



A Publication of C.J.F. Ministries and Messianic Perspectives Radio Network

Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.



**Why Are
There So Many
Jewish Atheists?**

BY ERIC CHABOT

As a full-time campus representative for CJF Ministries, I lead two apologetic/outreach ministries at The Ohio State University (64,000 students) and Columbus State Community College (30,000 students). Ohio State has close to 3,000 Jewish students with a Hillel chapter on campus, as well as a Chabad house.¹

Over the years, my campus colleagues and I have spoken with many Jewish students about their worldview, focusing on their beliefs about God and spirituality. As a result of these conversations, I can say without hesitation that in spite of the fact these young people are ethnically Jewish, most of them have no firm belief in a personal God. In fact, many of them openly identify as agnostics—that is, they don't know if there is a God.

Others come right out and say they are atheists—that is, they *know* God doesn't exist. There is no question about it. They can look up into the sky at night, observe our spectacular little slice of the Milky Way galaxy, and conclude that no one designed it. Instead, this wondrous display just happened without anyone's planning, forethought, or effort.

This is not surprising given that a 2020 Pew survey offered this haunting reality check about theism (i.e., belief in God) in the Jewish community:

About a quarter of US Jewish adults (27 percent) do not identify with the Jewish religion. They consider themselves to be Jewish ethnically, culturally, or by family background [because they have] a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish. However, they answer a question about their current *religion* by describing themselves as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” rather than as Jewish. Among Jewish adults under 30, four-in-ten describe themselves this way.²

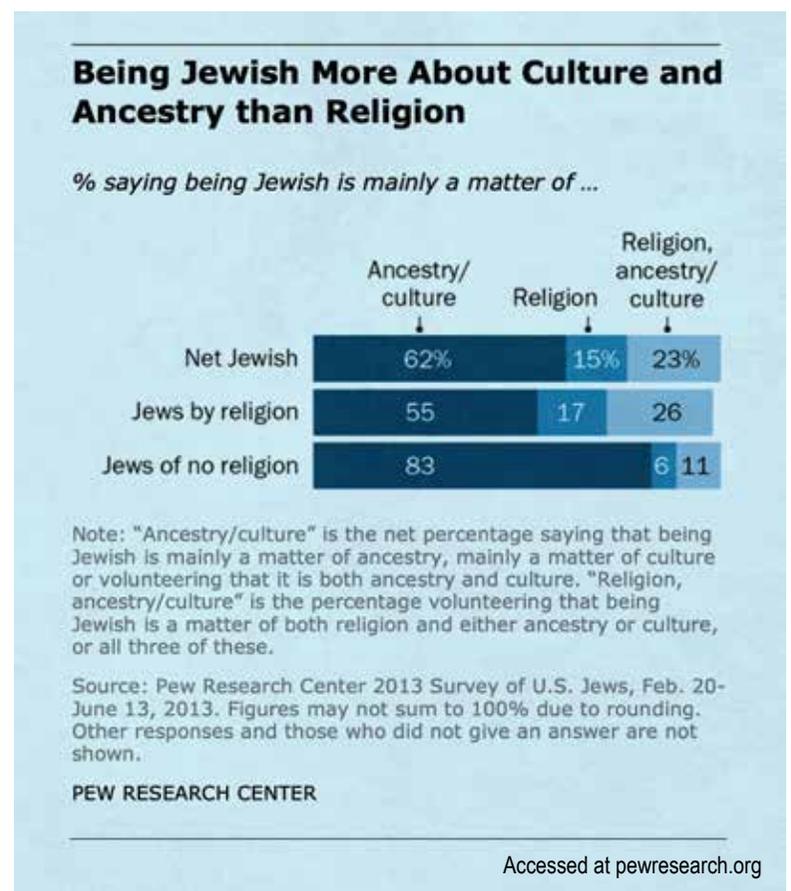
Not much has changed, I'm afraid, since 2020. A more recent survey (2021) says that of the 7.5 million Jewish people living in America, about 4.2 million of the adults identify their religion as “Jewish,” while the rest of the adults (3.3 million, or roughly 44 percent of American Jews) fall into a category Pew labels “Jews of no religion.”³

Think about that. Let it sink in. Almost half of American Jews (forty-four percent), according to the Pew pollsters, may participate in Jewish culture, but for all practical purposes, they have “no religion”—that is, no definable belief about (or connection with) the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Also, nearly nine-in-ten US adults who were raised Jewish (eighty-eight percent, to be precise) still identify as Jewish today. This includes seventy percent who identify with the Jewish religion and eighteen percent who don't identify with any religion but who consider themselves Jewish in some other way, such as culturally, ethnically, or by family background.⁴

The “retention rate” is higher among people who say they were brought up in the Jewish religion than it is among those who were raised as an atheist, agnostic, or none of the above.

Nine-in-ten of these “Jews by religion” are still Jewish today, compared with only seventy-six percent of those who were raised as “Jews of no religion.”⁵ While ten percent of American Jews identify with Orthodox Judaism, and about eighteen percent of American Jews identify with Conservative Judaism, the largest percentage (some thirty-five percent) of American Jews identify with Reform Judaism.



¹ Hillel International is the largest Jewish campus organization in the world, working with thousands of college students globally. Campus-based Chabad Houses can be found at over 260 colleges and universities across America, and in many countries around the world.

² See “Jewish Americans in 2020,” in the Jewish Americans in 2020 | Pew Research Center (May 11, 2021). Accessed at pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020.

³ See “10 key takeaways from the new Pew survey of American Jews” in the *Times of Israel* (May 11, 2021). Accessed at timesofisrael.com/10-key-takeaways-from-the-new-pew-survey-of-american-jews.

⁴ See “Denominational switching among U.S. Jews: Reform Judaism has gained, Conservative Judaism has lost” in Pew Research Center (June 22, 2021). Accessed at pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/06/22/denominational-switching-among-u-s-jews-reform-judaism-has-gained-conservative-judaism-has-lost.

⁵ Ibid.

Messianic Perspectives®

Dr. Gary Hedrick, *Editor in Chief*
 Brian Nowotny, *Publisher*
 Erastos Leiloglou, *Creative Director*



Messianic Perspectives is published quarterly by CJF Ministries, P.O. Box 345, San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345, a 501(c)3 Texas nonprofit corporation: Dr. Charles Halff (1929-2000), Founder; Dr. Gary Hedrick, President; Brian Nowotny, Vice President for Administration; Erastos Leiloglou, Creative Director. Subscription price: \$10 per year. The publication of articles by other authors does not necessarily imply CJFM's full agreement with all the views expressed therein. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Visit us online at cjfm.org. Toll-free OrderLine: (800) 926-5397. © 2024 by CJF Ministries. All rights reserved.

Reform Judaism

The attraction of Reform Judaism seems to be its progressive approach of adapting Jewish tradition to modern culture and sensibilities. It sees itself as politically progressive and social-justice oriented while emphasizing personal choice in matters of ritual observance. You're unlikely to notice *peyot* (side curls) or *tzitzit* (knots tied around the waist of males) in your local Reform temple!

The Founder of CJF Ministries, Charles Halff, came from a Reform background. He grew up in a Reform temple, Beth-El, in San Antonio, and his life's ambition was to become a rabbi someday. Charles said that one thing that spurred him to undertake his spiritual quest for truth is that Reform Judaism didn't emphasize the need for a personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—even though all three of those men (the “fathers,” or *Avot*, of the Jewish faith) had such a relationship with Him. On occasion, they even had conversations with God. It doesn't get much more personal than that!



Charles Halff in front of Temple Beth-El

What do we say about people today who have conversations with God? We pigeonhole them as psychotic or delusional. We encourage them to get therapy. However, categories like these don't apply when the conversation with God is real and not imaginary.

All three of these men—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—had a personal relationship with the LORD God. Abraham had several personal encounters with God, including the ones where He and his posterity were declared to be beneficiaries of the covenant promises of descendants and land (Gen. 12, 15, and 17).

Isaac, too, had conversations with God, most notably when He reaffirmed to him (i.e., to Isaac) the covenant promises He had made to his father, Abraham, before him (Gen. 26). This made Isaac a co-heir, along with Abraham.

Jacob also had a notable encounter with God in a dream at Bethel. In this dream, Jacob saw a ladder stretching from earth to Heaven and received divine promises about his descendants (Gen. 28).

He also wrestled with a mysterious “Man” for most of the night (32:24–26). Later in the same chapter, this Man is identified as “God” (Heb., *Elohim*; see vv. 28–30), thought by some to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah.



Jacob wrestled with a mysterious “Man” for most of the night in Genesis 32. Later, this Man is identified as “God” (Heb., *Elohim*; see vv. 28–30), possibly a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus the Messiah.

Alexander Louis Leloir

This wrestling match is what precipitated Jacob's name change to “Israel,” which in Hebrew means, “Prince with God.” *And [the Man] said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed”* (v. 28).

This all-night contest left Jacob with a limp from a dislocated hip (v. 31), which became a lifelong mark of divine ownership.

All three of the founding Fathers of Judaism, then, had an intensely personal relationship with God. Our Founder, too, yearned for this kind of relationship. He didn't necessarily want to carry on literal conversations with the Lord, of course, but he wanted a more personal connection than what Reform Judaism offered.

The Apostle Paul found this spiritual intimacy in his relationship with Jesus the Messiah: *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death* (Phil. 3:10).

Many of the Jewish college students we encounter on campus are also from a Reform background—and they express their surprise when we explain that it's possible to have a personal relationship with God. The same thing can be said of Jewish people who were raised in an Orthodox or Conservative home—they don't always believe in a personal God, either. Sometimes, even in Orthodoxy, or ultra-Orthodoxy, their faith is more about the routines and rituals, or about community, than it is about a deeply meaningful, personal connection with God.

What Does It All Mean?

For one thing, and perhaps most obviously, it means that belief in a personal God is no longer considered a requirement for being Jewish. It is true, though, that traditionally speaking, Jewish identity has been defined biologically, not theologically. According to rabbinic Judaism (or, *Halacha*), if one's birth mother (the maternal line) is Jewish, then that offspring is Jewish, regardless of the person's actions, beliefs, or even religion.

That's the biological approach. Other Jewish people, though, may define their Jewishness in terms of their adherence to Jewish culture and traditions. They might say, for example, "We pay our temple dues and attend Yom Kippur services every year." To them, that's what it's all about. However, many of them can't articulate what they believe about God.

Let's take a quick look at two of the main reasons for there being such widespread ignorance and apathy about God in the Jewish community.



Jewish "Denominations"

- **Ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*)**—Emphasizes strict adherence to Jewish law (*Halacha*) and tradition; the Hebrew Bible is God's Word to His people (an estimated 10–15% of the total community)
- **Orthodox**—Also observant of Jewish law, and respectful of Scripture, but less strict and more willing to engage and participate in modern culture and society (10–15%)
- **Conservative**—More "liberal"; seeks to strike a less demanding balance between tradition and modern life (18–20%)
- **Reform**—The largest category by far; ethical and philosophical teachings have priority over tradition and literal, legal observance (35–40%)
- **Reconstructionist**—A more democratic (less authoritarian) approach, viewing Judaism as a living, evolving "civilization" (1–2%)
- **Humanistic Judaism**—A more individualized approach, preserving selected aspects of Jewish culture and identity without any recognition of a Deity or authoritative scripture (1–2%)



Reason #1: Ignorance

I'll readily admit it: I am ignorant about many things. Whenever people say to me, "Do you know about this?" or "Do you know about that?"—I find myself answering, "No, I don't. Would you please inform me?"

When my colleagues and I talk to Jewish students on campus, we never assume they have any belief in a Messiah—because we know in advance that many of them don't. After all, why would you care about the Messiah if you're not even sure there's a God who sent Him into the world?

Like their non-Jewish counterparts, many Jewish people haven't thought deeply about the question of God's existence. Since Jewish identity tends to be more focused on culture and family, the God question can end up being a low priority.

At Ohio State, through trial and error, we have developed an approach that effectively engages agnostics. We set up tables and chairs and then strike up conversations with passing students by writing provocative questions in large letters on a whiteboard. Two of our most popular "tabling questions" are "Does God exist?" and "Is God real?" Or sometimes, it'll take the form of a challenge: "God exists. Convince me that I'm wrong."

Many Jewish students, not surprisingly, answer these whiteboard questions with a very honest "I don't know." They are willing to admit that they are uncertain. Despite the uncertainty, however, they are usually open to talking about God.

Now, while we're thinking together about ignorance, would be a good time to clarify two key terms, just to make sure we're on the same page.

First, let's define the term "atheism." The atheist philosopher, Julian Baggini, defines atheism as "the belief that there is no God or gods."⁶ Dr. Baggini quite correctly associates atheism with secular humanism, the view that humans can lead meaningful and productive lives based on rational thought and empirical evidence, rather than on the Bible or divine authority.

⁶ J. Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

And second, what is an “agnostic”? The standard definition of *atheism* is the outright rejection of belief in God/gods, while the term “agnostic” identifies someone who admits that he doesn’t know if God exists. He may think there’s no God, but he’s not certain enough to state his unbelief as a fact.

An agnostic might say, for example, “I don’t think we can know God exists,” or “How would we know if God exists?” Also, “Even if He does exist, how would He reveal Himself to us?”

Some agnostics might set aside the whole matter of evidence and say they are “suspending belief.” What they mean is that they are setting aside their own skepticism or critical thinking to accept something as true—like, for instance, their conclusion that God doesn’t exist. Ironically, they accept this conclusion by faith. In doing so, they effectively put themselves in the driver’s seat. They decide what they want to believe—and this autonomy is what they’re after.

Suspending belief isn’t necessarily a good way to ascertain truth, but people do it, nonetheless. Related concepts include “cognitive dissonance” or “confirmation bias.” These terms refer to someone who only listens to facts and evidence that support what he already believes. Before long, these people find themselves in an echo chamber that reverberates only with their own thoughts and ideas. Again—not a good way to get at the truth.

All of us are guilty of confirmation bias to one extent or another, especially when the topic is politics or religion, but atheists and agnostics take it to an extreme. Christians can argue and persuade until they’re blue in the face, but no amount of logic or argumentation will move the secular naturalist from his entrenched position. He only listens to facts that confirm what he already believes.

So, then, in view of these challenges, how do we engage atheists and agnostics in meaningful dialog? In my experience, *the key is showing humility and asking questions.* This is much more effective than making sweeping, dramatic faith-claims. Jesus, the Master Teacher, used this questioning technique (e.g., Matt. 16:15; 19:3–9, 16–22; Luke 10:25–37; John 4:7–26).



Jesus Sits by the Seashore and Preaches
James Tissot

One good opening question is: “Do you want to know if God exists?” This cuts through all the nonsense and challenges the agnostic to be honest with you. Also, it begins the conversation with the assumption that God is “up there,” somewhere—and if He is, wouldn’t we want to know about it? Also, as a concession, it keeps the skeptic in the driver’s seat—at least, for now. They decide if they really want to know the truth.

Sometimes, agnostics will concede that they believe in a God or gods, but they’re not sure which one. There are, after all, thousands of religions in the world, and each one has its own set of deities. So, if they say they’re open to the possibility that God exists, we can ask, “Which God is it?” Details, details, we want details. The more specific the conversation is, the more productive it will be.

The purpose of all this is to pierce the veneer of ignorance in the agnostic’s belief system.

Reason #2: Education

The Jewish community places a high priority on education—and most Jewish families encourage their young people to enroll in college. But when these young people are raised in a family that emphasizes the identity that is found primarily in family, ethnicity, and culture, but with little mention of a personal God, the university then becomes an environment where agnosticism or atheism can flourish.

The New Testament tells us, *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear* (1 Peter 3:15). Evangelical Christians tend to take this admonition seriously, so we make apologetics a priority. Apologetics is the branch of theology that provides believers with reasons, evidence, or a defense as to why historic Christianity is the one, true faith.

While many young Christians are sent off to college without a good foundation in apologetics (believe me, I have seen the results), others are at least minimally informed about the basics of Christian doctrine and apologetics.

But that’s in the *Christian* community. In the Jewish community, it’s different. Learning how to defend your religious beliefs is not a huge priority among Jewish people. Sometimes, it is said that Christianity is more about the “creed” (deriving the right beliefs from Scripture), while Judaism is more interested in the “deed” (right actions). Granted, this is a bit of a caricature. But the fact remains that many of our Jewish friends have never learned how to express their religious viewpoints—other than their obligation to do good deeds.

This is where the idea of “worldview” comes into play. A worldview is a lens through which we look at the world—and whether we realize it or not, we all have one. More specifically, a worldview is “an explanation and interpretation of the world, and second, an application of this view to life.”⁷ When Jewish young people find themselves on a university campus, it is often their first exposure to such a wide variety of worldviews—including the one Christians (like us) are proposing. It may be the first time they’ve been challenged to think about these matters.

⁷ W. Gary Phillips, Williams E. Brown, and J. Stonestreet, *Making Sense of Your World from a Biblical Viewpoint* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 29.

One of the most common worldviews that dominates campuses these days is evolutionary naturalism. Naturalism, of course, is the view that nature is all there is—that is, the atoms and molecules that constantly swirl around us make up the sum and total of the universe. There is nothing beyond the physical. The building blocks of life were guided over billions of years by a random, evolutionary process that enabled simple life to form and gradually, over many generations, to become more complex.

Professors of science and philosophy make it their goal to defend the superiority of their evolutionary worldview. As part of this indoctrination, students are exposed to various versions of the following questions and answers:

1. *Who rules?*

No one is on the throne. God does not exist or is irrelevant. No one is guiding the process. This is the evolutionists' answer.

2. *Where do we come from?*

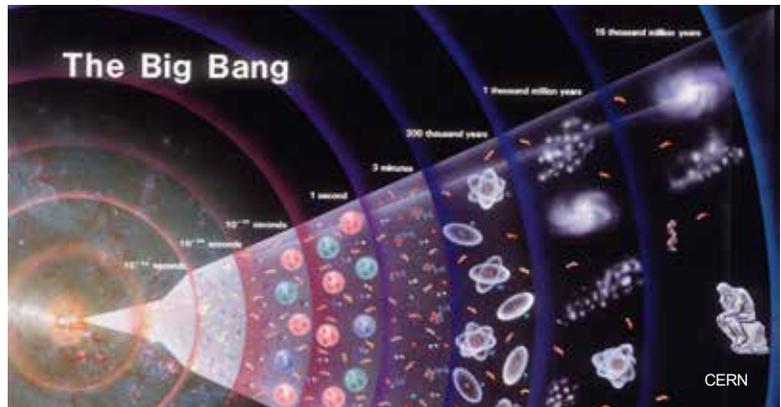
According to the evolutionary worldview, purposeless, random adaptation and mutation are responsible for the rise of humanity, alongside other living species. Everything that exists should be traceable back to a “first cause,” of course; but evolutionists are strangely silent when asked how the first matter came into being and what (or Who) caused the Big Bang.⁸

3. *Where are we going?*

From a strictly chemical standpoint, we are destined to return to death and dust, in that order. We're told that the sun will die out in about five billion years, when the hydrogen that fuels it is exhausted.

At that point, the hydrogen-starved sun will expand into a red giant and shed its outer layers, incinerating the inner planets (including Earth), and leaving behind a white dwarf star. A white dwarf star wouldn't generate enough light and heat to sustain life as we know it.

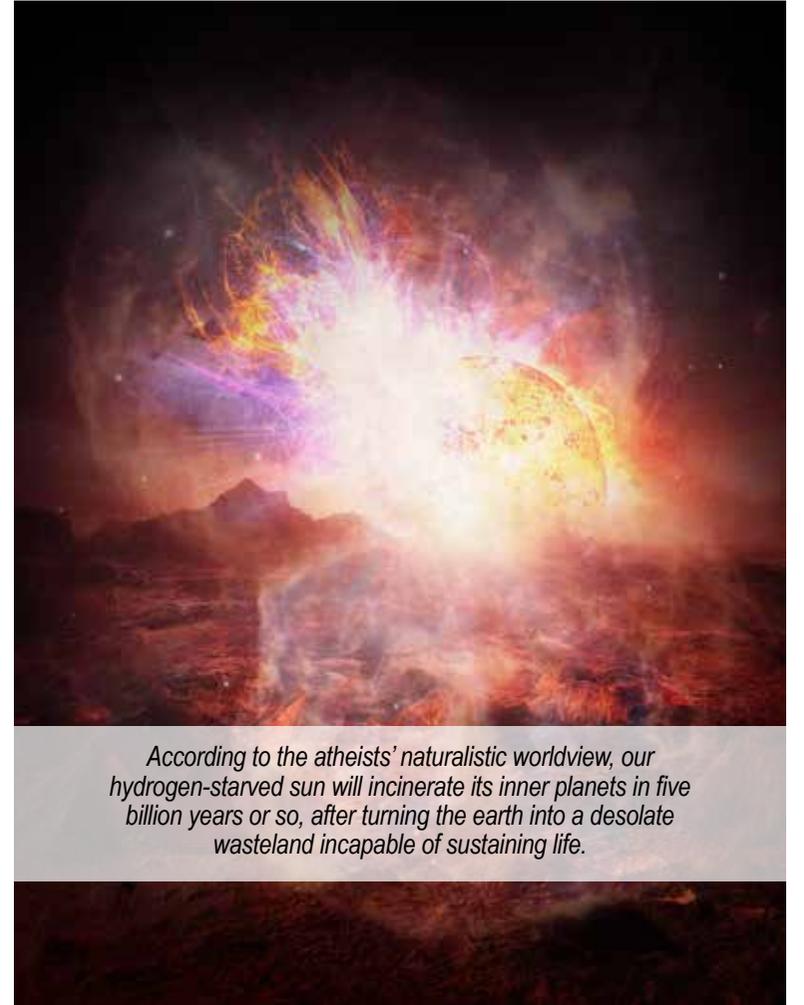
Some futurists are more optimistic, predicting that eventually, before the sun dies, humans will evolve into something else nonhuman, or perhaps superhuman. Others are more realistic, saying that humanity will either adapt or perish.



⁸ The traditional, evolutionary view is that the so-called “Big Bang” began with a singularity (an extremely hot and dense state of matter and energy) that exploded billions of years ago and began the expansion we observe in the universe today. A singularity, according to general relativity, is a point where density and temperature become infinite. Physicists now recognize that under such extreme conditions, laws of physics and general relativity would break down; so, much about the creation of the universe, and the theoretical, original singularity (millions of years before atoms and molecules came into existence), continues to elude modern science. As yet, even with artificial intelligence (AI) on the rise, no one seems to have improved on what Genesis 1:1 tells us: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

4. *Why are we here?*

The naturalistic answer: We are here to propagate the species—not much different from tadpoles in a pond or chickens in a coop. Ultimately, according to Darwinian thought, the universe is without purpose, and hence human life in its cosmic setting is also devoid of meaning or purpose beyond its meager contribution of keeping the species from extinction.



According to the atheists' naturalistic worldview, our hydrogen-starved sun will incinerate its inner planets in five billion years or so, after turning the earth into a desolate wasteland incapable of sustaining life.

Another definition of naturalism goes like this:

A person who does not affirm the supernatural—God, gods, ghosts, immaterial souls, spirits—is a person who affirms naturalism. For naturalists, nature is all there is. And if it is not science, then it is nonsense (i.e., nonsense). Most naturalists put stock in empirical, evidence-based ways of justifying opinions about what is real; this is exemplified by science. Naturalists think such beliefs are more reliable and objective than those based on intuition, various kinds of revelation, sacred texts, religious authority, or reports by people claiming to have had religious experiences.⁹

A cousin of naturalism is *materialism* (sometimes called *physicalism*), which is the belief that matter is all that exists and anything that is not composed of molecules and atoms (i.e., anything that is not a physical entity) does not exist. Most forms of atheism are variations of philosophical naturalism and materialism.

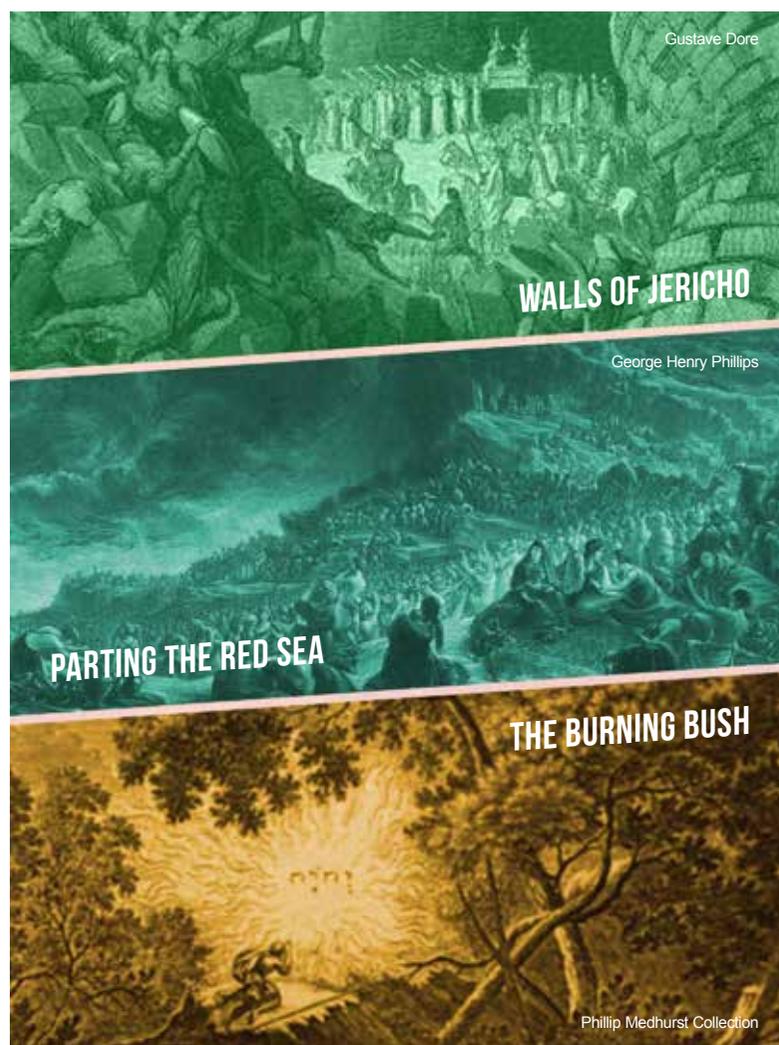
⁹ Paul Copan, Tremper Longman III, Christopher Reese, and Michael Strauss, *Dictionary of Christianity and Science: The Definitive Reference for The Intersection Of Christian Faith and Contemporary Science* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2017), 469.

What about Miracles?

These secular-material-evolutionary worldviews inevitably influence how students on our campuses think about the miraculous. The Bible, “the Greatest Story Ever Told,” is fundamentally a narrative about God’s intervention in human history—so much of it, by definition, is supernatural and miraculous.

In its hallowed pages, we read about the shofar blast that brought down the walls of Jericho (Josh. 6:20), the bush that burned with fire but was not consumed (Ex. 3:14), and the spectacular parting of the Red Sea at Moses’ command (Ex. 14:21), with the subsequent rescue of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt.

Some Jewish students have told me they don’t know if events like these really happened, or if they were fabricated. Moreover, these students do not seem to be particularly bothered by the prospect that those events might be fiction.



One Reform Jewish rabbi told me he doesn’t worry about the historicity of the biblical miracles because all that really matters is the lesson to be learned. For example, he says the Passover account doesn’t need to be historically true. For him, the point of the story is that “slavery is wrong.”

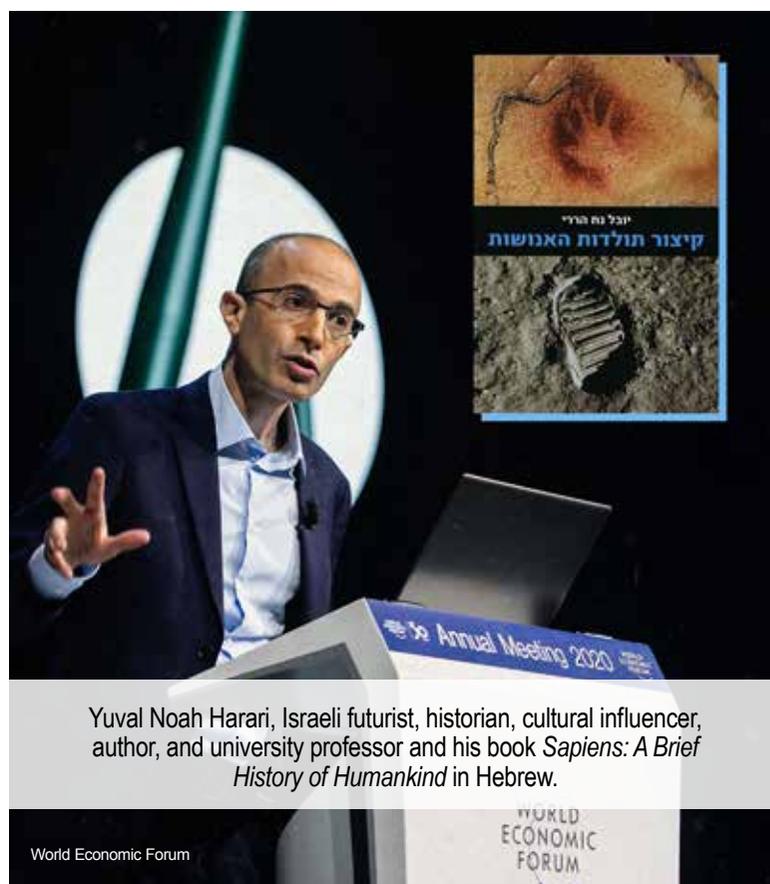
So, while Christianity’s truth claims are contingent on supernatural phenomena—the Virgin Birth, Jesus’s Resurrection, and the numerous other miracles attributed to Him—some in the Jewish community say miracles are not needed to validate religious beliefs.

Judaism Without God

Noah Harari is an Israeli historian, futurist, popular author, and, most importantly, the chief adviser to Klaus Schwab, founder and director of the extremely influential and controversial World Economic Forum (WEF). Harari is a huge influencer of secular Israelis and is the author of the bestselling book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, where he says:

According to the science of biology, people were not “created.” They have evolved. And they certainly did not evolve to be “equal.” The idea of equality is inextricably intertwined with the idea of creation. The Americans got the idea of equality from Christianity, which argues that every person has a divinely created soul, and that all souls are equal before God. However, if we do not believe in the Christian myths about God, creation and souls, what does it mean that all people are “equal”? Evolution is based on difference, not on equality. Every person carries a somewhat different genetic code and is exposed from birth to different environmental influences. This leads to the development of different qualities that carry with them different chances of survival. “Created equal” should therefore be translated into “evolved differently.” Just as people were never created, neither, according to the science of biology, is there a “Creator” who “endows” them with anything. There is only a blind evolutionary process, devoid of any purpose, leading to the birth of individuals. “Endowed by their Creator” should be translated simply into “born.”¹⁰

Obviously, if you have this kind of influence over the minds and hearts of Jewish people, and this is what you’re telling them, it isn’t going to push them towards belief in a personal God. It certainly won’t incentivize any sort of “search for the Messiah,” either.



Yuval Noah Harari, Israeli futurist, historian, cultural influencer, author, and university professor and his book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* in Hebrew.

¹⁰ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Toronto: McLellan and Stewart, 2014), np.

But as we noted earlier, being an atheist (or agnostic) isn't necessarily seen as being contradictory to Judaism. Back in 2011, an article appeared in *USA Today* called "Judaism without God? Yes, say American atheists." The article makes the point that atheism and Judaism aren't necessarily incompatible.¹¹

The way things stand now, a Jewish person who attends synagogue, participates in Jewish community life, or contributes heavily to Jewish charities can be considered unquestionably Jewish. There is no need to ask them about their belief (or unbelief) in God.

However, the question of whether Judaism can survive long-term without a reasonably well-defined faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is another matter.



Probing for Morality and Meaning

So, now that we have established the fact that atheism and agnosticism are entrenched in the Jewish community, how do we deal with this situation as believers in Jesus? Under these circumstances, how do we approach secular Jews and engage them in meaningful "God" conversations?

One obstacle we face today is that most Jewish people are more concerned about the here-and-now than they are about going to Heaven. This attitude resonates with certain aspects of ancient Judaism (prior to AD 70), when parties like the Sadducees were wary of theological developments that were derived from the Pharisees' Oral Tradition rather than directly from the written Torah itself.

Contrary to what many people think, the Sadducees didn't object to everything supernatural. They affirmed miracles like divine Creation (Genesis), the Passover (Exodus) and its miracles, and other miraculous aspects of the Torah. However, they objected to teachings like Heaven and the afterlife, the existence of angels, and the bodily resurrection of the dead—all of which they felt lacked a clear basis in the written Torah.¹²

So, we want to engage modern Jewish people in conversation about issues they care about. That would include matters like justice, equality, and human rights. We can also ask them to explain the "why" behind what they are doing with their lives. Any system of morality will consist of moral *values* and moral *duties*. These are all things we are prepared to talk to them about. However, the single most important issue we place at the forefront is that of truth.

¹¹ See "Judaism without God? Yes, say American atheists" in the Religion News Service (September 23, 2011). Accessed at religionnews.com.

¹² The Sadducees were right—the facts about Heaven, the resurrection(s), and angels are scant in the Hebrew Bible. They joined the Samaritans in rejecting the authority of the rabbis' Oral Torah, which sought to fill in these gaps of knowledge. This is why the New Testament (ברית החדשה; *Berit HaChadashah*) was necessary. It provides details without resorting to human speculation.

Truth

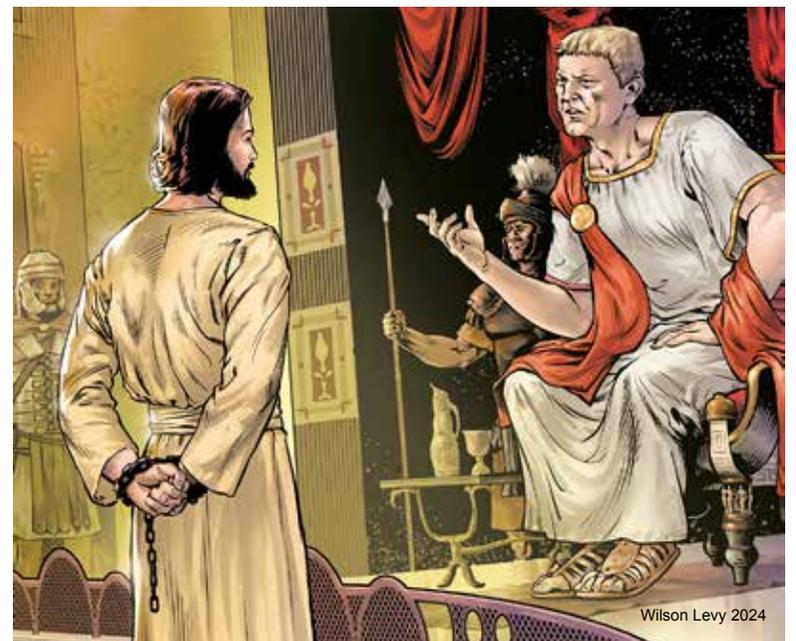
The Roman Governor Pilate famously looked Jesus in the eye and asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). The irony here, of course, is that Jesus Himself is "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6). The very embodiment of truth was staring the Roman in the face.

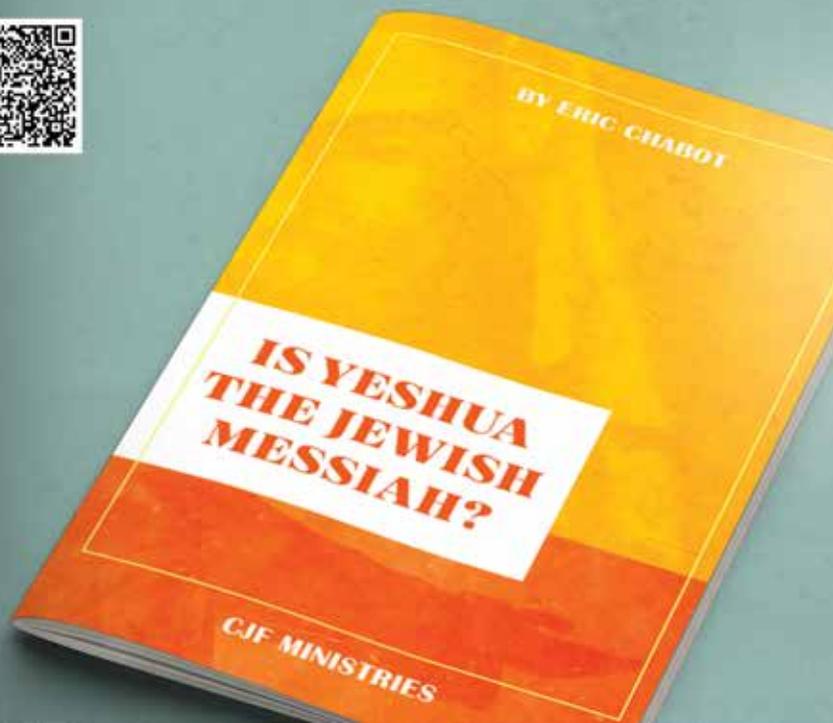
The reality is that all the other issues we're talking about in this article take us back to the truth question. What is truth? Can we know truth? Many Jewish people have been impacted by a postmodernism which generally rejects the idea of objective truth. Thus, to them, truth is socially constructed. Postmoderns are suspicious and skeptical of authority and can be more in search of transcendence and some nebulous plane of spirituality, but not religion.

The classical view (and the view that's biblical) is that *the essence of truth is conformity to fact or actuality*. In other words, truth is what's real. As believers, we live our lives by this definition of truth. For example, the statement "God exists" is objective truth. It means that there really is a God outside the created universe. Or when we say, "God raised Jesus from the dead," it means that the dead corpse of Jesus of Nazareth supernaturally vacated its tomb, fully alive again, on the third day after its burial. He is alive today—and He's seated at the right hand of the Father. This is what is true and real.

Therefore, there is something called "objective truth" which means truth can be derived from outside us. It's not like postmodernism, where truth is in the eye of the beholder. Neither is it like "subjective truth," which is rooted in the opinions and beliefs of the ones who hold these views—views that vary from person to person.

We tell agnostics and atheists that we are making objective truth claims. We want them to understand that we are dealing with realities, not mere imagination or opinions. If it is true that the God of the Bible exists and that Jesus rose from the dead, those things will still be true tomorrow, ten days from now, ten years from now, and a hundred years from now! We reiterate by asking, "If this is true, will you commit your life to God and His Messiah?" Now, if they say, "Okay, how do we know it is true?" then this opens the door to take the conversation deeper. But if they respond with, "No, I don't really care if it is true!" this means the person is not a genuine seeker—at least, not yet. In this case, we disengage and look for someone else.





There is no doubt that many Christians are fully convinced that Yeshua is the Savior of the world, and millions of evangelistic appeals are given each year for people to accept Him as personal Savior. In talking with Jewish people about this issue, I have realized that there is a wide range of thought. This booklet takes a more extensive look at some of the objections to the Messiahship of Yeshua by Jewish thinkers.

Is Yeshua The Jewish Messiah?

by Eric Chabot

\$5.00

Add to cart

What About Messianic Prophecy?

Sometimes people ask if appealing to Messianic prophecy can be helpful in dealing with Jewish agnostics or atheists (secularists). After all, the Bible portrays prophecy as God's preferred method for proving that He is the one true God (Deut. 18:15ff; Isa 41:21–24; 42:8–9; 43:9–13; 44:6–8, 24–28; 45:11–13, 20–22; 46:8–11; 48:3–7, 12–16).

The Lord Himself used Messianic prophecy in two post-Resurrection appearances (Luke 24:25–27; 24:44–46), including one where He rebuked two disciples on the road to Emmaus for being slow to believe “all that the prophets [i.e., Messianic prophecy] have spoken.”

In their preaching, the Apostles likewise appealed to fulfilled prophecy and the Resurrection as evidence for Jesus being the Messiah (Acts 2:14, 32, 39; 3:6–16, 4:8–14; 17:1–4; 26:26).

However, we should remember that Messianic prophecy was used in the NT with people who already believed in God and had some knowledge of the Scriptures. Today, sadly, we seldom meet young people with these qualifications. As we've been saying, many Jewish people are secular these days and don't know much about their own Scriptures.

Nonetheless, this doesn't mean we can't use Messianic prophecy in conversations with our secular friends, whether Jewish or Gentile. Prophecy is powerful, and it can be convincing. At the same time, however, let's remember our audience! If they are secular, recognize their limitations. Don't expect them to know and understand more than they actually do. And don't become discouraged when you find yourself having to lead them back to “square one” because of their weak background.

Speaking of background, everything starts with the question of origins—how did we get here? Then from there, the conversation turns to the human condition (we're sinners) and how we are redeemed (by the blood of Jesus). Ultimately, we want to shake lost people loose from their worldly, naturalistic “here-and-now” mentality, and give them a glimpse of eternity and the question of all questions—that is, where will I go when I die?

God's existence, and His identity as the First Cause of everything, impacts every area of our lives. It's the lens through which we view all of reality. We need to be willing to engage with Jewish people on this basis—that is, building on the foundation of God as the First Cause.

A good way to start is by building relationships of trust with our Jewish loved ones and acquaintances. Never assume anything. Follow the example of our Lord by asking questions. Be humble and who knows? You might learn a thing or two! And remember that Jewish people come to faith just like anyone else. They must be open to the truth—and when they are, God's Spirit will respond in kind and open their eyes (2 Cor. 4:4–6) and use us to share His Good News with them. 



Eric's ministry is a Gospel outreach to students, both Jews and non-Jews, on secular college campuses in the vicinity of Columbus, Ohio. He and his team are supported in their efforts by the free-will offerings of fellow believers who share a burden for these students—and the Lord's blessing is wonderfully evident

in the fruit of this ministry (Col. 1:6). Hardly a month goes by without us receiving a report from Eric about yet another student who has come to faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior. If you would like to join his team of supporters, please preference your gift to ERIC CHABOT. Checks should be made payable to “CJF Ministries,” PO Box 345, San Antonio, TX 78292. Or feel free to call our OrderLine at 1-800-926-5397 (during normal business hours in the Central Time Zone) to contribute with a credit card. If no one is available to take your call (which sometimes happens during high-traffic periods), please leave a voicemail with your name, phone number, and the best time to return your call. Contributions can also be made online at cjfm.org/donate.

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *Some critics say that the Gospel rests on a shaky foundation, with very little in the way of evidence supporting it. Do you agree with this assessment?*

ANSWER: No, not at all. Let's think together about this.

First, we can quickly dispense with the so-called “mythicist” view of some cranky, out-of-date skeptics who used to say that Jesus of Nazareth never existed. This position was more common a century or so ago, but it has been soundly and repeatedly refuted since then, even by secular or liberal scholars.

One of today's most vocal anti-Gospel academics, agnostic Bart Ehrman (PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary), has written a book entitled *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2013). In it, Ehrman argues quite forcefully that the idea of Jesus being a myth is unsupportable. Ehrman says that virtually all credible scholars today recognize that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jewish rabbi who lived in first-century Palestine. They may not agree with biblical claims about His miracles, His Resurrection, or other details of His life—but, except for a few crackpots with an axe to grind, they all agree that He existed.

Even the famous skeptic, Robert Ingersoll, never cast doubt on the existence of Jesus. He questioned lots of other things (like the reliability of the Bible and the validity of miracles), but not Jesus' existence.

Virtually all academic religious scholars, from all backgrounds, universally agree on these four key facts:

1. Jesus of Nazareth existed. He was a first-century Jewish preacher active in Galilee and Judea. His Hebrew/Aramaic name was Yeshua (ישוע).
2. He was crucified under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. (This was disputed until 1961, when archaeologists in Israel confirmed it.)
3. After His death, Jesus' followers spread the belief throughout the Roman Empire that He had risen from the dead, forming the early Messianic (Jewish-Christian) movement.
4. With the lone exception of John, tradition tells us that the original disciples (including Matthias, who replaced Judas Iscariot; Acts 1:15–26) were martyred in various parts of the world by enemies who wanted to squelch their message that they had seen the resurrected Son of God.

Now what about the remaining points where these scholars are *critical*—like their disputation of Jesus' miracles, for instance? Interestingly, we find tacit confirmation of the Lord's miracles in a most unexpected source—namely, the Jewish Talmud (*Bavli*). While it's true that the Talmud

wasn't codified in written form until the fifth or sixth century AD, many scholars nonetheless believe it contains strains of much older data passed down orally from generation to generation—some of which could date as far back as biblical times. These references change Jesus' name to *Yeshu* (a sometimes-pejorative form of Yeshua),¹ and describe Him as a worker of “magic” or “sorcery.” What better way for enemies of the Gospel to try to explain away the Lord's miracles than to attribute them to “magic” or “sorcery”?

These sources also say Yeshu led the people astray with His false teachings and was executed on the eve of Passover (Sanhedrin 107b). In another Talmudic passage, He is known as Ben Stada, who is said to have taught “perverse things” (Sotah 47a). The text says Ben Stada's mother's name was Miriam (Mary), and it raises questions about his being a *mamzer* (i.e., born out of wedlock). This sounds remarkably like Jesus' interchange with the Pharisees in John 8:18–41, does it not? In that conversation, they challenged the legitimacy of His birth.

The safest and most reasonable approach is to trust the eyewitness accounts in the four gospels (and in Acts).² Would those early believers have sacrificed their lives for something they knew wasn't true? Of course not. No one would. Even James, the brother of Jesus, who was an early skeptic, became convinced of the truth of the Gospel and ended up a martyr when his enemies dragged him up to the pinnacle of the Temple and threw him down to his death.³

The Gospel's historical foundations are far from shaky; in fact, they are rock-solid. John himself affirmed that his faith was based not on the shifting sand of flimsy assumptions, but on solid, tangible things he himself had seen and heard:

That which was from the beginning, **which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—**

the life was manifested, and **we have seen**, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1–3, emphasis added).

¹ The truncated form Yeshu (shortened from Yeshua) carries negative overtones, especially in polemical and rabbinic texts. Taken as an acronym, Yeshu means, *Yimmach Shemo V'Zichro* (ימח שמו וזכרו); that is, “May his name and memory be blotted out.”

² Luke, the author of Luke-Acts, was not an eyewitness. However, he explains that he received much of his information from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1–4).

³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (Book 20, Chapter 9). The distance from the pinnacle of the Temple down to the Kidron Valley below would have been roughly 450 feet (137 meters)—about the same as the length of one and a half football fields.

Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger



UNLV Outreach

Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation (Las Vegas), is blessed to share that 28 students on the campus of the University of Las Vegas have prayed to receive Jesus since school began in late August. Rich is amazed at how God uses his wife, Oanh, as she shared the Gospel message with 26 of those students. “Michael,” one of those students, is Jewish and told Oanh that he was attending a seeker-friendly church in town but had not made a commitment to Jesus until Oanh had a conversation with him. Oanh faithfully prays that she would be able to help someone. God put her in the path of “J,” who had just left his class due to an anxiety attack and was on his way to the Crisis Center. Oanh shared the Good News message with him and he prayed with her to give his crisis and his life to the Lord. He said that his anxiety was gone and that he felt a lot better contemplating one of the verses Oanh shared with him when Jesus said: “*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matt. 11:28). Rich also noticed that too many students were walking past all of their campus volunteers and not taking tracts, so he decided to use a megaphone and open air preach. Please join him and his team in praying for more opportunities to share the Gospel message as small groups gather to listen.

Rich and his wife, Oanh, have witnessed to Oanh’s 92-year-old father for the past 30 years to no avail. He and his second wife are Buddhists. They have hundreds of Buddha statues inside and outside their house. Rich and Oanh tried visiting her dad last February, but his wife would not let them enter the house because they are believers in Jesus—and she did not mask her hostility toward them. There was nothing they could do other than pray. However, this past summer, Rich and Oanh decided to try one last attempt and embarked on the “mission impossible,” not knowing whether they would be allowed into the house to see Oanh’s father. They prayed during the 5-hour drive, knowing that they also had a lot of prayer support back home. Prayers were answered, and they were allowed to go in. Oanh shared the Gospel with her father in Vietnamese, without his wife’s knowledge. He told her, “I have no choice but to believe in Jesus,” admitting that Buddha had done nothing to help him. Rich adds, “What a statement from a diehard Buddhist!” They were allowed to return for a second visit, during which Oanh’s father twice emphatically confirmed to her that he believed in Jesus. Thirty-one days later, he passed on from this life. Rich and Oanh are confident he met his Maker in Heaven. They rejoice in how “God’s timing is awesome in every way, as He turned “mission impossible” into “mission successful!”

Please pray for God to continue to open doors for their outreaches at *Beth Yeshua*, UNLV, the malls, parks, speaking in churches, referrals, and Oanh’s Israeli dance team in convalescent homes.

Haredi Ministry

Diann Parkas, CJFM representative (New Jersey), is excited to report the latest developments in the Haredi ministry, which focuses on the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. God has been connecting Diann’s team with several Haredi individuals who are either seeking to know about Jesus or have already come to believe the truth—that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah. Some continue to live as secret believers within the community, while others choose to leave. “P” is a new believer who attends their online Bible study and is eager to be baptized. And God has given “T” a heart of enthusiasm to reach other Haredi for Messiah. The most amazing testimony recently came from an ultra-Orthodox man, “J,” who shared that he had a revelation that Jesus is the Messiah while he was in his synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and is now being disciplined in his new faith. Please pray for these new believers to grow strong in their faith and that the Lord will break through to reach many others in the Haredi community.

Connections

Marcos and Deborah Morales, CJFM representatives (Argentina), write about the people they come in contact with in their sphere of service to the Lord. Some individuals reach out to them because they have a Jewish friend and don’t know how to witness to them about Yeshua. Others may have met a Jewish person in their church and tell them about the Morales’ Messianic congregation. Others, who live further away, follow Marcos and Deborah through their social networks. This was the case with “Isaac,” a young Jewish law student who lives in a neighboring city and came to faith in Messiah in his senior year of high school. His family is very active in their local Jewish community, and he has an older brother who is studying to become a rabbi at a yeshiva in Buenos Aires. Because of his faith in Yeshua, Isaac cannot attend the local *kehillah* (community) and has been confronted with many difficult family situations. Isaac also texted Marcos and expressed his doubts about a teaching he had heard at a youth camp he had attended. He was told that God was no longer dealing with Israel, but rather with the Church. Marcos explained Replacement Theology and Supercessionism to Isaac, which many churches use as doctrine, clarifying that God has not replaced Israel with the Church and has not rejected His people, Israel. Isaac also receives weekly audio devotionals from Marcos, “Seeds of Peace and Love,” and streaming of their congregational meetings through their closed Facebook group. Isaac told Marcos that he is grateful to be connected through technology and for his counseling which is “a great blessing and spiritual help to my life.” Isaac also thanks the Lord for having met Marcos and Deborah and for the support of Jewish believers in Yeshua.

IN THIS ISSUE

Why Are There So Many Jewish Atheists?

by Eric Chabot
Page 1

Bible Questions & Answers

Is there evidence
to support the Gospel?
Page 10

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger
Page 11

CJF Ministries®

Post Office Box 345
San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345

DID YOU KNOW?

YOU CAN ACCESS THIS COPY OF

MESSIANIC PERSPECTIVES

AS WELL AS OUR ARCHIVE
OF PREVIOUS ISSUES.



VISIT CJFM.ORG/PAPER ON ANY COMPUTER OR TABLET.

