

WHY JEWS MUST REJECT THE BELIEF IN JESUS^{1,2}

I. INTRODUCTION

Topics that deal with the question of whether a Jew should believe in Jesus have been debated for many centuries. Such debates were often "staged" by the Church during the Medieval Period and the Early Modern Period, and Jewish scholars were forced to debate this issue with Church officials (who were often apostate Jews, such as Pablo Christiani, who had the famous "Disputation" with Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman [RaMBaN; Nachmanides] in 1263 C.E.). When the Jewish side proved the case against believing in Jesus, the aftermath was generally tragic for the Jewish community – book burnings, acts of violence against Jews and their property, and expulsions.

In the Modern Period, particularly in the second half of the 20th century, a paradigm shift took place when some evangelical Christian groups, affiliating themselves under the general banner of "Messianic Judaism", began a massive effort to convert Jews to Christianity, which is commonly known as **Jewish Evangelism**. Debates on questions such as "*Should a Jew believe in Jesus?*" have become commonplace events in "open forum" mode, and their aftermath no longer involves physical violence. However, the absence of physical consequences does not mean that the atmosphere created by these encounters is harmless to Jews. The mega-million dollar and multi-media campaigns and crusades launched by these evangelical Christian missionary groups into locales that have a significant population of Jews can be spiritually very dangerous and damaging to the Jewish community.

If there is one thing on which the Jewish community, with its diverse levels of observance, is in unanimous agreement, it is that a belief in Jesus is incompatible with Judaism. In this essay, the notion of "*Why A Jew Must Reject the Belief in Jesus*" is addressed in detail. The aim here is not to denigrate Christianity and

¹ Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in ***SMALL CAPS*** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
 - A vocalized letter נ is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
 - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
 - The letter ה is transliterated as "h"
 - The letter כ is transliterated as "ch"
 - The letter ד is transliterated as "k"
 - The letter פ is transliterated as "q"
 - A vocalized **SHVA** (וָ נְאָוָה) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
 - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagesh** (emphasis)

² Although this essay explicitly addresses Jews, it is implicitly also directed at those who follow the Seven Laws of Noah, the Noahides (**B'nei Noah**), who also are a target of evangelical Christian missionaries.

Christian believers in Jesus; rather, the purpose of this study is to present the Jewish perspective on the question “*Should A Jew Believe in Jesus?*”, and highlight the conflicts the belief in Jesus has with the teachings of the Hebrew Bible.

II. REASONS WHY JEWS SHOULD NOT BELIEVE IN JESUS

Although the fact that Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah and Jews do not is a major difference between Christianity and Judaism, it is not the only difference between the two theologies.³ In the following discussion, the belief that Jesus is the Messiah along with several other key aspects of Jesus' nature which, together, comprise the foundational elements of Christian theology, are contrasted with what the Hebrew Bible teaches.

A. Who Is Jesus to Christians?

The various titles, attributes, and functions of Jesus which are noted in the New Testament tend to blend into one another and, therefore, are difficult to separate. According to mainline Christian beliefs, four key attributes are:

- ⊕ Jesus is the Messiah who fulfilled hundreds of "messianic prophecies" in his "First Coming", and who will preside over the "Kingdom of Heaven" in his "Second Coming"
- ⊕ Jesus is "God"/"the Lord" who incarnated "in the flesh" in the form of a man
- ⊕ Jesus is the "only begotten" son of "God" whom "God", out of His love for humanity, sent to earth to be "sacrificed" in order to redeem mankind from the stain of "Original Sin"
- ⊕ Jesus was a prophet who was the "Moses-like" prophet promised by Moses, and whose miracles rank with the likes of the prophets Elisha and Elijah

B. What Does the Hebrew Bible Teach?

An important, though often overlooked or neglected fact is that the Scripture in force during the lifetime of Jesus, and even for many years following his death, was the Hebrew Bible. Given this fact, the Christian view of "*Who Is Jesus?*" needs to be validated against what the Hebrew Bible teaches. This is done in terms of the series of claims presented above and respective responses to them.

Christianity's Claim

- ⊕ Jesus is the Messiah who fulfilled hundreds of "messianic prophecies" in his "First Coming", and who will preside over the "Kingdom of Heaven" in his "Second Coming"

Judaism's Response

³ Some of the major differences between Christianity and Judaism were examined in the essay, *Judaism and Christianity – The Twain Shall Never Meet* – <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/JudChrComp.pdf>

Since detailed discussions of the Jewish messianic vision have already been presented in other essays, only the relevant highlights are included in the response to this Christian claim.⁴

❖ The מֶשֶׁיחַ (*mashi'ah*), Judaism's Messiah

During the first century B.C.E., the Jewish messianic paradigm experienced a significant transformation. It shifted away from the idea of a future blissful era, **אחרית הימים** (*aḥarit ha'yamim*), the end of days, and evolved into the notion of future mortal leader who will redeem Israel from the oppression the people had been suffering in exile and from enemies who occupied the Holy Land. It was during this time frame that the modern title of מֶשֶׁיחַ was adopted as the common reference to this individual, who was expected to be the next occupant of the throne of King David. Since the Hebrew Bible speaks of a future king from David's lineage who will preside over a united Israel during a joyful era for Israel, this paradigm shift did not give birth to a new idea, it just refocused the messianic picture.

Several key attributes that characterize the respective central figures of the Jewish and Christian messianic visions are compared in Table II.B-2 below.

Table II.B-1 – Judaism's מֶשֶׁיחַ vs. Christianity's Messiah, Jesus

Attribute	Judaism's (◊) מֶשֶׁיחַ	Christianity's (✚) Messiah, Jesus	Compatible ...	
			with each other	✚ - with Hebrew Bible*
Pedigree	Will be a bloodline descendant of King David, born of earthly parents	Was born of a virgin who conceived from the Holy Spirit	NO	NO
Birthplace	Not specified	Bethlehem	NO	NO
Nature	Will be a mortal human	Is the divine son of God	NO	NO
Status	Will be served and honored by all nations	Is worshipped	NO	NO
Function	Will be a righteous king who will redeem and restore Israel	Served as a sin sacrifice to atone for the sins of mankind	NO	NO
Reign	Earthly kingdom	None (1 st advent). Kingdom of heaven (2 nd advent)	NO	NO
Family Status	Will marry and have children	Was not married and did not father children	NO	NO
Advent	Will make one appearance, which is still being awaited	Came once, died, resurrected, and will come again	NO	NO

* Judaism's perspective is compatible with the Hebrew Bible by default

⁴ *Messiah Wanted* – <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Wanted.pdf>, and *Debunking "Proof Texts" from the Psalms: Part 7 – The "Big Picture"* - <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt7.pdf>.

The above comparison demonstrates that the attributes of Jesus gleaned from accounts in the New Testament do not match the attributes described in the Hebrew Bible for the future Davidic king, who will be the **מֶשִׁיחָה**, the promised and still awaited Messiah of Judaism.

◊ The "Messianic Agenda" of Judaism

The "messianic agenda", which was developed primarily through the writings of the prophets, is the centerpiece of Judaism's messianic vision. It consists of prophetic statements which describe, at various level of detail, the global state of affairs that will prevail in the messianic era. This constitutes the collection of "messianic prophecies" in traditional Judaism.

Several key characteristics of the respective prophetic components of the Jewish and Christian messianic visions are compared in Table II.B-2 below.

Table II.B-2 – Judaism's "Messianic Agenda" vs. Christianity's "Messianic Prophecies"

Characteristic	Judaism's (✡) "Messianic Agenda"	Christianity's (✚) "Messianic Prophecies"	Compatible ...	
			with each other	✚ - with Hebrew Bible*
Number	Between two- and three-dozen	Over three hundred	NO	NO
Function	To describe the conditions that will prevail in the messianic era	To describe Jesus, his life's ordeals, and to glorify him	NO	NO
Status	Unfulfilled. To be executed and completed by the מֶשִׁיחָה	Fulfilled by Jesus in his "First Coming"	NO	NO
Validation	Upon completion, the resultant changes in the world will be real – perceptible, tangible, and "measurable"	Their fulfillment and resultant changes must be accepted on faith	NO	NO

* Judaism's perspective is compatible with the Hebrew Bible by default

The above comparison demonstrates that Judaism's "messianic agenda" and Christianity's "messianic prophecies" are incompatible. This comparison also shows that the prophetic component of the Christian messianic vision is incompatible with accounts contained in the Hebrew Bible. As was demonstrated in another essay, Jesus did not fulfill any of the "messianic agenda" items.⁵

◊ The Advent of the **מֶשִׁיחָה**

Many of the prophetic passages that comprise Judaism's "messianic agenda" point to a future descendant of King David who will execute this "messianic

⁵ See Footnote 4.

"agenda" and reign as the King of Israel during the promised future era of bliss, a time characterized by some as an age of universal perfection. Due to the paucity of attributes provided in the Hebrew Bible about this future ruler, the מֶשֶׁיחַ, it will be possible to identify him only after he already is king. Therefore, in order to qualify, he will have to accomplish the "messianic agenda" at his first advent.

In order to put this into perspective, Table II.B-3 contrasts several of the most important "messianic agenda" items that the מֶשֶׁיחַ is expected to accomplish against the prevailing conditions during the era in which Jesus, the Messiah of Christianity, lived.

Table II.B-3 – "Messianic agenda" items vs. Conditions during the first century C.E.

Item	To be accomplished by Judaism's (✡) מֶשֶׁיחַ	Conditions during the era of Christianity's (✚) Messiah, Jesus	Compatible with...		
			each other	Historical Record	
				✡	✚
1	Elijah the Prophet will appear and herald the arrival of the מֶשֶׁיחַ	John the Baptist himself said he wasn't Elijah; Elijah never came	NO	YES	NO
2	There will prevail a peaceful coexistence among all nations in the world	War was raging in many parts of the world	NO	YES	NO
3	A universal knowledge and recognition of God will prevail	Paganism was widespread, and a new religion that would soon adopt many pagan ideas, will further divert people from the knowledge of God	NO	YES	NO
4	The Third Temple will be built in Jerusalem	The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans	NO	YES	NO
5	All exiled Jewish people (the 12 Tribes) will be repatriated to Israel	The Jews were scattered even more than in their previous exile following the destruction of the First Temple	NO	YES	NO
6	"Judah" and "Israel" will be reunited into one people	This never took place; most of "Israel", who were pagans, eventually joined the new religion	NO	YES	NO
7	The dead will be resurrected	This never happened; the story of Jesus' resurrection remains an unconfirmed myth	NO	YES	NO

As the above comparison demonstrates, the historical record indicates that the conditions detailed in the Hebrew Bible as part of the "messianic agenda" were not fulfilled during the era surrounding the life of Jesus. In fact, exactly the opposite conditions prevailed during and following his ministry.

Christian apologists counter this and claim that Jesus will fulfill these items in his "Second Coming". However, this contradicts the accounts in the Hebrew

Bible, which do not include such a concept, and which indicate that the **מֶשִׁיחַ** will fulfill the prophecies outright. Moreover, there is no indication anywhere in the Hebrew Bible that an anointed king of Israel/Judah would come and be sacrificed, via crucifixion, as an offering that would redeem mankind of sin, rise from the grave (i.e., be resurrected), and eventually return to fulfill the messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible and preside over an everlasting heavenly kingdom. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the notion of a "Second Coming" seems to have grown out of the recognition by Christian theologians that Jesus did not fulfill the expectations concerning the future state of universal perfection described in the Hebrew Bible. This fact led to the development of a new messianic vision centered on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the Christian Messiah.

Conclusion: Jesus cannot be the same as Judaism's **מֶשִׁיחַ**

Christianity's Claim

- † Jesus is "God"/"the Lord" who incarnated "in the flesh" in the form of a man

Judaism's Response

Judaism and Christianity agree on some aspects of the nature of God, such as: God Exists, is Eternal, is the Creator, is Omnipotent, is Omniscient, and is Omnipresent. However, there is a problem with the way that Christianity defines its deity, and this leads to the divergence in the two perspectives.

The major differences in how Judaism and Christianity perceive the nature of God are summarized in Table II.B-4 below, and discussed in greater detail later.

Table II.B-4 – The nature of Judaism's Deity vs. the nature of Christianity's Deity

Item	Judaism's (◊) Deity	Christianity's (†) Deity	Compatible ...	
			with each other	† - with Hebrew Bible*
1	Is One and Unique	Is a Trinity	NO	NO
2	a Is incorporeal	Incarnated "in the flesh" as a man	NO	NO
	b Is "constant"	Changes	NO	NO
3	Has no gender	Appears to be a male	NO	NO

* Judaism's perspective is compatible with the Hebrew Bible by default

Item 1 – The deity in the Hebrew Bible, the God of Israel, is an indivisible Unity. The credo of traditional Judaism, the ***Sh'ma***, describes God as being One (highlighting added for emphasis throughout this document unless otherwise noted):

Deuteronomy 6:4 – Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

Since the word "One" in this verse is an adjective, it describes the proper noun "the Lord", which rules out the possibility of a "compound unity". The concept of God as an indivisible unity can also be understood from the following passage:

Isaiah 44:6 – So said the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer the Lord of Hosts, "I am first and I am last, and besides Me there is no God."

The declaration by God, "... **I am the first** ...", indicates that He has no father. When He said, "... **I am the last** ...", it means that He has no begotten son. Finally, when God proclaimed, "... **besides me there is no God** ...", it shows that He does not share His role with any other god or entity – He has no "partners".

By contrast, the deity for the overwhelming majority of those who identify with Christianity is a triune godhead consisting of the Father, the Son (who is Jesus), and the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost) – the Trinity. The common explanations of the triune nature of the Christian deity vary from the description of the three components as being three separate "persons" at one extreme, to the admission that the Trinity eludes explanations and is a mystery, at the other extreme. In between these two extremes is the description that the Trinity is a "compound unity" – a single entity that has three different personalities or manifestations. The common thread in these descriptions is that all Trinitarians hold the Trinity to be consistent with monotheism. Yet, according to accounts in the New Testament, each of the three entities that comprise the Trinity has different knowledge, different powers, and different wills, which is a common characteristic of polytheistic religions.

It is interesting to note that Christian apologists tend to point to a select number of passages in the Christian "Old Testament" to justify the triune nature of their deity via an apparent "plurality" (e.g., Genesis 1:26). Yet, a survey of the Hebrew Bible reveals scores of passages that speak of the Oneness of God, His being alone, His not sharing His glory with any other god, etc., yet not a single passage where God is described as a compound unity that exhibits three manifestations.

Item 2a – The Third Principle of Faith of Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon [RaMBaM; Maimonides] states that God is incorporeal. This means that He cannot be perceived as having any form, a conclusion that is based on the following passage in the Torah:

Deuteronomy 4:15-19 – (15) And you shall watch yourselves very well, for you did not see not any image on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire. (16) Lest you become corrupt and make for yourselves a graven image, the representation of any form, the likeness of male or female, (17) the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the heaven, (18) the likeness of anything that crawls on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters, beneath the earth. (19) And lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, which the Lord your God assigned to all peoples under the entire heaven, and be drawn away to prostrate yourselves before them and worship them.

Since no form of God was visible and seen during the Revelation at Mount Sinai, the Israelites are told that representing Him via any sort of image is prohibited – God is a spiritual being who cannot be depicted in terms of any likeness.

That God is not a man is taught in the Hebrew Bible on several occasions:

Numbers 23:19 – God is not a man that He should lie, nor is He a mortal that He should relent. Would He say and not do, speak and not fulfill?

1 Samuel 15:29 - And also, the Eternal One of Israel will neither lie nor repent, for He is not a man to repent."

Job 9:32 - For He is not man like I am, that I should answer Him, 'Let us come together in debate.'

In stark contrast to Judaism's position, the Christian deity took on the form of a man in Jesus.

Item 2b – The view of Judaism that God's nature is "constant", that He does not change, is related to His incorporeal nature, and is reflected in the following passage:

Malachi 3:6 - For I, the Lord, have not changed; and you, the sons of Jacob, have not reached the end.

Yet, Christianity's deity changed from the infinite and transformed itself into the finite form of the man Jesus.

Item 3 – The understanding that God is neither male nor female follows directly from the fact that God is incorporeal (**Item 2a**). In sharp contrast to the Jewish view, the incarnation of Christianity's deity as the man Jesus makes it a male, as is evident from the New Testament account of Jesus' circumcision:

Luke 2:21(KJV) – And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Conclusion: Jesus cannot be the God of the Hebrew Bible and Judaism

Christianity's Claim

- † Jesus is the "only begotten" son of "God" whom "God", out of His love for humanity, sent to earth to be a "sacrifice" in order to redeem mankind from the stain of "Original Sin"

Judaism's Response

Of the various Christian positions on the aspects of God's nature being addressed in this essay, this one is perhaps the most extreme relative to what the Hebrew Bible teaches. Several issues that relate to this claim must be addressed: God "begetting" a son, the sacrifice of one's own child, (human) vicarious atonement, and the "direction" of sacrificial offerings described in the

Hebrew Bible. A discussion of the issue concerning the Christian doctrine of "Original Sin" appears in another essay and will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say, Judaism rejects this doctrine.⁶

❖ Would God "beget" a son?

Any dictionary of the English language shows that "to beget" means to procreate, to generate offspring. The question is: *Can this apply to God?* The answer to this question may be deduced by asking some other relevant questions.

Does the Hebrew Bible contain any accounts of God procreating? The answer, of course, is no. God created everything, including our progenitors, Adam and Eve. However, as to the rest of the people, while Jewish tradition holds that God is a "partner" in the process of procreation, they are brought into existence through the biological process where the sperm of the father fertilizes the egg of the mother.

How would God beget offspring, given that He is incorporeal and is neither male nor female (i.e., without genitalia)? There is no answer to this question, though it is not so much an issue of God's ability to procreate as it is a question about why He would do it. After all, since God was able to create the first man and woman, why would there be a need for Him to beget a child if He could have simply created a child?

The Hebrew Bible contains references to relationships in which God is in the role of the Father to various individuals and to the nation of Israel as a whole:

Exodus 4:22 - And you [Moses] shall say to Pharaoh, 'So said the Lord, "My firstborn son is Israel.'" [Israel]

2 Samuel 7:14 - I will be to him a father, and he shall be to Me a son; so that when he goes astray I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the sons of Adam. [King Solomon]

Psalms 2:7 - I will tell of the decree; The Lord said to me, "You are My son; this day have I begotten you. [King David]

Psalms 89:27-28 – (27) He will call to Me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.' (28) I, too, shall make him a firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. [King David's descendants who will sit on his throne, including בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל]

1 Chronicles 29:10 - And David blessed the Lord before the eyes of the entire assembly, and David said, "Blessed are You, the God of Israel our Father, from everlasting to everlasting. [Israel]

When these passages are read in context, it becomes evident that all these "father-son" relationships are metaphorical, they involve spiritual, not biological, children of God ["... **the God of Israel our Father** ..."].

⁶ See Footnote 3.

Does the use of "firstborn" in Exodus 4:22 and Psalms 89:28 imply this son was "begotten"? The answer to this question is "no". Being called the "firstborn" symbolizes greatness. For Israel as a nation, Exodus 4:22 not only implies the universal fatherhood of God, but that, among all the nations, which are God's children too, Israel is spiritually the firstborn, the nation that is destined to be "a light unto the nations". For King David, Psalms 89:28 indicates his status, his being the greatest of all the kings.

Is not the explicit use of "begotten" in Psalms 2:7 an example where God "begot" a son? The answer to this question is "no", since David had an earthly father, Jesse, who "begot" him, and he was the youngest of Jesse's sons. This figuratively refers to the day of David's enthronement, at which time he became God's servant who would guide the destiny of His people.

An interesting observation is that, according to Christian theology, the Christian deity fathered Jesus. *How and when was this done?*

Matthew 1:18-20(KJV) – (18) Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. (19) Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. (20) But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

According to this account, the Christian deity impregnated Mary while she was betrothed to Joseph. *What form did the Holy Ghost assume during this mission? Was the Holy Ghost in the image of a man?* This incident could be construed as rape, and, recalling that the Hebrew Bible was the Scripture in force at that time, the Torah states the following:

Deuteronomy 22:25-27 – (25) But if a man finds the betrothed girl in the field, and the man overpowers her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. (26) Whereas to the girl, you shall do nothing the girl did not commit a sin deserving of death, for just as a man rises up against his fellow and murders him, so is this case. (27) Because he found her in the field. The betrothed girl had cried out, but there was no one to save her.

Why would God want to break His own law and produce a child by raping a betrothed woman rather than create this child in a way that would not violate Torah? None of this makes any logical sense relative to the Hebrew Bible.

❖ Did God sacrifice His "only begotten" son?

Huh? Assume, for the sake of argument, that God actually "begot" a son. According to the Hebrew Bible, God abhors child sacrifice:

Deuteronomy 18:10 - There shall not be found among you anyone who passes his son or daughter through fire, a soothsayer, a diviner of [auspicious] times, one

who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, [See also Leviticus 18:21, Jeremiah 7:31, 19:32; Ezekiel 23:37-39.]

*Would God sacrifice His "only begotten" son and, thus, violate His own law?
You decide!*

❖ **Would God participate in an act of human vicarious atonement?**

According to the Hebrew Bible, human vicarious (i.e., substitution) atonement is strictly prohibited; every person is responsible for his or her own sins:

Deuteronomy 24:16 - Fathers shall not be put to death because of children, nor shall children be put to death for fathers; each person shall be put to death for his own sin. [See also Exodus 32:31-33; Numbers 35:33.]

2 Kings 14:6 - And the sons of the assassins he did not execute, as it is written in the book of the Torah of Moses, which the Lord commanded saying: "Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, nor shall sons be put to death for fathers, but each man shall be put to death for his own sin." [See also Jeremiah 31:29{30 in Christian Bibles}; Ezekiel 18:4,20; Psalms 49:7-8.]

In other words, the concept of human vicarious atonement goes against Torah, and contradicts the inspired words throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible. *Would God violate his own law?*

❖ **Would God offer a sacrifice for humankind?**

The Hebrew Bible lists and describes various types of sacrificial offerings and contains numerous accounts of sacrificial offerings that were made. Without exception, all the accounts of sacrificial offerings contained in the Hebrew Bible went in one direction, from humans to God. There is not a single case described in the Hebrew Bible where God offers a sacrifice on behalf of mankind. Sacrificial offerings are a "One Way Street" – from mankind to God.

Conclusion: Jesus could not have been the "begotten" son of "God" whose purpose was to serve as a sacrificial offering that would redeem mankind from the stain of "Original Sin"

Christianity's Claim

- † **Jesus was the "Moses-like" prophet promised by Moses, and whose miracles rank with the likes of Elisha and Elijah**

Judaism's Response

According to Jewish tradition and beliefs, it is held that true prophecy was removed from the world after the last prophets who lived at the time of the

destruction of the First Temple, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, passed on.⁷ This situation was foretold by the psalmist Asaph:

Psalms 74:9 - Our signs we have not seen, there is no longer a prophet; and there is none among us who knows for how long.

An integral part of Judaism's messianic vision is that prophecy will return in the messianic era:

Joel 3:1 - And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your elders shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions;

Malachi 3:23[4:5 in Christian Bibles] - Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord;

The **מָשִׁיחַ** himself will be endowed with the gift of prophecy.

◊ The Torah's "litmus test" for prophets

The Hebrew Bible provides a "*litmus test*", designed ostensibly to identify false prophets; a test that is valid even after a given prophet passes on – the prophetic horizon, though not unlimited, is definitely not constrained by a prophet's own lifetime:

Deuteronomy 13:2-6 – (2) If there arise in the midst of you a prophet, or a dreamer of a dream; and he gives you a sign or a wonder, (3) and the sign or the wonder whereof he spoke unto you occurs, [and he] says, "Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us worship them"; (4) you shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or unto that dreamer of a dream; for the Lord, your God, is testing you, to know whether you truly love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul. (5) You shall follow the Lord, your God, and Him you shall fear, and His commandments you shall keep, and unto His voice you shall hearken, and Him you shall worship, and unto Him you shall cleave. (6) And that prophet or that dreamer of a dream shall be put to death, because he spoke falsehood about the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and who redeemed you from the house of bondage, to lead you astray from the way in which the Lord, your God, commanded you to go; and so you shall remove the evil from your midst.

Deuteronomy 18:22 - If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the thing does not happen nor does it come to pass, that is the thing the Lord has not spoken; and the prophet has spoken it wantonly, you shall not fear him.

These passages contain the following criteria for identifying false prophets:

- ➔ One who claims to have been sent by God to advocate idolatry
- ➔ One who proclaims the permanent abrogation of any precept in the Torah
- ➔ One whose prediction used as credentials for his/her divine call is not fulfilled

⁷ According to traditional Jewish belief, prophecy can only exist in the Land of Israel when a majority of the world's Jews resides there, which has not been the case from the time of the destruction of the First Temple and Babylonian exile to this day.

According to Torah, false prophecy is punishable by death, a penalty that must be administered by a human tribunal:

Deuteronomy 18:20 - But the prophet who shall wantonly speak a word in My name which I did not command him to speak, or who shall speak in the name of other gods; that prophet shall die.

The true prophets of Israel chastised the people for not doing God's will and for turning from God's laws. They always acted according God's will and in accordance with the Torah and its immutability, never on their own authority. Jesus, on the other hand, although he chastised his people as did the true prophets of Israel, justified his actions on his own authority and, therefore, he did not follow the path of the true prophets of Israel.

The New Testament contains numerous accounts to which Christian apologists point as being prophetic statements by Jesus. They also claim that some of these were even fulfilled, although the validity of those claims is questionable. However, many statements attributed to Jesus, which were clearly intended to be prophetic, were not fulfilled at all. One such example is when he tells his disciples about his imminent return, his "Second Coming":

Matthew 16:28(KJV) - Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

⇒ **THIS "PROPHECY" WAS NOT FULFILLED! The generation that Jesus addressed died some 19 centuries ago!**

Another example of a "prophecy" about his "Second Coming" is the following:

Mark 1:14-15(KJV) – (14) Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, (15) And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

⇒ **THIS "PROPHECY" WAS NOT FULFILLED! 19 centuries have passed and the "Kingdom of God" has not yet arrived!**

Jesus, addressing the scribes and Pharisees, allegedly prophesied his death and resurrection:

Matthew 12:38-40(KJV) – (38) Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. (39) But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: (40) For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

⇒ **THE "PROPHECY" OF THE "SIGN OF JONAH" [3 DAYS & 3 NIGHTS] WAS NOT FULFILLED! Jesus was "in the heart of the earth" 36 hours or less. According to the Gospel of Luke, he died Friday afternoon and "rose" Sunday before dawn. When the women reached his tomb, he was**

already gone (Luke 23:54–24:3). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus remained in the tomb from Friday afternoon until Saturday evening at nightfall - a total of some 26 hours (Matthew 28:1)!

- ⇒ THE ENTIRE "PROPHECY" WAS NOT FULFILLED! Jesus addressed his doubters, the scribes and Pharisees, with this "prophecy". Why did he not appear to them following his alleged resurrection? According to the accounts in the New Testament, the "witnesses" were his followers, on whose accounts of the resurrection one is expected to rely.

According to the "*litmus test*" from the Torah, even a single false prophecy is sufficient to brand an individual as a false prophet, which makes him punishable with death by execution.

◊ Miracles and their purpose

Unique among the religions of the world, Judaism is based on a national revelation, not on claims of miracles performed by an individual. The "personal revelation" claimed by founders of some major religions must be accepted by others purely on faith, even if their founders perform miracles to try to support their claim. Miracles, even if they are genuine, may only indicate that an individual has certain powers, but do not prove his or her being a true prophet. One of the "*litmus test*" passages above specifically warns the Israelites about such individuals (Deuteronomy 13:2-4).

In performing miracles, a true prophet of Israel did so in the name of God and on His authority, with the objective of strengthening people's belief in God and drawing them nearer to Him.

According to accounts recorded in the New Testament, Jesus, too, is said to have performed miracles. However, in contrast to the actions of any of the true prophets of Israel, Jesus declared miracles on his own authority, and he performed them in order to make people believe in him.

Conclusion: If Jesus was a prophet at all, he was not a prophet of God; rather, he was a false prophet!

III. SUMMARY

In this essay the validity of four of the main Christian claims concerning the nature of Jesus was examined relative to the Hebrew Bible, the Scripture in force during the era in which Jesus is said to have lived and ministered, and even for many years thereafter. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table III.1 below.

Table III.1 – Summary of claims and responses

Christianity's (†) Claim:	Judaism's (✡) Response:	
	Is it acceptable to a Jew?	Why? According to the Hebrew Bible...
Jesus is the Messiah who came, died, and resurrected, and who will return	No	Jesus is disqualified. The promised מֶשֶׁיחַ will accomplish the "messianic agenda" in his first appearance.
Jesus is "God" who came to earth incarnated in the flesh	No	God is not a man. God has no form and He does not change.
Jesus, the son of "God", is the sacrifice that redeemed mankind from sin	No	God does not procreate; He can forgive sins without the need for a human sacrifice, which he abhors.
Jesus was a prophet and performed miracles	No	Jesus was a false prophet; he failed the "litmus test".

The typical Christian apologist will attempt to counter these facts from the Hebrew Bible with various arguments that are based on accounts in the New Testament as well as on misinterpreted and mistranslated passages from the Christian "Old Testament". The doctrine that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, must believe in Jesus and be baptized in order to be "saved" appears in Peter's sermon:

Acts 2:38(KJV) - Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Jews who are approached by Christian missionaries should remember the following point-by-point summary of the lessons brought forth in this essay:

- ✡ A JEW MUST REJECT THE IDEA THAT JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH since he did not fulfill the prophecies that constitute the "messianic agenda", the best evidence for this being that, at no time following his arrival and death was the world redeemed – tragedy, suffering, and pain are still rampant throughout the world.
- ✡ A JEW MUST REJECT THE NOTION THAT JESUS WAS GOD INCARNATED since this violates a cardinal tenet of Judaism, namely, that God is purely spiritual and is incorporeal.
- ✡ A JEW MUST REJECT JESUS AS THE DIVINE BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD since God does not generate progeny. At best, one can recognize Jesus as just another spiritual child of God in the sense that all people are His children.
- ✡ A JEW MUST REJECT THE IDEA OF HUMAN VICARIOUS ATONEMENT IN RELATIONSHIP TO HIS OWN DELIVERANCE since this is prohibited in the Torah. The Hebrew Bible teaches that every person is responsible for his or her own sins; no other person can take on someone's sins, suffer their consequences, and thereby absolve the sinner. Related to this is the notion that a Jew does not need a mediator, not even a symbolic one, in his or her relationship with God; Jews approach God directly.

The notion that a person can be redeemed ("saved") only by accepting the belief in Jesus, and that all those who do not do that are condemned to roast in (the Christian concept of) "hell", is not only repugnant to Judaism, it is antithetical to the idea of compassion and justice.

There are Christian leaders have retreated from this requirement, and have accepted the idea that Jews have their own path to God, as demonstrated in the following excerpt from a sermon delivered by The Reverend Dr. Frank G. Kirkpatrick of the Trinity Episcopal Church in Hartford, Connecticut:

In the Lectionary which determines what Biblical passages are to be read each Sunday, this particular day gives the option of leaving out Acts 13:44-52. I have deliberately chosen to leave it in, replacing a passage from the Book of Revelation. The reason why I chose to leave it in is because I want to confront head-on the incendiary and historically momentous words of Paul, who says to people who are indiscriminately called "the Jews", "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles."

On these words, plus some others from the New Testament, an entire history of anti-Semitism and Christian triumphalist exclusivism has been built. Simply put, Christians over the ages have been taught that the Jews (an unspecific term) have rejected Jesus as their savior and in the process condemned themselves and all their descendants to eternal damnation. At the same time Christians have declared themselves to have been the replacement for the Jews in the eternal covenant with God.

...[snipped]...

In claiming the power of the revelation of God through Jesus, we Christians need not feel threatened when others have found that same God in other ways. Slowly, even the official voices of Christianity, from the Pope and major religious spokespeople, have been coming to acknowledge that Judaism, in particular, has no need of the Christian way to God. God established an everlasting covenant with the Jews at Mt. Sinai. And as one who never breaks His promise, God has remained faithful to that covenant, which bound him as much as it did the people of Israel. It is arrogant and exclusivist for Christians to claim that the Jews need Jesus to find God. The Jews have God already, in the Torah, in the Covenant, in the very being of a people who have survived against all odds and persecution down through the centuries. Why would Christians insist that Jews still don't have enough of God and that they now also need Jesus? This makes no sense.⁸

Thank you, The Reverend Dr. Frank G. Kirkpatrick!

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⁸ The complete sermon by The Reverend Dr. Frank G. Kirkpatrick, who is also Professor of Religion at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, may be found on the Internet: [Why Jews Don't Need Jesus - http://www.trinityhartford.org/s050904.htm](http://www.trinityhartford.org/s050904.htm).