

The background is a watercolor painting. On the right side, there is a figure wearing a blue robe, with a portion of their face visible in shades of blue and green. The left side of the image is filled with soft, blended watercolor washes in pale yellow, pink, and light blue.

In the **FLESH**



Celebrate **MESSIAH**

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Celebrate MESSIAH

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SHALOM!

I hope you will enjoy this special evangelistic issue of the newsletter. May

I tell you a little bit about my own journey to faith?

I grew up in a fairly typical Jewish home. My parents were Jewish—my mom was more Orthodox and my dad was from a more culturally liberal Jewish home. They sent me to Hebrew School to study for my Bar Mitzvah, we celebrated all the major Jewish holidays, I went to Jewish summer camps and was involved in a number of Jewish young adult activities. I don't remember having any non-Jewish friends until sometime in high school, and I never recall my parents having Gentile friends. We lived in a very close-knit, "safe" Jewish neighborhood in the borough of Queens, New York City. This was important when you consider the historical context—I was born just seven years after the Holocaust!

Even though I was raised as a "not very religious" Orthodox Jew, there were a few non-negotiable things that I knew about being Jewish. First of all, we celebrated Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover and Hanukkah—but certainly not Christmas or Easter. I also knew we believed in one God and not three—as I thought Christians believed—and that as a Jew I could not possibly believe that God could become a man. That would be idolatry.

When it came to Jesus, it was a simple matter: If he had actually existed historically, then he was the savior of the Gentiles—and frankly, they were welcome to him. He may have started out as Jewish, but he wasn't anymore, or his followers would never have persecuted the Jewish people, which is what I was raised to believe.

This is what I thought, and most of the Jewish people I knew held the same view. Even though I went to Hebrew School three days a week and learned how to read the Five Books of Moses in Hebrew, I still wasn't sure if God existed. Being Jewish was in my blood and in my soul—but not necessarily in my belief. Many of my heroes were in the Jewish Bible, such as Moses, Abraham, David and others—but as a young man, I never quite understood that what made them so heroic was their faith in the God of Israel.

All of this was to change soon after my 19th birthday.

“JESUS MAY HAVE STARTED OUT AS JEWISH, BUT HE WASN'T ANYMORE, OR HIS FOLLOWERS WOULD NEVER HAVE PERSECUTED THE JEWISH PEOPLE, WHICH IS WHAT I WAS RAISED TO BELIEVE.”



My family left the borough of Queens and moved to New Jersey for a few years. It was then that my life took a couple of wrong turns, and I ended up getting involved in drugs and leading a rebellious life. I went to college in Connecticut and completed one semester before dropping out and hitchhiking across the United States with Efraim Goldstein, my closest friend. When I reached the great state of California, I settled in the San Francisco Bay Area for a number of months.

This was 1970—somewhat at the tail end of the “hippie movement,” but right in the middle of the “Jesus movement.” One of my friends, through a series of what now seem to me to be miraculous spiritual encounters, became a follower of Jesus the Messiah. She told me all about her newly discovered faith and I rejected it immediately. After all, if I accepted the message and became a follower of Jesus, I would be affirming that the Jewish people were wrong about “everything!”

Then Efraim became a believer in Jesus as well, which really shook me up. I tried to convince both of my friends that they were wrong and began reading my own Bible—the Old Testament—in order to prove their error. Curiously, I found my biblical heroes to be even more interesting for a reason that had never before really entered my mind. It was because of their faith in the God of Israel. At times, it was breathtaking to read the accounts of Jewish history while allowing myself to believe that these events really took place, and were not simply written by my imaginative ancestors.

Eventually, I saw the dramatic and positive changes in my friends’ lives due to their faith. I wasn’t sure I wanted to clean up my act quite yet—but the moment of my epiphany was closer than I imagined.

I was working at a campground 60 miles south of the Bay Area, teaching ecology to urban youth through a program sponsored by the Marin County Board of Education. The “Jesus question” was still bothering me, and one day I actually prayed to God to show me the truth and let me know whether or not Jesus was the Messiah.

Later that evening, I went down to the only phone booth in the entire camp to make a call. There on the ledge, where there should have been a phone book, was a copy of a book entitled *Good News for Modern Man*. I picked up the book, took it back to my bunk

and began reading. I soon realized that it was a New Testament, and it didn’t take me long to realize that my “battle” was not with a non-Jew, but rather with a Jewish person—an extraordinary Jewish person—who claimed to be the Messiah and God in the flesh.

Every bone in my body rejected the possibility that either of these statements was true. I read through the New Testament Scriptures, comparing them with the Old Testament. I also began having some extraordinary spiritual experiences that seemed to confirm what I was reading, which I could only believe were orchestrated by the Holy One of Israel. After all of this, and a great deal of additional thought and soul-searching, I finally came to a decision—to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

I do not know how I overcame my deep-rooted prejudice against the possibility that God could take on flesh. I suppose the only thought I had was that if Jesus was the Messiah, then everything written about him in the New Covenant Scriptures must be true—including the previously unthinkable notion that he is God in the flesh.

I won’t pretend that I understand this profound and earthshaking proposition—or all of the arguments against it—even after all of these years. I’m sure you will enjoy the following excerpt from Dr. Michael Brown, a fellow Jewish scholar from Queens, about the idea of God becoming man in the Scripture and even in Jewish tradition.

If you are not a follower of Jesus the Messiah, I hope you will approach what you read with an open mind and a sincere seeking heart. Consider this: “Is there anything that God cannot do?” I came to believe that the Creator of the universe is capable of anything—even becoming a man.


Please enjoy the rest of the newsletter, and give it some thought.

May the God of Israel give you joy!


Mitch

Dr Mitch Glaser is President of Chosen People Ministries. He will be guest speaker at the Simcha 2012 conference at Phillip Island from 30 Nov - 2 Dec.





CAN YOU BE JEWISH AND BELIEVE THAT GOD BECAME FLESH?

IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE JEWISH AND BELIEVE

in the deity of Yeshua (Jesus)? Traditional Judaism rejects Yeshua's deity. Some rabbis have even argued that faith in Yeshua as God is more objectionable than idolatry. However, the deity of Messiah is not simply an inconsequential belief; it is an indispensable component of the New Testament message.

Although many rabbis think belief in Yeshua's deity is abhorrent, the concept of a divine Messiah is in fact consistent with Jewish thought. Leading Messianic scholar Dr. Michael Brown, in *The Real Kosher Jesus*, demonstrates how the deity of Yeshua as described in the New Testament Scriptures does not conflict with traditional Jewish thinking.

TRADITIONAL JUDAISM AND THE LIFE OF YESHUA

Brown shows that according to Judaism, it is not idolatrous to envision that God, "who is complex in His unity," can "sit enthroned in heaven, filling the universe with His presence, infinite and uncontainable in His majesty, and yet at one and the same time manifest His glory among us in the tent of a human body."¹

In building his case, Brown cites the *Midrash* (an expanded interpretation of the Bible) on Psalm 91, which explains how it is possible for the walls of the Tabernacle to contain the presence of the Almighty, while God's presence simultaneously inhabits the heavens.² The Midrash reads, "The Master of the Universe Himself explained, 'the entire world cannot contain My glory, yet when I wish, I can concentrate My entire essence into one small spot. Indeed, I am Most High, yet I sit in a *limited* refuge—in the shadow of the Temple.'"³

Brown argues that throughout Jewish history, God reveals Himself to His people and allows His invisible presence to become visible in such a way. Therefore, it is reasonable, from within Jewish thought, to hold that if God allows His presence to occupy a specific location within the Temple, it is also possible for God to allow His presence to inhabit human flesh.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God's people continually encounter the presence of God in visible form. In Genesis 18, the LORD appeared to Abraham near the entrance of his tent. When Abraham looked up, he saw three men standing in front of him. The Talmud states that during this encounter, Abraham saw the "Holy One" at the door of his tent (Baba Mesia 86b). Brown explains how this passage "explicitly tells us that Abraham and Sarah talked with the LORD, that He appeared in human form to them, dusty feet and all

The following article draws upon the book by Dr. Michael Brown, *The Real Kosher Jesus*, and has been adapted for this use with his permission by Scott Nassau of Chosen People Ministries. The words "God" and "Lord" include the letter "o," which is counter to

the practice of some religious Jewish people. If this applies to you, please forgive us, as we are writing to a very mixed audience. Thanks for your understanding, and I hope you appreciate the article.

Lawrence Hirsch
Executive Director of
Celebrate Messiah Australia





“GOD ... CAN SIT ENTHRONED IN HEAVEN ... AND YET AT ONE AND THE SAME TIME MANIFEST HIS GLORY AMONG US IN THE TENT OF A HUMAN BODY.”

(Gen. 18:4), and that He even sat down and ate their food. Yet all the while, He remained God in heaven.”⁴

THREE KEY CONCEPTS

Dr. Brown cites concepts within Judaism that illustrate why a divine Messiah is consistent with Jewish thought. The first concept focuses upon **Memra**. Rabbinic writings explain the revelation of God’s presence in the Hebrew Bible as the Memra, an Aramaic expression for the divine Word of God. The Hebrew Bible frequently depicts God’s Word as an extension of Himself.⁵ For instance, “The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there He revealed Himself to Samuel through His Word” (1 Sam. 3:21). This is why the **Targums**, which are *amplified* Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, speak of God’s interaction with His people through the Memra (Word). Isaiah 45:17 presents just one example of how the Targum substitutes the term Memra for the Name of God. The Hebrew reads, “Israel will be saved by the LORD,” while the Targum translates the Hebrew to say, “Israel will be saved by the *Word of the LORD*.”⁶

When reading the introduction to **John’s Gospel**, one of the four biographical accounts of Yeshua’s life, in light of the Jewish concept of Memra, it is evident that John’s depiction of Yeshua is traditionally Jewish. Since Memra is the Divine Word, John’s introduction actually proclaims, “In the beginning was the Memra, and the Memra was with God, and the Memra was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:1–4). John is not inventing a concept foreign to Judaism, but rather demonstrating how Jesus is the anticipated *Word of the LORD* spoken about throughout the Jewish Targums.

The idea of **Shekinah** is another concept addressed by Brown. John states, “The Memra became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This introduction to John’s Gospel refers to the Jewish concept of the indwelling of God’s presence within Israel, known as the Shekinah. Judaism teaches that God came down from the heavens to dwell amongst His people, Israel. This occurred when the LORD’s glory filled the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). The Targum explains God’s presence in the midst of Israel as Shekinah (Targum Onq Ex. 25:8).

Brown cites noted Jewish scholar and professor at Jewish Theological Seminary, Benjamin Sommer, to say, “God is the same as the Shekinah, but the Shekinah does not exhaust God, so one can refer easily to ‘God’ and subsequently to ‘God and the Shekinah.’”⁷ Sommer argues that Christianity’s belief in a God who took on human form is a perfectly Jewish concept and consistent with the Jewish idea of Shekinah.

Although the manner in which God is able to inhabit the entire heavens while simultaneously dwelling in a specific location on earth remains a mystery, it is clear this concept is consistent with Jewish thought. Therefore, it is possible to remain faithful to Jewish traditions and believe in a Messiah who is the Incarnation of the Deity.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

While some within the Jewish community might want to minimize the importance of the topic of the deity of Messiah, those who have understood the Bible in this way have found their lives filled with profound meaning and purpose. Yeshua is now no longer merely an itinerant Galilean Jewish prophet who came to revolutionize first-century Judaism, but God Himself, taking on flesh and fulfilling the ancient prophecies of a Messiah whom Isaiah said would be called *a wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father and prince of peace* (Isa. 9:6).

Can you be Jewish and believe that Yeshua was God in the flesh? Dr. Brown and many thousands of Messianic Jews who have had their lives dramatically changed by his power would say YES! Why let others make up your mind for you? We have made the case that the issue is far less clear-cut in traditional Judaism than you may have thought. Now, study the evidence... and reach your own conclusion.

1 *The Real Kosher Jesus*, p. 125

2 *Ibid*, p.126

3 *Ibid*

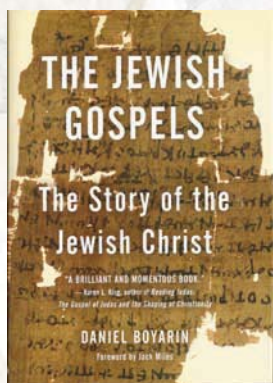
4 *Ibid*, p.129

5 *Ibid*, p.129

6 See *The Real Kosher Jesus* for many other examples.

7 *Ibid*, p. 135

Your opinions are important to us, so let us know your thoughts. Write to newsletter@celebratemessiah.com.au.



The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ.
By Daniel Boyarin. New York: The New Press, 2012,
xxiii + 200 pp.



Reviewed by
Alan M. Shore

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belief that the Christological claims about Jesus made by his followers, mainly through the activity of Paul, gained a foothold only later and as a result of an impure mixture with non-Jewish influences. Jesus himself, therefore, though perhaps an admirable yet tragic figure, was not responsible for the doctrines of Christianity that followed him, for they were not to be found in the Jewish world he inhabited.

Now, Daniel Boyarin has set out in his most recent book, *The Jewish Gospels*, to make the case that these shibboleths of earlier Jewish scholarship—and some from the Christian world as well—must be discarded. His case for the Jewish Jesus is far from new, but what is truly original in the realm of Jewish scholarship is his approach to Jesus as an authentic candidate for Messiah based on criteria derived from the already-existing Jewish world. As Boyarin puts it,

While by now almost everyone, Christian and non-Christian, is happy enough to refer to Jesus, the human, as a Jew, I want to go a step beyond that. I wish us to see that Christ too—the divine Messiah—is a Jew. Christology, or the early ideas about Christ, is also a Jewish discourse and not—until much later—an anti-Jewish discourse at all... Thus the basic underlying thoughts from which both the Trinity and the incarnation grew are there in the very world into which Jesus was born and in which he was first written about in the Gospels of Mark and John (pp.5-6).

In other words, the Messianic role that Jesus fit was not, as many would have it, constructed after the fact by Christians who sought to portray him as such. Rather, it was an already-existing Jewish expectation that Jesus sought to fulfill. Working with in-depth analysis of texts such as Daniel 7, First Enoch and Fourth Ezra, Boyarin builds a case for a Messianic-divine “Son of Man” already deeply embedded in Jewish thought and expectation.

Boyarin does not only challenge the assumptions of Jewish scholarship. In his chapter, “Jesus Kept Kosher,”

he questions the prevailing Christian interpretation of Mark 7 as the abrogation of the laws of kashrut in a nuanced exploration of the differing categories of “kosher” and “clean and unclean,” which have been conflated by interpreters. The controversy, as Boyarin puts it, is not whether to follow the Torah, but how. Here Boyarin positions Jesus as the conservative Galilean Torah keeper who is opposed to Pharisaic innovations not in the area of what is kosher, upon which they presumably agree, but under what circumstances kosher food would be considered unfit for consumption.

Perhaps the most hot-button issue Boyarin addresses is the question of the validity of the Suffering Messiah in Jewish thought, particularly in that most controversial of passages, Isaiah 53. In response to commentators who assert that a Messianic connection with that passage is an entirely Christian interpretation, tailor-made to accommodate the suffering and humiliation of Jesus, Boyarin demonstrates that a Suffering Messiah is part and parcel of Jewish tradition, both before and after Jesus. In his treatment of this issue, Boyarin observes,

The fascinating (and to some, no doubt, uncomfortable) fact is that this tradition was well documented by modern Messianic Jews, who are concerned to demonstrate that their belief in Jesus does not make them non-Jewish. Whether or not one accepts their theology, it remains the case that they have a very strong textual base for the view that the Suffering Messiah is based in deeply rooted Jewish texts early and late (pp.132-133).

In many instances in his academic career, Daniel Boyarin has challenged existing assumptions and stirred the pot. In *The Jewish Gospels*, he has succeeded in doing so again. Although it is too early to say whether his assertions will gain purchase in the Jewish world, his is a voice emanating from the academy that is not easily ignored.



WHAT'S NEXT?

AFTER A SEASON OF THINKING ABOUT YESHUA (JESUS), you might be ready for the next step—to acknowledge him as Israel's long-awaited Messiah. Here are some simple steps to take as you continue your journey.

- ☑ Repent – God is holy and we are not! We frequently behave in ways that separate us from Him, and we need His forgiveness. The Hebrew Scriptures say, “Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:1-2). Recognizing our sin is the first major step towards an intimate and personal relationship with the Lord.
- ☑ Believe – We cannot earn God's forgiveness through good works or keeping the Mitzvot. The Torah says, “Abraham believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). The New Covenant Scriptures say, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. 6:23). Personal salvation is a gift from God that we accept by faith.
- ☑ Accept Yeshua – The great Rabbi Saul, writing in the New Covenant Scriptures, tells us what we should believe to receive the gift of personal salvation, “That Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). If Yeshua is both divine and the rightful king of Israel, then he deserves our full allegiance.
- ☑ Pray – Prayer is a personal conversation with God—heart to heart. You can pray in this way: “God, you are righteous and I am not. I have disobeyed your commandments. I believe Yeshua is my Messiah. His death and resurrection is my only hope. Please forgive me and give me a new life with you.” And God will answer, as we read in the New Covenant Scriptures, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” (John 1:12).

We would love to help you discover how Yeshua can transform your life—so please do not hesitate to contact us! Email enquiries@celebratemessiah.com.au.

“I WISH FOR US TO SEE THAT CHRIST
TOO – THE DIVINE MESSIAH – IS A JEW.”



THE JEWISH GOSPELS: THE STORY OF THE JEWISH CHRIST

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EGINNING IN THE EARLY

19th century, Jewish scholars began to write the history of the Jewish people as modern historians. When they considered the first century CE, they viewed Jesus not as the Christian Redeemer, but as a Jewish man in a Jewish world whose teaching could be weighed alongside his contemporaries and those who came before him. Using the tools of emerging biblical criticism and modern historiography, plus their

considerable knowledge of ancient Judaism, they painted a portrait of a Jewish Jesus that was detached from Christian doctrinal confession.

Among the most prominent of the early Jewish historians was Abraham Geiger, one of the early leaders of Reform Judaism. Over the next decades, other Jewish historians and theologians such as Heinrich Graetz, C.J. Montefiore and Joseph Klausner followed in Geiger's steps. Two common threads bind the work of these scholars. One is the unambiguous assertion that the life of Jesus and the genesis of Christianity must be viewed in the context of first-century Judaism. The other is that the most authentic and worthwhile teachings of Jesus could already be found in Judaism.

Another prominent feature of their teaching, which has persisted to this day, is that Jesus of Nazareth and the Christian Savior are not the same person. That is, the

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