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## *The Shepherd of Israel*



**W**as Jesus Christ a Christian? This seems like a very stupid question, even worse than asking if Abraham was a Jew. But the answers to both questions are startling. Abraham was not a Jew; he was a Gentile. The Lord Jesus Christ was not a Christian; He was a Jew! The opening verse of the New Testament Scriptures proves His Jewishness. "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt. 1:1, N.I.V.). Read through the entire genealogy—all of his forefathers, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesse, David and Solomon were Jewish. There isn't an esteemed rabbi living today who can prove a finer lineage. Jesus was a Jew.

But wasn't He also a Christian? No, He was not. It was not until several years after He lived on earth that "the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Actually, He did not start a new religion. He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until

heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Mt. 5:17, 18).

Jesus Christ was a Jew and, without getting into any theological discussions, it can truthfully be said that no finer Jew ever lived. He was not only a Jew, but He was a rabbi! Pinchas Lapide is a prominent Israeli scholar and has written the following about Him: "Among the eighteen main names and titles which the authors of the New Testament give their Savior, 'rabbi' occurs with special frequency—no fewer than thirteen times. Although in Jesus' day this term had not yet acquired the formal meaning of an ordained official, it was nevertheless already in common use as a title of honor for well-known Bible teachers and scribes. Not only his disciples (Mk. 9:5; 11:21; 14:45) but others as well, Pharisees (Mk. 12:14; Jn. 3:2), Sadducees (Mk. 12:18), and scribes (Mk. 12:32), address him as 'rabbi'—

**"Did Jesus Start a New Religion?"**

Not only was Jesus a Jew and a rabbi, but every claim that He made about His Messiahship was based on the Jewish Scriptures, the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets. In fact, the New Testament Scriptures, which give His only authentic biography, either quote or paraphrase the Law, the Writings and the Prophets more than 500 times.

the Hebrew-Aramaic title is translated into Greek as 'master' or 'teacher.' "

"The relations between the rabbi of Nazareth and his Pharisaic colleagues find their most authentic expression . . . in the question of the greatest commandment: 'And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." And the scribe said to him, "You are right, rabbi; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he. . ." And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk. 12:28-34). What comes out in this dialogue, which sounds quite plausible historically, is above all the shared love for the fundamental values of the Hebrew Bible and the mutual recognition of two rabbinical teachers."

"Jesus taught many of the Pharisees of his day both in the Temple (Mk. 12:35) and the synagogues (Mk. 1:21 ff.; 6:2) of his homeland. And despite profound differences of opinion, he never denied their teaching authority but insisted, 'Practice and observe whatever they [the Pharisees] tell you' (Mt. 23:3). The general rabbinical attitude toward Jesus can be measured by the fact that he was frequently a guest in the houses of Pharisees (Lk. 11:37; 14:1), that 'some Pharisees' warned him of Herod's plan to kill him (Lk. 13:31), and that the 'respected member of the council' (Mk. 15:43), the Pharisee Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus to give it honorable burial according to the Jewish rite. It is also fair to assume that a number of 'rabbinical colleagues' joined Jesus' circle of disciples, as Nicodemus the Pharisee did when he came to Jesus by night and confessed, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God' (Jn. 3:1-2)."

*Israelis, Jews and Jesus*, Pinchas Lapide pp. 70, 71.

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All of the writers of the New Testament Scriptures were Jewish. We realize that some scholars believe that the author of the Gospel of Luke was not Jewish, but we believe that only a Jewish man could have written his Gospel. In fact, Lapide is greatly impressed with this truth. He says: "But Matthew and Luke also show clear traces of tannaitic ways of thinking, midrashlike biblical exegesis, and Pharisaic methods of argument. These point unambiguously to rabbinical sources of the text(s) on which they based their Gospels." *Ibid.* p. 72.

The first Christian church was not the church of Rome. It was the church of Jerusalem. Its membership was entirely Jewish—there wasn't a Gentile present. Among the members were "a great many of the priests" (Acts 6:7) as well as a number of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the most famous Jew of history, yet it is ironic that there has for centuries been a reluctance of both Jews and nominal Christians to accept the Jewishness of Jesus. We must study these truths in the original sources—including our Scriptures, the Law, the Writings and the Prophets as fulfilled in the New Testament Scriptures—the Gospels, the Epistles and the Revelation. —DF

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## The Most Jewish Thing I Could Ever Do

by Jerry Kaplowitz

I did it! I reached what some might call a spiritual milestone in the life of a Jewish boy. I was Bar Mitzvah. In a way, I felt free now, having pleased my conservative Jewish parents. I was no longer required to attend the twice-weekly Hebrew school at our local synagogue, and I could concentrate on simply being a "normal" teenager.

But, somehow in the midst of my new-found freedom, I sensed that I

had not lost the "old friend" who had been with me since childhood. It was the spiritual part of me that was always there. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't escape it, and even more frustrating, I couldn't even define it. It was like another person living inside of me, just waiting to be discovered.

Throughout high school and for at least six years in the Navy, I felt that I was one of God's chosen people and

that He certainly would be pleased with my moral life. I always attended the Passover Seders and Yom Kippur services and had a definite pride in my Jewish heritage. I often thought, "No one has a better way to worship God—not even the Christians. They are, after all, only Gentiles."

I first learned the ignorance of this statement when I met a true Christian. While in the Navy, we were brought together on the coast of Malaga, Spain. Long hours at sea together gave us a good chance to get to know each other well. Day by day, our friendship grew, and yet I remained unaware of the very force that motivated his entire life. Finally, before my friend was transferred, he poured out his heart, and shared his faith in Christ with me.

Somehow, as he spoke, I sensed I was beginning to discover a small clue to the puzzle that had plagued me for so many years while I was growing up. Thus, the first seed had been planted.

The topic of "religion" soon became a source of constant intrigue for me. I devoured all the books I could obtain on various theologies and beliefs. But, it wasn't long before I narrowed my studies down to Judaism and Christianity. They seemed to present the most logical doctrines. And yet, even the thought of believing in Jesus Christ seemed equivalent to joining the "enemy," and I had no desire to be called "traitor" by my Jewish family and friends.

But, I had to find out if the reactions I expected were only unrealistic fears in my mind. So, I told my mother of my spiritual quest. At first, she was interested to hear about my search, but then, when I mentioned Christianity, she suddenly became uneasy and told me that she wasn't interested in discussing it any further.

I can't say it was hard to understand my mother's reaction. I had expected it all along. "Believing in Jesus," I told myself, "is too difficult for any Jew to understand." My spiritual search was now being detoured by that anticipated wall of fear. My family and all my Jewish friends reacted harshly to me whenever I tried to share anything with them about Jesus. Even though I hadn't come to believe in Jesus yet, they still felt threatened by my serious discussion about Him. "You're a Jew," they told me. "This Jesus idea is totally

*continued from inside*

ridiculous. And Jerry, *you're* ridiculous for even thinking about it." It seemed I had come up against an insurmountable barrier. I didn't want to continue to hurt anyone so I stopped talking about my search. In fact, I totally stopped searching!

Peace in my family was eventually restored, as I tried to ignore this "supernatural shadow" I had just begun to discover.

But then, only after a short time had passed, another Christian came into my life. This upset me because it reminded me of the spiritual search I had just given up. I had been struggling to hide that spiritual self so that I would never have to be confronted by it again. But soon, many of my closest friends were Christians, and they made no attempt to keep their faith to themselves. It seemed they were always telling me about Jesus—how He loved me and how He wanted me to search my heart again.

"What's going on?" I asked myself. Part of me desperately needed to

resume that search for the truth, but the other part of me struggled with the pain I sensed would lay at the end of my search if I came to Christ.

These friends gave me several books about believing in Jesus. As I read, these books became my guides back into my journey, and the Bible became my map. I was amazed as I saw the wonderful Word of the Lord unveiled before me!

Messianic prophecies in Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, Zechariah and Micah opened my eyes to the startling truth I was learning about in the once-forbidden New Testament. My heart was filled with joy, as I sensed my journey was reaching a definite conclusion.

Yes, without a doubt, this Jesus was the Messiah! He was the very Savior whose coming was foretold by the prophets! Now all that remained was for me to receive Jesus personally, as my Messiah and Savior. It seemed like an easy thing to do—to pray to Him and tell Him that I believe and to ask Him to forgive my sins. But, for some reason, I couldn't do it. I simply could

not make that final commitment.

Frustration was building within me. Why was it so hard to understand? The idea of a Jew believing in Jesus just seemed unreal. Confusion tore at my soul and almost caused me to abandon these exciting discoveries about Jesus once again. But, I couldn't. God would not allow it to happen a second time.

Just as I was beginning to climb back into my comfortable shell, I met a Jewish believer in the Messiah. A warm friendship quickly grew between us. We got together often to study the Bible, and he introduced me to many other Jewish people who believed in Jesus. Finally, I realized that it's okay to be Jewish and believe in Jesus as the Messiah. In fact, that's just what God wants for all of His people. I was beginning to see that believing in Jesus is absolutely the most Jewish thing I could ever do.

I accepted Jesus Christ as my Messiah. The mystery had been revealed and I knew the truth. My journey was completed, my whole life was just beginning.

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**ANDREA J. ROBINSON, Editor**

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