

# **CONTRA BROWN**

**Answering Dr. Brown's Objections to Judaism**

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## I. Who is Dr. Brown?

The debate between Judaism and Christianity has been raging for some 2000 years. As a general rule, the argument between these two belief systems conformed to a specific pattern. The Church was the initiator of the discussion. In the ongoing (and largely unsuccessful) effort to convert the Jewish people, the Christian would put forth his argument. The Christian would present the proof-texts from the Jewish Bible and the Jew would explain why the particular verse cannot be quoted in support of Christian doctrine. The Christian never found himself obligated to respond to the Jewish argument, because it was Judaism that was under attack and Christianity was never threatened. Over the years little has changed in this debate (with the exception of the Dominican friars of 13<sup>th</sup> century Spain resorting to quotations from rabbinical sources to supplement the scriptural proof-texts, adding a new dimension to the old debate).

The past several decades have seen significant change in the age-old template. With the emergence of the Messianic movement, many Jews have been attracted to Christianity. No longer are the discussions initiated by the Christians. The Jewish community is now forced to initiate the discussion in its effort to bring her children back home. Jews who have converted to Christianity find themselves challenged by the arguments presented by the Jewish community, and have exerted themselves to formulate a defense to these arguments. In place of the deaf ear that the gentile Church has turned towards the Jewish arguments, these Jewish Christians take these arguments quite seriously. Many of them have indeed come back to their people on the basis of these arguments.

Other Messianic Jews have taken a different path. These people have reformulated the Christian argument, abandoning many of the old arguments, and created a genre of fresh arguments in their effort to justify their new-found faith. Dr. Michael Brown is one of the prominent representatives of this group of Messianic Jews. As a prolific writer and an international speaker, he has considerably influenced the direction of the Jewish Christian polemic. As a member of the Jewish community, my position is diametrically opposed to his position, yet I must commend him for leading his community in recognizing the seriousness of the Jewish challenge.

The time has come to pen a response to the arguments of Dr. Brown. The sheer volume of his work<sup>i</sup> prevents me from responding to every last one of his arguments in the space of this brief article. Yet there are some core arguments that represent the mainstay of Dr. Brown's reasoning. In an interview with Lee Strobel<sup>ii</sup>, Dr. Brown puts forth the salient points of his position. In the following article we hope to demonstrate why these central elements of Dr. Brown's position are untenable.

## **II. The real Jewish objections**

Brown is in the process of producing a five volume series entitled “Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus”. As the title denotes, Brown brings up various Jewish arguments against Christianity, and presents a Christian refutation to each of these arguments. In this work Brown articulates many arguments in support of Christianity and against Judaism. In the upcoming pages we will point out some of the serious flaws inherent in Brown’s central arguments. However this will not be our starting point. The most significant flaw in Brown’s work lies not so much in what he wrote, but in what he omitted. In all of the 1200 pages of his work Brown fails to address the core objections<sup>iii</sup> that the Jewish people have against Christianity. We will begin by identifying the core Jewish objections to Christianity.

Judaism’s debate with Christianity is vastly different than her debate with Buddhism or Hinduism. The Far Eastern religions attribute no validity to Judaism and Judaism attributes no validity to them. There is little if any common ground upon which to establish a meaningful debate. Christianity is different. Christianity acknowledges that before the birth of Jesus, God had imparted truth to the Jewish people. Christianity recognizes that the Jewish scriptures, which predate Christianity, are an authentic representation of God’s word. In other words, Judaism was here before Christianity. Brown argues that modern rabbinical Judaism is not an accurate representation of the Judaism that predated Christianity. We will refute this contention in a separate article<sup>iv</sup>. For now it will suffice for us to recognize the fact that Christianity acknowledges that a true teaching from God existed before anyone ever heard of Jesus, and that the Jewish people were in possession of that teaching.

### **1. The totality of scripture**

What was that teaching? Both Jews and Christians admit that the Jewish scriptures represent a significant part of that teaching. Let us focus on the Jewish scriptures. We must cast our mind back to the time before Jesus was born. We must ask ourselves how a Jew would have read the scriptures before the advent of Christianity. What was the total world-view that the Jewish scriptures imparted to the Jewish people? What would have been the perspective of the Jew who accepted the totality of the Jewish scriptures concerning the major theological issues that stand between Judaism and Christianity?

The Jewish scriptures provide the Jewish people with clear and direct guidance on the major issues that separate Judaism from Christianity. The scriptures taught the Jewish people that deification of a human is idolatry. The scriptures clearly state that God freely grants forgiveness from sin to anyone who approaches Him with sincere repentance. And the prophetic authors of scripture painted a complete portrait of the Messianic era which

leaves no room for Jesus. The teaching that God had granted the Jewish people directed them to reject the theological claims of Christianity.

Brown will be quick to point out that there are certain passages in scripture which seem to support the Christian claims and he presents these verses in his books. We will shortly demonstrate how those passages do not in fact support the Christian position, and in most cases turn out to be the strongest refutations to Christianity. But at this point we are not addressing individual passages. We are looking at scripture as a whole.

Scripture is a lengthy and complex document. The message of scripture cannot be found in the reading of specific isolated passages. Rather, the true message of scripture emerges from an understanding of the totality of scripture. When any given doctrine is presented as a scriptural teaching, there are four basic criteria that should be applied to determine if the doctrine is truly scriptural.

We must ask ourselves if the doctrine in question is fully supported by scripture. Does scripture support all of the main points of the doctrine? Or are there significant gaps which the proponents of the doctrine must fill in? Does scripture provide **comprehensive** support for the doctrine in question?

Another quality we must look for in our examination of the given doctrine is clarity. Is the scriptural support claimed for the doctrine **clear** and unambiguous? Or are there other possible interpretations of the passages marshaled on behalf of the doctrine in question.

A third criteria by which we should judge a specific doctrine is the directness of the scriptural support. Are the passages quoted to sustain the theory addressing the issue in a **direct** and straightforward manner? Or is the scripture discussing another issue altogether.

Finally we must ask if the scriptural support for the doctrine is **consistent**. After evaluating the doctrine for comprehensiveness, for clarity and for the direct nature of the support – we must then ask if scripture ever provides a conflicting teaching that is as comprehensive, clear and direct as are the passages cited in support of the doctrine in question.

When we apply these criteria to the opposing doctrines of Judaism and Christianity, it becomes obvious why Jews could not accept the arguments of the missionary. The scriptural support for the doctrines of Judaism is comprehensive, clear, direct and consistent. While the scriptural support presented for the doctrines of Christianity is fragmentary, vague, indirect and inconsistent.

For the purpose of illustration we will focus on the issues of idolatry and atonement.

In order to establish His relationship with the Jewish people God introduced Himself to the nation as a whole with the words “I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2). This revelation gave the people to understand that there is no power aside from God (Deuteronomy 4:35). This revelation was God’s way of teaching us whom to worship, and through the process of elimination – who we cannot worship. If the being in question was not present at Sinai, then it does not deserve our devotion (Exodus 20:19, Deuteronomy 4:15). Scripture consistently warns against worshipping - “gods that neither you nor your fathers have known” (Deuteronomy 11:28, 13:3,7,14, 28:65, 29:25, 32:17, Jeremiah 7:9, 19:4) – or “that which I have not commanded” (Deuteronomy 17:3). The clear message of scripture precludes worship of a being that was not revealed to us at Sinai. It is on this basis that the Jewish people cannot accept a teaching which deifies a human being.

These passages provide full support for the Jewish doctrine. The entirety of the Jewish doctrine as it relates to this issue is contained in Deuteronomy chapter 4. The Sinai revelation defined for the nation who it is that they are and who it is that they are not to worship – and that is all there is to it – we worship the God who revealed Himself to our ancestors - as our ancestors preserved that revelation.

These passages are clear. It occurred to no-one to dispute the obvious fact that this passage speaks of the issue of idolatry<sup>v</sup>.

These passages are direct. In these passages God directly commands His people who it is that they are to worship and who it is that they are not to worship.

And these passages are consistent. There are no other passages in scripture which are as direct, as clear and as comprehensive as these, that would give us a conflicting view. The Jew can be satisfied that the doctrines of Judaism are indeed scriptural.

The verses that Dr. Brown mustered in support of Christianity do not meet any of these criteria.

In order to support the Christian doctrine which attributes deity to and encourages worship of Jesus, Brown quotes Psalm 110:1, Daniel 7:13, Psalm 45:18, Isaiah 52:13, Isaiah 9:6-7, Exodus 24:9-10, and Genesis 18<sup>vi</sup>. Even if we were to grant that Brown’s interpretation of these verses is correct (and we shall shortly demonstrate that this is not the case), still, all of these verses together only provide fractional support for the doctrines of

Christianity. According to Brown, these verses teach that a person can be God. These verses do not tell us if this is limited to one person or if many persons can be God. These verses do not tell us if this representation of God is co-equal to God or if he is subservient to God. These verses could be used to support the Hindu and Buddhist doctrines of the incarnation of the divine as easily as they could be used in support of the Trinitarian doctrine. And most importantly, these verses do not teach us to worship this representation of God as a deity. The scriptural support that Brown presented for the Christian doctrine is fragmentary and incomplete.

These passages that Brown presented in support of Christianity are not clear. Each of these verses can be understood without reference to the Christian doctrine of incarnation<sup>vii</sup>. The scriptural support presented for Christianity is vague and ambiguous<sup>viii</sup>.

None of these passages directly address the issue at hand. Not one of these passages is placed in a context which would give us to understand that this is God's teaching on the correct method of worship or to help us understand His nature. The scriptural support is circuitous and oblique.

In light of the limited nature of the Christian proof-texts, and in light of the vague and indirect quality of the support that these passages provide for the Christian doctrine, we recognize that the Christian usage of these passages is inconsistent. The scriptures declare openly and unequivocally that God has no form (Isaiah 40:17, 25) and that no representation of Him is to be worshiped (Deuteronomy 4:15). There is no way that one can say that the Christian doctrine is a consistent scriptural theme.

On the issue of atonement, the message of scripture rings loud and clear. Ezekiel 33:10 gives expression to the feeling of hopelessness that overtakes the sinner - "our sins and transgressions are upon us, and we melt away in them, how then shall we live?" The next verse gives us God's response - "Tell them - as I live says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn away from his sins and live". The passage goes on to assure the penitent sinner "none of the sins that he committed will be remembered against him" (Ezekiel 33:16). Here the scriptures directly address the feelings of guilt and hopelessness that overwhelm the sinner. God's answer is repentance - a turning away from sin and a new commitment to follow God's Law. The primary and direct purpose of this passage is to address the issue of getting out of the trap of sin and achieving God's forgiveness. The teaching of scripture on this issue is - repentance. There are quite a number of passages in scripture which directly address the question of the sinner's hope and the answer is always repentance. (Deuteronomy 4:29,30, 30:1-3, - addressing the nation as a collective unit, Isaiah 1:16,17, 55:7, Ezekiel 18:21,22,23, Micah 6:6-8 and the entirety of the book of Jonah all give us clear and direct guidance



on the issue of atonement. See also Jeremiah 36:3, Zechariah 1:3, and Job 22:23.) These passages are comprehensive, they are clear they are direct and they are consistently affirmed throughout scripture. It is on the basis of God's explicit word that the Jewish people reject the Christian theology which denies the efficacy of repentance.

Brown builds the scriptural case for the Christian doctrine of atonement upon the passages that describe the various Temple offerings, the Day of Atonement service described in Leviticus 16, Leviticus 17:11, Numbers 35:28, and upon Isaiah 53<sup>ix</sup>. These verses are presented in support of the Christian doctrine which posits that there is no forgiveness for sin without faith in Jesus.

The support is not comprehensive. Even if we were to read these passages with the interpretation that Brown proposes, all of these verses together do not tell us that there is no atonement without a blood offering. These passages do not teach that faith in an individual plays any role in the atonement process, and they certainly do not teach that without faith in an individual there can be no atonement. The scriptural support that Brown presented is fragmentary and incomplete.

The scriptures that Brown presented do not clearly support the point he is trying to make. The passages which speak of the offerings, refer to specific procedures associated with the Temple and not to the death of an individual who is seen by Brown as a replacement to the Temple. And Isaiah 53 is understood by many to be speaking of Israel and not the Messiah. The scriptural support that Brown presented for Christianity is vague and ambiguous.

Not one of the passages that Brown quoted, directly addresses the general issue of forgiveness for sin. The passages that deal with the Temple offerings speak of atonement for specific sins<sup>x</sup>, while the salient passages of Brown's presentation do not discuss the issue of atonement in a direct way at all. Isaiah 53 and Leviticus 17:11 are not placed in a context which would tell us that a teaching on the subject of atonement is about to be presented. There is no way that the Christian doctrine can be presented as the direct teaching of scripture.

In light of the limited nature of the Christian proof-texts, and in light of the vague and indirect quality of the support that these passages provide for the Christian doctrine, we recognize that the Christian usage of these passages is inconsistent. The passages that speak of repentance and repentance alone stand in direct opposition to the Christian doctrine. There is no way that the Christian doctrine can be considered the consistent message of scripture.

The broad sweep of the Jewish scriptures provided the Jew with a clear and complete theology. The theology that emerges from the Jewish scriptures does not allow the Jew to accept Christianity. As one former missionary (whose path to the God of Israel went through the pages of the Jewish scripture) put it - the Bible is the most powerful counter-missionary book ever published.

## 2. Faith Structure

The Jewish people did not only possess a book before the advent of Christianity, they possessed a belief system. A belief system, much like a building, must have a structure. Just as a building has foundations and pillars which support the entirety of the building, a faith must also be supported by foundations and pillars. These will be unique ideas or concepts which the adherents to the belief system recognize as absolute truth. All the rest of the beliefs will flow forth from the power of these foundational truths.

We must ask ourselves, what was the belief system that God established for the Jewish nation before the advent of Christianity? What were the mainstays of that belief system and what was its structure? Let us examine the Jewish scriptures with an eye out for the framework of the true faith that existed before the birth of Christianity.

The uniqueness of Judaism stands on the fact that it was God Himself who directly instructed the Jewish people on a national level. God introduced Himself to the nation in order that they learn who it is they ought to be worshiping (Exodus 20:2, 3). God allowed the people as a whole to listen as He spoke to Moses in order to establish the truth of Moses' mission (Exodus 19:9). The concrete events of the Exodus and the subsequent sojourn in the desert, which were collectively experienced by the entirety of the nation, established God's irrevocable relationship with His people (Deuteronomy 4:32 - 35). The Jewish people did not read these facts in a book, they did not hear them from a prophet; it was God Himself who imparted these truths to the nation as a whole. This is the foundation of Judaism. All subsequent information must conform to these God-given truths before it can be incorporated into the Jewish belief system.

When a claimant to prophecy presented his case to the Jewish people, the people examined the prophecy in light of these foundational truths<sup>xi</sup>. Is the God of this prophet the same God that revealed Himself to us at Sinai? Does this prophecy conform to the teachings of Moses? Only after it was determined that the prophecy was in line with Sinai and with the teachings of Moses, could the prophet hope to have his claims accepted. The only reason we have scripture today is because the Jewish people as a

collective unit recognized that these prophecies are in line with the foundational concepts established by God.

Christian missionaries do not claim that it was a trinity that appeared to the Jewish people at Sinai. The worship that the missionary promotes is precluded by the Sinai revelation – the very foundation of scripture. The doctrines of Christianity are not only refuted by scripture, they stand at variance to the fundamental principles upon which God established the validity of scripture.

The true faith that God established amongst the Jewish people before the first page of scripture was written, does not allow the Jew to accept the claims of the Christian missionaries.

### **3. The relationship that the Jewish people share with God**

It was not just the scriptures that the Jewish people possessed before the advent of Christianity, and it was not only a belief system - it was deep and intimate relationship with God that the Jewish people enjoyed long before Christianity came into being. The scriptures speak of the intensity of this love. *“Many waters cannot extinguish the love nor can the rivers sweep it away”* Song of Songs 8:7. Isaiah and David give expression to the yearning of the nation - *“Indeed even in the way of your judgments have we hoped for You, Your name and Your remembrance the yearning of our soul. My soul longed for you during the night, with my spirit within me I search for you”* - Isaiah 26:8,9. *“As the deer longs for brooks of water so my soul longs for You O God. My soul thirsts for God for the living God”* – Psalm 42:2,3. Jeremiah speaks of God’s love for His nation *“From the distant past did the Lord appear to me (declaring; that) it is an eternal love that I have loved you therefore have I drawn you to me with kindness”* - Jeremiah 31:2. A heart that is brimming with such love has no room for the adoration that Christianity demands for Jesus<sup>xii</sup>.

The relationship that the Jew shares with God is dearer to him than life itself (Psalm 44:23). How could the Jew compromise the sacred realm of that relationship? When the Jewish martyrs chose to give their lives rather than convert to Christianity, it was this fiery love that empowered them with the strength to make the supreme sacrifice. It was on the basis of the Jew’s unwavering loyalty for God that the rivers of Europe literally ran red with Jewish blood<sup>xiii</sup>. And it is on this same basis that the Jew continues to resist the arguments of the Christian missionary.

Brown’s failure to mention the Jew’s love for God as a reason Jews have resisted Christianity is particularly distressing. Millions of men, women and little children chose death over Christianity - were their hearts empty? Could they have all been willing to die in the most horrible manner without

a mighty love for God? Do our martyrs not deserve this minimal recognition for their supreme sacrifice?

God has chosen the Jewish people. God imparted His teaching to them and He established His truth in their midst (Psalm 78:5, 147:19,20). The relationship that God forged with the Jewish people is such that no nation or religion can claim anything similar (Deuteronomy 4:32 – 35). In order for a Jew to accept Jesus, he must turn his back on God, on God's truth, and on God's word.

### **III. Messianic Prophecies**

The Christian accepts Jesus on the basis of the Christian understanding that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Jewish Bible. The Jew cannot accept Jesus based on the Jewish understanding of the same Bible. Brown puts forth several arguments in support of the Christian position as it relates to the role and identity of the scriptural Messiah. Before we examine the specific arguments that Brown presents, let us remind ourselves of the overall portrait that the Jewish prophets painted of the Messianic era.

#### **A. The Messianic era according to scripture**

The prophets spoke of the ingathering of the Jewish exile (Deuteronomy 30:3, Isaiah 11:12, 40:11, 43:5,6, 49:12,18,22, 60:4, 66:20, Jeremiah 3:18, 30:3, 31:7, 32:37, Ezekiel 11:17, 20:41, 34:13, 36:24, 37:21), the rebuilding of the Temple (Isaiah 2:2, 60:7, Jeremiah 33:18, Ezekiel 37:26, 43:7, 44:15, Micah 4:1), national resurgence of Torah observance (Deuteronomy 30:10, Jeremiah 31:32, Ezekiel 11:20, 36:27, 37:24, 44:23,24), universal peace (Isaiah 2:4, 65:25, Jeremiah 33:9,16, Ezekiel 34:25,28, 37:26, Hosea 2:20, Psalm 72:3), and universal knowledge of God (Isaiah 11:9, 45:23, 54:13, 66:18,19,23, Jeremiah 3:17, 31:33, Ezekiel 38:23, Zephaniah 3:9, Zechariah 8:20-23, 14:16).

When we focus on Israel's relationship with God in this era, we find Israel reaping the reward of their suffering throughout a long and torturous exile (Isaiah 12:1, 40:2, 51:17-23, 60:10,15,16, 61:3,7, 66:10-12, Jeremiah 30:11, Micah 7:8,9), Israel's vindication in the eyes of the nations which scorned and persecuted them (Isaiah 41:11, 49:23,25,26, 60:10-14, 61:6,9, Jeremiah 30:16, Ezekiel 37:28, 39:25-29, Joel 4:2,16,17, Micah 7:10,16,17, Zephaniah 3:20), and their total reconciliation to God, to the degree that they become the channel through which God's light flows to the nations (Isaiah 52:10, 60:1,2,3,19,20, 61:11, 62:11,2, Jeremiah 33:8,9).

The prophets looked forward to a time when all of humanity will be united in worship of the God of the Jews (Zephaniah 3:9, Zechariah 8:23). They spoke

of a world in which the central expression of mankind's submission to God is the service performed in the third temple, by the Aaronic priests (Jeremiah 33:18, Ezekiel 44:15 - 31, Zechariah 14:16, Malachi 3:3). A world in which God's presence is manifest in the midst of the Jewish people, in order that the nations know "*that I the Lord do sanctify Israel when My sanctuary shall be in their midst forever*" (Ezekiel 37:28). A world in which former monarchs bow low to the Jewish people "*in order that you know that I am the Lord and those that hope to Me will not be shamed*" (Isaiah 49:23). A world in which the Law of Moses is faithfully observed (Deuteronomy 30:10) under the direction of the Aaronic priests (Ezekiel 44:23,24). A world in which a Messiah prince brings a sin offering for himself and leads the people with his own submission to God (Ezekiel 45:22).

The person of Messiah is likened to King David<sup>xiv</sup> (Jeremiah 30:9, Ezekiel 34:23,24, 37:24,35), and the yearning for the Messiah is described as the Jewish people seeking their king; David (Hosea 3:5). Need the prophets have said more? There is no individual in scripture who we know as well as we know David. His whole heart is open for all to read in the book of Psalms. Every emotion that exists within the relationship between man and his Creator finds expression in this holy book. Through the songs of the Psalms, David is still king over the Jewish people who stand fast in their loyalty to God. All those who seek the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David find guidance and direction in the songs of David. The Messiah, like David his ancestor, and even more so, will lead all of mankind in their acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. Like David his ancestor, the Messiah will not divert an iota of the worship that is appropriate to God, towards himself. On the contrary, his own fear of God will serve as the catalyst and the vehicle of expression for the rest of humanity to submit itself to the absolute dominion of God (Isaiah 11:2, 3).

This is the portrait that scripture provides of the Messianic era. Did you notice what is missing? The prophets do not speak of the vindication of the worshipers of the Messiah. They said nothing about having faith in the Messiah. They did not breathe a word about a new election on the basis of loyalty to an individual. There is not one verse in scripture which says that eternal salvation is achieved through devotion to the Messiah. But it is not only the silence of the prophets which precludes Christianity. The hope and the promise of the Jewish scriptures leave no room for Christianity. Christianity preaches a trinity which the Jewish people reject, yet the prophets tell us that the God that the Jewish people worshiped and hoped for throughout their bitter exile will be the One exalted on that day (Isaiah 25:9, 49:23). Christianity preaches a doing away with the sacrificial system, yet the prophets predict its restoration as it existed in the days of old<sup>xv</sup> (Malachi 3:4). Many Christians (including Strobel<sup>xvi</sup> and Brown) believe that the Law of Moses is no longer binding, yet the prophets teach that the Law of Moses will be observed in the Messianic era (Deuteronomy 30:2,8,10, Ezekiel 11:19,20, 36:26,27, 37:24).

The Jew did not need to examine the specific quotations of the Christian missionary. The scriptures provide a complete and comprehensive description of the Messianic era. The missionary can perhaps misapply a passage or two to support one fragment or one detail of his doctrine, but there is no way the Christian can compete with the broad sweep of the Messianic theme that supports the Jewish position. Still, we will analyze the particular passages that Brown sees as the evidence to the claims of Christianity.

## **B. Son of David?**

Both Jews and Christian recognize that the Messiah must be of the tribe of Judah and a descendant of David. Throughout the Jewish scriptures we find that tribal and royal lineage must follow the line of the father. (In chapters 1 through 4 of the book of Numbers where tribal lineage is described, the phrase "*to the house of their fathers*" appears over 20 times.) The claim that the Messiah must be born from a virgin - a central tenet of Christian dogma - is not consistent with the Bible's description of the Messiah.

In an attempt to counter this argument Brown claims that there is one scriptural passage that supports the theory that in some cases lineage could pass through the mother – namely; 1Chronicles 2:34 – 36<sup>xvii</sup>. Before we get to the passage in question, let us take stock of the context of the argument. Scripture consistently teaches that tribal and familial lineage flows through the male line. There are hundreds of verses which support this teaching. The episode described in 2Kings 11:1 - 3 clearly shows that royal lineage cannot pass through a female descendant even in the absence of a male descendant<sup>xviii</sup>. So are we to assume that one isolated verse contradicts this consistent teaching and we should yet accept that tribal lineage could follow the mother in contradiction to the rest of scripture? Wouldn't it be more reasonable to assume that we don't understand the one verse in Chronicles rather than take this verse and assume that we don't understand the rest of scripture?

In any case, when we approach the passage that Brown marshaled in support of his theory it becomes evident that, instead of sustaining his theory, this passage is perhaps the strongest refutation to his theory.

1Chronicles 2:25 begins by listing the descendants of Jerahmeel (mentioned previously in verse 2:9). In verse 33 the list concludes with the words "*these were the children of Jerahmeel*". After this concluding statement we are told that one of Jerahmeel's great grandchildren (a fellow named Sheshan who was 7 generations removed from Jerahmeel) had no sons but a daughter who was given in marriage to an Egyptian slave. We are then given the lineage of this union (verses 35 - 41). But from the concluding statement in verse 33 it is made clear that the children of this union were not considered descendants of Jerahmeel. That list was closed in verse 33. So Sheshan's grandchildren from

his daughter were not considered a continuation of his family's lineage. Again, scripture's consistent teaching is that tribal lineage can only flow through the male line.

In conclusion we can state that there are many verses in scripture which teach us that tribal lineage must follow the male line. There is not one verse which tells us otherwise. So the claim that Messiah of the tribe of Judah, and a descendant of David, is to be born from a virgin is inconsistent with open teaching of the Jewish Bible<sup>xix</sup>.

### **C. Psalm 22 and a light to the gentiles**

Brown points to Psalm 22 as a key Messianic prophecy. The individual described in this passage suffers grievously and is ultimately saved by God. The salvation of this individual is then to be related in the assembly of Israel. The story of this deliverance will then cause all the nations to turn to God. Brown argues that no other individual fits this description aside from the Christian Messiah<sup>xx</sup>.

Brown sees the conversion of the world to faith in Jesus as an essential element in Christianity's claim that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jewish Bible. The central provable prophecy that Brown believes that Jesus fulfilled is the conversion of the world<sup>xxi</sup>.

The problem with Brown's argument is that it flies in the face of the Jewish scriptures. The scriptures clearly tell us exactly how the conversion of the world will be achieved. The message is repeated quite a number of times in an open and unambiguous manner. Isaiah compares the error of the nations to a veil that covers their faces (25:7), and to a thick cloud of darkness (60:2). The prophets teach that God will use the physical salvation of the Jewish people to dispel this dark error. When the downtrodden and persecuted nation is exalted, and their enemies are destroyed, the nations will see the light and be converted to the service of God. Israel's deliverance is the catalyst for the conversion of the nations. This lesson is repeated by the prophets again and again (Isaiah 17:12 - 18:7, 25:1 - 8, 30:26, 34:1 - 35:10, 40:1 - 11, 41:17 - 20, 49:8 - 13, 52:7 - 10, Zephaniah 3:8 - 20, Psalm 9:8 - 13, 40, 66, 69, 98, 102, 117<sup>xxii</sup>). Any faith that the nations are coming to before the light of God is openly revealed upon Israel, can only be a part of the darkness that the prophets yearned to see dispelled (Isaiah 60:1 - 3).

### **D. Must the Messiah appear before 70 C.E.?**

Brown argues that according to the Jewish scriptures, Messiah must appear before the destruction of the Second Temple. There are three passages from the Hebrew Bible and one passage from the Talmud which Brown presents in support of this hypothesis, namely, Haggai 2:6 -9, Malachi 3:1- 5, Daniel 9:24

– 27, and Yoma 39b, respectively. We will address each of these to see if they truly support his contention.

### 1. Haggai 2:6 - 9.

*“For thus says the Lord of hosts: There will be one more; it is a small one. I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. I will shake the nations and the precious things of all the nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. Mine is the silver and mine is the gold – the word of the Lord of hosts. Great shall be the glory of this house – the latter more so than the former, said the Lord of hosts, and I will grant peace in this place – the word of the Lord of hosts.”*

The prophet is encouraging those who returned from the Babylonian exile. They were disappointed with the modest nature of the Second Temple (2:3, 4, Zechariah 4:10), and this was God’s message of reassurance. God encouraged the people by telling them that this Temple will be filled with glory (vs. 7), a glory that will surpass that of the First Temple (vs. 9). This prophecy did not come to pass in its most literal sense. Brown admits as much<sup>xxiii</sup>. Still, Brown contends that in a certain sense the glory of the Second Temple actually did exceed that of the First and that is because Jesus - who Brown believes is God Himself, visited the Second Temple but did not visit the First Temple.

One problem with this interpretation is the simple fact that God did visit the First Temple in an open and obvious way (1Kings 8:11, 2Chronicles 7:1 – 3). All who witnessed that visitation – and the entire nation was present – recognized that the God of Israel had come to dwell in His house. When the people saw Jesus walking in the Temple courtyard (he couldn’t enter the sanctuary itself for he was not a priest), they just saw a man. So which visitation was greater? Or does Brown believe that Jesus is God while God is not God?

The second problem with Brown’s interpretation is that Jesus never came to glorify the Temple. According to Christian theology he actually came to replace the Temple. According to Brown Jesus came to replace both the atonement that was provided through the Temple offerings and the connection to God that the Temple represented<sup>xxiv</sup>. How could the career of Jesus, a man who claimed the glory of the Temple for himself, be considered a glorification of the same Temple?

So what did Haggai mean with this prophecy? The fact that the prophecy was not fulfilled in the most literal sense, lends weight to the explanation<sup>xxv</sup> that this prophecy was conditional on the nation’s full repentance - as was the prophecy of Zechariah (6:15 - see below). When the nation ultimately



turns back to God<sup>xxvi</sup>, then the glory of the Temple will indeed surpass the glory of the First Temple<sup>xxvii</sup>.

If we will insist on a fulfillment of this prophecy during the time of the Second Temple, we ought to allow the scriptures to tell us how the glory of God was manifest in the Second Temple<sup>xxviii</sup>.

The scriptures teach that the purpose of the sanctuary was so that God could dwell in the midst of Israel (Exodus 25:8, 29:45, Ezekiel 37:27), and so that He could meet with Israel there (Exodus 23:17, 29:43, Deuteronomy 16:16). The primary purpose of the Temple was the connection it created between God and His beloved nation.

The Godly spirit which guided the nation during the Second Temple era was not as dramatic or as openly manifest as was the prophetic spirit that was manifest in the First Temple period. But the connection that it created between God and His people ran deeper and was more fully absorbed by the nation. In the context of this same prophecy, Haggai assured the people that God's own spirit had come to dwell in their midst (Haggai 2:5)<sup>xxix</sup>. Under the influence of this spirit the leaders of the Jewish people were able to seal the canon of scripture. It was through this spirit that God influenced our leaders to establish a network of rabbinical institutions which preserved the nation's loyalty to God throughout the darkness of the exile. The divine inspiration bestowed through this spirit enabled our leaders to formulate the Mishnah and Talmud, the books that would unite all of Israel throughout the realms of time and space in their ongoing discussion of God's Law.

In the historical context of the Second Temple, the spirit that dwelt amongst our people encouraged the brave resistance to the Greek persecution. The people were inspired to take on the might of the Syrian-Greek Empire in order to maintain their loyalty to God and His holy Law. The victory that was achieved against overwhelming odds and the miracle of the Menorah associated with that victory, still testifies to the world that God was with the Jewish people (Zechariah 9:13 – 16).

The glory that was manifest in the Second Temple was not more spectacular than the glory that was manifest in the First Temple. But it went further in achieving its purpose, and in that sense it was greater than the glory manifested in the First Temple. That still and silent spirit that came to dwell in the Second temple is still manifest amongst us, and will remain with us forever – just as God has promised (Isaiah 59:21, Haggai 2:5, Zechariah 4:6).

## 2. Malachi 3:1 - 4

*“Behold I send My messenger, and he will clear the path before Me, and suddenly the Lord whom you seek will come to His sanctuary, and the messenger of the covenant for whom you yearn, behold he comes, says the Lord of hosts. Who can bear the day of his coming and who can survive when he appears? For he will be like the smelters fire and like the launderer’s soap. He will sit smelting and purifying silver; he will purify the children of Levi and refine them like gold and like silver, and they will be for the Lord presenters of offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in years gone by.”*

In this passage the prophet speaks of a visitation of the Divine into the Temple. But it does not specify in which Temple the manifestation will occur. The prophet simply states that the Master will enter His sanctuary suddenly. This could refer to the future Third Temple as easily as it could refer to the Second. This passage cannot be used as evidence that the Messiah must come before the destruction of the Second Temple, because the prophecy does not indicate which Temple it is referring to<sup>xxx</sup>.

What this passage does tell us is that when the manifestation does occur, it will not be a Christian manifestation. Christianity believes that the sacrificial system and the Levitical priesthood were terminated with the advent of Jesus. Malachi has a different message. Malachi teaches that the Levites will be purified so that the offerings of Israel will be pleasing to God exactly as they were in days gone by. There is no way that one can repudiate the Levitical priesthood together with the sacrificial system and claim to fulfill this prophecy at the same time.

## 3. Daniel 9:24 - 27

*"Seventy weeks (490 years) are decreed upon your people and upon your holy city to finish the transgression to make an end to sin, to expiate iniquity, to usher in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophet and to anoint the holy of holies". Know and understand: from the emergence of the word to return and build Jerusalem until an anointed prince will be seven weeks, and for sixty two weeks it will be rebuilt street and moat, but in troubled times. Then after the sixty two weeks an anointed will be cut off and none will be left to him, and the nation of the prince that comes will destroy the city and sanctuary and his end will be with a flood, and to the end war desolations are decreed.”*

This passage talks of God’s ultimate program for the expiation of sin, the ushering in of everlasting righteousness and the culmination of all prophecy. Jews and Christian differ in their interpretation of this passage

in two areas. Christians insist that the program must be completed within the 490 year time-frame mentioned in this passage (and this is the thrust of Brown's argument), while Jews believe that the 490 year time-frame is a preparation period which must precede the implementation of God's program. The second area of disagreement between the Jewish and Christian interpreters of this passage focuses on the nature of God's program. Christians accept that the career of Jesus was a fulfillment of God's program while Jews recognize that the scriptures paint quite a different picture.

This passage is not the only description Daniel gives us of these events. In chapter 11 verse 31 Daniel describes the violation of the sanctuary using the same terminology that he uses in the passage under discussion (9:26, 27). This event is to take place at the close of the 490 years. This event is to be followed by a refining process (11:33-35). This refining process represents God's program for the ultimate expiation of sin and for the salvation of mankind. This clearly indicates that the program will only begin at the close of the 490 years. The 490 years were decreed in order to pave the way for the program to be set in motion.

What is God's program for the expiation of sin and the ushering in of everlasting righteousness? The scriptures spell out the details of God's program for the salvation of the world clearly and consistently. Daniel's prophecy must be read in the context of the overall message of scripture.

God's program for the expiation of Israel's sin and for the establishment of Israel's everlasting righteousness requires that Israel undergo a period of suffering. The purpose of this suffering is to refine Israel so that her sin can be pardoned (Leviticus 26:41, Isaiah 1:25, 40:2, 48:10, Psalm 66:9, Daniel 11:31 - 35). Ultimately Israel will be redeemed from her suffering and her sins will be wiped away (Deuteronomy 32:43, Isaiah 44:22, Jeremiah 31:33, 33:8, 50:20, Ezekiel 36:25, 37:23). At that time Israel will be exalted, the light of God will shine upon her head, and her everlasting righteousness will be revealed to all (Isaiah 24:23, 35:10, 51:11, 52:10, 12, 60:1 - 3, 19 - 21, 61:11 - 62:3, Jeremiah 33:9, Zephaniah 3:20). These prophecies all affirm that the expiation of Israel's sin and her ultimate exaltation will only take place at the time of her physical redemption and restoration to the land.

We can safely assume that Daniel knew all of this. Daniel had been hoping and praying that the 70 years of the Babylonian exile would be the end of Israel's suffering, and the subsequent deliverance would usher in the ultimate Messianic era. In this passage (Daniel 9:24 - 27) Daniel was informed that this was not to be. His nation and the holy city still needed to undergo a period of purification before the final redemption process can begin. The suffering of the Babylonian exile and the turmoil of the Second

Temple era was going to prepare the nation for the long exile ahead. It will be the suffering that follows the destruction of the Second Temple that will begin the ultimate process for the expiation of sin and for the establishment of everlasting righteousness. The 490 years which end with the destruction of the city and the Temple (Daniel 9:26), can only mark the beginning of the process. The completion of the process will be accomplished through the Messiah of the Jewish scriptures, the one who will lead the nation in her age of glory.

In conclusion we can say that there is no passage in the Jewish scriptures which requires that the Messiah put in an appearance before the destruction of the Second Temple. When we take the three passages from the Hebrew Bible that Brown presented to support his theory and read them in the context of the fullness of the scriptural message, we see that these passages do not support his hypothesis.

#### **4. Yoma 39b**

Brown quotes the Talmud in support of his contention that the Messiah must appear before the destruction of the Second Temple. The Talmud tells us that during the Yom Kippur service in the Temple, a red thread would be tied to the doorway of the sanctuary. As a sign of the forgiveness of Israel's sins, this thread would miraculously turn white. The Talmud reports that during the last 40 years of the Second temple's existence, this miracle ceased to occur and the thread would remain red<sup>xxxix</sup>. Brown concludes that this signifies that the sacrificial system was no longer effective and that another system for atonement had been established.

It is interesting to note that the Jewish disciples of Jesus<sup>xxxii</sup> did not read this sign in the same way that Brown does. The Christian scriptures<sup>xxxiii</sup> describe an interesting episode that took place after the death of Jesus. Paul, who had been preaching throughout the Roman Empire, came to visit the Jewish disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem. James, the brother of Jesus, told Paul that the members of the Jerusalem Church were under the impression that Paul had been encouraging Jews to abandon the Law of Moses, and this report disturbed them greatly. James suggested that Paul put these rumors to rest by participating in the offering of sacrifices for the expiation of sin<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Through his involvement in these sacrificial activities Paul would demonstrate that he was loyal to the Law of Moses.

What emerges from this story is that the Jewish disciples of Jesus were still bringing sacrifices for the expiation of sin long after his death. This was not a peripheral activity of the Jerusalem Church, but it was an activity which they saw as symbolic of their loyalty to God's Law. The act of bringing the offerings to the Temple establishment (to be processed by non-Christian priests), was employed as a public display that would

demonstrate Paul's alleged loyalty to the Law of Moses. A public performance relies on the audience to interpret its message. There is no question that the Jerusalem crowds would understand the act of bringing an animal offering, in the same way that the scriptures explain it. They would read the performance as an acknowledgment of the validity of the sacrificial system. This was the obvious intention of James when he demanded that Paul go through these motions.

But according to Brown, the sacrificial system was obsolete. Brown contends that with the death of Jesus the animal sacrifices could no longer atone, and it is only faith in Jesus that could atone. It seems that the Jewish disciples of Jesus never heard of this teaching, and if they did hear of the teaching, they did not accept it. Can we blame them? This teaching runs contrary to scripture. The book of Leviticus teaches that the offerings do indeed atone and there is no indication that they will one day be rendered obsolete and ineffective.

So how are we to understand the Talmudic passage? Why did the thread fail to turn white during those forty years? Scripture teaches us that the sacrifices of the wicked are not acceptable to God (Proverbs 15:8, 21:27). True repentance must precede the bringing of an animal-offering in order to render the sacrifice meaningful to God. When we see that the national offerings were not accepted, scripture would have us understand that the repentance which must precede the offering was lacking. During the last forty years of the Temple era, the nation as a national body was lacking in her devotion to God. It was for this reason that her sacrifices were not accepted by God. There is no room in scripture that would allow us to jump to the preposterous conclusion that the system established by God was discarded and done away with.

## **E. Priestly King**

Brown refers to Zechariah 6:11 - 13 as "the most overt passage in the Bible where a human being is identified with a Messianic figure<sup>xxxv</sup>". Brown's understanding of this passage is that the High-Priest Joshua is representing the Messiah. Brown argues that the Messiah must have a priestly role to play which involves the expiation of sin. Brown goes on to point out that according to Numbers 35:25, the death of the high priest serves as atonement for a particular sin. Brown's concludes that as a priest, the Messiah must provide atonement for sin with his death<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

There are three major problems with Brown's argument. 1) His interpretation of Zechariah 6 is totally off the mark. 2) Brown falsely assumes that the sole role of the priest was the expiation of sin. This is not so. In fact, the scriptural depiction of the Messiah has him sharing the role of the priests in areas other than the expiation of sin. 3) If the title "priest" must indicate atonement for sin,

then there is another scriptural candidate for this role - a candidate that Brown has unequivocally rejected. Let us tackle these one at a time.

### 1. Zechariah 6:9-15

*“And the word of the Lord came to me saying, take from the exiles, from Heldai, from Tobijah, and from Jedaia, come on that same day, and enter the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah who have come from Babylon. And take silver and gold and make crowns and place on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak the high priest. And say unto him saying, thus said the Lord of hosts saying behold a man his name is Zemah and he will flourish in his place, and he will build the sanctuary of the Lord. And he will build the sanctuary of the Lord and he will bear majesty, and he will sit and rule upon his throne, and the priest will be on his own throne and there will be a counsel of peace between the two of them. And the crowns will be for Helem, and for Tobijah, and for Jedaiah, and for Hen the son of Zephaniah as a remembrance in the sanctuary of the Lord. People will come from afar and they shall build in the sanctuary of the Lord, then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me unto you, and this shall come to pass if you will truly listen to the voice of your God.”*

This prophecy takes place in the early days of the Second Temple. The man who served as High-Priest at that time, was a certain Joshua son of Jehozadak. Now the prophet Zechariah was commanded to take gold and silver and create crowns (in the plural). He was then to place a crown on the head of the High- Priest<sup>xxxvii</sup>. The prophet then informs us that an individual will appear who will build the Temple. The prophet refers to this man as "Zemah" - which translates into "branch" - a possible reference to the Messiah<sup>xxxviii</sup>. The prophet goes on to tell us that this man will bear glory and rule from his throne, the priest will be on his own throne and there will be peace between the two of them. In other words, when the Branch arrives, he will take office as ruler, the priest will still retain his own office, and there will be peace between these two rulers<sup>xxxix</sup>.

It is not the Messiah - Branch who is portrayed as a priest, it is the priest who is described as one who sits on a throne and bears a crown. This passage does not speak of a priestly Messiah; it speaks of a governing priest - as a personality distinct from the person of the Messiah. This concept fits right in with the general teaching of scripture concerning this matter.

The three prophets who prophesied during the early days of the Second Temple (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) all emphasized the role of the priests as guides to the people (Haggai 2:10 - 15, Zechariah 3:1 - 7, Malachi 2:4 - 8, 3:3,4). The prophets spoke of the holy responsibility of the priests in instructing the people, and the prophets rebuked the priests who

were not fulfilling this responsibility in the proper manner. In Ezekiel's description of the Messianic era, an entire chapter (Ezekiel 44) is devoted to a depiction of the role of the priests, with specific emphasis on their role as teachers to the people (verses 23, 24). In the context of a Messianic prediction, Jeremiah speaks of the two families who were chosen by God - the royal family of David, and the priestly family of Levi (Jeremiah 33:17 - 26). The prophet assures us that God's choices are permanent and irrevocable. It is clear that the Levitical priesthood plays a significant role in the Messianic era.

During the Second Temple era and in the period of exile that followed, the nation did not wield much political power<sup>xi</sup>. The leaders of the nation were the arbitrators of God's Law, a function of the priesthood (Leviticus 10:11, Deuteronomy 33:10, Ezekiel 44:23, Malachi 2:7, 2Chronicles 19:11). The priests were then prominent in the government of the nation from the times of Zechariah onward. In the Messianic era the priesthood will also join the office of royalty in governing the nation. In that era, when everyone will observe the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 30:8, Jeremiah 31:32, Ezekiel 36:27, 37:24), the teaching role of the priests will be significantly exalted.

The prophet Zechariah accurately predicted the increase in the governing power of the priesthood. He said nothing about a priestly role for the royal ruler.

## **2. Psalm 110**

In this Psalm we indeed find that the Messiah (or his ancestor David) is designated with a priestly title. The Psalmist declares God's words to the King - "*You are a priest forever after the manner of Melchizedek*" (Psalm 110:4). But there is no reason to make the leap and assume that the only connotation that the priesthood carries is the function of expiating sin. In the days of Melchizedek<sup>xii</sup> when there was no Temple - anyone could have brought an offering. The processing of the animal offerings was not limited to the priesthood except in the context of the Temple or the Tabernacle. The priests were always charged with administering justice (Deuteronomy 17:9). As king of Salem, it is clear that this duty was well within the scope of Melchizedek's station. If the scriptures wanted to imply that the Messiah's role includes the expiation of sin, it would have referred to the Aaronic priesthood, which is explicitly associated with atonement. The fact that the Psalmist refers to Melchizedek and not to Aaron, indicates that the Messiah is charged with the roles of teacher and judge (Isaiah 11:4).

### **3. Messiah is not the only priest**

Let us accept Brown's argument for a moment. Let us assume that whenever scripture designates an individual with the title - "priest", then we have no choice but to accept that this individual is to serve in the capacity of expiating sin. We must recognize that the Messiah is not the only individual who is designated with a priestly title. As opposed to the Messiah, where the priestly reference is shadowed with uncertainty, the people of Israel are called priests openly and obviously (Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 61:6). Yet when the Jewish commentators identify the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, with the nation of Israel, Brown rejects their interpretation out of hand. If Psalm 110:4 teaches that the Messiah is to suffer for the sins of the world, then Exodus 19:6, and Isaiah 61:6 must also tell us that Israel is to suffer for the sins of the world. If the priestly references are not enough of a scriptural basis to establish this role for the nation of Israel, then they are not enough for the Messiah either.

## **F. Isaiah 53**

### **1. The identity of the servant and the anti-Semitism of the Christian scriptures**

Brown seems to be impressed by the fact that many people immediately associate this scriptural passage with the person of Jesus from Nazareth<sup>xiii</sup>. Let us step back and examine the facts. The prophet presents certain physical details that mark the servant's history enabling us to identify the servant. Then there is the theology of the servant. The prophet gives us a theological explanation to help us understand the suffering of the servant. The spiritual explanation for the suffering of the servant is not something that can be seen in the world of objective reality. The description of the servant's suffering, on the other hand, can be measured in the realm of objective reality. Upon examining the identifying details of the passage, it will become apparent that there is another subject that would more readily correspond with Isaiah's description. It is the invisible theology of the passage that causes people who read this passage to think of Jesus. No other figure in history is more closely associated with the theology of this passage than is Jesus. It is not the man, Jesus, who people see in this passage, it is Christianity.

Is this so impressive? Christianity has erected her theology on the non-contextual meaning of this passage, and has vociferously spread her doctrines to the ends of the earth. The 2000 years of missionary activity have publicized the Christian claim that Jesus fulfilled the theology of Isaiah 53. Upon reading Isaiah 53, many people do indeed make the association with the theological claims of Christianity. But did anyone see Jesus fulfill the theology of Isaiah 53? Did anyone see Jesus die for the



sins of the world? The fact that Isaiah 53 is associated with Jesus testifies to the success of the Christian effort in promulgating their intangible theology. This association is not rooted in an objective observation of the real world, nor is it supported by the text of Isaiah 53.

There is another point to consider in relation to this discussion. There are quite a number of passages in the Christian scriptures which seem to encourage anti-Semitism. Upon reading John 8, where Jesus entitles the Jews with the appellation “children of the Devil”, or Matthew 23, where Jesus disparages the Pharisees – the immediate association that comes to mind is that Jews and Judaism are intrinsically evil. Throughout history these passages were read by the most honored names in Church history, in this malevolent light. Now that anti-Semitism is considered a sin in many Christian circles, Brown appeals to his audience not to take these verses at face value. Rather, he encourages us to understand these spiteful utterances in light of the social context in which they were spoken<sup>xliii</sup> and in light of the general message of the Christian scriptures.

If Brown expects his audience not to jump to hasty conclusions based on the immediate association that comes to mind when it comes to the Christian scriptures, he should maintain the same standard when it comes to the Jewish scriptures.

## **2. What did the Rabbis say?**

Brown makes the argument that the ancient Jewish writings interpret this passage as a reference to the Messiah and not to Israel (or the righteous of Israel<sup>xliiv</sup>). According to Brown, it was Rashi, who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century who initiated the national interpretation by explaining the passage in reference to the righteous remnant of Israel. The fact is that this discussion is not very relevant. The Messianic and national interpretations are not mutually exclusive<sup>xlv</sup>, and either way, a proper reading of the passage will reveal that Jesus is not the one described. But it is appropriate to set the record straight. Firstly, Brown has overlooked numerous references<sup>xlvi</sup> that predate Rashi<sup>xlvii</sup>, and reflect the understanding that Isaiah 53 speaks of Israel.

Another, more serious point to consider, is that Brown is well aware that the early rabbinical writings do not set out to give a plain interpretation of the text. In Vol. 4 of his *Answering Jewish Objections*<sup>xlviii</sup>, Brown himself stresses this point. Brown acknowledges (in endnote 14 of Vol. 4) that the Rabbis were aware of the plain contextual meaning but that they did not see fit to record it in any systematic way. So of what significance is it that the early Jewish writings do not accentuate the national interpretation of Isaiah 53? They were not attempting to present the plain contextual meaning, so what is the surprise if it does not dominate their writings?

### 3. The innocence of the servant

Brown presents four objections which stand in the way of applying this passage to the nation of Israel as a whole. The first objection Brown puts forth - and I quote (AJO, Vol. 3, Page 50):

"Throughout Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12, the servant is depicted as completely righteous."

Brown goes on to argue that according Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, if Israel would be righteous they would not suffer but they would be blessed.

Objection number 2 centers on the exaltation of the servant. The servant depicted in this passage is highly exalted, while Israel is not exalted in the same sense that Jesus is exalted.

The third objection goes back to the servant's innocence. Again I quote (AJO, Vol. 3, Page 52):

"Isaiah presents a picture of a totally righteous, guileless servant of the Lord."

Brown argues that Israel is not and never was sinless.

The fourth objection Brown raises deals with the theology of the chapter. The servant of this passage brings healing to the world with his suffering. Brown asks - how has Israel's suffering brought healing to the world?

Since two of Brown's objections focus on the innocence of the servant, we will use this as the starting point for our discussion.

Brown's assertion that - "throughout Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12, the servant is depicted as completely righteous" - is unjustified according to any interpretation. There is only one half of one verse which, if read incorrectly, would lead to this conclusion. So the statement "*throughout Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12*" is without foundation.

Let us turn our focus to the verse in question (53:9):

*"And he set his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his deaths for no violence that he had done, nor for any deception that was in his mouth."*

The prophet does not claim that the servant never committed an act of violence in his life neither does Isaiah tell us that the servant was never

guilty of deception. In the book of Psalms David prays to God to save him from enemies that persecute him unjustly (Psalm 35:7, 38:21, 69:5). David is not claiming that he is sinless. In fact, in some of these very passages he admits his guilt before God (Psalm 38:5, 69:6). What David is saying is that he is not guilty of the crimes of which his persecutors accuse him. The servant of Isaiah is in the same situation. The governments of various countries deal with him as if he was a violent criminal, and they deal with the servant as if he had acquired wealth with deception. But the servant is innocent of these charges. Throughout history the two accusations hurled at the Jewish people was the accusation of violence<sup>xlix</sup>, and the accusation that they had stolen the riches of the nations<sup>l</sup>. The world has dealt with the Jew as if he were guilty of these two crimes. The prophet is informing us that the servant is being persecuted unjustly. Isaiah is not telling us that the servant was totally sinless. He is telling us that the servant is innocent of the crimes of which he is accused. Two of Brown's objections have just disappeared.

#### 4. The suffering of the servant

As we have seen, the prophet did not have much to say about the innocence of the servant. The prophet does describe the servant's suffering and his rejection. The prophet describes the servant;

*"his visage is disfigured in a manner that marked him as less than human, and his form is marred from that of men" (52:14).*

The prophet continues to tell us that the servant;

*"has no form or comeliness that we should look at him and no countenance that we should desire him" (53:2)*

Did anyone ever associate unsightliness with Jesus? Was Jesus ever put into a class of creatures that is less than human? There are countless pieces of art that demonstrate that the European mind saw the Jew as a repulsive creature whose appearance set them apart from the rest of humanity.

*"Despised, isolated from men"*

How was Jesus "isolated from men"? Was he confined to Ghettoes as were the Jews for centuries upon centuries? Was he barred from interacting freely with the citizenry<sup>li</sup> in dozens of countries as were the Jews? How many places of habitation were "off-limits" to Jesus?

*"a man of pains and acquainted with sickness"*

The Christian scriptures report that Jesus was crucified, but does that make him stand out as - "a man of pains and acquainted with sickness"? Many people were crucified and many individuals suffered so much more than Jesus. But the suffering of the Jewish people sets them apart from any other national entity.

*"we hid our faces from him and we esteemed him not" (53:3)*

When did mankind hide their faces from Jesus? Mankind certainly did hide their faces from the Jews while the most horrid crimes were being committed against them.

*"we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted" (53:4)*

Did the suffering of Jesus ever play a role in the theology of those who rejected his mission? But both Christianity and Islam focus on the suffering of the Jewish people in their theological assessment of the Jew. According to both of these belief systems, the suffering of the Jewish people is the evidence of their lowly status in God's eyes.

*"His grave is with the wicked, and his deaths are with the rich." (53:9)*

The servant of God is buried with the wicked, but the Christian scriptures tell us that Jesus was buried with the rich and not with the wicked. God's servant is to die with the rich, yet the Christian scriptures tell us that Jesus did not die with the rich, but with the wicked. It is obvious that Isaiah did not have Jesus in mind when he uttered these words.

The prophetic description clearly applies to the persecution of the Jewish people. Throughout the generations, the enemies of the Jew characterized the Jew as both rich and wicked. They justified the murder of the Jews because they believed that the Jew swindled the world of its wealth. The imagined wealth of the Jew triggered many pogroms and massacres. The preconception of the Jew as a criminal served as the basis for the disrespect that the killers showed for the Jewish dead.

When we focus on those verses which describe the servant's physical attributes, it becomes clear that the prophet foresaw the suffering of the Jewish people. The suffering servant is the persecuted Jew.

## **5. The exaltation of the servant**

Brown's second objection to the national interpretation of Isaiah 53 focuses on the exaltation of the servant. The beginning of the passage describes the great exaltation of the servant –

*"My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted, and extolled and be very high" (52:13)*

The prophet goes on to say that the kings of the nations will stand in awe of the servant's greatness. How can this apply to Israel asks Brown? But Jesus, says Brown, is exalted and worshiped by the leaders of many nations.

The fact is that the prophet's description of the exaltation of the servant actually eliminates Jesus as a candidate for the role of the servant of this passage. When was Jesus exalted, or when will he be exalted? There are three options for the believing Christian, and none of them fit the description of the prophet. Christians believe that after Jesus died, his disciples saw him exalted and sitting at the right side of God. But this cannot be the exaltation that the prophet had in mind. The prophet speaks of exaltation to the eyes of kings - hardly a fitting description of Jesus' disciples. Furthermore, the servant is exalted in the eyes of those who had considered him sub-human and despised. This alleged exaltation of Jesus was only witnessed by those who were already totally devoted to him, and was not seen by anyone who hadn't already placed their faith in him.

A second option for the exaltation of Jesus is the exaltation that takes place in Christendom today. Much of the world believes Jesus to be a deity, and this includes kings of various nations, and people who had formerly rejected his claims for the Messiah-ship of Israel. Could this be the exaltation that the prophet was referring to? No, it cannot. The prophet describes the exaltation as being communicated not through the spoken word, but through physical vision:

*"That which was not told to them they saw, and that which they have not heard they now perceive. Who has believed our report and upon who is the arm of the Lord revealed" (52:15, 53:1)*

When the nations will see the "arm of the Lord" bared for the benefit of the servant, they will come to recognize his true nature. This will be something that the nations will see clearly, not something that has to be explained to them. The "glory" of Jesus is not visible in any sense of the word. It can only be "perceived" after one has heard a dissertation on Christian theology. This is not the exaltation that Isaiah is describing.

Furthermore, and on a more foundational level, the entire thrust of the passage is that the servant is despised until his exaltation. It is his obvious exaltation that changes the people's attitude towards him. According to Christian theology, the worshiper must first accept Jesus before Jesus can forgive his sins. In the case of Jesus, the attitude of the onlooker must be positive before the exaltation can be perceived - the precise opposite of

the exaltation that Isaiah describes. In modern parlance we would say, that in the case of Jesus one has to “believe” in order to “see”. In the case of the servant it is the seeing that leads to the believing. The subjective glorification of Jesus is not the exaltation that Isaiah was telling us about.

Perhaps Isaiah was referring to the future exaltation of Jesus? Christians believe that when Jesus will return, all the earth will see his glory. Once again, this cannot be the interpretation of the passage. If there is any one person in the history of mankind who the prophet cannot be referring to, it must be Jesus of Nazareth. At this point in time there is no person who is more beloved than Jesus. Aside from the two billion or so Christians who consider him a god, you have almost one billion Muslims who regard him as a true prophet. The Hindus, almost a billion strong, also have a positive place for him in their heavenly scheme. The prophet is telling us that when the arm of the Lord is revealed, it will come as a shock to the onlookers. They will be surprised that the one they despise turns out to be God’s beloved servant. If there is any one person in the history of mankind who will not arouse surprise if the arm of the Lord is revealed upon him, it is Christendom’s Jesus. Jesus cannot be the servant Isaiah was talking about.

In order to understand the exaltation of the servant, all we need to do is read the scriptures not more than three verses before the opening of this passage:

*"Burst forth with joy, sing together O ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted His people He has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has made bare His holy arm to the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (52:9,10)*

A few verses later we read:

*"Who would have believed our report and upon whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (53:1)*

The arm of the Lord spoken of in verse 53:1 is the same arm of verse 52:10. In both cases the arm is revealed upon (or for the sake of) God’s servant<sup>lii</sup>, and in both cases this revelation of the arm of the Lord allows the nations to see the salvation of the servant of God. This has not yet taken place. God promised that it will happen, and He repeated this promise many times. The revelation of God’s glory upon the people of Israel and their ultimate exaltation is a consistent theme throughout the prophecies of the Messianic era (Isaiah 4:5, 18:3, 24:23, 40:5, 52:10, 60:2,19, 61:3, 62:1, Jeremiah 3:17, 33:9, Ezekiel 37:28, Micha 7:16, Zephaniah 3:20, Psalm 98:3, 102:17).

When God's glory will be revealed over the nation of Israel, to the shock and consternation of all who despised her, the world will suddenly understand Israel's mission. Just as God's glory appeared openly in Solomon's Temple in a manner which gave the nation to understand that He had chosen this building as His sanctuary, so will God's glory appear over Israel, allowing all of mankind to understand that Israel is God's sanctuary (2 Chronicles 7:3, Ezekiel 37:27,28).

If all that God had wanted to accomplish through Israel was to create a resting place for Himself amongst His chosen nation - Israel would not have had to undergo the torturous exile through which they suffered. God appointed Israel to serve as a sanctuary for His holiness toward all the nations of the earth (Isaiah 49:6<sup>liii</sup>). Israel's mission is no less than the salvation of the world. In order to accomplish this mission Israel must suffer the refining pains of the exile, so that they can be purified to the degree that they serve as the vessel for God's light. They must suffer not only for their own sins, but they must suffer a double measure (Isaiah 40:2), so that they can be purged for the sake of the nations as well. The task of creating a sanctuary for God here on earth belongs to the whole world, yet Israel must accomplish it by herself. Israel must be refined, not only for her own sins but for the sins of the nations as well. Israel suffers for the sins of the nations.

Israel's mission is not only redemptive in a future sense. Throughout the exile, Israel bears the torch of morality and Godliness amongst nations that revile her for it. The refining process that Israel undergoes, fortifies her in her loyalty to God's cause. Israel was God's servant who taught the world that each human being belongs to God, and is not intrinsically subservient to any other entity. This teaching is the root of the philosophy of democracy. Israel bore God's message to the world that the human being is capable of finding God's truth in the realm of the physical and in the realm of the spiritual - influencing both the renaissance of science, and the ongoing reformation of the Church. And Israel suffered in order to remain loyal to the scriptural truth that the works of men can indeed find favor in God's eyes - the concept that lies at the root of all civilization. It is through Israel's suffering that the nations were healed even before Israel's ultimate mission will be brought to fruition.

There is yet another scriptural teaching that sheds light on Israel's suffering. The chastisement of Israel brought her to levels of righteousness that would otherwise have been inaccessible (Deuteronomy 8:3, Psalm 25:18, 94:12, Proverbs 3:11,12,). The moral giants that Israel produced were refined by the national experience. The faith of the simple-folk of our nation, who maintained an island of sanity in a depraved world that sought to destroy them, was forged in the crucible of anti-Semitism. At the same time that the Jewish people were being refined, the gentile

nations around them were steeped in evil. Throughout history, the “moral beacons” of the gentile world – the Church, and the Mosque – spewed forth teachings of hatred and cruelty. Countless times throughout history, the gentile society did much to provoke God’s wrath. Like Sodom before them, God would have utterly destroyed them. But God found ten righteous people in the city that stayed His hand (Genesis 18:32). Where did God find these righteous people? There is no question that there were some righteous people amongst the gentiles. But in order to find ten, God probably had to look in the Jewish ghetto. The suffering that refined the Jewish people, brought healing to their gentile neighbors (Isaiah 53:5)

#### **IV. Is the Messiah to be divine?**

##### **A. Genesis 18 and Exodus 24**

Brown argues that the Messiah is to be a divine being. In recognition of the absurdity inherent in the belief that a man can be a god, Brown turns to the scriptures. Brown points to various instances in the Jewish scriptures where God seems to be represented by the human form - such as Genesis 18, and Exodus 24:10.

Indeed the scriptures do explicitly teach that God could use an angel to represent His glory to the people. God tells Moses that He will send an angel to guide the people. This angel bears God’s name. God warns Moses:

*"hearken to his voice and do all that I speak" (Exodus 23:20 - 22).*

It is the angel’s voice, but God has spoken. The same occurs in Genesis 22:16, and Numbers 22:35/23:5, where an angel speaks God’s words. But what does this have to do with Christianity? Christianity does not stop at the claim that Jesus was a representative of God to bring His words to the people, or to guide them and protect them - as preposterous as this claim would be. Christianity demands that the worship, the love, the awe and the adoration that belong to God, and to God alone, are to be directed towards Jesus. The attitude of self-negation and total devotion which belongs to no-one but to God is demanded by the Jesus of Christianity. There is no subject on which God has spoken more clearly. God taught us at Sinai, through our conscience and through the scriptures, that, as His creations, our devotion belongs to no-one but to Him.

At Sinai God revealed Himself to His people in order that they know whom to worship (Exodus 20:19, Deuteronomy 4:15). If God would have wanted us to worship Jesus, He would have shown Jesus to us at Sinai. This consideration is of paramount importance. The Sinai revelation came before scripture. All of scripture must be read in the context of the Sinai revelation. Since the Sinai



revelation precludes the worship of Jesus (and of any other being aside from God) then all of scripture must be read in that light.

Through our conscience God reveals to us that we should not give to one that which belongs to another. We are but God's creations. It is not for us to choose to whom to devote our souls. It is only for us to recognize Who it is that our souls belong to, and to live in that recognition. Furthermore, God created us with a sense of self-respect; after all, we are created in His image. This sense of honor should prevent us from submitting ourselves in self-negation before another created being. Just imagine people prostrating themselves on the ground in worship of a human being standing there in front of them. Picture the scene in your mind, and think about it. That scene lies at the heart of Christianity. Do Christians not believe that when Jesus walked this earth he was worthy of the devotion appropriate toward the divine? Do they not claim that he was one hundred percent god?

In the scriptures God explains the basis for our devotion to Him:

*"He is your father who created you, He made you and He established you"*  
(Deuteronomy 32:6)

*"Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these, He brings out their host by number"* (Isaiah 40:26)

*"He created the earth with his strength, He established the world with His wisdom, and with His understanding He spread the heavens"* (Jeremiah 10:12)

*"For all the gods of the nations are but idols, but the Lord made the heavens"*  
(Psalm 96:5)

When Daniel rebukes Belshazzar for worshipping idols he condemns him for not glorifying *"the God who holds your breath in his hand"* (Daniel 5:23). The scriptural theme is clear. When the prophets contrast the worship of idols against the worship of God, they invariably point to the fact that God is our Creator. We owe our existence to Him and we only exist in the world that He created. A man who lived, breathed and died in a world he did not create is not deserving of our worship (Isaiah 2:22, Jeremiah 10:11).

## **B. The exalted nature of the Davidic King**

As part of his effort to justify the worship of Jesus, Brown points to all of the references in scripture that describe devotion to the Davidic kings. Psalm 89:28 is quoted where the Davidic king is *"most high"*. Psalm 72:11 has people bowing to the Davidic king. 1Chronicles 29:20 has the people bowing to God and to the Davidic king, while Jeremiah 30:9 has the people serving

God and the Davidic king. The nations are called upon to praise the Davidic king (Psalm 45:18). What more could scripture say to encourage worship of the Messiah?

When examined in context, it becomes clear that these verses are talking about earthly kings. Psalm 89:28 and 1Chronicles 29:20 refer to David himself. Psalm 45 talks of a king whose children will take the place of his fathers - not a pre-existing divine being who never got married. It is clear that the obeisance spoken of in these verses is of the type offered to a human king and is not worship of the divine.

Furthermore, we find the same terminology elsewhere, and it is directed at the Jewish people. Deuteronomy 26:19 and 28:1 refer to the Jewish nation as "*most high*". Genesis 27:29, Isaiah 45:14, 49:23, 60:14, have the nations bowing to the Jews. Genesis 25:23, 27:29, Isaiah 60:10,12, Daniel 7:27 all have different terms of service directed towards the Jewish people. Isaiah 45:14 has the nations praying to the Jews. Deuteronomy 28:10, Psalm 105:38, and Esther 9:2 have the nations fearing and revering the Jews. 2Chronicles 31:8 has a blessing directed at God together with the Jewish people. 2Chronicles 35:3 has the priests serving both God and the Jewish people. The specific expression of praise directed at the Jewish people in Deuteronomy 33:29 are nowhere else to be found except in praise of God (Exodus 15:11, Psalm 35:10, 71:19, 89:9). This does not mean that the Jewish people are divine. What we can clearly learn from these verses is that the usage of these terms does not indicate the divinity of the entity to which they refer.

### C. Daniel 7:13

In the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Daniel, we learn of a prophetic vision granted to Daniel. He tells us of four great beasts rising out of the sea, one after another. After describing each of the four beasts Daniel sees "*one like the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven*" (Daniel 7:13). Brown considers this verse to be of "critical importance", because it establishes the exalted nature of the Messiah<sup>lv</sup>. Brown does not seem to entertain the slightest doubt that this verse is talking of the Messiah. This is incredible. This is one of the few passages in scripture that come along with a commentary. Scripture itself explains this passage and the "son of man" of Daniel 7:13 is not the Messiah<sup>lv</sup> – it is the people of Israel!

The scripture informs us that after Daniel had seen the vision he approaches an angel and asks for a clarification of all that he had seen (7:16). The angel replies that the four beasts represented four kingdoms, and the final dominion will be given to the "*holy ones of the most high*" (7:18) – a reference to the nation of Israel. The angel elaborates further by telling us that the dominion under all of the heavens is given to "*the nation of holy ones of the most high*"

(7:27) – again a clear reference to the nation of Israel. According to the angel, each of the beasts represents a different kingdom, while the son of man in Daniel’s vision represents Israel. Brown’s assertion that this passage refers to the Messiah is plainly refuted by scripture itself.

## **V. Atonement**

### **A. Brown’s solution for a Christian problem**

In his interview with Strobel<sup>lvi</sup> as well as in his own books, Brown attempts to demonstrate that the Christian beliefs about the expiation of sin are rooted in the Jewish scriptures. Christianity maintains that there is no expiation for sin without faith in the Messiah’s all-atoning sacrifice. But the Jewish scriptures explicitly teach a different doctrine. Time, and time again, the prophets remind us that the answer to sin is repentance<sup>lvii</sup>. In his effort to counter the direct message of scripture, Brown presents the following set of arguments.

#### **1. Talmud commentaries**

First, Brown attempts to prove that there can be no atonement without a blood-offering. Brown is confronted by the simple fact that there is not one verse in the scriptures, nor is there a passage in all of the rabbinical writings, which teach this Christian doctrine. Instead Brown argues<sup>lviii</sup> that this was a universally held Jewish view, as reflected in some of the commentaries on the Talmud.

#### **2. The centrality of the offerings**

In order to further buttress his argument, Brown maintains that the fact that the Mosaic Law highlights the blood-offerings, tells us how central these offerings were to the theology of atonement<sup>lix</sup>. The central position that the blood-offerings occupy in the Five Books of Moses convince Brown, that there can be no atonement without blood. After having come to this conclusion, Brown then argues that scripture wouldn’t contradict this universally held doctrine. If scripture speaks of any atonement without a blood offering, we must read it in the context of this universal doctrine which doesn’t allow for atonement without blood<sup>lx</sup>. We must understand, claims Brown, that any atonement spoken of in scripture must work in conjunction with the blood offerings - for that is the only context within which one can read scripture.

#### **3. The path from Leviticus 17:11 to Hebrews 10:4**

At this point in his presentation, Brown has painted himself into a corner. If indeed the blood-offerings of scripture were so indispensable, how could the blood of Jesus, who is not one of the specified scriptural blood offerings, qualify to atone? In response to this challenge, Brown draws upon rabbinical

literature with support from scriptural sources to establish the concept that the death of the righteous has the power to atone<sup>lxi</sup>. If the death of the righteous had the power to atone, then Jesus, who claimed to have never committed a sin, certainly has the power to atone with his death.

In claiming that Jesus is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, Christendom has done away with the blood-offerings of scripture. The Christian scriptures actually take this one step further with the assertion that the blood offerings of Leviticus never really atoned at all (Hebrews 10:4). It is very difficult to give this doctrine an appearance of conforming to the Jewish scriptures. The scriptures explicitly declare that the blood-offerings do atone, and that this method of atonement stands forever<sup>lxii</sup>. How then can Christianity profess to conform to the Jewish scriptures that repudiate her doctrine?

Brown steps up to this challenge with a two pronged defense. First, he posits that the theology of the blood offerings of scripture rested on the principle of a life for a life. Thus, even if the letter of the law has been replaced, its spirit has been preserved<sup>lxiii</sup>.

The second prong of Brown's defense is based upon the claim that the Rabbis of the Talmud also taught that the blood-offerings of scripture were replaced. Brown believes that the Talmud teaches that while the Temple stood there was no atonement outside of the blood-offerings, and after the destruction of the Temple, the offerings were discarded and done away with, only to be replaced with prayer and charity<sup>lxiv</sup>. Brown attempts to show his readers that the alternative ideology offered by Judaism is much further removed from the plain meaning of scripture than is Christianity.

## **B. The Talmud commentaries in context**

Let us approach Brown's arguments one at a time. Brown tacitly admits that there is not one statement in scripture which openly declares that there is no atonement without blood. Instead Brown demands that his readers accept this theology because it was a universally accepted Jewish view<sup>lxv</sup>. Before we demonstrate that this premise is without foundation, we would point out that this argument undermines Brown's entire position. Brown begins his book by encouraging his readers to forget doctrine and to read the Bible<sup>lxvi</sup>. "Universally accepted Jewish views" tend to favor Judaism over Christianity. It is a "universally accepted Jewish view" that it is idolatrous to attribute deity to a man, no matter what the philosophical explanation. Another "universally accepted Jewish view" maintains that the role of the Messiah is not to create a new election but rather to bring redemption to those already elected. If "universally accepted Jewish views" are to guide us, we would hardly end up with Christianity.

The second problem with Brown's argument is that it is patently false. There was never any such "universally accepted Jewish view" which maintained that there is no atonement without blood. Let us examine the basis for Brown's claim that this Christian doctrine was accepted by the Talmudic Rabbis. Brown presents his case on Pages 108 and 109 of AJO, Vol. 2. The Talmud states that within the limited realm of animal offerings the blood is the key factor in affecting atonement. Brown then asks - how did the Rabbis come to this conclusion? The only response he has for this question is that the Rabbis must have subscribed to this "universally accepted Jewish view" - no atonement without blood.

The fact is that the Talmud explicitly informs its readers the source of this idea. It is from the verse in Leviticus 17:11. Out of all the parts of the animal, God prohibited the blood<sup>lxvii</sup>. The scripture explains that the blood is reserved for atonement and that is the reason it may not be consumed. The Rabbis came to the obvious conclusion that the other parts of the animal which are permitted, do not affect atonement. There is simply no basis for the claim that the Rabbis subscribed to a universal doctrine of no atonement without blood. It was only within the limited realm of an animal offering that the Rabbis saw the blood as the critical component that affects atonement. In no way does this negate the atoning power of factors outside of the sacrificial system, such as repentance.

Allow me to illustrate with an analogy. Imagine if one were to state that in the realm of air-travel, the jet plane is the key mode of transportation. Would there be any justification to jump to the conclusion that no other method of transportation exists? The speaker here does not address methods of land or sea transportation. The Rabbis of the Talmud stated that within the realm of animal offerings, it was the rituals involving the blood which provided the atonement. Brown's conclusion that no atonement exists without blood is unjustified. The Rabbis were not addressing any methods of atonement which exist outside the limited realm of the animal offering.

Brown makes the claim that the primary commentaries of the Talmud, Rashi and Tosafot, both affirm the doctrine of "no atonement without blood"<sup>lxviii</sup>. The fact is that both Rashi and Tosafot say exactly the opposite of what Brown claims they say. Rashi and Tosafot both focus on the passage in the Talmud which states that in the limited setting of the animal offering - of all the parts of the animal, it is the blood that affects atonement -. Rashi and Tosafot both note that this is not to say that the rituals involving the other parts of the animal had no atoning effect at all. It is just that the atoning effect that those rituals had, was a peripheral one when contrasted with the blood<sup>lxix</sup>. In other words instead of broadening the Talmud's limited statement as Brown would have us believe, Rashi and Tosafot are limiting the Talmud's statement even further.

To clarify the matter, let us refer to our analogy. The speaker has just stated that within the realm of air-travel, the key mode of transportation is the jet plane. A friend of the speaker notes that even within the realm of air travel there are other

modes of transportation. We have the propeller plane and the helicopter, to say nothing of blimps and hang gliders. Still, the jet plane is indeed the most prominent form of getting from place to place by air. Would we be justified in concluding that this friend of the speaker believes that no-one uses boats, cars, trucks, or buses to get from place to place? On the contrary, instead of broadening the speaker's original statement, this friend has limited his statement. The friend did not say that the original statement holds true in areas of transportation aside from air-travel. Instead he simply pointed out that even within the limited realm of air-travel there are other, less significant modes of transportation.

The Talmud is the original speaker of our analogy. The Talmud asserts that within the limited realm of animal offerings (- air-travel of our analogy) the blood (jet-plane of our analogy) was the key factor in achieving atonement. Rashi and Tosafot are represented by the speaker's friend in our analogy. Their comments limit the Talmud's statement by stating that even within this limited realm of animal offerings (air-travel) there are other, less significant methods of achieving atonement (helicopters and blimps). But they said nothing which would imply that there is no method of atonement outside of the realm of the animal offering.

### **C. The centrality of the offerings in context**

Brown's claim that the blood offerings play a central role in the Mosaic Law can be compared to the following argument. Go out to the nearest street corner and find a stop sign. Now look at the letter "O". Do you notice how large it is? How it was painted white on a red background? How it reflects the light? Whoever designed this sign certainly put in a lot of effort to highlight that "O".

The argument makes no sense. The "O" is only one segment of a larger picture. The letter "O" is meaningless when you remove it from its true context.

Brown's argument is no better. The scriptural books of Exodus and Leviticus emphasize the Tabernacle - Temple. As a component of the Temple, the sacrificial system is also highlighted. The blood offerings for atonement only constitute a subset within the sacrificial system. All of the sacrifices together do not take up half of the space that scripture devotes to the narration of the building of the Tabernacle. To point to the atonement offerings outside of the Temple context and claim that they are highlighted by scripture is no better than pointing to the "O" on the stop sign.

When the Torah discusses expiation of sin outside of the Temple context, it never refers to blood. It speaks of repentance (Leviticus 26:40, Deuteronomy 4:29,30, 30:1,2). The Torah tells us that even within the Temple context the sacrifices are not guaranteed to be accepted (Leviticus 26:31). In order for the offerings to be meaningful, the nation as a whole must stand on a high level in their relationship with God. The fact that we do not have the Temple is a sign of

God's judgment against us. At this point in time God is not interested in our blood offerings. God gave us clear instructions that tell us how to restore our national relationship with Him. He did not say that we should seek a replacement for the blood-offerings. Instead God commands us to repent.

#### **D. From Leviticus 17:11 to Ezekiel 11:16**

##### **1. The suffering of the righteous**

Brown's acceptance of the rabbinical interpretation which teaches that the death of the righteous atones, actually works against his position. If the death of the righteous atones then why do we need Jesus? If the death of the righteous atones then could not the deaths of the millions of Jewish children that died at the hands of Crusaders, Inquisitors, Nazis, and Islamic terrorists atone for our sins? Were these children not innocent enough? Our martyrs, who accepted the most gruesome tortures rather than desecrate their relationship with God, were they not righteous enough?

"But Jesus was sinless" counters the missionary. How could you compare the suffering of someone who was totally clean from sin, with the suffering of people who are tainted by sin?

Was Jesus really sinless? Could Jesus have been sinless? No human being can know if another man is truly sinless. This is a matter that only God can know, and God tells that Jesus was not sinless. The scriptures declare - "*how can one born of a woman be righteous*". This declaration clearly includes Jesus. God saw fit to have this pronouncement repeated twice (Job 15:14, 25:4). That is twice the number of times that scripture mentions the principle of "a life for a life". Think about it.

Here is another thought to consider. According to the rabbinic understanding, it is not necessary to believe in the righteous in order for their suffering to render atonement. In accordance with scripture, the Rabbis taught that the righteous atone for the sins of those who despise them. The speakers in Isaiah 53 admit that they had despised God's servant, yet the servant had already healed these same people who despised him (Isaiah 53:5). The central tenet of Christianity, namely; faith in Jesus as a prerequisite for the expiation of sin, has no parallel in either the scriptures or in the rabbinical writings.

##### **2. Life for a life**

We now approach Brown's closing arguments on the issue of atonement. Brown insists that the offerings of scripture stood on the principle of a life for a life. This is simply not true. Even within the sacrificial system, other methods of atonement also worked – methods that were not predicated on the principle

of a life for a life. The ornamental head-plate of the high priest (Exodus 28:38), the flour offering (Leviticus 5:13), and the verbal confession (Leviticus 16:6) all had the power to atone.

But, Brown protests, the flour-offerings had to be mixed with the blood in order to be effective<sup>lxx</sup>. This is clearly not so. The verse says that the flour offering had to be placed on top of the fire offerings of the Lord, not necessarily on top of the blood offerings (Leviticus 5:12). This injunction could be fulfilled by placing this particular flour offering on top of other flour offerings which go by the title "fire-offerings of the Lord" (Leviticus 6:11). But what would be the point in that? What is gained when one flour offering is placed on top of another flour offering? Similarly, we can ask, what is gained when one blood offering is placed on top of another (Leviticus 4:35)? It certainly didn't need the atoning power of the blood, because it possessed that power itself.

In order to answer these questions, we must ask ourselves; what is the one thread that runs throughout the entire Tabernacle narrative? What is the one theme that could tie all of the various aspects of the Temple together? It is not the principle of "a life for a life", because that principle would not explain the construction of the tabernacle, the incense, or the flour-offering. The one theme which relates to every aspect of the Temple is the concept of obedience. God emphasizes this point by repeating the phrase -"*they did as God commanded Moses*", no less than 18 times in the culminating chapters of Exodus (39, 40). The reason that any of the offerings of the Temple were meaningful to God was because of obedience. Every offering was an expression of obedience on the part of the individual bringing the offering. And the offerings only atoned when they were brought in the Temple that was built through the greatest expression of Israel's obedience as a nation.

Throughout the scriptural instruction concerning the sacrifices, we are reminded that the offerings are to be put on the altar of the elevation offering (Leviticus 3:5, 4:10,18, 25,30,34), a reference to the national daily offerings (Exodus 29:39-42, Numbers 28:1-8). This national offering was the first offering on the altar every morning and the last to be offered every evening (Leviticus 6:1-6). All of the offerings of the individuals were framed between these two national offerings. The message that is conveyed through these laws is that the offerings of the individual are only effective within the context of the general obedience of the nation. It is in this light that we can understand the injunction to place the fats of the blood offering or the flour of the poor man's offering upon the "fire-offerings of the Lord". These private offerings were to be placed on top of the national offering, thus placing them in the context of the nation's obedience towards God.



### 3. Who replaced the sacrifices?

Brown attempts to present the authors of the Talmud as individuals who have no regard for the message of scripture. After quoting 2Chronicles 7:14, Brown states:

*“Yet this is the very verse quoted in the Talmud to prove that when the Temple was NOT standing, prayer repentance and charity replaced sacrifice. Isn’t this amazing? A verse based on the centrality of the Temple sacrifices is used to prove that those very sacrifices were replaced.”* (AJO Vol. 2 Page 98)

Let us examine the relevant quote from the Talmud in context (Jerusalem Talmud Taanit 2:1). The Rabbis are not discussing a replacement for the offerings. The Rabbis are also not talking about the specific situation of a destroyed Temple. The Rabbis are making a general statement about the power of prayer, repentance and charity without limiting them to a specific time-frame. In fact this same passage is repeated in the Talmud<sup>lxxi</sup> in order to help us understand how Hezekiah averted the penalty of death that was decreed against him<sup>lxxii</sup>. This event took place while the first Temple still stood. It is obvious that the Rabbis recognized the effectiveness of prayer, repentance and charity to expiate sin while the Temple stood. Brown’s portrayal of the Talmud as if it had quoted the verse in Chronicles to support a doctrine that seeks the replacement of the sacrifices after the Temple was destroyed – is a blatant misrepresentation.

The Talmud recognizes the scriptural truth that it is only repentance which can render a person righteous before God. This truth is not affected with the presence of the Temple or with its absence. While the Temple is standing and the possibility to offer sacrifices is available, God declares; “The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination before the Lord” (Proverbs 15:8, 21:27). One must change his standing before God from “wicked” to “righteous” before approaching God with an offering. This is done through repentance - a commitment to turn back to God and to obey His word (Deuteronomy 30:2). The offering was an outward expression of the penitent heart, and is only meaningful in the context of repentance and obedience. Through the act of bringing an offering in compliance with God’s explicit command, the sinner gives expression to his sincere submission to the authority of God. If the opportunity to bring the offering is available, and the sinner fails to bring the offering, this failure stands as an expression of rebellion against God’s sovereignty. Now that the Temple lies in ruins, and the opportunity to bring the offerings is not available, the failure to bring the appropriate offerings does not stand in the way of our repentance. As long as the sincere desire to comply with God’s command is present in our hearts, our inaction is not held against us.

Since the destruction of the Temple, the loyal Jew constantly declared his yearning to bring the sacrifices in obedience to God's express directive. This yearning is expressed in the national prayers, and in the study of Talmud. The authors of the Talmud devoted several hundred pages of discussion in relation to the laws of the sacrifices. It is through this discussion that the spirit of these laws is preserved in the heart of Eternal Israel (Isaiah 51:7). When the Temple returns, in fulfillment of God's promise, the loyal Jew will not miss a beat in bringing the sacrificial system back to life. The Jew's longing and desire to obey every last word of God's holy law, is the tool through which God kept the law alive for the last generation. The accusation that charges the authors of the Talmud with the discarding and doing away with the sacrificial system is the height of absurdity. When this accusation issues forth from a belief system that actually does preach a discarding and doing away with the scriptural sacrifices, it is the height of hypocrisy.

Although we no longer have the physical Temple, God promised us that for the duration of our exile, He will be our Temple (Ezekiel 11:16). In light of this prophecy, the leaders of the Jewish people sought parallels to the Temple service in the activities which are available to us in our exiled state. They found these parallels in prayer (Proverbs 15:8), in charity and acts of kindness<sup>lxxiii</sup> (Micha 6:8, Proverbs 16:6), and in the broken heart of the sinner (Psalm 51:19). The Rabbis recognized that God considers these activities as parallels to the Temple offerings, and that this is the service that God desires in our Temple in exile. As it was with the sacrifices, the Rabbis recognized that these activities were only meaningful as expressions of a repentant heart.

The Rabbis did not teach that these activities only became effective with the destruction of the Temple. The Talmud describes how the nation would react when they were stricken with a drought<sup>lxxiv</sup>. In recognition that the calamity had come upon them as a result of their sins, they would proclaim a public fast. The leaders would remind the people that it was not the fasting of the Ninevites that brought God to rescind the decree of destruction. The prophet states that God saw their deeds that they had repented from their evil ways, and it was this repentance that turned the tide in their favor (Jonah 3:10). The fasting only served as a means to encourage and to give expression to sincere repentance, and outside of the context of repentance, the fast is meaningless<sup>lxxv</sup>. The procedure of the public fast and the call to repentance was followed while the Temple stood<sup>lxxvi</sup>, as well as after the destruction. The Talmud<sup>lxxvii</sup> makes no mention of a sacrifice in this situation. Since there was no commandment to bring a sacrifice in this situation, no sacrifice was necessary. It is clear that the authors of the Talmud believed that prayer and repentance effectively atoned for sin even while the Temple was standing.

The Rabbis did not proclaim that prayer, repentance and charity had replaced the Temple offerings and rendered them redundant. On the contrary, our leaders saw in these activities, the path that God had ordained so that we can

repair our relationship with God, and merit the return of the Temple together with the sacrificial offerings. May it happen speedily in our days.

## **VI. A call to my Messianic brothers and sisters**

Perhaps this article has caused you a bit of confusion. You never saw these arguments in the pages of scriptures, and you are not sure what the Christian response is going to be. But you are confident that Christendom will come up with a response. You have confidence in the body of believers. The collective experience of the full body of believers can certainly come up with some responses to these challenges. You are probably right. The human mind is very capable. Every belief that people have accepted comes with a full gamut of apologetic material that attempts to justify the faith to her adherents.

How then can we find the truth? Should we look for the most sophisticated arguments? Are we to seek out the greatest scholars? How can we factor in our own bias? I happen to believe that Judaism has the best arguments, and the greatest scholars. But what do I gain by telling you this? Christians believe the same about Christianity. I could tell you that many committed Christians have converted to Judaism, but this information is wasted on you because missionaries claim that many committed Jews have turned to Christianity.

I will ask you to consider a few points. Where did we begin? Christianity admits that God gave us the Jewish scriptures before Christianity came into being. Try reading the Jewish scriptures the way a Jew would have read this book before Jesus was born. Read the Jewish scriptures and look for the overall theology of the book. Who does the Author of the book encourage us to worship? What is the scripture's teaching on atonement and the Messiah? What is the attitude of the divine Author on the issue of the Law? What did God expect the Jewish people to understand from the reading of His book? I trust that this exercise will lead you to God's truth.

Dear reader, please allow me to bring some scripture to your attention. In order to teach His people, God established testimony in Israel (Psalm 78:5). The testimony He established was the collective national experience (Deuteronomy 4:32 – 35). God's objective with this testimony was so that the last generation of Jews can be confident in the knowledge that they possess God's truth (Deuteronomy 4:9, 30, Psalm 78:6). This is the pillar upon which God established the faith in His word amongst His holy people. This is the context within which God set down the Jewish scriptures. Please try to read scripture in this context. Feel the experiences of the exodus and the Sinai revelation as they reverberate through the living heart of corporate Israel, and hear God's word in that light. I trust that this exercise will also lead you to God's truth.

Finally I beg you to consider our nation's relationship with God. Ask yourself - what was the love that beat in David's heart when he composed the Psalms?

What devotion did David's Psalms inspire in the heart of Eternal Israel that gave us the vitality to outlast all who sought to destroy us? What fire burned in the breasts of our people when they mocked the tortures that attempted to move them from their loyalty to God? What was the love that moved so many of our people to choose death instead of the cross? Seek that love my friend. It will yet burn as brightly in your heart as it burned in theirs.

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<sup>i</sup> Of which the comprehensive series Answering Jewish Objections [henceforth AJO] stands out.

<sup>ii</sup> The Case for the Real Jesus [henceforth, CRJ], Zondervan 2007, Chapter 5

<sup>iii</sup> I refer here to the objections entitled; The totality of scripture, Faith structure, and The relationship that the Jewish people share with God.

<sup>iv</sup> Entitled "The Council of My Nation" – available on the Jews for Judaism website

<sup>v</sup> Amazingly, Brown does not address these foundational verses in his comprehensive AJO.

<sup>vi</sup> CRJ pages 204 - 206

<sup>vii</sup> We will address Genesis 18, Exodus 24:9, Psalm 45:18 and Daniel 7;13 further on in this same article. For the other references we refer the reader to the aforementioned article "The Council of My Nation".

<sup>viii</sup> In a his interview with Strobel (CRJ page 204) Brown states "Bear in mind, however, that the Jews were staunch monotheists, and it would have been totally misunderstood if the claim of the Messiah's divinity had been too explicit." This statement is quite astonishing. Brown goes through great lengths to show how the Christian doctrine is consistent with the Hebrew Bible and that the modern Jewish view is not based on the Bible or upon rabbinic literature but is rather a "gut-level negative reaction to anything Christian" (AJO vol. 2 page 7). Yet here he states that even before God formulated the words of scripture the Jews were staunch monotheists to the degree that they would have trouble with the Christian doctrines. Furthermore, Brown's assertion makes no sense. If the Jews would have a problem understanding a doctrine, would that be a reason for God to explain the concept more clearly or to hide it between the lines? According to Brown, the way to get a message across is by making sure it is not "too explicit". In any case we have an admission from Brown that the Christian doctrines are not to be found "too explicitly" in the Jewish scriptures.

<sup>ix</sup> AJO Vol. 2 pages 71 – 186.

<sup>x</sup> Leviticus 16 which does deal with general atonement is not introduced as a teaching on atonement but rather the passage is introduced as an instruction guiding the High Priest in the correct procedure to enter the holy of holies.

<sup>xi</sup> God instructed us to disregard the miracles of a claimant to prophecy if his prophecy is at odds with what we were taught at Sinai (Deuteronomy 13:2 – 6). Since Christianity includes the deification of a man, all of her alleged miracles – including the resurrection - are to be disregarded.

<sup>xii</sup> To put this concept into Christian terms – A Christian should try to imagine what would go through his heart if someone were to claim to be the fourth person in the god-head, and claim a share in the devotion presently directed towards Jesus.

<sup>xiii</sup> On the 20<sup>th</sup> of Sivan 5408 the Jews of Nemirov chose to die rather than to accept Jesus. The nearby river turned red with their blood.

<sup>xiv</sup> The assertions of Brown and Strobel that "Messianic prophecies are not clearly identified as such" (AJO Vol. 3 Page 189), or "scholars must pore over the context of various passages to determine which ones deal with the coming of the Messiah" (CRJ Page 190) have no basis in fact. There are several passages which speak openly and unequivocally about the Messiah, aside from the many passages that we mentioned that speak of the Messianic era. Some of the

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passages which speak of the Messiah are Isaiah 11:1-10, Jeremiah 23:5,6, 33:14-16, Ezekiel 34:23, 37:24, Micha 5:1-5. The statements of Brown and Strobel seem to be a reflection of the difficulties they encounter when they seek the Christian Messiah in the pages of the Jewish scripture.

<sup>xv</sup> Brown attempts to defend Christianity against this argument (AJO, Vol. 2, Page 169). He argues that aside from Ezekiel, the prophets do not explicitly mention offerings for the expiation of sin. He continues to argue that the chapters in Ezekiel are difficult to understand - therefore they cannot be used to formulate doctrine.

The fallacies of Brown's argument are readily apparent. Isaiah and Jeremiah use the Hebrew word "zevach" to tell us about the future sacrifices (Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 33:18) – this is the very same word that is used in 2Chronicles 7:12 to describe the function of Solomon's Temple. Brown quotes the Chronicles reference (AJO, Vol. 2 Page 95) in order to establish the Christian doctrine that there is no expiation for sin without blood. Yet when Isaiah and Jeremiah use the same word, Brown assures us that they are not talking about offerings for the expiation of sin.

Malachi (3:3) uses the Hebrew word "mincha" to predict the future offerings of Israel. "Mincha" is a general term which can refer to all offerings – although it most often refers to flour offerings. But this term certainly includes offerings for the expiation of sin as is evident in Leviticus 5:13, 1Samuel 3:14, 26:19.

Offerings for the expiation of sin play a central role in Ezekiel's vision of the future (43:19 – 27, 44:27, 45:17 – 25). Although some of the details of Ezekiel's prophecy are difficult to reconcile with the rest of scripture, the general thrust of his prophecy fits in with scripture most perfectly. There can be no question that a straightforward reading of scripture teaches that all of the offerings will be coming back in the Messianic era, including those which expiate sin.

<sup>xvi</sup> CRJ page 89

<sup>xvii</sup> Brown also makes reference to a passage in Numbers (36:1 – 12), but he acknowledges that this passage deals with the issue of inheritance and not with genealogy. (AJO, Vol. 4, Page 88)

<sup>xviii</sup> The wicked Athaliah is described as having destroyed all of the seed of royalty, yet it is clear that the daughter of the king was not targeted. Brown acknowledges that this passage presents a challenge to his theory [AJO, Vol. 4, Page 96]. He attempts to counter this argument by suggesting that Athaliah would not have gone through the lengths to eliminate every legal claimant to the throne. What Brown fails to note is that the prophet does not speak of Athaliah's intentions. The prophetic narrator reports it as a fact that the royal seed was destroyed – with the exclusion of the one son of Ahaziah. If, as Brown contends, that royal lineage could pass through the mother, then the prophet is a liar – because Athaliah did not kill the female descendants of the royal family.

<sup>xix</sup> Matthew's argument (Matthew 1:23) that Isaiah predicted that the Messiah is to be born from a virgin (based on Isaiah 7:14), is without foundation. The verse in Isaiah says nothing about the Messiah, does not speak of a virgin, and the historical context of the passage places the birth of the child some 700 years before the advent of Christianity.

Brown struggles with these issues (AJO, Vol. 3, Page 17). He spends quite a number of pages trying to explain why Matthew was not utterly mistaken for interpreting the passage the way he did. But this is not the issue. For the claims of Christianity to stand, this passage in Isaiah must conclusively prove that the Messiah is to be born of a virgin. This, Brown is unable to do.

<sup>xx</sup> AJO, Vol. 3, Page 120

<sup>xxi</sup> AJO, Vol. 3, Page 160

<sup>xxii</sup> David's own suffering and deliverance play a central role in this procedure. David's personal experiences forged his own relationship with God, and inspired the nation of Israel in her relationship with God. Under the guidance of David's songs the nation of Israel will ultimately repair her own relationship with God and be delivered from their troubles. When this deliverance occurs, all of the nations will join Israel in paying homage to God.

In Psalm 22 these concepts appear in historical progression. The first section of the Psalm describes David's personal suffering and his subsequent deliverance. Verses 23 – 26 describe David's praise of God amongst the congregation of Israel. Verses 25 and 27 speak of Israel's subsequent praise of God (- the "meek" and the "seekers of God" that the Psalmist speaks of are

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the people of Israel – see Isaiah 61:1-3, Psalm 9:13,19, 24:6, 69:33, 149:4 - ). Israel's turning to God draws the nations of the earth to join them in paying homage to God (verse 28).

<sup>xxiii</sup> AJO, Vol. 1, Page 78

<sup>xxiv</sup> CRJ, Page 201, AJO, Vol. 1 Page 74, Vol. 2 Pages 178,179

<sup>xxv</sup> Malbim bases this interpretation on the enigmatic phraseology that introduces this message of Haggai. The phrase in verse 6 is generally translated – “in just a little while”, but this is far from a literal rendition. Literally, the phrase ought to be translated “yet one, she is little”. It is commonly understood to be referring to the amount of time that is to take place before the fulfillment of the prophecy. But Malbim argues that the prophet is not referring to a small amount of time, but rather the prophet is encouraging the nation to bring forth a bit more repentance and sincerity. When the nation will produce this small measure of repentance, and only then, will the glory of the Second Temple surpass that of the first. The fact that the prophecy was not fulfilled in its most literal sense is a sign of Israel failing to fulfill her part of the divine plan.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Hosea 3:5

<sup>xxvii</sup> Although Haggai used the words “this house” to describe the Temple, the prophecy is not limited to the Second Temple which stood before him. In verse 3 of the same chapter, Haggai uses the words “this house” to refer to the First Temple. It is clear that the words “this house” can refer to the Temple in any of its manifestations.

<sup>xxviii</sup> One interpretation supported by many commentators simply points to the fact that ultimately, the glory of the physical building of the Second Temple surpassed that of the first. This interpretation is supported by verse 8 of this chapter where God declares that silver and gold belong to Him, an indication that this is the type of glory He speaks of here. Furthermore, it must be understood that the people were only looking at the physical building and this is what had discouraged them. It is appropriate that the encouragement offered to them addressed the area in which they were discouraged.

I have chosen to offer another interpretation in order to broaden the reader's perspective on the spiritual history of our nation during the Second Temple era. I believe that both of these interpretations are viable and supported by the text. Please bear in mind, that in order to prove his point, Dr. Brown must prove that no other interpretation is valid aside from his own. We have demonstrated that several interpretations are possible, while the interpretation that Brown has offered is faulty and unsound.

<sup>xxix</sup> The expression used here “My spirit stands in your midst” is never used in association with the First Temple, and is reminiscent of the Messianic prophecy of Ezekiel (36:22).

<sup>xxx</sup> Brown addresses this objection to his interpretation (AJO, Page 223 n. 15). He argues that the context would indicate that the visitation was to occur in the times of the Second Temple. He does not note that the same context would indicate that the prophecy that follows this one (3:19-21) would also have to be fulfilled in the Second Temple era (the same people are being addressed) – which describes how all wickedness will be utterly eradicated – an event that has yet to occur.

It is relevant to note that the scripture teaches that the exile that we presently endure, will last for but an instant (Isaiah 54:7,8). The eternal nature of the redemption will make 2000 years of exile look like an insignificant amount of time.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Although there were several signs in the closing years of the Temple which indicated to the nation that God was displeased with their actions, this is only part of the picture. The Talmud in the same tractate of Yoma (21a) reports that there were more than 10 miracles which continued right up to the destruction. These miracles demonstrated that God still dwelled in the Temple amongst His beloved people.

<sup>xxxii</sup> I do not refer to the Jerusalem Church because I attribute any weight to their opinions. The fact that the curse of Ezekiel 13:9 was fulfilled against them tells me that God was displeased with them to the degree that He had them cut off from the covenant community. The reason I use this story as a foil to Brown's argument is because I feel it is important to bring this major controversy in the early Church to light. Strobel's assertions (CRJ, Page 35) to the contrary notwithstanding, there were serious doctrinal differences between the Jewish disciples of Jesus and the Gentile Church of Paul. Paul himself refers to teachings that he considered false that

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were rife in the first century of the common era (1 Corinthians 9:2, 2 Corinthians 11:13, Galatians 1:6).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Acts 21:17-26

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Acts 21:24 – 26, - a Nazirite offering included an offering for the expiation of sin - Numbers 6:14.

<sup>xxxv</sup> This statement is quite bizarre according to any interpretation. As we mentioned earlier, the prophets used the person of David to represent the Messiah in a manner which is open and direct (Jeremiah 30:9, Ezekiel 34:23,24, 37:24,35).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> CRJ, Page 199

<sup>xxxvii</sup> The prophet does not specify how many crowns are to be placed on the head of Joshua, but the flow of the verses would indicate that one crown was for Joshua while the second crown was for Zerah.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Some interpreters understand that this is a reference to Zerubbabel.

<sup>xxxix</sup> This prophecy was conditional. It would not be fulfilled unless the Jewish people were obedient to God (Zechariah 6:15).

<sup>xl</sup> In the one time period that they did gain political independence, the government was in the hands of the Hasmonean family of priests.

<sup>xli</sup> As in the time of David.

<sup>xlii</sup> It is in place to note that quite a number of Christian scholars concur with the Jewish interpretation of this passage and identify the servant with the people of Israel – for example - The New Interpreter's Study Bible, Abington Press. The Harper Collins Study Bible, Harper Collins Publ. The New English Study Bible, Oxford Study Edition, Oxford University Press

<sup>xliii</sup> Although by the time John put his words into writing there could have been little doubt as to how his gentile audience would have read them.

<sup>xliiv</sup> Brown argues (AJO Vol. 3 page 56) that the righteous remnant of Israel is not an identifiable entity and is therefore precluded as a viable candidate for the role of Isaiah's servant. This argument is without merit. The prophet is referring to a time when the glory of God will be revealed upon the servant. At that time the righteous remnant will certainly be an identifiable entity (Zephaniah 3:13, Malachi 3:18, Daniel 12:3). At that point the kings of the world will look back at the remnant's experience as members of the persecuted Jewish community and understand God's purpose in their suffering.

<sup>xli v</sup> The person of Messiah will emerge from the community of Israel. All of the suffering that Israel experienced will be part of the national consciousness of the Messiah.

<sup>xli vi</sup> The Midrash known as Tana Devei Eliyahu contains three references to Isaiah 53, applying them to the righteous of Israel (chapters 6,13,27). Midrash Aleph Beitot (final chapter) quotes Isaiah 53 in reference to the nation as a whole. Chovot Halevavot, Gate of Trust, chapter 3. Kuzari, Section II paragraph 44

<sup>xli vii</sup> The Kuzari was not put into writing until a generation after Rashi, but it reflects the widespread beliefs of the Jewish community in Spain before the writings of Rashi were extant in that country.

<sup>xli viii</sup> Page 7

<sup>xli ix</sup> We can include the charge of deicide, the blood libel, and the accusations of poisoning the wells under this category of "violence".

<sup>i</sup> John 8:44 has Jesus accusing the Jews of murder, and of being liars. This was a favorite quote of anti-Semites throughout history.

<sup>ii</sup> For centuries on end, Jews could not become legal citizens of most Christian countries.

<sup>iii</sup> In the later chapters of Isaiah (40-66) Israel is referred to as God's servant several times (41:8,9, 43:10, 44:1,2,21, 45:4, 48:20). In these verses God's servant is identified as Israel in a manner which leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader. It is argued that the servant of 42:1 and 49:3 cannot be referring to Israel because he is sent to speak to Israel. But the language in 49:2 is paralleled in 51:16 in a clear reference to Israel where Israel is appointed to speak to Israel. This is no problem when we understand that the servant is the righteous remnant of the nation. In any case, aside from Israel, no-one is openly identified as God's servant.

<sup>iiii</sup> Some commentators understand that these passages are talking of the prophet Isaiah, or of the Messiah. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive. It is the righteous of Israel who bring the words of the prophet and the message of the true Messiah to the world. When the

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Messiah appears, as a member of corporate Israel, he will have the experiences of his nation seared into his consciousness. The suffering that Israel experiences serves to refine the person of the Messiah, who will emerge from the body of corporate Israel.

<sup>liv</sup> AJO, Vol. 2 Page 74, see also CRJ Page 204.

<sup>lv</sup> Missionaries point to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98a) and to various Jewish commentators (e.g. Rashi) who seem to identify the son of man as the Messiah. This is hypocrisy. Imagine if the tables were turned and the scripture were to identify the son of man as Messiah and the Jewish commentators would identify the son of man with Israel. The missionaries would spare no scorn and ridicule against the Rabbis to uphold the plain meaning of scripture. But when the plain meaning of scripture does not fit their agenda – suddenly the Rabbis become authorities whose opinion must be accepted.

In any case, we must bear in mind that the word “Messiah” means one thing to the Jewish commentators and something entirely different to the Christian missionary. This verse speaks of honor and service rendered to the people of Israel as the angel explained. The Jewish commentators saw the Messiah as a human leader of Israel. One way to render honor to Israel would be to honor the office of the leadership of Israel. According to the Christian interpretation of this verse, the honor coming to Jesus is not coming to him in capacity of leader of Israel, but in capacity of his alleged divine nature.

An analogy to this would be when one renders honor to the president of the United States. It is possible to honor him because of his office as the leader of a country, and it is possible to honor him because of some personal qualities he may possess. The difference between these two types of honor in the context of this verse in Daniel, is that one violates the plain meaning of the verse and one upholds it. The same commentators who saw Messiah in the context of this verse, saw Israel there as well (e.g. see Rashi’s comments of verse 14). But when the Christian explains the verse in terms of the alleged divinity of Jesus, the nation of Israel is out of the picture.

<sup>lvi</sup> CRJ, Page 208, AJO, Vol. 2 Page 103

<sup>lvii</sup> These are quoted above – page 8.

<sup>lviii</sup> AJO, Vol. 2 Pages 107 – 110, CRJ, Page 202

<sup>lix</sup> AJO, Vol. 2 Page 107, CRJ, Page 209

<sup>lx</sup> AJO, Vol. 2 Pages 75,76, 119,

<sup>lxi</sup> AJO, Vol. 2 Page 153

<sup>lxii</sup> Leviticus 6:11, 16:34.

<sup>lxiii</sup> AJO, Vol. 2 Page 163

<sup>lxiv</sup> AJO, Vol. 2, Pages 95, 96, 99,

<sup>lxv</sup> AJO, Vol. 2, Page 108

<sup>lxvi</sup> AJO, Vol. 1, Page xx of the Introduction

<sup>lxvii</sup> Aside from the blood, certain parts of a limited category of animals are also prohibited. But the blood is prohibited in all categories of animals

<sup>lxviii</sup> AJO, Vol. 2, Page 109

<sup>lxix</sup> All of the rituals involving the offering provided atonement, still, if the peripheral rituals were not performed, the offering was still valid. But if the rituals involving the blood were not performed, a replacement offering would be required.

<sup>lxx</sup> AJO, Vol. 2, Page 113, CRJ, Page 210

<sup>lxxi</sup> Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 10:2

<sup>lxxii</sup> 2Kings 20:1-5

<sup>lxxiii</sup> It is interesting to note that the authors of the Christian scriptures also recognized this scriptural parallel (Acts 10:4).

<sup>lxxiv</sup> The procedure described by the Talmud parallels the procedure described by Joel (2:15).

<sup>lxxv</sup> This same sentiment is repeated in Isaiah 58:5-14.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> This is made clear by the Mishna in Taanit 2.6.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> The passage in the book of Joel also makes no mention of an offering.