

## Never Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth

The *Tanakh* teaches that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has a special plan for Abraham's descendents, the Jewish people. Furthermore, the Torah also promises that through Abraham's seed God intends to bless all nations as well.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. **Genesis 12:3**

Consequently, as we read in this verse, our attitude towards the Jewish people matters to God very much. And we gratefully acknowledge that God, through you, has given us Abraham and the Patriarchs, Moses and the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, Jesus the son of David, and believe it or not, the New Testament, a book written in its entirety by Jewish people (with the possible exception of one author). One Jewish author of the New Testament clearly stated our obligation to reciprocate the blessings we've received through the Jewish people:

For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. **Romans 15:27**

So how can we miss this opportunity to return blessing for blessing? Happy Hanukkah!

## A Hanukkah Miracle

Did you know that Hanukkah miracles still happen today? As a matter of fact, *you* are the Hanukkah miracle! That may sound funny, but you are in fact one of God's

greatest modern miracles. You shouldn't be here! We don't mean here, in America. We mean you, a Jewish person from Israel, living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century shouldn't be here. Many famous men have scratched their heads in wonder at the miraculous existence of the Jewish people. Take, for example, the American writer Mark Twain. Listen to what he wrote more than a hundred years ago:

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one per cent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. . . .He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. . . .The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

Mark Twain concluded this essay, "The Immortal Jews," with a penetrating question that deserves an answer, not only from Israel's staunchest friends but also from her most vitriolic enemies. "What is the secret of his immortality?" Jeremiah the prophet answered Mark Twain's question 2600 years ago:

This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by

night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the Lord Almighty is his name: “Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the Lord, “will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.” **Jeremiah 31:35-36**

Have you looked up at the sky lately? The sun and the stars are still there. Israel’s enemies can shoot rockets into Israel, but they still have not developed the technology to destroy the sun, moon, and stars! You are still here to celebrate Hanukkah and that’s an amazing Hanukkah miracle.

But, what good does it do you to know that your existence is miraculous? What’s so miraculous about working in a kiosk? Listen to Jeremiah’s words to you:

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” **Jeremiah 29:11**

## **The Grass is Always Greener on God’s Side of the Street**

What are God’s thoughts towards you? Where can you find this peace and hope the God of your fathers has promised? There are few places on this globe that Israelis haven’t looked. Even the Dalai Lama has been recruited for help in this search for answers.

Do you remember that famous proverbial saying, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence?” How true it is! All the answers for this life and the life to come are found in the *Tanakh*. Unfortunately (or fortunately—depending how you look at it), the *Tanakh* describes our problem (the bad news) before it gives us the answer (the good news). Like going to a doctor when you’re not feeling well, first you have to hear the bad news (the diagnosis) before you can hear the good news (the prescription).

Although we don't like to talk about it, the *Tanakh* informs us that we're really not quite as good as we'd like to think. The ancient philosophers said that the path to the "good life" is to "know thyself." With this good piece of advice in mind, we'd like to take you on a grand tour of the Torah (Tour de Torah) and together see ourselves through the eyes of Moses and the Prophets.

## Let the Journey Begin

The Torah begins (Genesis) with two commandments in the Garden of Eden. By the time we reach the end of the Torah (Deuteronomy) Israel is standing outside the Promised Land with 613 commandments. How in the world did we get so many commandments? If you read the Torah carefully you will notice that each time people sin (disobey God) in the Torah more commandments are added (much like a rebellious child who needs more and more rules to keep him in line). With this in mind, let's do a quick survey.

When God put the first man and woman on a perfect earth, with perfect bodies, in a perfect garden, He gave them only two commandments: "Be fruitful and multiply" (positive) and "Don't eat from that tree!" (negative). How did they fare in these perfect conditions? Not so well. They ate the fruit (Genesis 1-3).

What about Noah? He could count the number of commands God gave him on two hands. He was a pretty good guy, right? How did he do? Soon after he got off the boat he got drunk and, consequently, a member of his family was cursed (Genesis 9:18-27).

How about your people, Israel, the very people God brought out of Egypt? They were privileged to walk through the parted Red Sea. They witnessed the thunder and fire on Mount Sinai. They heard the voice of God from heaven. Surely, they succeeded to

please God and keep His commandments. The sad truth is, however, they failed in a big way. While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving instructions for the proper worship of God, Israel was down below worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 32-33). That entire generation who left Egypt perished in the desert as a result their disbelief and disobedience, with the exception of only two individuals, Joshua and Caleb. Think about that! Of the two and a half million people that left Egypt, only two made it to the Promised Land.

What about the great law-giver himself, Moshe Rabenu? He was the greatest of all the prophets in the *Tanakh*. He was the one who led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. He was the one who spoke to God face to face (Num 12:7). He was the one who received the Torah on Mount Sinai. How did he do? Once again we see that even Moses, though he was the greatest of all the prophets in the *Tanakh*, disobeyed, didn't believe God, struck the rock, and, consequently, was not allowed to enter the Promised Land (cf. Numbers 20:9-13).

Let's think about this for a moment. With all the advantages these individuals had, they failed to obey God completely. If these spiritual giants failed, what hope is there for us? If Moses didn't make it to the Promised Land, can we expect to do any better?

At the end of the Torah, Moses, having spent so much time with his people, reached a sad and sobering conclusion. He anticipated that all Israel would go astray. Listen to what he wrote:

Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to testify against them. For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall upon you because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord and

provoke him to anger by what your hands have made. **Deuteronomy 31:28-29**

Imagine that. Such bad news at the very end of the Torah!

## **So What's the Big Deal Anyway?**

At this point all of us are tempted to minimize our disobedience and sin. "Well, it's really no big deal. God understands I'm not perfect. He's loving and merciful. Surely, He will look the other way."

The truth is that God's holiness does not allow Him to trifle with sin. Think about Adam and Eve. What did they do to deserve expulsion from the garden and eventual death? Did they kill someone? Did they steal something? Did they commit adultery? No, they "just" ate a fruit.

*WHAT! That's all they did wrong: they ate something they weren't supposed to?*

Yes, they ate a fruit. What's so bad about that?

Consider this: the degree of punishment for disobedience is always proportional to the rank of the individual who has been disobeyed. For example, there is a huge difference between disobeying your teacher in school and disobeying the General of the Army (*Ramat Kal*). If our teacher tells us to do our homework, but catches us sleeping in class instead, we get yelled at. If the *Ramat Kal* catches us disobeying his orders, *oy vavoy!* The degree of punishment is always proportional to the rank of the individual who has been disobeyed.

Who has a higher rank in this universe than God? If this is the case, is there a worse offense than to disobey the commands of the Lord of Hosts? It does not matter how small or insignificant the offence may seem to us. Sin is serious because it is

perpetrated against an infinite God. That is why Isaiah the prophet, after seeing a vision of God seated in the heavenly temple cried out:

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” **Isaiah 6:5**

Later on Isaiah has this to 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. **Isaiah 59:1-2**

Yes, the *Tanakh* teaches that our sin separates us from God. All of us must admit we have sinned against this infinitely Holy God both in word and deed. Where do we go from here?

## Now for the Good News

And now for the good news. Throughout the Scriptures God has offered atonement to His people. What is atonement? It literally means “to cover.” Atonement was God’s means of covering our sin. How does it work? We find the answer in the Torah.

God gave Adam and Eve a beautiful garden to live in and even offered them a gourmet menu. One thing, however, was off the list: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God’s warning was clear:

The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” **Genesis 2:16-17**

God could not have been clearer. The

consequence of disobedience (sin) was death. Oddly enough, after Adam and Eve ate the fruit they did not die right away. As a matter of fact they both lived for hundreds of years more than we can ever hope to.

Why didn't they die immediately? Didn't God say, "In the day you eat from it you will surely die?" The answer is ATONEMENT. A death did take place on the very day that Adam and Eve sinned.

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

**Genesis 3:21**

God graciously provided a covering of skin to atone for the sin and shame of our first parents. Although Adam and Eve attempted to "cover" themselves with fig leaves, it was not enough. Why did this animal have to die? It died in place of Adam and Eve. That's atonement – the covering of sin by the blood of an acceptable substitute.

The Torah speaks quite a bit about the necessity of blood for the atonement of sin. God clearly told Israel in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." Any careful reading of the Torah will show that atonement can only be found through sacrifice (you can read this for yourself in chapters 1-7 and 16 of Leviticus).

But now we have a little (okay, not so little) problem. The temple was destroyed almost 2,000 years ago. Today we have no temple, no altar, and no sacrifices. Now what do we do? The rabbis at the time of the destruction of the temple replaced blood atonement with prayer and fasting. Till this day we are told that if we fast on Yom Kippur God will forgive our sins. This sounds great. The only problem is that this is not what the Torah teaches. Read Leviticus 17:11 once again for yourself:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.

God could not have stated Himself more clearly. With no temple and no sacrifices, where can God's people find atonement today?

## **Guess Where/Who?**

Are you willing to participate in an important experiment that may, in fact, provide an answer to the question concerning atonement? Please read the following paragraph. When you have finished reading this paragraph please answers the following two questions: (1) whom does this passage describe? (2) In what book are these words found?

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken

away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Now that you have carefully read this chapter please note the following:

1. To whom is this chapter referring?
2. From what book is this chapter taken? \_\_\_\_\_.

## **God's Provision of Atonement**

According to Isaiah, God would send an individual to His people who would be received by the Gentiles (Isaiah 52:15) but despised by his own people:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

This despised individual, however, would

take upon Himself the sins of the people of Israel through His death and resurrection from the dead:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

The ancient rabbis agreed this passage was a reference to the Messiah. The prophet describes a suffering Messiah who dies for the sin of the nation of Israel.

## **Other Amazing Prophecies in the *Tanakh***

Not only does the *Tanakh* describe a suffering rejected Messiah who dies for the sins of His people, the *Tanakh* also tells us *where* the Messiah would be born:

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. **Micah 5:2 (verse 1 in Hebrew)**

The *Tanakh* tells us *how* the Messiah would be born:

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. **Isaiah 7:14**

The *Tanakh* teaches us how the Messiah would die:

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. **Isaiah 53:5**

I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. **Zechariah 12:10**

The *Tanakh* clearly teaches that the Messiah would be the *Son of God*:

When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. **1 Chronicles 17:11-13**

Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know! **Proverbs 30:4**

Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Messiah, saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!" He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger

and terrify them in His fury, saying, “But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.” “I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’” **Psalm 2:1-7**

The Tanakh also teaches that a time would come when through the Messiah God would establish a new covenant with the house of Israel, whereby He would cleanse His people from their sins:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

The above verses have two elements in common: (1) they are all cited from the *Tanakh* (not the New Testament); and (2) they are all remarkable descriptions of the Jewish carpenter’s son who was born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

## Some Final Words

The reason we wholeheartedly love Israel and the Jewish people is our gratitude for God’s Jewish gift to the world: Jesus. We have come to wish you a Happy Hanukkah.

We have also come to tell you about your special heritage as a physical descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God loves you. You are the apple of His eye. And He has provided a way for you to find atonement for sin and eternal life through personal faith in the Jewish Messiah.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. **Romans 3:21-24**

## Want to Know More?

We'd love to hear from you. Do you have questions, comments, complaints? Please write to us and let us know how we can help you on your spiritual journey toward home.

**AMF International  
P.O. Box 5470  
Lansing, IL 60438-5470  
[www.amfi.org](http://www.amfi.org)**

