

Letter to a Skeptic (Part I)

The following letter of reply was written by CPM worker, Winn Crenshaw, to a Jewish man who questioned the Messiahship of Yeshua (Jesus). Winn's response has been reproduced here verbatim. Only the Jewish writer's identity has been concealed out of respect for his privacy.

By Winn Crenshaw, The Chosen People Magazine, October 1991.

Dear Ben:

I am a staff worker for Chosen People Ministries working in the Son of David Congregation in suburban Washington, DC. I received your letter from our Charlotte headquarters today. I have read the letter several times and would like to respond. I trust you will read this long letter objectively as I try to respond to your charges.

It seems that your concerns fall into two major areas. First, you feel that Chosen People Ministries is striving to "compel" Jewish people to assimilate into the majority "Christian" culture. Second, you seem to be concerned about the person of Yeshua of Nazareth, for you said, "Nowhere in the 'New Testament' is any credence given to the fact that Yeshua was Orthodox and honored all feast and shabbats."

I'd like to address #2 first, for in reality that is the most important of the two since the Messiahship of Yeshua is the central issue in all that Chosen People Ministries does.

Some observations about His orthodoxy and celebration of the feast of Israel (since you asked for New Testament references, I will give them) are:

✧ Matthew 1:1-16 records His genealogy. Some interesting points to consider. Verse 1 states, "The book of the genealogy of Yeshua haMashiach, the son of David the son of Abraham." That sounds like pretty good Jewish ancestry to me.



Chosen People Ministries (Canada)

- ✧ Luke 2:21 records, "And when eight days were completed before his circumcision, his name was called Yeshua."
- ✧ Luke 2:22-38 records Yeshua's parents taking Him to the Temple to be redeemed since He was a firstborn.
- ✧ Luke 2:41 records, "And his parents used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover."
- ✧ John 2 and many other Scriptures record Yeshua being in Jerusalem to celebrate Pesach as an adult. (At least three times it is recorded He celebrated Pesach during His ministry years.)
- ✧ John 7 records Him in Jerusalem for Sukkot.
- ✧ John 10:22-33 records Him in Jerusalem for Hanukkah.
- ✧ More times than I have space to go into here, the "New Covenant" records Yeshua being in the synagogues or the Temple on Shabbat.

The question of Yeshua's Orthodoxy isn't the major issue. In reality, the question is, "Was Yeshua in fact who He claimed to be?" For example, let me quote the passage mentioned above when Yeshua was at the Temple at Hanukkah.

At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Yeshua was walking in the Temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jewish leaders gathered around him, and were saying to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Yeshua answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe the works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness of me. But you do not believe because you are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

The Jewish leaders took up stones to stone him. Yeshua said to them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning me?"

The Jewish leaders answered him. "For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make yourself out to be God."

It is apparent from this passage that the Jewish leaders of Yeshua's day understood His claims very clearly. He claimed to be God. Also in the beginning of that passage, He claimed to be the Messiah prophesied in the Tenach (Old Testament). It's not a case of compelling Jewish people to follow the Gentile

god, as many Jewish people charge. Yeshua either was the Messiah or He wasn't. If He wasn't the Messiah foretold in the Jewish Scriptures, He wasn't the Messiah at all -- for Gentiles or Jews! If He is the Messiah of Israel (as all of us at Chosen People Ministries believe He is), then sharing that information with Jewish people isn't "thrusting a foreign religion" upon them; it is showing them the good news that Messiah has come. Let me ask you an important question: "If Yeshua is in fact the Jewish Messiah, what could be more Jewish than following Him?"

Let me give you a little more to ponder on your own. What do you think of this passage?

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot. And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hid their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

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. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in His death; although He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.

As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

This is an interesting passage; it's Isaiah 53 from the Tenach. The interesting thing about it is that it is never included in the Haftorah readings! It appears

that someone doesn't want the Jewish people to read it or hear it read. I wonder why? Could it be that it sounds so much like Yeshua?

There are many other passages from the Tenach that point to Yeshua being the Messiah, such as Daniel 9:24-27, Micah 5:1, Isaiah 7:14 and 9:5, to mention a few. However, this letter isn't the place to discuss all of them.

I wanted to spend a few lines on your charge #1. You seem to think that becoming a follower of Yeshua will make one less Jewish. That may have been true years ago, but at Chosen People Ministries we have as our goal the establishment of Messianic Jewish congregations like Son of David. Our congregation worships the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, recognizing Yeshua as the Messiah. The worship is very Jewish in its style and content even though about 50% of the congregants are Gentile. In response to your questions about *yarmulkah*, *tallit*, and *tzitzit*, some men wear them on a regular basis. We celebrate all the holidays and have Bar/Bat Mitzvah for the children. Much emphasis is placed on what you call "Jewish trappings." I would rather call it "Jewish heritage." For instance, in April we always have a Holocaust remembrance service and in May an Israeli Independence celebration.

Nothing I can say will convince you that it's OK for Jewish people to believe in Yeshua until you have experienced it for yourself. Psalm 16:11 says, "Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; in thy right hand there are pleasures forever." It is that kind of personal relationship that God offers to all of us through Messiah Yeshua. I pray that you will find Him soon.

Shalom,

Winn Crenshaw
Numbers 6:25-26