did not have a physical father.

Our encounter inspired Avi to ask if we could continue our conversation at a later time. So, through weekly WhatsApp and Zoom video calls, we delved deeper into the Torah's criteria for the messiah.

Avi was particularly amazed by the last four verses of Ezekiel Chapter 37, which point out that the messiah must rebuild the Temple, gather all Jews back to Israel, establish world peace, and usher in an era when the entire world will believe in one God. He agreed that these are criteria Jesus never fulfilled.

Over a period of one year, I respectfully and meticulously refuted every "proof text" Avi brought to my attention. At the same time, we explored the beauty of Judaism, and Avi ultimately returned to Judaism with a newfound love for the Torah and an appreciation of the spiritual path it provides.

Shabbat Shalom.

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