

The Guide

(A Jewish Encounter with a Missionary)

The conversation was unsettling. Your friend has just revealed to you that he or she now believes in Jesus, or Yeshua as he or she prefers to call him. No, your friend insists, this is not a conversion to Christianity. Jesus is the “Jewish” Messiah, and I am fulfilling my destiny as a Jew by putting my faith in him.

The thoughts and emotions rush through your inner being. Jews don't believe in Jesus! So many Jews sacrificed so much in order to avoid the step your friend has just taken. You and your friend have always identified yourselves as Jews in a Christian world. That was something that you felt good about. It was not always comfortable, but you felt part of something holy, timeless and true. Now that is gone. Or is it? Your friend claims that his or her new belief is part and parcel of being Jewish. Is this true? What are you to make of all of the Scriptural arguments that your friend is now so enthusiastically espousing? What about the amazing inner peace and connection to the divine that your friend claims to have found?

This brief article was written with the purpose of guiding you through the confusion that many Jews experience when they encounter the Christian missionary campaign up close. It may be a friend, it may be a family member, and it may be yourself who is seeking clarity. Our aim is to provide a step by step guide through the process of a Jewish encounter with Christianity. Our prayer is that you find this humble work helpful in your search for truth.

Where Do I Start?

(Did You Read it All?)

The Bible. It is the Jewish prophets who predicted the coming of the Messiah, and it is upon their words that the missionary is encouraging you to base your faith. The missionary claims that various passages in the Jewish Bible predict the advent of Jesus. The missionary contends that: “Your own prophets are telling you to put your faith in him”.

Let us step back and look at this logically. The missionary is in essence telling you to make a life-transforming decision on the basis of a book.

There are many questions that should be addressed before allowing a book to make such an impact on our lives. What is the basis of the authority of this book? Who guarantees its authenticity? How can I be sure that this book is truly the word of God?

Before addressing these important questions, I would encourage you to ask yourself: Do you really know this book? What is the central message of the Jewish Scriptures? Are you aware that there are many passages in the Jewish Scriptures which would discourage you from putting your faith in Jesus?

If the missionary truly wanted you to make a decision based on honesty and integrity, he or she would have encouraged you to read the Scriptures from cover to cover before making any decisions. If the missionary truly believed that the Jewish Scriptures is God's guidance to His people, the missionary would have suggested that you study the Scriptures seriously and intensely, and then, and only then, make your decision. The fact that the missionary is satisfied to have you turn your life around on the basis of his or her preselected passages, should prompt some questions. If God really meant to provide guidance through this book, why do I need someone to tell me which particular passages I should be reading? Perhaps if I would be reading a different selection of passages, I would be pointed in a different direction?

I encourage you to study the Jewish Bible from cover to cover. I also encourage you to study the foundational doctrinal differences that separate Judaism from Christianity. After you feel comfortable with the Bible and with the opposing doctrines of Judaism and Christianity, I suggest the following exercise. Study the words of the Jewish prophets and see which of the two belief systems is supported by the text of the Bible.

You may find the work challenging. But if you do anything less, your decision will be that much less than honest.

Are There Any Shortcuts?

(Where Is This Book From Anyway?)

Is this the only way we can discover the truth? Are we to remain in a state of confusion until we master a lengthy series of ancient writings? This doesn't seem right. And it is not! The belief that the Bible is the only guide to God's truth is both illogical and unbiblical.

A merciful God would not leave us in the dark until we find the time and obtain the capabilities of mastering the Jewish Scriptures. Can you really believe that God presented the Bible to the Jewish people in a vacuum, devoid of any additional information? It is clear that God has another method of communicating with us outside of the book. Just ask yourself: What method of communication did God use to inform you that this is His book and that its contents are accurate and valid? How does God expect you to believe that each of the Biblical books truly belongs in the Biblical canon?

You will find the answers to these questions in the narratives of the Bible. The Bible itself describes how God handed the foundations of faith to His people, and it wasn't through a book. The Bible also describes how God ensured that His truth be preserved for the future generations. The Five Books of Moses serve as one of God's witnesses. But the Bible also describes another witness appointed by God to perpetuate His truth throughout history.

I encourage you to read the Bible with these questions in mind. What are the foundations of the faith of the Jewish Scriptures? How did God establish these truths in the minds and the hearts of the Jewish people? What methods did God use to preserve these truths so that the later generations may learn these basic truths?

Please try to discover: How were the Jewish Scriptures canonized? What were the requirements demanded of a claimant to prophecy before his or her books were accepted? Who determined that these requirements were indeed met, and how can we be sure that the judgment of these people was indeed accurate?

If you are going to base a life-transforming decision on the basis of a book, you owe it to yourself to find the answers to these fundamental questions.

Keep It Simple

(Idolatry)

There is something that must come before the Bible and even before the questions pertaining to the origins of the Bible. The entire discussion is based on the presupposition that man has the capability of differentiating between truth and falsehood. The original missionary presentation is in essence an appeal to the human sensitivity to truth. The Jewish counter-argument is also an appeal to the same human sensitivity to truth. But if we consult the human sensitivity to truth, with which God blessed us all, the debate does not begin.

Our innate sensitivity to truth tells us that a man is not God and that God is not a man. That's really all there is to it.

Christians tend to have a hard time realizing how this argument applies to Jesus. Libraries of arguments have been written in an ongoing effort to justify the Christian devotion to Jesus. But the sum-total of all of these arguments points to a human being and encourages us to direct all of our love and devotion towards him. The innate sensitivity to truth that we all share tells us that no finite being is deserving of that kind of worship.

Would you accept an argument that encourages this type of devotion towards a statue? A frog? A cow or a cat? Would you believe it if any person told you that he or she is God incarnate? How *could* such a claim be substantiated? Why is Jesus claim different?

The fact that Jesus is not visible today confuses some people. The general perception of idolatry would have people bowing down in reverence to a physical statue that is right there in front of them. Since Jesus cannot be seen in a physical sense, people do not readily associate Christianity's adoration of Jesus with idol worship. But while Jesus was alive, Christianity contends that he was worthy of absolute worship, adoration and reverence. So please picture the following scene in your mind. Imagine a human being standing in front of a crowd of people who have prostrated themselves on the floor in worship of this human being. This scene is at the heart of Christianity.

Spectacular Experiences and Inner Peace

(Jesus Spoke to Me)

Some Missionaries encourage people to put their faith in Jesus on the basis of certain spiritual experiences. People have had encounters with Jesus, healings have been affected in the name of Jesus, and lives have been radically transformed through faith in Jesus. The missionary points to these experiences as evidence to substantiate the claims of Christianity.

The obvious problem with this missionary contention is that these experiences are not limited to Christianity. All of these occurrences, be they encounters with an ethereal being, faith healings, or transformed lives, are found in many religions that the missionary would readily identify as fraudulent. These include but are not limited to, Mormonism, Islam, Hinduism, Christian Science and Judaism. These supernatural experiences cannot honestly be used to substantiate a religious claim for the simple reason that these experiences are not the exclusive possession of any one belief system.

Another problem with drawing upon supernatural phenomena as a basis for faith is that the Bible clearly warns us against basing our faith on miracles. In the book of Deuteronomy (13:2) God warns us not to be persuaded by the miracles of a prophet if the prophet is encouraging worship of a strange god. If the missionary wants us to accept the Bible, he or she will also have to accept that a sign or a wonder cannot validate a religious claim.

One more comment before we leave the subject. There are various types of religious experiences, some of which are quite spectacular. But there is one experience that towers above all the rest. It is not as spectacular or as exciting as most other spiritual experiences, but it is more solid than all of them put together. It is the only one which could morally justify acceptance of a religious claim. This experience of which I speak is the sense of honesty. The spiritual experience that I encourage you to seek is one where you can look at yourself in the mirror and say: I am true to myself, I am true to my people, and I am true to my God. This experience is not easy to attain. It requires diligent searching and ongoing self-examination. But there is no spiritual experience that is more rewarding than the knowledge that you are living your life in an ongoing honest search for truth.

Meanwhile

(What Do I Do Until I Find the Answers?)

What do I do if I find myself in a state of confusion? What do I do while I try to find the path of truth between these two world-religions? For the time being, while I seek, should I commit myself to Jesus? Or should I withhold that commitment?

You should withhold your commitment.

There are several angles from which we can approach this question and all of them lead to the same conclusion. Unless you are absolutely convinced that Jesus is who he claimed to be, it would be immoral to commit yourself in worship to him. I present here two basic paths through which we can determine the moral course of action for one who cannot come to a clear decision between Judaism and Christianity.

First and foremost is the simple fact that if Jesus was not who he claimed to be than veneration and worship of him is idolatry. In the dictionary of the Bible, idolatry is the greatest sin. There is no moral justification for a commitment to worship when one is not certain that this worship is not idolatrous.

A second approach to this question would be through the principle of “status quo”. Before Jesus presented his claim there was no reason to believe in him. All of the theological claims of Christianity were introduced to a world in which these claims were not established. The “status quo” is: “No Jesus” and “no Christianity”. The “burden of proof” rests solely and squarely upon the shoulder of the missionary. Until clear and conclusive evidence is brought forth, there is no reason to assume that the status quo has changed.

I would expect that a Christian should respect a person’s reluctance to commit themselves in worship to Jesus. Why would anyone value a hasty conversion to faith that failed to appreciate the serious nature of the decision?

I Can’t Get Through

(How Could I Get Them to Hear Me?)

How do I deal with my friend or my family member who has taken the step? How can I attempt to motivate a committed believer in Jesus to re-evaluate that commitment?

The first step is to try to get professional help. An experienced counter-missionary activist will be able to communicate more effectively with the person you are trying to reach. These experts are conversant with the missionary arguments, they are familiar with the thought process of believers in Jesus and they are skilled communicators. It often takes all of this, and more, in order to get a believer in Jesus to realize that their decision was made without having considered all of the pertinent information.

What do I do if the person I am trying to reach refuses to speak with a professional?
How do I react if my friend or my family member closes their ears to any communication that implies that their decision may have been made in error?

If you find it impossible to communicate with the new believer, don't give up. Never cut the lines of communication. Expressing anger and frustration are generally counter-productive. Generally, the right path for this situation is patience, empathy and love. You can only hope to break the communication barrier when the person you are trying to reach senses that your core motivation is a genuine concern for their best interest.

Renew Your Commitment

(What Does Being a Jew mean to Me?)

The fact that Christian missionaries are making inroads amongst our people is a sign that we, as a people, need to tend to our own vineyard. If our youth would understand their own heritage, the missionaries would have no one to talk to. If our youth would be exposed to the full richness of Judaism, they would not be seeking fulfilment in strange fields.

We are all one body. If something is lacking in any one of us, it is a reflection on all of us. No one of us can say that I have done all I can. Each of us can refresh his or her commitment to our national heritage. Judaism is about growth. We can all grow in our understanding of what it means to be a Jew. If we see each Jewish soul lost to Christianity as a tragedy, we must commit ourselves to the goal that tomorrow will find a stronger, brighter and more vibrant Judaism than yesterday. It is in our hands.

Summary

(Lets Review)

It is my hope that this brief summary will help you see the “big picture”, the grand total of the concepts that were covered in this booklet.

1. If you are going to make a decision based on a book, you owe it to yourself to study the book seriously. You also owe it to yourself to acquire an familiarity with the differences that separate Judaism from Christianity before deciding between these two belief systems.
2. If you are going to make a decision based on a book, you owe it to yourself to discover the background to the book. What did the prophets expect their audience to believe before they presented their words to them? On what basis did the prophetic authors of Scriptures expect their audience to accept their claims?
3. You walk into a room. You see many people bowing in worship of a man standing in front of them. What kind of argument could possibly justify this activity?
4. Before you base your decision on a spiritual experience, you owe it to yourself to find out if this experience is unique to the belief system that it is being called upon to validate. Find out if these experiences are not matched or surpassed by competing belief systems. Find out what the Bible has to say about making a religious commitment on the basis of a spiritual experience.
5. As long as conclusive evidence has not been presented to support the claims of Christianity, no- one should expect you to accept those claims.
6. When you are trying to persuade someone to re-evaluate their commitment to Christianity, the most important factor is a genuine concern for their best interest.
7. Refresh your own commitment to your glorious heritage.

Supplements

Bible Study

I encourage you to make a serious effort to study the Bible on your own. I will present here some concepts that you may find helpful in your study, but I encourage you not to accept my words without thought. Think about these concepts. Accept them only if they appeal to your own innate sensitivity to truth.

I hope you find the following suggestions helpful in your study of the Jewish Scriptures.

When a Biblical passage is presented as supportive evidence for a given doctrine, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 – Does the Author of the passage make a clear and explicit association between the doctrine in question and the passage that is presented as evidence? Does the Author state in a clear and unequivocal way that this passage is presenting a teaching on the specific subject matter?
- 2 – Does the passage support every major aspect of the doctrine in question?
- 3 – Are there any other viable interpretations to the passage in question?
- 4 – Are there any other passages that present a message that conflicts with the doctrine in question?

The Context of Scripture

When studying the Bible, I would suggest that you ask yourself the following set of questions:

- 1- Is the Bible addressing a specific target audience?
- 2 – Did the Author of the Bible expect the audience to read the book with a set of presuppositions?
- 3 – If you answered yes to any of the previous questions, then who is the target audience? What beliefs did the prophets expect their audience to maintain before they presented their words to them?

Idolatry

The Bible itself teaches that the human sensitivity to truth is capable of identifying idolatry (Isaiah 2:22, Jeremiah 10:11). This is a gift God that granted equally to all of humanity. God recognized that mankind will be led astray by advocates for the worship of various idols. It is for this purpose that He charged the Jewish people with a historical mission, the most important mission in the history of mankind. God presented the Jewish people with a deep and intense knowledge of the truth of His absolute sovereignty (Deuteronomy 4:35). It is the mission of the Jewish people to carry this truth throughout the halls of time. Throughout history, the Jew has stood for this truth. Even Jews who have strayed far from their roots have generally maintained some connection to this ultimate truth. At times when the surrounding populations were steeped in the belief that some people are intrinsically higher than others, or that man should consider himself lower than one power or another, the Jew stood apart. When the Romans were deifying their Emperors, when the pagans were surrendering themselves in worship to various supernatural entities, and when most nations believed that the nobility was intrinsically superior to the serfs – the Jew stood apart. The Jew stood for the knowledge that all of creation is equally subservient to God and to God alone, and the world was blessed through the loyalty that the Jew maintained towards this belief. When a Jew accepts a theology that attributes divinity to a human being, he or she has betrayed the very core of the calling of the Jewish people before God.