

Answering the Objections of Judaism

Most Jewish people presume that they are in good standing with God. They will not understand the concept of salvation unless it is explained to them for, as they see it, they have nothing to be saved from. What is more, to them Christian is only another name for a Gentile churchgoer: Jewish people are Jewish people because they have been born into Jewish families so Christians must be Christians because they have been born into Christian families.

When you set out to explain your faith point out that although you were born a Gentile you became a Christian by personal faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, and that by believing in Him you came to know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Remember too, for a Jewish person to consider turning to Christ can stir up many anxieties. Jewish ways of thinking and doing things are very different to Gentile ways. Jewishness is a way of life even for those who are not particularly religious. Social, family and commercial consequences may be a big concern.

Things to Avoid

When speaking to people from a Jewish background avoid unnecessary hindrances:

- Avoid the use of Christian jargon
- Do not speak of “Jews” — it sounds anti-Semitic coming from a Gentile. Instead speak of Jewish people and do not call Jewish people Hebrews: that name is long outdated.
- Avoid telling Jewish jokes!
- Be clear about what you mean when you talk about sin, salvation and other fundamental concepts. Remember that the Jewish person’s understanding might be very different to yours and different to what you would expect it to be from your understanding of the Old Testament.

Beginning Conversations

Conversations about faith and spiritual things can often be opened by showing interest in Jewish festivals and customs or asking about points of common belief from the Old Testament. You could, for example, talk about the similarities and differences between the Passover and the Lord’s Supper. The concept of sin may be more readily considered in the context of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

Common Objections

There are some objections that Jewish people commonly present in opposition to Christian teaching. Those objections raise questions that every believer ought to be able to address.

The New Testament is Anti-Semitic

Often those who claim that the New Testament is anti-Semitic will not be able to point to anything specific that supports their claim. Some may point to certain harsh-sounding passages such as John 8:44 or 1 Thessalonians 2:14 – 16. It can be helpful to point out that this was frequently the way the prophets of Israel spoke — Isaiah 1 is a good example.

Jesus was not anti-Semitic. Rather He was saddened at the sins of the Jewish people. He wept over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37 – 39). All have sinned, and God’s response to sin is the same for all people.

Christians Believe In Three Gods

The objection that because of our belief in the Trinity we Christians believe in three Gods not one is dealt with in the same way as when it is raised by Muslims. It is helpful to point out that in Mark 12:29 we read that Jesus Himself quoted the Shema.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD, the One and Only.”

Deuteronomy 6:4

Beyond that sometimes the simple statement that God is bigger than us and we will never fully understand Him can avoid a long and fruitless discussion.

There Is No Proof...

Jewish people will often argue that there is no proof that Jesus was the Messiah. This is often an ill-thought-out objection. Usually the case for Jesus' Messiahship will never have been considered. Never the less the question it raises is a good one — after all, there have been false Messiahs in Jewish history. It also provides an opportunity to look at the evidence.

The Hebrew Scriptures (the Tanak) contain over 360 prophecies concerning the identity of the Messiah including the following:

- Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem: Micah 5:1
- Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah: Genesis 49:10
- Messiah would present himself by riding on an ass: Zechariah 9:9
- Messiah would be tortured to death: Psalm 22
- Messiah would arrive before the destruction of the Second Temple: Daniel 9:24 – 27
- Messiah's life would include suffering, silence at his arrest and trial, death and burial in a rich man's tomb, and resurrection: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

According to the New Testament Jesus matched all the expectations perfectly. But that is not all the evidence: several other things combine with it to substantiate the Messiahship of Jesus.

First, He claimed to be the Messiah: John 4:26. That claim does not prove that He was the Messiah but it does prompt us to consider the rest of the evidence.

Second, Jesus' life stands in sharp contrast to that of all the false Messiahs, and it is a positive demonstration of what we would expect the Messiah to do. He worked many miracles, He carried out the Law of Moses as a devout Jew and although He died, He rose again.

Third, the resurrection is the most convincing vindication of Jesus' claims. An Israeli scholar, Pinchas Lapide, has written a book in which he says that the resurrection of Jesus is well within the realm of possibility. After all, he reasoned, the Hebrew Scriptures give a number of accounts of people coming back to life. Why not Jesus as well? He fails to add that the resurrection of Jesus is described in terms that go far beyond those of the other stories and that Jesus predicted his own resurrection and held it up to be the proof of His Messiahship.

Various theories have been offered to explain away the resurrection but none stands scrutiny.

- Did the Roman authorities steal the body of Jesus from the tomb? Then why didn't they produce it when the word started being spread that Jesus was risen?
- Maybe the disciples stole His body. But could such a fabrication on their part account for the change in their attitude? Three days earlier they were disillusioned, defeated idealists who had hoped that Jesus would bring in a new world order; could a lie which they knew to be a lie, now account for their hope, their boldness in the face of official persecution, and for the high ethical standards they set?
- If Jesus never died but just fainted on the cross and revived in the tomb the fact that the Romans pierced Jesus' side must be overlooked. Also, there was a contingent of Roman soldiers guarding the tomb as well as a huge stone that blocked its entrance. There was no way that a resuscitated Jesus could have escaped and then convinced hundreds of sceptical eyewitnesses that he had conquered death forever.
- Was it all a mass hallucination? It must have been quite a hallucination to be seen by vastly different kinds of people at different times of day in many different places. He appeared to five hundred people at one time and His appearances stopped as suddenly as they started, forty days after the resurrection took place. In all these ways the post resurrection appearances of Jesus are unlike the normal pattern of hallucinations.

The only satisfactory explanation is that the resurrection actually occurred, just as the record says. And if that is the case, it is a solid reason for accepting the Messiahship of Jesus.

Fourth, Jesus transforms people's lives because He provides atonement for sin, reconciliation with God, peace, joy, and purpose and He gives power to overcome sin.

If Jesus Was The Messiah...

"Jewish people don't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. After all, the world is no different because of Him. Where is the Kingdom of God He talked about? He didn't even deliver His Jewish people from their enemies. Messiah will bring peace to the world when He comes. Look at the mess the world is in. Jesus changed nothing."

Jewish people, when presented with the claim that Jesus is the Messiah, frequently use this conversation stopper. The reality is that the world is a very different place in ways that can only be attributed to Jesus.

Isaiah 49 portrays the Messiah, the Servant of Yahweh. Through the prophet God tells the Servant that to confine His activities to the exiles returning to the land is "too small a thing". There is a larger task:

"I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth"

Isaiah 49:6

Being a light to the nations involves taking the good news of God and His salvation to the Gentiles but over the centuries that activity has been largely missing from the Jewish contribution to the world. They have formed no missionary societies and have sent out no missionaries. They neither produced nor distributed translations of the Scriptures nor attempted to inform the world of God's Law. But the Gentile world does know the God of Scripture. Jesus' disciples took up the task of proclaiming the "good news of the Kingdom of God" to every tribe, tongue and nation and the world is a very different place because of it.

The story does not end there. At His ascension, Jesus told His disciples that He would return in power and glory. He would then make a full and final conquest over evil and enable righteousness to reign by virtue of His presence in the midst of Israel and the nations.

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, And princes will rule with justice."

Isaiah 32:1

The prophet was peering into the far distant future when he predicted the final consummation of all human history through the Messiah. The Messiah's work has begun but its completion is something we still look forward to. Meanwhile His work is ongoing.

"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come"

Matthew 24:14

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Matthew 28:18 – 20

Questions for Discussion

1. How might you present the gospel to someone from a Jewish background?
2. What difficulties and obstacles might you encounter?
3. In what ways can a Jewish person who becomes a Christian hold on to his or her Jewish identity?